FROM EMPIRE TO NATION STATE: THE GREEK COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN DOBRUDJA (1878–1880)

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This article is focused on relationship between the Orthodox Christian Churches (Greek and Bulgarian), and the secular administration in the late 1870s. After the annexation of the region by the Romanians, the *Ottoman raya* become Romanian citizen. The Greeks in the cities of Constanța, Tulcea, and Sulina sought to ensure the exclusive property and possession of their churches that had belonged to the Eastern Orthodox Christian community in the Ottoman Empire.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, Romania, Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Bulgarian Exarchate, Greek communities in Dobroudja.

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

I encountered difficulties in researching this topic due to the scarcity of historical sources. Many archives of the Greek communities, but also of the local authorities of Dobrudja were destroyed during the two World Wars. At the Constanța County Directorate of the National Archives there is a fund called the Greek Community, but the information about the period that concerns me in this paper is extremely scarce. Searching on the website of the National Archives, I found that there may be a consistent archive fund of Sulina Town Hall, but, due to the pandemic, it was not possible for me to get documented on this topic, neither here, nor in other cities in Dobrudja. Three years ago, I visited Sulina, where I was deeply impressed by the poor condition of the Greek St. Nicholas church. I do not know if in the meantime restoration work has been done. As regards the community archive from Sulina, I found out from a local source that, between 1945 and 1948, with the emigration of Greek merchants from the town, all church and school documents, library, etc. were burnt outside, in the middle of the courtyard. Dimitris Kontogeorgis, a Greek historian, recently published a study on archival sources concerning Greek communities in Dobrudja. He also concludes that the historian does not have much to work with.[1] However, for this study, I identified two archive funds that deal with the issue of Greek communities in Dobrudja in the

[1] Dimitrios M. Kontogeorgis, "Ερευνητική αποστολή στη Ρουμανία. Ελληνικές κοινότητες (1829–αρχές 20ού αι.). Καταστατικά-Σύλλογοι-Ταυτότητες. Εισαγωγικέ παρατηρήσεις", *Εώα και Εσπέρια*, 7, 2007, p. 393–397.

early years of the Romanian administration: the fund of the Ministry of Domestic Affairs from the National Archives of Bucharest, and the diplomatic reports preserved in the Historical Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Athens.

SEVERAL DEMOGRAPHIC AND ETHNIC CONSIDERATIONS: FROM OTTOMAN SUBJECT TO ROMANIAN CITIZEN

For start, I am going to present several demographic considerations. How many Greeks lived in Romanian Dobrudja in 1878? The information is contradictory and depends on who collects it and for what purpose. After all, until 1878, how can be defined "nationality" in the Ottoman Empire? A Greek could simply be an Orthodox Christian subject, an *Ottoman raya*, or he could be protégé of a foreign power (usually Greek or British).

In 1878, there were three important cities in Dobrudja: Constanța, Tulcea and Sulina. The Greeks were a dynamic element, but they did not represent the majority in these cities, except in Sulina. At that time, Tulcea was the most important trading centre of the province. The city's population grew steadily from 6,000 in 1842 to 39,000 in 1875. According to the Greek vice-consul in Tulcea, I.A. Pileinidis, in 1866, the Greeks represented at most 6% of the population, about 2,000, of which 500 were "foreign subjects", generally Greeks.[2]

The Greeks (nationality-origin) according to report of Tulcea Prefecture, 1888
(5, 155 Greeks regardless of citizenship in the Tulcea county[3]

Settlements	Population	Greeks	%
Tulcea	15, 711	1, 997	12.71
Sulina	3, 986	2, 399	60.19
Alibechioi village	410	409 (all Greek inhabitants were Romanian subjects)	99.76

