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# THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE CENTER AND THE PERIPHERY IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE: STRATEGIES FOR CO-OPTING THE BESSARABIAN ELITES

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## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

**Relevance and importance of the topic.** National historiography often approaches the period of the Russian imperial domination in Bessarabia with excessive emotions. While it is understandable that some historians may struggle to approach the subject *sine ira et studio*, it is essential to recognize that analyzing any historical process or phenomenon demands a complex and objective approach. Competing historiographic narratives about the early period of the Russian dominance in Bessarabia (1812–1828) either emphasize the "positive and progressive" aspects of the Empire's policies in the region or, conversely, reduce all imperial activity to the "merciless exploitation" of natural and human resources in the annexed territories. While resource exploitation was indeed a goal of the Russian Empire, and Bessarabia was no exception[1], it is incorrect to view all off the actions of the central authority through this lens alone. Such reductionism fosters a mistaken perception that the Russian Empire pursued a coherent and inherently malicious policy toward its peripheries in general, and towards Bessarabia in particular. In reality, the Empire's policies were neither fully coherent[2] nor uniformly malevolent, and its medium, and long-term governance of territories was limited by its ability to manage them effectively; central policies in the regions often reflected responses to local specificities and situational dynamics.

Furthermore, the manner in which these policies were implemented reveals the vulnerability and volatility of the imperial structures, marked by frequent paradigm shifts in both domestic and foreign policies. These shifts not only reflect the lack of central consensus on how the empire should function but also reveal evolving perceptions of the role and place of the newly annexed territories within the imperial framework. However, a careful analysis of Bessarabia's integration into the Russian Empire does not negate the existence of Russia's "natural" tendencies to exploit newly acquired lands economically, socially, and strategically. Attention must instead be given to the unique circumstances that accompanied this process, as they cannot be reduced to a simplistic, generalized model. Russia's territorial expansion created an immense empire characterized by varied relationships between the Center and its many regions. The Russian Empire was managed in a centralized manner, but only to the extent allowed by geographic distances and cultural affinities. Thus, under

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[1] Cușco, A, Taki, V. *Basarabia în componența Imperiului Rus, 1812-1917*. Chișinău: Cartier, 2024, 420 p.

[2] Slezkine, Y. *Arctic Mirrors. Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994, 445 p.

the pressure of circumstances, a more flexible approach towards local diversity was permitted in peripheral regions where distances and cultural differences were more pronounced, provided that order was maintained and primary interests were satisfied. This attitude was also motivated by a desire to project a positive image of the Russian presence—not only to gain the goodwill of the local population but also to leverage the territory effectively as a strategic base for future expansion.

Throughout the 18th and the early 19th centuries, the western peripheral territories acquired through wars often comprised regions with deeply rooted social and political structures, heavily influenced by longstanding European traditions. These peripheral regions featured well-established institutions and systemic social practices that could not be easily dismantled or assimilated into the Russian imperial norms. Forced disruption of these structures could lead to regional destabilization and potential conflicts, situations that the imperial Center sought to avoid at all costs. Consequently, in these areas, the Russian Empire refrained from imposing its own administrative and judicial standards, recognizing instead the traditional rights and privileges of the local elites or adopting hybrid forms of governance. These hybrid forms incorporated elements of Russian imperial rule alongside the preservation of local particularities, allowing the persistence of pre-existing state traditions to facilitate elite cooperation and secure their legitimacy.

The Center-Periphery relationship is a critical area of study in the social sciences, examining interactions between the institutions of power—political, economic, military, and cultural—and the peripheral communities that receive and adapt to these influences. In this context, the strategies employed to co-opt local elites play a significant role in shaping Center-Periphery dynamics. To gain a nuanced understanding of such relationships within the Russian Empire, it is essential to explore the methods used to engage local elites in dialogue with provincial authorities, particularly the co-optation strategies applied in Bessarabia after 1812. By examining these strategies, we seek to uncover the mechanisms through which the Center extended its influence and control over Bessarabia. These co-optation strategies varied depending on the context and included measures such as promoting conformity, offering privileges or material benefits, and fostering a shared ideology or culture among the elites. Generally, these approaches served to strengthen the ties between the Center and the Periphery, while simultaneously increasing the latter's dependency. In this research, the term "elite" refers specifically to the segment of the Bessarabian society comprising large landowners, nobility, and high-ranking officials who held substantial political and social influence between 1812 and 1828. This definition deliberately excludes other social groups, such as the clergy, minor nobility, and *mazili* (dispossessed nobles), who, while possessing some social and

economic standing, do not fit within the elite category as defined for the purposes of this study.

The behavior of the Bessarabian elite within the Center-Periphery relationship, particularly during 1812-1828, can be examined through policies aimed at involving local decision-makers in the governance and administration of this newly annexed territory. This approach, also common in other continental empires, is known as "indirect governance". The considerable geographical distance and cultural differences between imperial subjects allowed certain areas, those not directly impacting imperial interests, to operate with limited central oversight. This facilitated the transfer of administrative powers to the local elite, essential for an effective regional governance. Autonomist initiatives were thus encouraged in negotiations with these elites, reinforcing their influence over regional policies. Consequently, analyzing the local elite's responses and behavior within this regional policy framework is essential.

The imperial homogenization practices, often justified as part of a "civilizing mission" were frequently counterbalanced by adapting central policies to local specifics. The retention of local customs in certain provinces was feasible due to the mobilizing capacity of the local elite, who often advanced interests aligning with broader local population needs. Nonetheless, competition for resources and influence inevitably led to internal conflicts, including among the Bessarabian elite. Their co-optation into administrative roles proved challenging and contentious, as the Bessarabian nobility sought to preserve regional authority and influence in the face of central pressures. As a result, hybrid administrative-political forms specific to Bessarabia emerged, drawing upon models used in other western imperial provinces, yet incorporating local administrative traditions gradually adapted to central practices. It is important to assess whether the diversity of the administrative practices across territories represented a genuine compromise or merely a strategy to mitigate resistance against the integration into the empire. Additionally, identifying the factors that allowed some western peripheries to maintain an autonomous status, while others, like Bessarabia, saw this autonomy diminish, is essential. The Bessarabian nobility was a product of the imperial context, shaping its identity through a struggle for privileges and the expression of an autonomous position. This reflects both the solidarity and acceptance of belonging to a distinct ideological community. At the same time, the limited mobility of the Bessarabian nobility, noted by some contemporaries, can be attributed to a range of interconnected factors. Firstly, the Bessarabian elite, shaped by an unprecedented Russian imperial context and marked by a relatively lower level of political culture, tended to focus more on individual issues than on forming a unified position. Despite the initially permissive legal

framework, the full participation of the local elite in the Bessarabian administration was constrained, with major decisions made by the Center, creating tensions between local elites and central authorities.

The relevance of this research topic is not only given by its heuristic value but also by the current global interest in Russia's expansionist policies in the northern Black Sea region and the detailed examination of the mechanisms involved in this process. Notable similarities exist between practices employed two centuries ago and those observed in the Ukrainian territories occupied after 2014, and especially post-February 24, 2022. Historical studies analyzing how Russia seeks to legitimize its presence in the annexed territories—whether under the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, or the Russian Federation—will likely involve a genuine interest from those engaged not only in history but also in political sciences, sociology, and related subjects. Additionally, this study may offer insights into the strategies Russia adopts to create networks of influence and control in annexed territories, including through local intermediaries, to secure a governance deemed "efficient" by imperial standards. This research thus aims to reveal Center's incentives in attracting specific local actors or groups for strategic purposes.

