



THE ROUMANIANS AND  
THEIR LANDS

EDITED BY PROFESSOR VASILE STOICA

IV

THE  
DOBROGEA

GEORGE JULIAN ZOLNAY 1914

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By Vasile Stoica*

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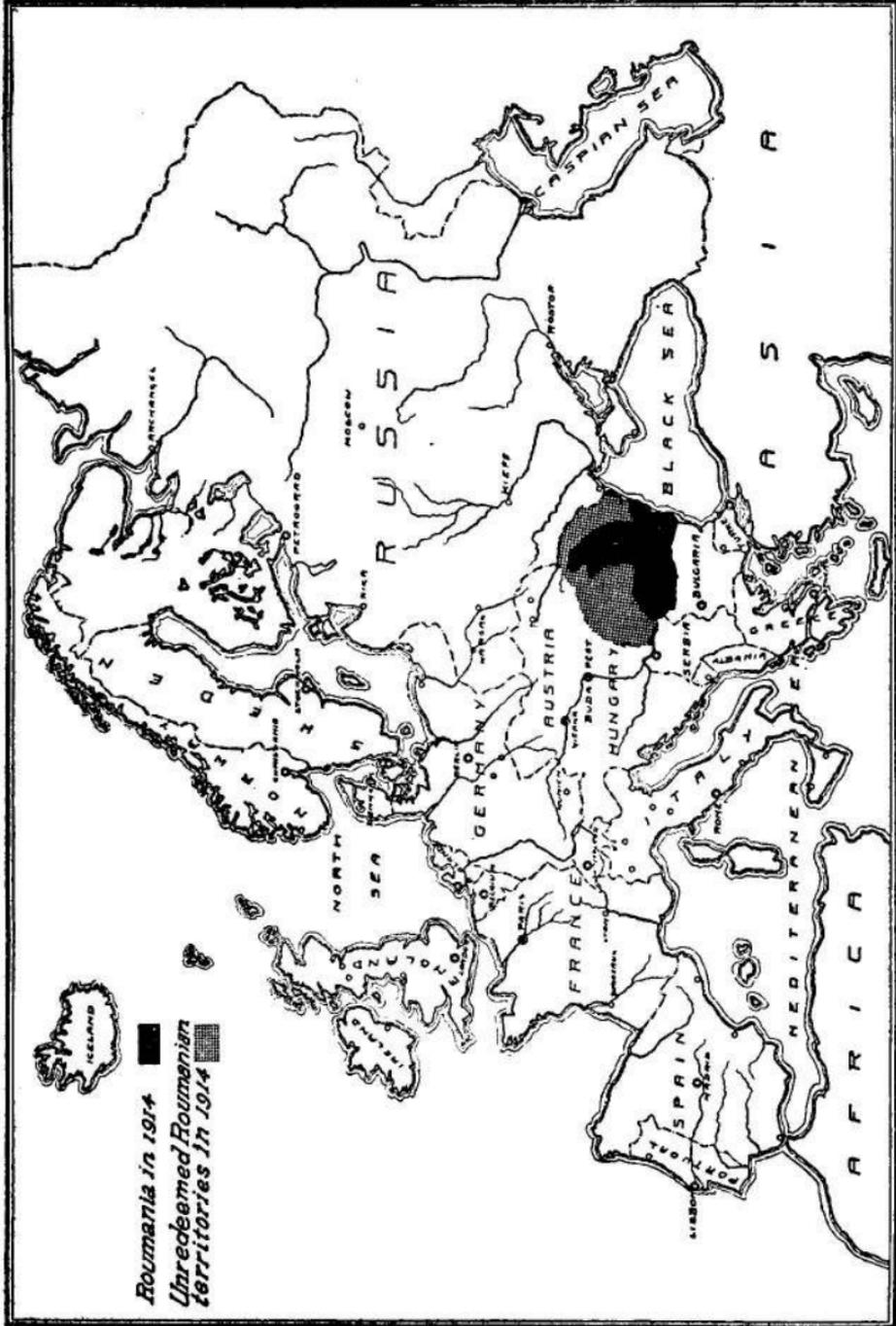