Most of the Greek subjects, that is, those who had a Greek passport, dealt in the grain trade. They were originally from the Ionian Islands, mainly from Kefalonia (and many of them had businesses in England and in other parts of Europe and the East). According to Andreas Papadopulos Vretos, a Greek consul in Varna, around 1856, in Constanța lived about 1,500 Orthodox Christians, half of the city's population, of which only 500 (16, 67%) were Greek (rayas grecs).[4] Acording to the 1899 census, in Sulina, the headquarters of the European Danube Commission, lived almost 2,000 Greek subjects, representing at most 40% of the population. The Greeks

[2] Dimitrios M. Kontogeorgis, "Σύσταση και οργάνωση ελληνικών κοινοτήτων στη Ρουμανία. Η περίπτωση του Τζιούρτζιου και της Τούλτσεας (β΄ μισό του 19ου αι.)", *Μνήμων*, 28, 2006–2007, p. 222.

[3] Virgil Coman (ed.), *Dobrogea în Arhivele românești (1597–1989). Profesorului Stoica Lascu la 60 de ani*, Bucharest, 2013, p. 125–129.

[4] André Papadopoulos Vretos, *La Bulgarie ancienne et moderne*, St. Petersburg, 1856, p. 186.

in Constanța represented 6.03%, in Mangalia, 5.57%[5], in Tulcea, a little more than 3%.[6] There was also a small Greek rural community in Alibeichioi (today, Izvoarele), situated close to Tulcea, which was probably constituted as a result of the migration from the first decades of the nineteenth century in the aftermath of the Russian-Ottoman wars. However, there is very little information available to the historian about this community[7]. We can estimate that, between 1880 and 1900, the Greeks represented almost 3% of the total population of Dobrudja. The population growth of the Greeks from 4,000 to 9,000, as in the case of other ethnic categories, was due almost exclusively to migration.[8]

By the law of organization of Dobrudja from 1880, all the inhabitants, that were Ottoman subjects, became subjects of the Romanian state, except for those who held foreign passports. But the inhabitants of Dobrudja were treated in a discriminatory manner in relation to the other Romanian citizens. Romanian political parties made the Bulgarian danger look worse in front of the public opinion. Only after 40 years the inhabitants of Dobrudja will receive full civil rights, including the right to representation in the Romanian parliament.[9] As we saw earlier, an important part of the Greeks in Dobrudja constituted Greek subjects. The interests of the Greek subjects were in the hands of the Greek consular authorities. In the 1830s and 1840s, Greek consulates were established every where throughout the Ottoman Empire where Greeks lived. In the proximity of Dobrudja, Greek consulates were established in Varna in 1845, in Balchik in 1846. In Tulcea, a vice-consulate was established in 1846, and in Sulina, in 1856.[10]

THE RUM-MILLET IN DOBRUDJA

From a religious point of view, the Orthodox Christians of the Ottoman Empire were organized in Rum-millet, and the leader of this community was the

[5] Leonida Colescu, *Recensământul general al populației. Rezultate definitive*, Bucharest, Eminescu, 1905, p. 382.

[6] *Ibidem*, p. 448.

[7] C. Brătescu, "Câteva notițe despre grecii din satul Albeichioi județul Tulcea", *Analele Dobrogei*, 10, 1929, 1–2, p. 269–272; Nichita Bonjug, "Note asupra grecilor din satul Ferdinand", *Analele Dobrogei*, 15, 1934, 1–2, p. 273–289; Narcisa Știucă, *Comunitatea greacă din Izvoarele (județul Tulcea)*, in Jakob Albert Zsolt, Peti Lehel (ed.), *Procese și contexte social-identitare ale minorităților din România*, Cluj-Napoca: Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities & Kriterion Publishing, 2009, p. 277–299.

[8] Vasile M. Kogălniceanu, *Dobrogea 1879–1909. Drepturi politice fără libertăți*, Bucharest: Socec, 1910, p. 45.

[9] Constantin Iordachi, *Citizenship, Nation and State-Building: The Integration of Northern Dobrogea into Romania 1878-1913*, Carl Beck Papers in Rusisia and East European Studies, 2002, p. 43, 59–60.