The topic of Center-Periphery relations in the 19th century Bessarabia has received only limited attention in Moldovan historiography. Therefore, a systematic investigation would be valuable in uncovering new aspects of the Bessarabian history. The research will conduct a comprehensive analysis of the Center-Periphery relations, focusing on strategies for co-opting and assimilating the local elite, as well as examining their degree of resistance. This analysis will consider cultural and ideological disparities between the central authorities and the local elite, as well as the social and economic factors that influenced these dynamics.

**The goal of this research** is to provide an in-depth analysis of Center-Periphery relations in Bessarabia between 1812 and 1828, with a focus on strategies of co-optation and assimilation of the local elite. The study explores how the Russian Empire integrated and negotiated with the Bessarabian elite to solidify its control over the region, investigating governance mechanisms, administrative practices, and the effects of these policies on the region's social and economic structure.

**The research objectives** are centered on critical aspects of power dynamics and governance in the early 19th century Bessarabia. The first objective is to analyze the local governance structures and models, as well as the process by which Bessarabian elites were integrated into these systems. The second objective involves a theoretical investigation of imperial policies and an assessment of their practical implementation in Bessarabia, focusing on Center-Periphery interactions. Another objective is to examine how local elites negotiated and secured their access to influence and

resources within the new imperial power structures. Additionally, the research assesses how the Russian Empire used the noble privilege system to co-opt and build loyalty among local elites, thus maintaining stability and imperial control. The study also analyzes the role of the Bessarabian elite in the regional administration and its contribution to implementing imperial policies locally. Finally, the research will examine the process by which the local elite was structured, integrated, and transformed into an imperial subject, with a particular focus on the processes of confirmation of the noble status.

**The research hypothesis** starts from the observation that in the process of imperial construction (Center-Periphery relations), legitimacy was not based solely, or at least initially, on political force. Over time, this political supremacy—grounded in power, conquest, and expansion—needed to evolve into an acceptance of the civilizational supremacy by the local elites, effectively resulting in their *de facto* acceptance of a domination/subordination dynamics within broader social practices. A first stage in the collaboration between the metropolis and its peripheries involved a recognition of the differences between the imperial and the local elites, where cultural assimilation became a means for the metropolis to legitimize itself *vis-à-vis* the periphery. This is where initial tensions arose, as the Bessarabian boyars initially resisted certain limits, fearing a loss of identity—the very basis of their legitimacy as the region's dominant elite. Thus, the critical concept within the Center-Periphery relations is one of "distance" not only territorial, although significant, but also cultural and "civilizational" in the sense of a superior-inferior hierarchy that underpinned the acceptance of dominative/subordinate relations.

**The research methodology** employs an interdisciplinary approach, integrating methods from history, sociology, and political sciences. This approach is justified by the complex nature of the co-optation of the local elites into the governance and administration systems, as well as by the dynamics of the Center-Periphery relations within modern continental empires, which demand a comprehensive, integrated approach. The research methods include the documentary research, the information processing and integration, the content analysis, and the comparative analysis. Throughout the study, the research adheres to the scientific principles of objectivity, verifiability, validity, reliability, and generalization. This approach provides a structured and nuanced analysis of the Center-Periphery relationship in Bessarabia, revealing the mechanisms of the elite integration and the broader social and political implications of the Russian imperial policies. The investigation promises to enhance the understanding of how these historical dynamics resonate within broader and modern contexts of imperial influence.

## CORE CONTENT OF THE THESIS

The doctoral thesis has been developed in compliance with the applicable academic requirements and regulations. The introduction presents the relevance and importance of the research topic, the aim and objectives of the thesis, the scientific hypothesis, the theoretical relevance, the research methodology, and the thesis structure. The work includes annotations in Romanian, English, and Russian, an introduction, a methodological-historiographical chapter, two chapters with specific subchapters, general conclusions and recommendations, a bibliography, and the author's CV.

**Chapter I,** titled *The Bessarabian Elite: Historiographical milestones and historical sources*, provides an analysis of the research concepts and methodologies related to the elites in historiography, along with the evolution of the Bessarabian elite during the Russian Empire rule. It also offers a historiographical perspective on the topic and examines the documentary sources used in the research.

In developing the thesis, a research approach was adopted that primarily synthesizes scientifically circulated information regarding the behavior of the local elite in the context of implementing various Center policies in Bessarabia during the initial years following annexation. The used sources establish a solid foundation for obtaining a more accurate and complex understanding of the research problem. Thus, the thesis emphasizes the use of well-known sources previously used in similar researches and analyses, rather than lesser-known, unvalidated ones. The Bessarabian elite had not been systematically studied historiographically until recent years. Western and Russian historiographies are therefore valuable resources for understanding the situation in Bessarabia, providing comprehensive material on the profile of the nobility, especially the Russian nobility, and the processes that shaped its image. These studies help frame the trajectory of the local boyars as they integrated into the Russian social structures, a central objective of this thesis. Accordingly, historiographical contributions that focus on the evolution and role of the Russian nobility in the 18$^{th}$ and the 19$^{th}$ centuries are given significant attention.

Among the Russian works from the 19$^{th}$ and the early 20$^{th}$ centuries that address Russian nobility are the contributions of M. Bogoslovsky[3], A. Romanovich-

[3] Богословский, М. *Быт и нравы русского дворянства в перовой половине 18 века*. Москова: Тип. Г. Лисснера и Д. Совко, 1906, 51 с.

Slavatinsky[4], B. Solovyov[5], M. Mikeshyn[6], and others. Recent publications, such as the *Historia Rossica* series edited by historians like E. Anisimov, A. Miller, A. Zorin, A. Kamenskii, R. Wortman, and others, are also of key importance for researching the evolution and role of the Russian nobility in the imperial context. The volume *Западные окраины Российской империи*[7] (The Western Peripheries of the Russian Empire), edited by Alexei Miller and Mikhail Dolbilov, examines the role of the local elites in shaping and sustaining the political, economic, and social structures of the western peripheries of the Russian Empire in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The authors suggest that elites played a significant role in shaping and administering territories in the Empire's west, holding control over resources and serving as key actors in these regional economies. Additionally, these government elites participated in political activities through their positions in the local administrative structures. However, the authors emphasize that the elites, especially the nobility, were not always united in their visions and objectives, leading to internal conflicts and a disadvantage in their struggle with the Center for status and privileges. Unlike the West, where the aristocracy maintained its political and economic autonomy from the state, Russian nobility accessed resources and rents solely at the will of the Autocrat, highlighting the importance of the loyalty to the Throne as the primary source of legitimacy. The influence of two scholars, Marc Raeff[8] and Yuri Lotman[9], is particularly noted in shaping paradigms regarding the image of the Russian nobility. They provided foundational concepts and contextualized the place of the nobility in 18th century Russian culture.