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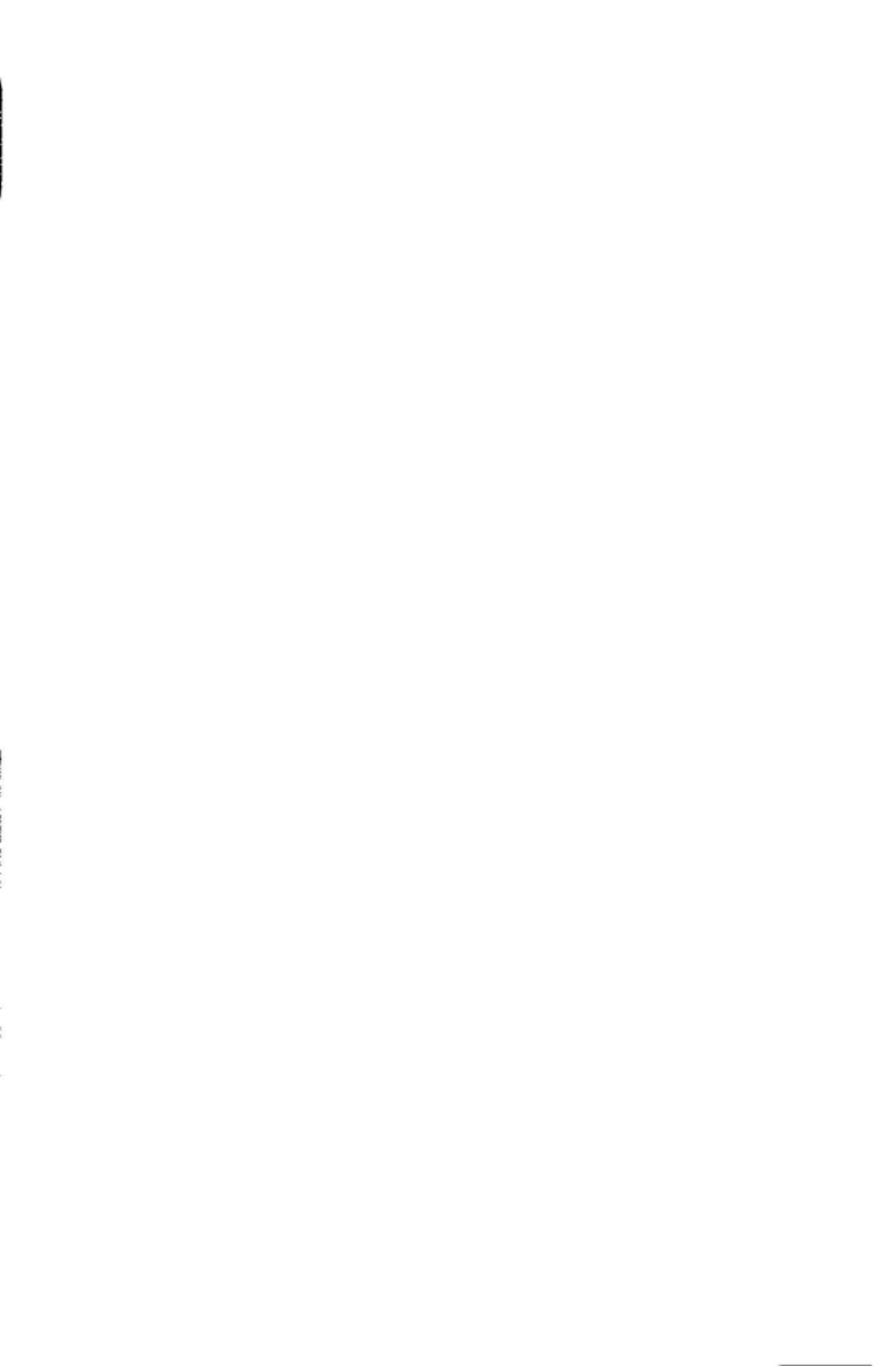
## CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE DOBROGEA . . . . .	I
I	
HISTORICAL SKETCH . . . . .	2
II	
RE-PARTITION OF THE POPULATION . . . . .	10
III	
ROUMANIA'S CIVILIZING WORK IN THE DO- BROGEA . . . . .	13
IV	
IMPORTANCE OF THE DOBROGEA . . . . .	18

