

THE GATE OF CHRISTIANITY

“The sources from this period show that Stephen was well aware of Moldavia’s unique geo-political position—the region was Europe’s eastern-most Christian frontier. Stephen acknowledged the crucial location of his principality in a letter dated 25 January 1475, and written after his battle against the Ottomans at Vaslui two weeks before, on 10 January 1475—an event that reverberated throughout all of Europe.¹¹⁵ Stephen sent his message to Europe’s leaders¹¹⁶ in an effort to secure additional military and financial support for his anti-Ottoman struggles. In the letter, the Moldavian prince referred to his domain as the “gate of Christianity”¹¹⁷ and explained that if this eastern Carpathian region were to be conquered by the Turkish forces “the rest of the Christian world would be in great danger.”¹¹⁸ Three years later (after his defeats at Vaslui in 1475 and Războieni in 1476), in a letter delivered by his messenger and uncle John Țamblac to the Venetians and Pope Sixtus IV (1414-1484; in office 1471-1484), on 8 May 1478, Stephen explained:

I do not want to repeat how important my country is for all the Christians; I think it is superfluous [to repeat], because it is in fact too clear that my country is the main stronghold for Hungary and Poland, and the garrison of these two kingdoms. Aside from this, because the Turks tripped on me, many Christians remained in peace for the past four years.

Excerpt from *The Painted Fortified Monastic Churches of Moldavia: Bastions of Orthodoxy in a Post-Byzantine World*
by Alice Isabella Sullivan

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“ Stephen’s victory in the Battle of Vaslui was “arguably one of the biggest European victories over the Ottomans”, according to historian Alexander Mikaberidze.] Mara Branković, Mehmed II’s stepmother, stated the Ottomans “had never suffered a greater defeat”. Stephen sent letters to the European rulers to seek their support against the Ottomans, reminding them that Moldavia was “the Gateway of Christianity” and “the bastion of Hungary and Poland and the guardian of these kingdoms”. Pope Sixtus IV praised him as *Verus christiane fidei athleta* (“The true defender of the Christian faith”). However, neither the Pope, nor any other European power, sent material support to Moldavia. Stephen was also approaching Mehmed with peace offers. According to disputed reports by the chronicler Jan Długosz, he was also playing down the invasion as the deed of “some fugitives and brigands” whom the Sultan would want to punish.











“ If Stephen fathered two or three sons named Alexandru, the one who was for a while his designated successor was born to Evdochia of Kiev, whom Stephen married in 1463. An Olelkovich she was closely related both to Ivan III of Moscow, and to Casimir IV of Poland and Lithuania. Stephen’s charter of grant to the Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos refers to two children of Stephen and Evdochia, Alexandru and Olena. Olena was the wife of Ivan Molodoy, the eldest son of Ivan III, and mother of the usurped heir Dmitry. Stephen’s second (or third) wife, Maria of Mangup, was of the family of the princes of Theodoro. She was probably also cousins with the Muscovite Grand Princess Sophia Palaiologina, and was related to Trebizond’s royal couple, Emperor David and Empress Maria.