Romanian historiography has only sporadically addressed the evolution of the Bessarabian elite, often viewing it as antagonistic to national aspirations due to its loyalty to the Romanov dynasty during the interwar period. One of the first systematic approaches to the elite was made by Gheorghe I. Brătianu in a 1933 conference. Influenced by the elitist concepts of the time, Brătianu argued that the

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[4] Романовичь-Славатински, А. *Дворянство в России от начала XVII века до отмены крепостного права.* СПб: тип. Министерства внутренних дел,1870, 564 с.

[5] Соловьев, Б. *Русское дворянство и его выдающиеся представители.* Ростов-на-Дону: Феникс, 2000, 340 с.

[6] Микешин, М. *Дворянство: от истории к метафизике*. Санкт-Петербург: Политехника-сервис, 2015, 400 с.

[7] Миллер, А., Долбилов, М. *Западные окраины Российской империи*. Москва: Новое литературное обозрение, 2007, 608 с.

[8] Raeff, M. *Origin of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966, 260 p.

[9] Лотман, Ю. *Беседы о русской культуре. Быт и традиции русского дворянства (XVIII-начало XIX века).* СПб: Искусство, 1994, 214 с.

masses are leaderless and unable to govern themselves, while the elite possesses authority[10]. For Brătianu, elites act as a mediating force between the power and the people. Gheorghe Bezviconi also significantly contributed to the study of the Bessarabian nobility, publishing a series of works and articles on this social class[11]. He examined a wide range of subjects, from the general evolution of the Bessarabian nobility to the individual histories of nobles involved in the political, economic, and cultural life of the region, emphasizing the struggle for national consciousness.

In the postwar period, the study of nobility was heavily influenced by Marxist paradigms, which discouraged any focus on elites, stigmatizing them as "class enemies" and "traitors" to the people's interests. Surprisingly, even in the first decade after independence, the study of the 19th century elites was not encouraged, likely due to similar reasons as in the interwar period. However, there was some interest among Romanian historians and sociologists, with notable studies by Gh. Platon and Al. Fl. Platon[12]. In 1996, the A.D. Xenopol Academic Foundation in Iași dedicated a special volume to elites (*Xenopoliana IV*, 1996, 1-4) [13]. Researchers focused on this theme include Alexandru Zub, Stelian Tănase, Petru Bejan, Alexandru-Florin Platon, Cătălin Turliuc, Gheorghe Teodorescu, Florea Ioncioaia, Remus Câmpeanu, Simion Retegan, and Ștefan-Mihai Ceaușu. More recent studies on elites in the Romanian space include the contributions of historians Cristian Ploscaru[14] and Dan Dumitru

[10] Brătianu Gh. *Problema noilor elite şi a liberalismului în România*. Extras din revista „Libertatea". Bucureşti: Leopold Geller, 1933, 15 p.

[11] Bezviconi Gh. *Boierii Catargi*. În: Din trecutul nostru, 1936, anul IV. nr. 36-39 pp. 106-126; Idem. *Boierii Stamati*. În: Din trecutul nostru, anul III, nr. 15-16, pp. 3-47; Idem. *Paul Gore*. În: Din trecutul nostru, 1938, anul V, nr. 50 pp. 1-4; Idem. *Manuc-Bei*. În: Din trecutul nostru, 1938, anul VI, nr. 54-55, pp. 1-57; Idem. *Din vremea lui Alexandru Sturdza (1791-1854)*. În: Din trecutul nostru, anul IV, nr. 36-39. pp.1-81; Idem. *Familia Krupenski în Basarabia*. În: Din trecutul nostru, 1939, anul VII, nr.10, pp. 5-52; Idem. *Femeia Basarabeană*. În: Din trecutul nostru, 1934, nr.11-12, pp. 7-70; Idem. *Fraţii Stroescu*. În: Din trecutul nostru, 1935, anul III, nr. 17-20, pp.102-108; Idem. *Natalia Keşco. Regina Serbiei*. În: Din trecutul nostru, 1935, anul III, nr. 17-20, pp. 59-74; Idem. *Boierii Sturdza şi Basarabia (urmare*). În: Arhivele Basarabiei. Revistă de istorie și geografie a Moldovei dintre Prut și Nistru, 1934, anul VI, nr. 1, pp. 36-51. Idem. *Patruzeci de ani din viaţa Basarabiei, 1877-1917;* În: Din trecutul nostru, 1939, nr.8-9, pp. 3-41.

[12] Platon, Gh., Platon, Al. Fl. *Boierimea din Moldova în secolul al XIX-lea. Context European, evoluţie socială şi politică (Date statistice şi observaţii istorice)*. Bucureşti: Ed. Academiei Române, 1995, 204 p.

[13] Xenopoliana, Buletinul Fundației Academice „A.D. Xenopol" din Iași, 1996, IV, 1-4. (Disponibil: biblioteca-digitala.ro/?tip-publicatie=periodic&volum=21854-xenopoliana-buletinul-fundatiei-academice-a-d-xenopol--x-1-4-2002)

[14] Ploscaru, C. *Originile „partidei naţionale" din Principatele Române: Sub semnul „politicii boiereşti" (1774-1828)*, vol. I. Iași: Editura Universității „Al. I. Cuza", 2013, 784 p.

Iacob[15]. Even after independence, the interest in studying the 19th century Bessarabian elite remained limited. However, in the recent decades, significant progress has been made with the works of Alexei Agachi[16], Valentin Tomuleț[17], Cristina Gherasim[18], Andrei Cușco[19], and Vladimir Morozan[20]. These studies highlight the economic, social, and cultural role of the local nobility, contributing to a broader understanding of the region's history. Recent researches indicate that the Bessarabian nobility was more active than previously believed—not merely passive victims of the imperial policies, but agents negotiating a limited autonomy with the Center. This elite managed to secure privileges and positions in the imperial administration, although it was gradually marginalized and forced to adopt norms that restricted its initial autonomy.

The research on the Bessarabian elite has been based on the archival document analysis from the collections preserved by the National Archives Agency. Key

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[15] Iacob, D. D. *Elitele din Principatele Române în prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea. Sociabilitate şi divertisment*. Iași: Editura Universității „Al. I. Cuza", 2015, 409 p.

[16] Agachi, A. *Basarabia sub regim țarist (1812-1868): (Administrație și politică),* Chișinău: Pontos, 2022, 422 p.; Idem. *Lichidarea de către guvernul țarist a particularităților administrative și privilegiilor regiunii Basarabia în anii 1828–1868*. În: Revista de Ştiinţă, Inovare, Cultură şi Artă „Akademos", 2019, nr. 3(54), pp. 69-76; Idem. *Participarea guvernatorului civil Scarlat Sturdza la organizarea administrației Basarabiei (1812-1813).* În: Revista de Istorie a Moldovei, 2017, nr. 1(109), pp. 71-93; Idem. *Țara Moldovei și Țara Românească sub ocupația militară rusă (1806-1812)*, Chișinău: Pontos, 2008, 388 p; Idem. *Consiliul Suprem al Basarabiei în perioada august 1816 – aprilie 1818.* In: *Revista de Ştiinţă, Inovare, Cultură şi Artă „Akademos"*, 2018, nr. 2(49), pp. 73-77.