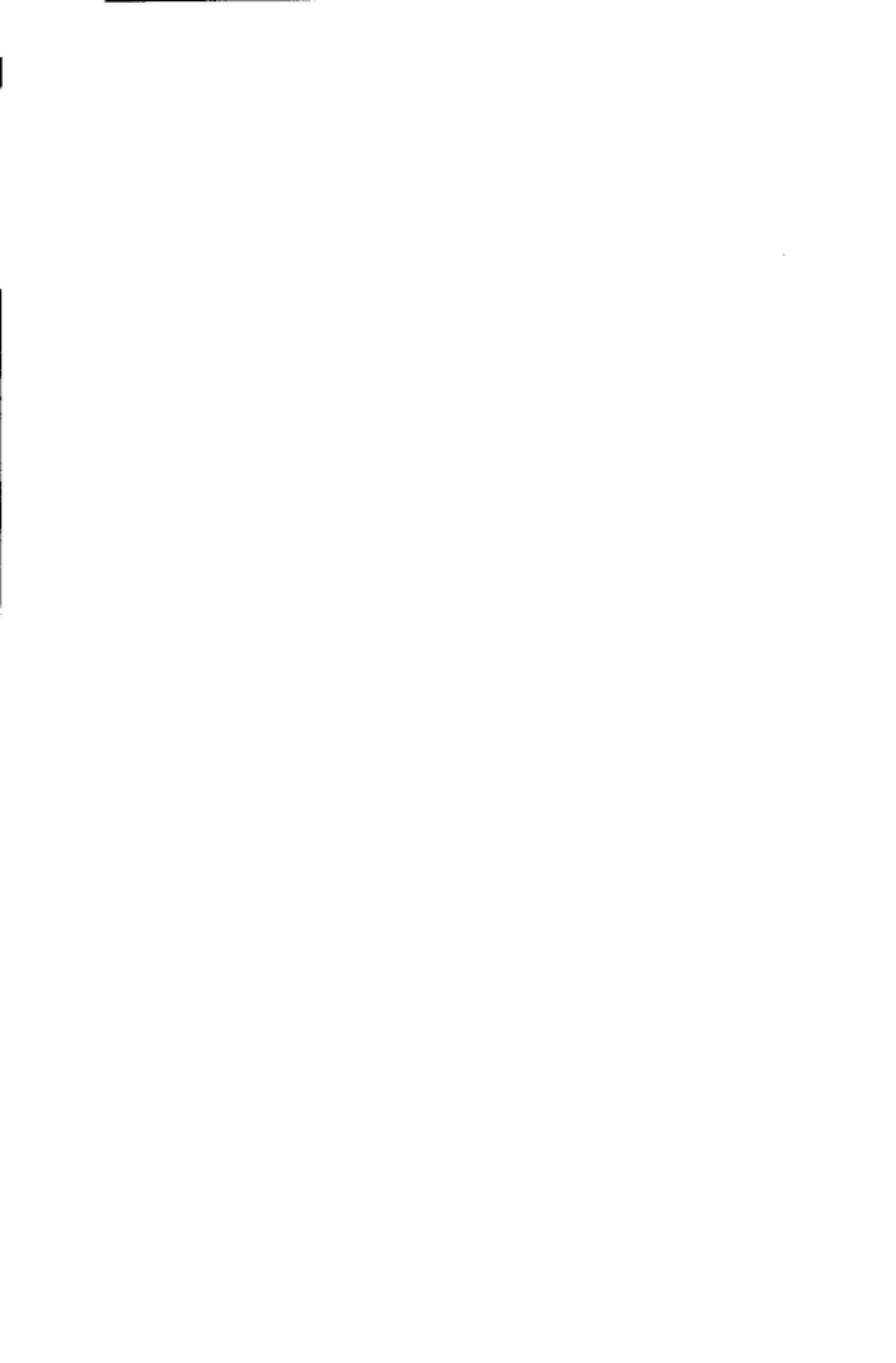




*Roumania in 1914*  
*Unredeemed Roumanian territories in 1914*



# THE DOBROGEA



# THE ROUMANIANS AND THEIR LANDS

## IV

### THE DOBROGEA

THE north-eastern extremity of the Balkan Peninsula is by nature a distinctly individual geographical unit. Just to the south of the great bend of the Danube at Silistria, the pre-Balkan Bulgarian highlands terminate with a pronounced ridge. To the north of this cliff the forests disappear, the rivers become very rare, the climate is dry. Here begins the steppe, here begins the Dobrogea.