[10] Dimitrios M. Kontogeorgis, *Έλληνες υπήκοοι και γραικοί ραγιάδες. Εθνικές ονομασίες και πολιτικά διακυβεύματα στις ελληνικές παροικίες της οθωμανικής Δοβρουτσάς (1856–1877)*, in vol. Olga Katsiardi-Hering, Anastasia Papadia-Lala, Katerina Nikolaou, Vangelis D. Karamanolakis (ed.), *Έλλην, Ρωμιός, Γραικός. Συλλογικοί προσδιορισμοί και ταυτότητες*, Athens, Eyrasia, 2018, p.465.

Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. Dobrudja was under the jurisdiction of the metropolitan church of Drystra (whose headquarters were in Silistra). After 1860, especially with the official recognition of the Bulgarian exarchate by the sultan Abdülaziz in 1870, the Bulgarians started organizing their own religious life.[11]

Many Bulgarians in Dobrudja recognized the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian metropolitan church of Dorostol and Cherven (today Dorostol – Silistra), with the seat in Ruse.[12] In the 1870s, both Greek and Bulgarian metropolitans were fighting for control of the same territory: the Greek Dionysios of Silistra and Grigorii, the Bulgarian metropolitan of Dorostol. Dionysios was born in Stagiades (Thessaly) in 1803, and in 1851 consecrated Metropolitan of Silistra. He dead in 1879 in Romania and was buried at the Cernica monastery near Bucharest. [13] Grigorii Nemtsov (1828–1898) was born in Soroca in Russian Bessarabia, which made him be liked by a small part of the Romanian community. For instance, in April 1873, the Romanian community from Somova village, near Tulcea, in a letter to the Metropolitan Grigorii, asked him for support against the Greek Dionysios (this letter is preserved in the fund of the Metropolitan Church of Ruse). Particularly in Tulcea, the Bulgarians were very well organized, providing money for church and school.[14] However, until 1878, the supporters of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople remained the majority in Dobrudja among Orthodox Christians. According to Baron Willem d'Hogguer who used Russian sources (in 1877–1878), the Patriarch's group was the majority among Orthodox Christians: 31,726 out of 55,056, or 57.62%. [15] This success is largely due to the work of Dionysios, who did everything in his power to keep the Orthodox Christians together, and more particularly to temper the national zeal of the Greeks. At the urging of the Greek metropolitan, the Greeks from Tulcea and Constanța used in their Community Statutes the term of *Greek Orthodox Community* (γραικική), and not Hellenic (ελληνική), to emphasize their autonomy from Greece. On the other hand, Article 30 of the Statute of the Community from Tulcea granted the Greek Vice-Consul the position of President of the Community, which was contrary to Ottoman laws.

[11] Adrian Rădulescu, Ion Bitoleanu, *Istoria Dobrogei*, Constanța: Ex-Ponto, 1998, p. 395; Paraskevas Konortas, *Οθωμανικες θεωρήσεις για το Οικουμενικό Πατριαρχείο. Βεράτια για τας προκαθημένας της Μεγάλης Εκκλησίας (17ος – αρχές 20ου αιώνα)*, Athens, Alexandreia, 1998, p. 244, 274; Daniela Kalkandjeva, *The Bulgarian Orthodox Church*, in Lucian N. Leuștean, *Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Southeastern Europe*, Fordham University Press, 2014, p. 164–201.

[12]Zina Markova, *Българската екзархия (1870–1879)*, Sofia, Bulgarian Academy of Siences Publishing, 1989, p. 113–119.

[13] Tudor Mateescu, « Les Dioceses Orthodoxes de la Dobroudja sous la domination ottomane », *Balkan Studies*, 13, 1972, p. 293; M. D. Ionescu, *Dobrogea în pragul veacului al XX-lea. Geografia matematică, fizică, politică și militară*, Bucharest, Socec, 1904, p. 641.

[14] Idem, *Documente privind istoria Dobrogei (1830–1877)*, Bucharest, 1975, p. 282–283.