[17] Tomuleț, V. *Basarabia în epoca modernă (1812-1918), instituții, regulamente, termeni*, ed. a II-a. Chișinău: Lexon-Prim, 2014, 672 p.; Idem. *Cronica protestelor și revendicărilor populației din Basarabia (1812-1828)*, vol. I. Chișinău: CEP USM, 2007. 325 p.; Idem. *Politica comercial-vamală a țarismului în Basarabia şi influenţa ei asupra constituirii burgheziei comerciale (1812-1868).* Ediţia a II-a. Iași: Tipo Moldova, 2015. 564 p.

[18] Gherasim, C. *Aspecte privind influența legislației țariste asupra statutului nobilimii din Basarabia în prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea*. In: Tyragetia. Serie nouă, 2016, nr. 2(25), pp. 173-186; Idem. *Dinamica și structura etnică a nobilimii din Basarabia în secolul al XIX-lea.* In: Studia Universitatis Moldaviae (Seria Ştiinţe Umanistice), 2017, nr. 10(110), pp. 140-158; Idem. *Identitatea națională a nobilimii basarabene sub regim de dominație țarist.* In: Studia Universitatis Moldaviae (Seria Ştiinţe Umanistice), 2017, nr. 4(104), pp. 60-70.; Idem. *Impactul regimului de dominație țarist asupra mentalității colective a nobilimii din Basarabia în primele decenii după anexare.* În: În oglinda istoriei: de la medieval la contemporan: In honorem profesor Valentin Tomuleț / Universitatea de Stat din Moldova: Biblioteca Ştiinţifică (Institut) „Andrei Lupan"; Chișinău : Biblioteca Ştiinţifică (Institut) "Andrei Lupan", 2022, pp. 531-547; Idem. *Mentalități colective ale nobilimii din Basarabia în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea* . In: Revista de Ştiinţă, Inovare, Cultură şi Artă „Akademos", 2022, nr. 4(67), pp. 81-88.

[19]Cușco, A. Taki, V. *Basarabia în componența Imperiului Rus, 1812-1917*. Chișinău: Cartier, 2024, 420 p.

[20] Morozan, V., *Basarabia şi nobilimea ei în secolul al XIX-lea – începutul secolului al XX-lea*. Chișinău: Cartier, 2023. 2 vol.

sources include the Bessarabian Noble Assembly Collection (F. 88), the Bessarabia Governor's Fund (Senators' Archive), the Fund of Senators and Presidents in the Divans of Moldavia and Wallachia (F. 1), and the Bessarabia Regional Council Fund (F. 3), all of which are very important. Additional valuable resources include the Provisional Committee of the Bessarabia Region (F. 4), the Government of the Bessarabia Region (F. 5), and the Chancellery of the Plenipotentiary Resident of the Bessarabia Region (F. 17). Documents from the *Complete Collection of the Russian Empire Laws* and *Bessarabia in the Complete Collection of the Russian Empire Laws*, edited by Mihai Taşcă, Igor Ojog, and Igor Şarov[21], were also utilized.

Alongside archival sources, there are other various contemporary sources. Travel literature[22], in particular, significantly shapes the profile of the Bessarabian elite. The earliest descriptions by Russian travelers coincide with the escalation of the "Eastern Question" leading to a highly Orientalized discourse. Symbolic geography served not only as a cognitive tool for exploring the region but also as a formidable weapon in the domestic political battles and an influential factor in the international relations of the period[23]. These texts sought to exploit the civilizational division in favor of the Center, with the figure of the Bessarabian noble playing a pivotal role.

**The second chapter:** *The role of the local elite in integrating Bessarabia into the Russian Empire* focuses on analyzing the role of the local elite within the administrative mechanisms. It examines the activities of Bessarabia's regional leadership through its interactions with central authorities during the second and third decades of the 19th century, as well as the efforts of the local elite to strengthen its influence amid intense competition for power and resources with other local and central actors. The annexation of Bessarabia occurred at a pivotal moment for both the Russian Empire and Europe's evolution. In this era of profound changes, the newly acquired European territories required a different form of administration compared to the empire's internal regions. This differentiation was partly driven by a need to maintain stability in the new peripheries, preventing revolts or destabilization, and partly by the distinctive nature of these territories, which had deep European economic, social, and political structures roots. Russian authorities

[21] Basarabia în „Colecția compplетă a legilor Imperiului Rus". (în vol.) / Acad. De Științe a Moldovei, Univ. de Stat din Moldova, Fac. De Istorie și Filosofie, Inst. de Cercet. Juridice și Politice; lucrare îngrijită de Mihai Taşcă (et al.) – Chișinău: Cartdidact, 2017.

[22] Descrierile de voiaj ale călătorilor ruși în Basarabia le putem găsi în publicații precum: «Русский архив»; «Отечественные записки»; «Современник» «Чтения в Императорском обществе истории и древностей российских при Московском университете» ș.a.

[23] Pâslariuc V. *Reconstruind istoria Basarabiei sub dominație țaristă. Note pe marginea unei monografii recente.* În: Archiva Moldaviae, Vol VII, 2015, pp. 337-391.

needed to convey a message that would promise, at a minimum, to preserve these structures. Simultaneously, the newly acquired western peripheries of the Russian Empire were viewed as strategic points for future expansions, necessitating the support and loyalty of local elites.

The peripheries were not merely margins or external entities of the imperial system but rather essential, integral parts, bringing diversity and unique characteristics. This "unity in diversity" should not be seen as a political *motto* but rather as a reflection of a complex reality in the Center-Periphery interactions, with the periphery acting as an influential actor rather than a passive recipient of central decisions. Thus, the center and periphery, especially the western periphery, represented two distinct, interdependent, albeit unequal subjects that shaped each other through intense interactions. The center's flexibility in adapting to local specificities depended heavily on the strength of the local responses. Often, the center avoided risking regional stability by imposing forced homogenization, opting instead for a flexible approach to maintain the balance and uphold imperial interests.

Additionally, the experience of governing the western peripheries provided central authorities an opportunity to test new governance models, especially in the context of the early 19$^{th}$ century attempts of structural reforms within the empire. These measures, generally liberal in nature, could not initially be implemented in the empire's core regions due to the fierce conservative opposition. Therefore, in the Polish territories, Finland, and even Bessarabia, conventionally referred to in this text as western peripheries, the center adopted a flexible approach, avoiding the rapid and strict imposition of existing imperial norms. Instead, it recognized the traditional rights and privileges of the local elite, leading to the development of hybrid forms of governance. These hybrids combined elements of imperial administration with local specificities and, depending on regional developments, periodically leaned either toward homogenization or the preservation of local characteristics. This oscillation was influenced by various factors, including the profiles and visions of central and local leaders, the internal and external policies of the empire, its resources and capacities, and the local elite's ability to unify in a pursuit of shared goals and the ability to respond effectively, allowing the local elite to influence central decisions. In the Russian Empire, the tolerance for distinct governance systems in the western peripheries began as early as the 18$^{th}$ century with the annexation of the Baltic provinces. Peter I preserved the privileges and autonomy of Baltic cities, granting the predominantly German nobility the right to retain their traditional rights and religious freedom. Consequently, the transfer of sovereignty from Stockholm to Saint Petersburg did not significantly alter the daily life in these provinces, at least in the immediate post-annexation period.