The climate and the general aspect of man and nature, reminds one not of Bulgaria, but of southern Bessarabia and of the steppe of eastern Wallachia.

It is only in the vicinity of the Danube delta that the landscape changes; hills (1500 feet), deep oak forests, running waters—it is again al-

## 12 The Roumanians and Their Lands

together a different country, and, strangely enough, the geological constitution of these hills shows them to be distinct, both from the Balkan mountains and from the Carpathians.

The geographical individuality of the Dobrogea has struck all observers since the most distant times. Strabo knew it as Scythia Minor, separated by the Danube from Scythia proper and by the river Ziras (the Batova of to-day, near Ekrene) from Moesia. And since the Hellenic age it has always been known by a name of its own, the best evidence of its particularism.

### I. HISTORICAL SKETCH

The remains of ancient structures still to be found in different parts of the province testify to its ancient civilization. Enjoying the advantage of being enclosed between the Danube and the sea it attracted from very early times numerous Greek colonies, which founded the cities of Odessos, Dyonisos, Istria, Tomis, etc., along the coast, and Troesmis, Durostorum, etc., on the Danube. These towns were markets for the exchange of the produce of the northern plains for that of the Ægean shores. The region of the lower Danube had thus, even before the advent

of the Roman legions, been permeated for a long time by Mediterranean culture.

Greek influence had been, however, much more potent in the cities than in the country, so that the Romans had no great difficulty in assimilating the rather sparse rural population. To accelerate this Romanization, colonists were brought from different parts of the Roman Empire, and after the conquest of Dacia a certain number of families belonging to the vanquished race were scattered through the province, probably with the intent of merging them in an already Romanized community.

Archeological researches made during the last years before the war have shown that the neo-Roman population derived from the blending of all these races under Roman rule has never entirely disappeared and has formed to this day one of the basic elements of the population of the province. It has been terribly battered, though! Already in the fifth century, most of the flourishing cities of Greek and Roman times were ruined by the Slavs, and, in 679, what was left was swept away by the ruthless invasion of the Bulgarians, who passed through the Dobrogea on their way towards the south, into Bulgaria of to-day.

The Bulgarians were soon followed by the

## 14 The Roumanians and Their Lands

Varegs. These northern barbarians were hurled back, however, by the Greek forces and the Dobrogea returned to the Byzantine fold. The unfortunate land regained a little of its ancient prosperity. Silistria became the residence of an arch-bishop, a powerful Greek fleet was stationed on the coast, and trade flourished anew. Unfortunately this period of calm did not last very long, for in the tenth century, the Petchenegs (a Touranian stock) broke into the province and their work of destruction was completed by the Comans (another Touranian race) who appeared at the beginning of the eleventh century.

It is no wonder that in these circumstances we find a gradual weakening of the central authority and that we see rising in its place the power (11th century) of local chieftains, Tatos, Chalis, Solomon, Satzas, Sestlav, seemingly all, with the exception of Sestlav, Greeks or possibly Roumanians (Solomon and Tatos or Tauto). About 1150, however, the waning Byzantine Empire regained a little strength and the Emperor Manuel reestablished the imperial authority in the province. And as late as the fourteenth century the Byzantine Empire retained a certain degree of influence in the affairs of the country. It was about that time, during the civil war

waged by John VI Cantacuzene against John V. Paleologue for the imperial throne, that Balica, despot of Kavarna, a Roumanian, perhaps, if his name were any clue to his origin, sent to the help of the Regent, Anna Paleologue, a thousand horsemen under the command of two brothers, Theodore and Dobrotitch. This last was of great help to the Regent, who was raised to the rank of generalissimo and even obtained the hand of one of the Imperial Princesses. This brilliant career apparently stirred his ambition, and we find him a little later carving out for himself a state in the northern provinces of the empire. He stormed Varna, Kavarna, and finally established the capital of the new State of Kaliacra, near Kavarna. He died in 1396, but the province he conquered remained henceforth known as the land of Dobrotitch, that is, as the Dobrogea. Yet, he left no successors, and very soon after his death we find Mircea-the-Old, Prince of Wallachia, master not only of Silistria and of the eastern shore of the Danube, as he had been already for some years, but also of the seaboard, from the mouths of the Danube to Kavarna, or as he styled himself, "despotus terrarum Dobrodicii," "Ruler of the two shores of the Danube to the Great Sea and Lord of Silistria."