[15] Baron d'Hogguer, *Informațiuni asupra Dobrogei starea ei de astăzi resursele și viitorul ei*, Bucharest, Socec, 1879, p. 45 (*Renseignements sur la Dobrodja*, Bucharest, 1880).

The members of the Greek community could not have chosen as a leader the diplomatic agent of a foreign power.[16]

THE GREEK CHURCHES DURING THE ROMANIAN RULE

In March 1879, Dobrudja became part of the Romanian bishopric of the Lower Danube. From that moment on, any authority over this territory from the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Bulgarian Church stopped. It is clear that their attention was focused more on the dioceses of Ottoman Macedonia, and less on the dioceses of Romania and Serbia – in the Bulgarian case (Nish, Pirot), which they considered lost anyway.

With the establishment of the Romanian administration, including in the religious sphere, the Romanians claimed to have property rights over the churches that had belonged to the Bulgarians and the Greeks. The Consul General of Greece in Bucharest, Kleon Rangavis (1842–1914), and later his successor, Markos N. Dragoumis (1840–1904), did everything they could to defend the rights of the Greeks over the church wealth from Dobrudja.

Let us analyze the case of the St. Nicholas church from Cernavodă (it was built in 1860). The parish priest of the St. Nicholas church was, beginning with 1872, Dimitrie Chirescu (1842–1890), who spoke all the languages of the communities in the city.[17] Around the middle of the nineteenth century, Cernavodă was a village, but, with the inauguration of the Constanța-Cernavodă railway in 1860, it began to acquire certain economic importance. However, the town barely reached 2,000 inhabitants in 1878. The Greek community was small, but rich enough not to lose the wealth of the only Orthodox church in the city.[18] In 1872, the Bulgarians gave up church in exchange for a monetary compensation. The services were held bilingually, in the left aisle, they were singing in Romanian language, and in the right aisle, they were singing in Greek language.[19]

In 1879, the Greeks gave up this church in favour of the Romanians, but refused to hand over the money that was in the cashier's desk at that time. The money – a significant amount of 4,000 francs – ended up in the custody of the Consulate General of Greece. In a report from February 1880, the Greek members of the parish council proved that the committee that had built the church had consisted of 10 members, 6 of whom were Greeks who covered the expenses

[16] Dimitrios M. Kondogeorgis, "Σύσταση και οργάνωση ελληνικών κοινοτήτων στη Ρουμανία. Η περίπτωση του Τζιούρτζιου και της Τούλτσεας (β΄ μισό του 19ου αι.)…", p. 227.

[17] Lavinia Dumitrașcu, "Amintiri din copilărie și adolescență. Dimitrie D. Chirescu din «dinastia» Chireștilor din Cernavodă", *Analele Dobrogei*, 1, 2019, p. 231–242.

[18] Ioan Mușat, *Istoricul oraşului Cernavodă*, Bucharest, Viața literară, 1938, p. 46; M.D. Ionescu, *op. cit.*, p. 642.

[19] Ioan Mușat, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

related to the project in a proportion of three quarters.[20] The conflict between the Romanians and the Greeks ended only in the fall of 1880. On September 26/October 8, 1880, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vasile Boerescu, recommended Mihail Kogălniceanu, the Minister of the Domestic Affairs, to close the matter in order to avoid a trial that would have disturbed the Romanian-Greek relations. The Greeks gave the church to the Romanians, but kept their money.[21]