The Russian authorities adaptation to local specifics was driven not by altruism, but by a pragmatic approach aimed at facilitating the administration and exploitation of new territories. While local characteristics were acknowledged within the governance of the western peripheries, central authority was still asserted, primarily by securing the loyalty of local leaders. At the same time, the imperial regime acted firmly to suppress autonomous political institutions that could become centers of dangerous irredentist movements, attempting to neutralize separatist tendencies in their early stages. In cases of rebellion, any autonomous status was swiftly and decisively revoked, proving to be an insidious "favor" granted by the imperial center, a veritable "poisoned apple". By accepting this status, the local elite effectively acknowledged a new power dynamic with the imperial authority, signaling recognition of a new domination. From this perspective, the subtle role of the autonomous status as a tool to discipline the western peripheries becomes evident, where the maintenance of privileges was central to the imperial control through a skilled leverage over the local elites. By gaining the acceptance of the new authority from local elites, the Center not only facilitated economic and geostrategic exploitation of the region but also secured the legitimacy of its presence in these territories. In the western peripheries, this legitimacy needed to be transformed from an initially imposed political supremacy to a broader acknowledgment and acceptance of Russia's supposedly advanced or superior civilization by the local elite. The goal was to develop this interaction into a cohesive partnership aimed at implementing imperial policies in the periphery. In this context, Russian authorities hoped that Russian culture, broadly defined, including its governance system, would be accepted not through the means of force but through consensus and alignment with the Russian civilizational model, which was portrayed as superior.

In Poland and Finland, Russia positioned itself as the guarantor of traditional liberties, seeking to counter the progressive influences introduced by the French Revolution, which had spread through Central and Eastern Europe via Napoleon's armies. Additionally, Russia faced the Polish elite's tendencies to restore statehood, adding another layer of complexity to the integration of these territories. Autocratic and quasi-centralized, Russia encountered the challenge of incorporating societies that were often more advanced than itself socially, culturally, and sometimes economically. This situation created a profound contradiction between the desire to integrate the western periphery into the socio-political structures of the Russian autocracy and the need to use these regions as models to reform its own structure. Consequently, in Poland and Finland, Russia had to adapt its approach due to its institutional and political deficiencies and the presence of strong regional elites, which influenced and complicated the integration process.

In the case of Bessarabia, the central policies were marked by ambiguity, although it was presumed that the measures adopted in Bessarabia would align, at least formally, with those applied in the Kingdom of Poland or the Grand Duchy of Finland. However, contrary to this appearance, imperial representatives, governors and residents, assisted by their chancelleries, frequently implemented measures that contradicted the existing regulations in Bessarabia, justifying their actions with vague arguments, such as the transitional nature and political backwardness of the territory, alongside supposed signals from the Center. These measures, which violated existing regulations and contradicted the spirit of promises made by the emperor, prevented the establishment of an effective local autonomy and were favored by the context in which the Center was more concerned with foreign policy interests, leaving Bessarabia's affairs in the hands and at the discretion of the local representatives. In Bessarabia, the legitimacy of the Russian rule was based more on the alleged civilizational role of the Russian Empire, emphasizing and exaggerating perceived civilizational gaps that could supposedly only be bridged through rapid and radical alignment with the Russian model. These often-exaggerated differences were used by the Russian authorities both to justify the failures of the policies applied in Bessarabia and to argue against the autonomy project, favoring the homogenization of the Bessarabian structures with the established imperial ones. Thus, Russia simultaneously presented itself as the liberator of Christians in the region, responding to their call for salvation, and as a force combating "barbaric" and outdated Eastern practices. At the same time, these "backward practices" which drew Russian disapproval, served as the basis for the discourse of the Russian civilizational supremacy. In leveraging the civilizational divide for the Center's benefit, the figure of the Bessarabian noble occupied a central place. According to contemporary Russian perspectives, these nobles were perceived as being on the lowest rank of the social hierarchy, as they were considered servants of the Moldavian boyars (who were, in turn, subordinated to the Greeks, who were subjugated by the Turks). This context underscored a profound perception of inferiority and subordination, which influenced how the imperial authorities viewed and treated them.

At the same time, the uncertain nature of Bessarabia before 1828 is reflected in the volatility of the local institutions, which were in a state of constant formation, and in the frequent shifts in the Center's views on Bessarabia's place and role within the Empire. Bessarabia was not seen as an object of profound conceptualization by the central authorities but rather as an unclear subject still dealing with the impact of these changes. Initially, following its annexation, Bessarabia was governed according to the provisional administrative rules drafted by I. Capodistria under the auspices of P. Ciceagov. These provisional rules were replaced by the 1818 regulation, which,

although approved by the Russian sovereign, were introduced on a trial basis for one year. After this period, the regulation was not definitively approved but was tacitly applied in the absence of other normative acts. It wasn't until 1828 that another regulation was adopted, which nearly completely eradicated Bessarabia's autonomous character. The uncertainty regarding Bessarabia's status is also reflected in other aspects, such as its initial subordination to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, later to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and, finally, the preservation of the border along the Dniester River. Beyond formal explanations, these aspects can be interpreted as signs of the Russian authority's uncertainty regarding the Bessarabian project.

**In the third chapter**, entitled "Strategies for Co-opting the Local Elite" the mechanisms through which the imperial center selected, attracted, or rejected representatives of the Bessarabian elite in the governance of the province were analyzed. Special attention was given to the privileges granted by the imperial authorities, using the inclusion of the Bessarabian nobility in the local governance as a case study. Additionally, the chapter examines the complex and extensive process of recognizing the noble status for the members of the Bessarabian elite.

The case of Bessarabia, annexed by the Russian Empire in 1812, illustrates how imperial strategies for integrating and administering conquered territories were articulated and implemented. Between 1812 and 1828, Russian authorities implemented policies aimed at bringing the local nobility into the imperial power structures, as they were the only relevant political actors in the region. These strategies were designed to gain their cooperation in the process of integrating the new province, either by participating in the efforts to homogenize the region or by contributing to the creation of a distinct administrative system that would retain, even if partially, the local specificities. Bessarabia stands out in the context of the peripheries because the Prut-Dniester region had not experienced a distinct statehood prior to 1812. Thus, what was later called the Bessarabian elite, or the Bessarabian nobility, was essentially an emerging construct within the imperial context. This elite was primarily formed from Moldavian boyars who chose to obey to Russia for various reasons, along with opportunists and *nouveaux riches* who saw in this situation an opportunity for financial gain, as well as foreign elements who settled in Bessarabia. On one hand, the local elite was under pressure, but at the same time, it was motivated to receive a political-legal status within the Empire, thus becoming part of the system, to secure social prestige and economic advantages while protecting their personal interests. By integrating into the imperial nobility, the local elite did not only gain status but also accessed to significant resources and the opportunity to consolidate and expand its influence, improving its position both in

local and the imperial power structures. The main attraction for these local leaders were the benefits conferred by the Russian noble status, including the legal immunity, the exemption from taxes, the right to participate actively in the political and economic life, and the privilege of holding key administrative positions.