## 16 The Roumanians and Their Lands

The rising Turkish tide, under Mahomet I, swept away the Roumanian domination and the Sultan, with a keen appreciation of the great strategical value of the Dobrogea, colonized it intensively with Turkish settlers brought over from Asia Minor. Constantia—the Tomis of old, the Constantza of to-day—lost its Genoese name in 1445 and became Kustendje; Kalatis deteriorated into Mangalia; the long Ottoman slumber set in.

The XVth and XVIth centuries were fairly prosperous in a mediocre rural way, but the XVIIth and especially the XVIIIth century ushered in a new period of decadence. The towns dwindled into miserable villages, the roads disappeared, ruin and fever stalked the country.

It was then that, for the first time, the Bulgarians appeared in any numbers as established settlers. Their first colonies arrived after the peace of Kutchuck Kainardji (1774). After the peace of Bucarest (1812), by which Bessarabia remained in the hands of the Czar, many Bulgarians abandoned their country, where they were suffering at that time from a terrible recrudescence of Turkish lawlessness (the era of the Pashvanlis) and emigrated into Southern Bessarabia. When, however, the term of their exemption from taxes and military service was

up, some ten years later, many of them began to regret the Turkish yoke, preferring it to these shackles of modern civilization, and accordingly crossed the Danube again, back to the opposite Turkish bank, that is, into Northern Dobrogea.

This was the origin of the Bulgarian population in the region of Tulcea, anterior, therefore, only fifteen to twenty years, to the Crimean war.

As to the Bulgarians of southern Dobrogea, they were immigrants from the region of Kotel (northeastern Bulgaria, south of Shoumla).

As evidence of the continuous presence of a large Roumanian element there are, on the other hand, many proofs. The Roumanian folklore, for instance, contains numerous references to the Dobrogea and alludes often to the Roumanian population that is to be found there. Moreover, since the fall of the Byzantine Empire the Greek orthodox faithful were in the dependence of the Roumanian bishop of Braila, another sign of the close ties existing between the Dobrogea and the Roumanian Principalities.

These ties were not only spiritual or racial, but also commercial, for on account of the neglect into which Constantia had fallen since Turkish occupation, the port had deteriorated so greatly that nearly all the commerce of the province had to use now the way of the Danube, princi-

## 18 The Roumanians and Their Lands

pally by the ports of Macin and of the Moldavian Galatz.

At the time of the Crimean war, Camille Alard, a French officer, gives us, in his notes taken during the campaign, some interesting information. He tells us, for instance, that along the Danube, he saw Tartar and Roumanian villages but that "the Bulgarians are not numerous." He says, at another place, "There are Bulgarians only near Mangalia and in a few villages of the interior between Tulcea and Kustenje"; and then he adds this suggestive observation which may explain many things: "As the Roumanians are looked upon with disfavor by the Turks, they pretend to be Bulgarians and speak Turkish with strangers."

Lejean, one of the best authorities on Turkey of that time, says, "The Bulgarians are but a small minority in the Dobrogea" (Lejean in Peterman's *Mittheilungen* for 1861).

The Bulgarian geographers themselves, when not blinded by racial prejudice, confirm these statements, and Mr. Miletitsch (*Bulletin de l'Institut pour l'étude de l'Europe sud-orientale*, III, p. 234) writes as recently as 1913: "From the valley of the Provadia, and from the Black Sea, near Inrichoe, to the Danube (on the north) I have not been able to discover a single locality

where the Bulgarian element was native." (See Commène: *La Dobrogea*.) Professor Dr. A. Ischirkoff, of the University of Sofia, expresses the same idea in different works.