The situation of the Greek churches in Tulcea, Constanța and Sulina was completely different. These churches were preserved by the Greeks, particularly since their founders and church administrators were wealthy merchants, many of them Greek subjects from Kefalonia. Their material contribution to the building of the churches could not be disputed. However, in December 1879, the town halls of these cities asked the Greek communities to comply with the regulations of the Romanian Orthodox Church of 1874, regarding the organization of the parish councils.[22] In January 1880, the community in Sulina refused to appoint a parish council that had only three members, one of whom was delegated by the Town Hall.[23] The Consul General of Greece, Rangavis, met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Interim Affairs of Cults, Vasile Boerescu, and with the Minister of Domestic Affairs, Mihail Kogălniceanu, to discuss this matter. Kogălniceanu telegraphed the Prefecture of the Tulcea count. His position was very clear on "private churches": "the provisions on the constitution of the parish councils apply only to communal churches, and private churches have full freedom to manage themselves in accordance with their statutes".[24] This statement of the Romanian minister can be considered a first step towards the recognition, in 1901, of the legal personality of the Greek communities in Romania. The committee of the Greek churches obtained a regime of autonomy in relation to the municipal authorities and the Romanian bishop: they appointed priests and managed the church's revenues. The priests owed the Romanian bishop spiritual obedience only. There were four Greek churches in Romanian Dobrudja in the late of the nineteenth century: St. George in Mangalia (it was built in 1832, demolished in 1956), the Annunciation Church in Tulcea (1848–1854), St. Nicholas in Sulina (1863), the Church of the Transfiguration in Constanța (1863–1868).[25]

In the letter to the Primate Metropolitan of Romania, Calinic Miclescu (1875–1886), of December, 1879, the Ecumenical Patriarch Joachim III called on

[20] National Archives of Romania, Ministry of Interior Affairs fund (no. 320), box 5/1880, report of the Greek Community of Cernavoda, on February 15/27, 1880, p. 76–77.

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 213.

[22] *Ibidem*, The Town Hall to the Greek community of Sulina, on December 15, 1879, p. 90.

[23] *Ibidem*, p. 57: letter of the Greek Community of Sulina to the Town Hall, on 11 January, 1880.

[24] Historical Archives of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 76.1/1880, Rangavis to Theodoros Deligiannis (no. 51), on January 29, 1880; National Archives of Romania, Ministry of Interior Affairs fund (no. 320), box 5/1880, Kogălniceanu to Prefecture of Tulcea, March 17, 1880.

[25] Vicentios Kourelarou, *Οι εκκλησίες των ελληνικών κοινοτήτων της Ρουμανίας τον ΙΘ΄αιώνα,* Thessaloniki, Kyriakidis, 2008.

Romanians to recognize the specific rights of the Greek Orthodox communities in Dobrudja, not only in religious matters, but also in educational matters.[26] By order of the Greek government, in 1884, the Greek minister in Bucharest, Markos Dragoumis, undertook to examine the legal issue of the rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Dobrudja. In his opinion, the Treaty of Berlin relating the civil rights for all religious communities in the former Ottoman territories of the Balkan States could not be claimed in relation to the Greeks and the Bulgarians. The term used in Article 44 was *communions* (religions, cults), not *communautés* (communities). The Romanians, Greeks and Bulgarians belonged to the same cult. Dragoumis was of the opinion that the Ecumenical Patriarch should not have exercised any jurisdiction over the Greek communities outside of Greece and the Ottoman Empire, where his authority could not operate. In his opinion, the Greek communities in Romania should have first addressed the Synod of the Church of Greece whenever they needed priests. [27]

CONCLUSION

In 1870, Sultan Abdülaziz recognized the Bulgarians' right to constitute a confessional community (millet) different from that of the Greeks (rum). In the next years the Bulgarian and Greek Orthodox Christians communities (millets) functioned following a national logic (phyletism), incompatible with the imperial one. In this context, the Greeks, the Bulgarians, and later the Romanians, each sought to reorganize their religious life following the criterion of belonging to a national community. But, with the establishment of the Romanian administration in Dobroudja, the Romanian Orthodox Church tried to restore the unity of the Orthodox Christians under the name of ehtnophyletism. As we saw in this article, the Greeks, who did not represent a large community and did not threaten in any way the supremacy of the Romanian element in Dobrudja, like the Bulgarians, obtained from the Romanian authorities, without any objection, a privileged regime for their religious communities.

[26] Historical Archives of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, box 76.1/1880, Markos Dragoumis, on September 15/27, 1880.

[27] Idem, aak 1894, Markos Dragoumis to Alexandros A. Kontostavlos, on September 17/29, 1884 (no. 592).