By partially involving the local elite in the administration of the region, the Russian authorities gained not only pragmatic advantages and crucial legitimacy for their presence in the annexed territories, but also validated the status of this elite as a superior social class, thereby granting it a recognized role under the new dominant power. This approach created a mutually beneficial relationship, in which both the Russian authorities and the local elites benefited from cooperation. The alliance between the Russian autocracy and the nobility proved to be an exceptionally efficient mobilization mechanism for managing resources in a vast empire that still lacked consolidated institutions and a bureaucracy trained for this purpose. The involvement of the local elite in the provincial administration also aimed to discipline and control, providing its members with a role in implementing the directives imposed by the central authorities. In this way, the local elites were gradually transformed into agents of central power at the periphery, with privileges serving as the lever through which the center exercised control over the local elite. These elites played an essential role in mediating between imperial politics and local realities, translating and implementing central policies within a specific regional context. However, this arrangement did not preclude open conflicts between members of the local elite and representatives of central power at the local level, with both sides resorting to arbitration by central authorities to resolve disputes. It is worth noting that when the interests of the Bessarabian elite were threatened, they were prepared to act decisively, defending them with dedication and determination, alternating between involvement and sabotage. In this context of defending interests, which should not necessarily be viewed in a petty sense as they intersected with the interests of the broader population, a solidarity emerged that evolved into a distinct group identity for the Bessarabian elite. A complete acceptance of the policy of homogenization increased the risk of the local elite being absorbed into the mass of the imperial nobility, thus compromising any attempts at local autonomy.

For the effective implementation of co-optation measures, meticulous strategies had to be adopted. The first essential step was identifying individuals with significant influence or notoriety in the targeted territory, who would form the core of the future Bessarabian nobility. These individuals had to meet at least two crucial requirements from the Center. First, they needed to lend legitimacy to the actions of the Center, so the clear preference was for those who could claim noble origins, such as holding a significant rank or position in the administration of the Principalities. The second

requirement was pragmatic: the Center was unwilling to entrust its interests in Bessarabia to individuals who had not been previously tested. Therefore, those who had collaborated with Russian authorities before 1812 and managed to prove their trustworthiness had a clear advantage in this regard. Rewarding those who displayed fervent devotion and were especially useful to the central authorities in the region involved rapid advancement in both career and social hierarchy, often surpassing the established legal limits. In the case of Bessarabia, the promotion procedure within the bureaucratic apparatus was not always applied strictly, allowing exceptions for those who demonstrated consistency in defending the Center's interests and, not least, loyalty to the authorities. Several representatives of the nobility began their service from relatively low ranks, eventually advancing rapidly in the bureaucratic hierarchy. There were instances where they reached the upper class in a shorter time than the general norms allowed, which typically provided for a period of 3-4 years for promotion to a new rank. Premature transfer to a higher class represented an exception to the rule and was granted by the personal decision of the emperor, based on particular merits brought to the Russian state. However, there are cases where rapid ascension in the hierarchy slowed abruptly upon reaching the 9$^{th}$ class rank, the last before attaining hereditary noble status. This suggests that the authorities were not eager to extend the noble community in the Russian Empire until the noble origin of the claimant was confirmed, especially in the context of growing tensions between the old hereditary nobility and the new bureaucratic, life-term nobility.

The transformations in the Russian Empire during the 18$^{th}$ and 19$^{th}$ centuries revealed a sophisticated strategy of calibration in the administration of the western peripheries. In a complex framework with well-defined economic and social structures, the Russian administration opted for an indirect rule, relying on collaboration with local elites. This approach was essential in regions that, due to strong reactions to attempts at homogenization, required careful management. In Bessarabia, the imperial policies failed to provide local elites with real autonomy. Although they were integrated into the state structure, their actual power remained extremely limited, subordinated to central authorities. Local officials, elected to various positions, often acted more as representatives of the imperial administration than as voices of the local community, being forced to implement policies dictated by St. Petersburg. Thus, the independence of local institutions was reduced to a mere framework, and the Bessarabian elite was subjected to severe restrictions in exercising its authority. The imperial system created the appearance of association between the Bessarabian elites and governance by offering material and symbolic advantages, but this diminished their role as representatives of the local community. The benefits, including tax exemptions, advantageous loans, and noble ranks, were

sufficient to persuade the majority of the elite to accept the changes, even in the face of resistance from some members. Thus, the Russian noble system became an essential tool in consolidating the control and loyalty from the local elite. By joining the imperial nobility, local elites gained access to resources and opportunities to extend their influence within the economic and power structures. The financial and social offered benefits were strategic in ensuring the devotion of the local elite, even though these benefits were selectively granted. In conclusion, the integration of the Bessarabian elite demonstrated the efficiency of the imperial system in consolidating the control over the region and maintaining the loyalty to the central power.

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Russian Empire, faced with the challenge of maintaining the cohesion across such a vast and diverse territory, adopted a flexible policy in managing the Center-Periphery relationship, especially in the western peripheries. Imperial authorities resorted to various models of governance, oscillating between the direct management, the indirect rule through local elites, or hybrid forms. This choice not only reflected a strategy of control but also a pragmatic recognition of the local complexities, including different legal and administrative traditions, a variety of languages, and distinct religious practices. In many cases, the model of indirect rule through local elites was not adopted out of a spirit of concession, but as a necessary compromise to cope with the challenges posed by the geographical and cultural distance. Direct management would have entailed considerable costs, and the lack of qualified personnel to administer these distant territories led the Center to consider granting a certain degree of local autonomy during the initial phases of integration. Thus, the acceptance of diversity was not an expression of tolerance but a realistic solution for maintaining the stability of the empire in an extremely difficult international context, caused by the rise of new socio-political forces in the first half of the 19$^{th}$ century.

The integration of Bessarabia into the Russian Empire was characterized by a continuous adaptability, a combination of policies alternating between contradictory strategies and temporary solutions, designed to address regional challenges. The dynamics of transformations at the periphery were not always understood by the Center, and reactions were often inadequate, creating a dynamic of interdependence that often undermined the clarity of imperial policies. In Chișinău, high-ranking officials were required to navigate and find a balance between messages from the Center and local realities, often defying the instructions received to maintain the stability in the province. As a result, the institutional structure of Bessarabia had a transitional and fluid character, influenced not only by the attitudes and visions of

local leaders but also by the political fluctuations at the Center. In a broader sense, Bessarabia was more of an administrative experiment, a "territory in the process of definition" than an object of rigorously conceptualized central policies. The province's sensitivity to changes in the empire's internal politics was exacerbated by the lack of a mature administrative structure and the absence of a coherent vision, both from the central authorities and the local elite, regarding the directions of provincial development.