In connection with Bulgarian claims on this Roumanian province, it can thus briefly be said that until the Turkish conquest, the Dobrogea was never for any length of time under Bulgarian rule. Dobrotitch, its most famous lord, was but an adventurer and held it by right of conquest as he might have held any land, Greek, Roumanian, or Hungarian. His nationality implies nothing as to the nationality of his subjects.

Serious claims to a country must be founded on a similitude of race, a common culture, a common history, or a long continuous possession. None of these grounds hold good here for the Bulgarians. The majority of the inhabitants are not and have never been Bulgarian; whatever civilization flourished in the Dobrogea was Greek, Roman, or Byzantine, while its modern prosperity is due entirely to Roumania. Moreover with the exception of a few years, such as the episode of Dobrotitch or that of Mircea-the-Old, since the fall of the Roman Empire and until the annexation to Roumania, it has had only two stable masters, the Byzantine and the Turk.

## II. RE-PARTITION OF THE POPULATION.

A single glance at an ethnographical map of the Balkans will show us that between the eastern Balkan Mountains and the lower Danube, the Bulgarian population is separated from the coast by a large Turkish mass of compact settlements. This mass comprises most of the 600,000 Turks of Bulgaria. The Congress of Berlin cut this mass in two when tracing the Roumano-Bulgarian frontier from Silistria to Iianlic. By far the larger part, however, remained on the Bulgarian side, and although the new frontier of 1913 swept southwards it did not reach even then, excepting a few points, the Bulgarian ethnical frontier.

In the Dobrogea proper this Turkish population suffered much more from the wars of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries, than farther south, as it was here that always, or nearly always, took place the first clashes between the Russian and the Ottoman armies. Thus it was, that in the first half of the nineteenth century the land was very sparsely peopled and invited immigration from the north. It was consequently at that time that the deserted villages were filled with new-comers, Russian refugees, Bul-

garians from Bessarabia, Germans from Poland and Southern Russia.

The first census taken by the Roumanian administration in 1879 and in 1880 shows how mixed the population then was, although the Roumanian race was already the most numerously represented.

	Province of Tulcea, 1879		Province of Constantza, 1880	
	(number of families)		(number of inhabitants)	
Roumanians .	4082	32 per cent	15251	23 per cent
Bulgarians ..	3347	25	8038	13
Turks .....	1401	11	11126	18
Tartars .....	510	4	23498	38
Russians .....	304	2	....	..
Lipovanes ...	2169	17	513	1
Greeks .....	449	3	2121	4
Armenians ...	88	1	215	1
Germans .....	435	3	....	..
Jews .....	112	1	285	1
Gypsies .....	50	1	514	1
Total .....	12947	100	61561	100

Even a cynic would have to admit that these statistics are perfectly fair to the Bulgarians, for at the time the relations between the Roumanians and their southern neighbors whom they had just helped to throw over the Turkish yoke, were of the best. Yet, even then, the Bul-

## 22 The Roumanians and Their Lands

garians occupied but the third place amongst the races of the Dobrogea, after the Roumanians and the Tartars. And whereas the Roumanians peopled the whole western half of the province with a continuous mass of population, established in those regions since time immemorial, the Bulgarians were scattered over the eastern side in small groups and occupied in larger numbers only the region of Tulcea where they had arrived from Bessarabia but a generation earlier.

Moreover, this Bulgarian island was separated from the new Bulgarian frontier, over a hundred miles away, by compact masses of Moslems and Roumanians.

Since the annexation, the population accruing to the different races has been modified greatly by a constant stream of immigration coming from Roumania and a no less constant emigration of Mahometans towards Turkey.

The table on page 23 shows the movement of the population since 1890 (for the entire Dobrogea).

In 1911 the Roumanians were thus nearly four times as numerous as the Bulgarians, now occupying, however, the second place in the vital statistics of the province owing to the emigration of the Moslems. The very rapid growth of the Roumanian element is not surprising when

	1890	1900	1911	Per cent
Roumanians .....	72422	120691	186334	54.7
Bulgarians .....	33747	39282	48963	14.3
Tartars-Turks .....	42538	39490	35922	10.8
Russians, Lipovanes ....	22046	26953	34254	10.0
Greeks .....	7493	9105	8459	2.6
Germans .....	3993	8751	8490	2.6
Armenians .....	1227	2347	3528	1.1
Jews .....	3907	3415	4405	1.4
Others .....	2527	4807	7921	2.5
Totals .....	189959	261490	333275	100.

attention is given to the fact that it was the Roumanians who had the task of transforming the primitive Turkish waste into a modern prosperous land.

### III. ROUMANIA'S CIVILIZING WORK IN THE DOBROGEA.

When Roumania was forced to accept the Dobrogea in 1878 as a compensation for the loss of Bessarabia, this unfortunate land had reached the utmost depths of decadence. Fallow fields, miserable villages, squalid towns, no roads, no schools, no hospitals, but poverty and fever galore.

The only sign of civilization was a single-track railroad operated between the Danube and Con-

## 24 The Roumanians and Their Lands

stantza, or Kustendje, by a British society, the "Danube and Black Sea Railway Co." As Kustendje had no accommodation of any kind, save a very rickety wooden pier, the railway really reached nowhere.

As soon as the Roumanians occupied the Dobrogea they started work. An administration was established on the Roumanian pattern, courts and schools were opened, all the different races being placed on a footing of perfect equality. A Health Department, a thing undreamed of until then, and yet perhaps the most necessary of all the new institutions, was set up and was soon very busy. Hospitals and clinics were established in all the principal towns, state physicians were appointed in every district, and sanitary agents supervised in all the more important villages the application of the new health regulations.

The value of property and its security were much increased. The bands of highwaymen who still infested the roads in the early eighties were exterminated and before the war perfect order prevailed everywhere. Good roads took the place of the cattle tracks of Turkish times; the Constantza-Cernavoda railway was completely overhauled, a bridge—one of the most important works of the kind in the world, being nearly eighteen miles long with its embankments and

viaducts—was erected across the Danube at Cernavoda and connected the Dobrogea with the rest of Europe. It should be noted that this bridge is the only one to cross the Danube between Belgrade and the sea, a distance of over 800 miles. At the same time no sacrifice was spared to make of Constantza one of the finest ports of eastern Europe. A far-reaching plan of improvements was drawn up in 1888 and during nearly twenty-five years work was kept up to realize it.

To-day the port of Constantza covers two million square yards of land and water, it is protected by two concrete breakwaters of a total length of two miles and boasts of ten piers which can accommodate fifty large ships at one time. The special port devised for the export of petroleum is one of the most perfect of its kind. Pipelines bring the petroleum from the oil fields, two hundred miles away, directly to the tanks erected to receive the different products (benzine, heavy oil, light oil, etc.). Flexible conduits, over half a mile long, connect the tanks with the ships and permit them thus to ride at anchor at a distance precluding any possibility of mishap. In case of accident special contrivances have been devised to separate completely this basin from the other docks.

## 26 The Roumanians and Their Lands

The wheat-silos can contain 132,000 metric tons of cereals. Over 1,250,000 metric tons of lumber, petroleum and cereals were exported from Constantza during the last year preceding the war. After describing very extensively the organization of the port, a French engineer, Mr. Muzet, exclaims: "The installations of the port of Constantza are, in variety, modern. How far we do seem from Turkish conceptions"—(*Le Monde Balkanique*). Another Frenchman, Mr. Paul Labbé, writes more enthusiastically still: "The work accomplished by the Roumanians is wonderful and the results are really magnificent" ("*La vivante Roumanie*," see Connène, op. cit.). A line of fast and luxurious steamboats, the most fashionable in those seas, plied between Constantza, Constantinople, and the principal ports of the eastern Mediterranean. A freight line, also operated by the Roumanian government, connected Constantza with English and Dutch ports.

Splendid hotels and fine villas were rapidly being built at Constantza during the years preceding the war, and the miserable village of Turkish times was transformed already into a town of 30,000 inhabitants.

Besides the railroad Constantza-Cernavoda,

new tracks were laid from Carol I to Medjidie and Bazarjic, from Tulcea to Carol I, etc.

As for the elementary schools, their number passed from none in 1879 to 309 in 1910; and besides these elementary schools, high schools were founded at Tulcea and Constantza, as well as professional schools for girls and technical and commercial institutes. At Medjidie, the State, in a fine spirit of liberalism, kept a seminary for Moslem ministers; moreover, it should not be overlooked that all the expenses of the Mahometan faith are supported by the Roumanian administration.