Between 1812 and 1828, the administration of Bessarabia was shaped by a hybrid system of governance, an attempt of synthesis between the imperial governance models applied in other western provinces and the local traditional specificities. This approach was designed as a compromise that would allow Bessarabia to preserve its distinct cultural and administrative traits while gradually integrating into the imperial structures. However, the central authorities' inability to truly appreciate and respect the region's particularities resulted in an inefficient administration, undermining the autonomist project. The inclusion of the Noble Assembly into the rigid imperial hierarchy was initially perceived as a significant concession, but in practice, local elites did not benefit from a real autonomy. Their power was more symbolic, remaining strictly controlled by the Center. Thus, local institutions had almost exclusively formal independence, being forced to implement directives imposed from the Center, with any local initiative easily blocked by imperial local actors. Nonetheless, in times of crisis, when the economic and social interests of the local elite were threatened, these influential groups acted as true protectors of the local population's rights. Far from completely submitting to central policies, the local elite seized every opportunity to defend their prerogatives and, implicitly, to support a tacit resistance against the uniformity imposed by the empire.

The process of integrating the Bessarabian elite into the Russian nobility was marked by ambivalence and difficulties, reflecting the central authorities' cautious attitude toward the new province. Although recognition of the noble status was perceived by some members of the local elite as a return to the old privileges, the process was exhausting and at times humiliating. The fact that Russian authorities constantly requested additional evidence to confirm the noble status denotes implicit discrimination, accentuating the perception of inferiority applied to Bessarabia in relation to other regions of the empire. This attitude reflects how the Russian Empire viewed Bessarabia: a recently annexed province, seen as a "peripheral" territory that had not fully attained the status of a "safe" and "civilized" zone. In this context, the Russian authorities were reluctant to grant the Bessarabian elite a position equivalent to that of the Russian nobility. The process of recognizing titles was impeded by

suspicions and a paternalistic approach, where any claim was treated with skepticism and delayed by additional documents and genealogical proof requirements.

The system of noble privileges imposed by the Russian authorities played a crucial role in integrating the Bessarabian elite into the power structures of the Russian Empire, becoming a strategic tool in consolidating the control over the region. By offering material and symbolic advantages, the authorities managed to attract a significant portion of the local elite, thus creating an apparent but profoundly unequal alliance, in which the role of the elite as representatives of the local community gradually diminished. This tactic allowed the Russian Empire not only to exert its influence over the Bessarabian elite but also to transform it into a supporter of the imperial policies, a body of officials who, although formally were coming from the local community, largely acted in the interest of the Center. For many members of the elite, giving up their traditional role as protectors of the local interests and freedoms was a difficult concession, but the incentives and benefits offered were often too tempting to refuse. In the long term, this system of privileges contributed to reshaping the social and political structure of Bessarabia, creating a local elite dependent on the central authorities and loyal to the imperial Center rather than their own local traditions and values. Dependent on the favors of the Center, these elites became an extension of imperial power, less representative of the Bessarabian community and increasingly involved in implementing imperial policies at the expense of the local interests. Thus, the system of noble privileges functioned not only as a mechanism for integration but also as a means of subtly subjugating the local elite.

The strategy of attracting the Bessarabian elite into the Russian state service represented a subtle attempt of integration through symbolic and material rewards, aiming to establish a common ground between the local elite and the imperial structures. This mechanism leveraged the elite's previous experiences in the occupation administrations of the Romanian Principalities, allowing for a relatively smooth transition by obtaining key functions within the new Bessarabian administration. The granting of higher ranks and associated benefits solidified this apparent "alliance", while also fulfilling pragmatic needs for the Russian Empire, including covering personnel shortages and reducing expenses by avoiding the transfer of officials from other regions.

Moreover, the advancement system was applied flexibly in Bessarabia, often favoring individuals who had proven loyalty to the Russian authorities. This openness provided the local elite with the opportunity for an administrative career, particularly for those with a history of positive collaboration or higher ranks obtained within the administration of the Principality of Moldavia. However, most of the Bessarabian

elite remained hesitant toward the full integration into regional structures, a reluctance that can be explained both by a desire to maintain established noble traditions under the 1785 Charter and by the frequent tensions with Russian officials. The period 1812-1828 thus reveals a duality in the relationship between the Bessarabian elite and the imperial authorities: on one hand, cooperation driven by pragmatic benefits and career opportunities; on the other, a clear reluctance toward adopting Russian values and structures in their entirety.

**The recommendations** resulting from the analysis of the strategies of co-opting local elites in Bessarabia between 1812-1828, in the context of the Center-Periphery relationship, offer valuable reflections for understanding and managing current relations between the Russian Federation and its former peripheries. Our study highlights relevant similarities between the co-optation tactics used by the Russian Empire and those currently adopted by the Russian Federation, particularly in the context of the military aggression in Ukraine that began in 2014 and escalated in 2022. First and foremost, it is essential to recognize that the approach of co-opting local elites is based on exploiting regional loyalties and influences. In the case of Bessarabia's annexation in 1812, the Russian Empire employed similar tactics to integrate the local elites by granting privileges and administrative positions in exchange for loyalty to the imperial center. This method not only strengthened the imperial control but also divided the local society, creating an elite dependent on central power.

Analyzing the current behavior of the Russian Federation in the occupied territories of Ukraine, a similar strategy can be observed. Russian authorities attempt to co-opt influential local leaders by offering them administrative positions and economic leverages, but this loyalty must be demonstrated explicitly and constantly toward the imperial Center. This tactic reflects a historical continuity in the approach to the Center-Periphery relations, underscoring the persistence of the same governing methods. Thus, the results of this research can be useful in developing further studies or even in formulating resilience strategies against the abusive influences of the Russian Federation.

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# ANNOTATION

**Author:** Boțolin Sergiu. Relations between the Center and Periphery in the Russian Empire: Strategies for Co-opting the Bessarabian Elite, PhD thesis in History, Chișinău, 2024.

**Structure:** Introduction, three chapters, general conclusions and recommendations, bibliography with 244 titles, 152 pages of main text. The results are published in 11 scientific papers.

**Keywords:** Bessarabia, Russian Empire, local elite, nobility, co-optation, integration.

**Purpose of the thesis:** The thesis aims to thoroughly analyze the Center-Periphery relations in Bessarabia between 1812-1828, focusing on the strategies for co-opting and integrating the local elite by the Russian Empire.

**Objectives:** The first objective is the analysis of local structures and the integration of the Bessarabian elite into them. The second objective examines imperial policies and their practical implementation, emphasizing the interaction between the center and periphery. Another objective is to explore how the local elite negotiated access to influence and resources within the new Russian power structures. The use of noble privileges by the Empire to co-opt the local elite, thus maintaining control, will also be assessed. The research will examine the role of the elites in the regional administration and their integration as imperial subjects.

**Scientific novelty and originality:** The scientific novelty lies in the comprehensive analysis of Center-Periphery relations in Bessarabia through the lens of co-opting the local elite by the Russian Empire, a topic insufficiently addressed in local historiography. The originality stems from a multidimensional perspective that combines political, social, and cultural aspects, opening new avenues of study through comparison with contemporary influence strategies employed by the Russian Federation.

**Results contributing to solving an important scientific problem:** Through in-depth analysis of governance mechanisms and the role of the Bessarabian elite in consolidating imperial control, the research contributes to understanding processes of co-opting and local resistance, providing essential clarifications on the transition from autonomous administration to full integration into imperial structures.

**Theoretical significance of the work:** The theoretical significance lies in the contribution to the theory of Center-Periphery relations, developing an analytical framework for understanding power dynamics within modern empires. The historical, sociological, and political approaches offer a theoretical model applicable to other regions under imperial influence.

**Practical value of the work:** The research results are relevant not only for understanding the history of Bessarabia but also for interpreting the influence and integration strategies employed by the Russian Federation in its peripheral regions today. The work provides a useful framework for analyzing indirect governance mechanisms and power relations between the center and periphery.

**Implementation of scientific results:** The main results of the investigation, published and approved in 11 scientific papers, as well as in reports and conference presentations, are integrated into the teaching process for students. They can serve as a source for the development of scientific materials focused on the addressed topic.

# ADNOTARE

**Autor:** Boțolin Sergiu. Raporturile dintre Centru și Periferie în Imperiul Rus: strategiile de cooptare ale elitei basarabene, teză de doctor în istorie, Chișinău, 2024.

**Structură:** Introducere, trei capitole, concluzii generale și recomandări, bibliografie din 244 titluri, 152 pagini de text de bază. Rezultatele obținute sunt publicate în 11 lucrări științifice.

**Cuvinte-cheie**: Basarabia, Imperiul Rus, elită locală, nobilime, cooptare, integrare.

**Scopul lucrării** – Scopul tezei este de a analiza detaliat relațiile Centru-Periferie în Basarabia între anii 1812-1828, concentrându-se pe strategiile de cooptare și integrare a elitei locale de către Imperiul Rus.

**Obiectivele**: Primul obiectiv este analiza structurilor locale și integrarea elitelor basarabene în acestea. Al doilea obiectiv examinează politicile imperiale și implementarea lor practică, axându-se pe interacțiunea dintre centru și periferie. Un alt obiectiv urmărește modul în care elita locală a negociat accesul la influență și resurse în cadrul noilor structuri de putere rusești. Se va evalua și utilizarea privilegiilor nobiliare de către Imperiu pentru a coopta elita locală, menținând astfel controlul. Cercetarea va analiza și rolul elitelor în administrația regională și procesul de integrare a acestora ca subiecți imperiali.

**Noutatea şi originalitatea ştiinţifică** constă în analiza complexă a raporturilor Centru-Periferie din Basarabia prin prisma cooptării elitei locale de către Imperiul Rus, aspect care a fost insuficient abordat în istoriografia locală. Originalitatea constă în perspectiva multidimensională care combină aspecte politice, sociale și culturale, deschizând noi direcții de studiu prin comparația cu strategiile contemporane de influență utilizate de Federația Rusă.

**Rezultatele obținute care contribuie la soluționarea unei probleme științifice importante:** Prin analiza aprofundată a mecanismelor de guvernare și a rolului elitei basarabene în consolidarea controlului imperial, cercetarea contribuie la înțelegerea proceselor de cooptare și rezistență la nivel local, aducând clarificări esențiale asupra tranziției de la o administrație autonomă la integrarea completă în structurile imperiale.

**Semnificația teoretică a lucrării** constă în contribuția adusă la teoria relațiilor Centru-Periferie, dezvoltând un cadru analitic pentru înțelegerea dinamicilor de putere din cadrul imperiilor moderne. Abordarea istorică, sociologică și politologică oferă un model teoretic aplicabil și altor regiuni sub influența imperiilor.

**Valoarea aplicativă a lucrării** Rezultatele cercetării sunt relevante nu doar pentru înțelegerea istoriei Basarabiei, ci și pentru interpretarea strategiilor de influență și integrare aplicate de Federația Rusă în regiunile sale periferice în prezent. Lucrarea oferă un cadru util pentru analiza mecanismelor de guvernare indirectă și a relațiilor de putere între centru și periferie.

**Implementarea rezultatelor științifice**: Rezultatele principale ale investigației, publicate și aprobate în cadrul a 11 lucrări științifice, precum și în rapoarte și prezentări la conferințe, sunt integrate în procesul de învățământ al studenților. Acestea pot servi drept sursă pentru elaborarea unor materiale științifice axate pe tematica abordată.

# АННОТАЦИЯ

**Автор:** Боцолин Серджиу. Отношения между Центром и Периферией в Российской Империи: стратегии кооптации бессарабской элиты, докторская диссертация по истории, Кишинёв, 2024.

**Структура:** Введение, три главы, общие выводы и рекомендации, библиография из 243 наименований, 152 страниц основного текста. Полученные результаты опубликованы в 11 научных работах.

**Ключевые слова:** Бессарабия, Российская Империя, местная элита, дворянство, кооптация, интеграция.

**Цель работы:** Цель диссертации – подробно проанализировать отношения Центра и Периферии в Бессарабии в период 1812-1828 годов, сосредоточив внимание на стратегиях кооптации и интеграции местной элиты Российской Империей.

**Задачи:** Первая задача – анализ местных структур и интеграции бессарабской элиты в эти структуры. Вторая задача исследует имперские политики и их практическую реализацию, акцентируя внимание на взаимодействии между центром и периферией. Другая задача заключается в исследовании того, как местная элита вела переговоры о доступе к влиянию и ресурсам в рамках новых российских властных структур. Также будет оцениваться использование дворянских привилегий Империей для кооптации местной элиты, поддерживая таким образом контроль. Исследование также проанализирует роль элит в региональной администрации и процесс их интеграции как имперских субъектов.

**Научная новизна и оригинальность:** Научная новизна заключается в комплексном анализе отношений Центра и Периферии в Бессарабии через призму кооптации местной элиты Российской Империей, что недостаточно освещено в местной историографии. Оригинальность работы заключается в многомерной перспективе, которая сочетает политические, социальные и культурные аспекты, открывая новые направления исследований через сравнение с современными стратегиями влияния, применяемыми Российской Федерацией.

**Результаты, способствующие решению важной научной проблемы:** Посредством углубленного анализа механизмов управления и роли бессарабской элиты в укреплении имперского контроля, исследование вносит вклад в понимание процессов кооптации и сопротивления на местном уровне, предоставляя важные разъяснения о переходе от автономного управления к полной интеграции в имперские структуры.

**Теоретическое значение работы:** Теоретическое значение работы заключается в вкладе в теорию отношений Центра и Периферии, разработке аналитической основы для понимания динамики власти в рамках современных империй. Исторический, социологический и политологический подходы предлагают теоретическую модель, применимую и к другим регионам, находящимся под влиянием империй.

**Практическая ценность работы:** Результаты исследования актуальны не только для понимания истории Бессарабии, но и для интерпретации стратегий влияния и интеграции, применяемых Российской Федерацией в периферийных регионах сегодня. Работа предлагает полезную основу для анализа механизмов косвенного управления и отношений власти между центром и периферией.

**Внедрение научных результатов:** Основные результаты исследования, опубликованные и одобренные в 11 научных статьях, а также в докладах и презентациях на конференциях, интегрированы в учебный процесс студентов. Они могут служить источником для разработки научных материалов, ориентированных на обсуждаемую тематику.

**BOȚOLIN SERGIU**

# THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE CENTER AND THE PERIPHERY IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE: STRATEGIES FOR CO-OPTING THE BESSARABIAN ELITES

**611.02 – ROMANIANS HISTORY (BY PERIODS)**

Abstract of the Doctoral Thesis in History


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