It goes without saying, however, that everything is not perfect and that here and there some improvements could have been made, but on the whole the civilizing work accomplished by Roumania in a little over thirty-five years deserves, we think, even in the eyes of the most impartial observer, a most sympathetic consideration.

While in Turkish times a miserable population of 120,000 souls barely existed on the fever stricken soil of the Dobrogea, in 1912 the same province sustained easily and even in comparative plenty a population of 340,000 inhabitants, for in the meantime the agricultural production had increased sevenfold, mills and factories had been erected here and there (Cernavoda, Con-

## 28 The Roumanians and Their Lands

stantza, etc.), and the general commercial activity had increased in even vaster proportions. In 1908 already 139 popular banks were in existence and a whole series of co-operative societies for the collective sale of produce, the renting of large estates, etc., were being successfully operated. Nearly all the land is divided into small holdings, only a little over two per cent of the whole area representing estates of more than 140 acres.

### IV. IMPORTANCE OF THE DOBROGEA.

The Dobrogea, however, is important for Roumania, not only on account of the sacrifices she has made to develop a poverty stricken land, but essentially because it is her only seaboard, and therefore is of vital importance for her ulterior development. And whereas the Dobrogea is absolutely indispensable for a normal development of Roumania, its economical importance for Bulgaria is practically nil, for Bulgaria possesses already all the Black Sea coast from south of Burgas to north of Varna, a coast endowed with natural bays and creeks, that the flat Roumanian coast can envy, and she also enjoys since 1913, free access to the Ægean Sea, an

immense advantage by itself, as the Mediterranean is not a back yard like the Black Sea.

The truth is that she wants the Dobrogea—or rather wanted, for it may be hoped her collapse will have made her wiser—not to further her own commerce or to deliver oppressed kinsmen, but so as to be in a position to control at will Roumania's sea trade and thereby render her dependent to that extent. With Serbia ruined by a long and ruthless occupation and with Roumania severed from the sea and dependent on a Bulgarian Constantza for her connections with the ports of the west, Bulgaria knew that even without any further territorial acquisitions she would be the absolute mistress of the Balkans. The hypocritical argument that the Danube would still be open to Roumanian commerce, does not stand, for the Danube is closed to navigation during the winter, and sometimes for as long as four months. Moreover, the loss of the Dobrogea would have brought Braila and Galatz, Roumania's two chief remaining ports, under the constant menace of the opposite Bulgarian shore. If such a situation had ever come to be, it would have been the cause of perpetual tension in south-eastern Europe and would have infallibly provoked another war. Fortunately as it is now certain, the coming just peace will restore the

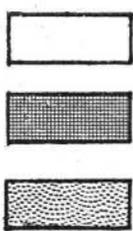
### 30 The Roumanians and Their Lands

Dobrogea to Roumania together with the due reparations for all the wanton damage perpetrated there by the Bulgarian troops.

As for that part of the Deliorman, or southern Dobrogea, annexed to Roumania in 1913 as a protection against Bulgarian aggression, the attitude of Bulgaria during the war has shown that the precaution was too well justified. If it be true that the Roumanian element is not as numerous here as it is in the north, it should not be overlooked that nearly two-thirds of this territory is peopled not by Bulgarians, but by Turks (nearly 150,000), and that therefore the Bulgarians have no ethnical grounds in support of their claim, at least to the western and central section of the province. All the more so, as the Turks, since 1878, have always enjoyed much better treatment in Roumania than in Bulgaria. The enthusiastic reception given to the Roumanian troops in 1913, and the perfect order that prevailed from that time until 1916, are clear evidence that this Mahometan population was quite satisfied with its lot and would not desire at all to revert to Bulgarian rule.



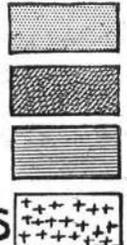
Roumanians  
 (Ruthenians  
 (Ukrainians)  
 Serbs



--- Border of Roumania  
 (in 1914)

--- Border of Greater Roumania

Germans  
 Hungarians  
 Bulgars  
 Turks & Tartars



ENGLISH MILES  
 0 10 20 30 40 50 100

