

From Forced Migration to New Patterns of Social Life: Bulgarian Refugees in Teleorman County, Romania, in the Nineteenth Century¹

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The aim of this paper is to discern the insertion strategies of the Bulgarian migrant waves to Wallachia, focusing on Teleorman County as a case study. The largest waves of Bulgarian migrants to Wallachia occurred in the first half of nineteenth century as a consequence of the two Ottoman–Russian wars. Teleorman County is a special case, as with its four urban centers, it had more such settlements than any other county in Wallachia. The Bulgarian migrants to Teleorman settled mainly in these centers. One must draw a distinction between the patterns of the upper social strata (which included city dwellers, merchants, and landowners) and the “common” Bulgarians, who lived in rural areas and worked in the fields and gardens. I focus on the urban strategies of insertion in the first half of the nineteenth century and on the ways in which these strategies persisted in the latter half of the century, with the foundation of the city of Alexandria as a privileged site. I offer sketches of the lives of important Bulgarophone families from Teleorman and contextualize their experiences in the framework of urban and economic development.

Keywords: Bulgarian migrants, Wallachia, social strategies, urban development

Introduction

Bulgarians came to Romania as migrants over the course of several centuries, especially to the southern part of the country, Wallachia, where they settled on the boyars’ estates, becoming tenant farmers. However, the largest waves of Bulgarian migrants arrived in the first half of the nineteenth century during the two Ottoman–Russian wars.²

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2 Velichi, “Emigrarea bulgarilor în Țara Românească,” 27–57; Velichi, “Emigrări la nord și la sud de Dunăre,” 67–116; Kosev, Paskaleva, and Diculescu. “Despre situația și activitatea economică,” 253–82; Roman, “Așezări de bulgari și alți sud dunăreni în Țara Românească,” 126–43; Trajkov and Jechev, *Bulgarskata emigratsija v Rumunija*; Mladenov, *Bulgarskite govori v Rumunija*.

In this context, the case of Teleorman County is at first sight significant given the relatively large size of the Bulgarophone population.³ Thus, looking beyond some exaggerations concerning the number of such migrants,⁴ the statistics for 1838 indicate that, after the two Russo–Turkish wars, the number of Bulgarophone families in Wallachia reached almost 12,000,⁵ with 1,400 of them settled in Teleorman County.⁶

What is really significant, however, is the large number of families settled in the county's four towns or townlets, namely, Rușii de Vede (today Roșiori de Vede), Zimnicea, Alexandria, and Mavrodin. With its four urban centers, as shown by the 1838 census, Teleorman had more such settlements than any other county in Wallachia. The Bulgarian migrants who came to Romania in the first half of the nineteenth century settled mainly in these centers. Thus, of the 1,400 Bulgarian families that remained in Teleorman, 520 settled in the four towns of the county.⁷ Teleorman differed from other counties in this respect too, since between 1831 and 1848 it occupied the third place among the counties entitled to organize fairs (83 of them), after Vlașca and Dâmbovița Counties.⁸

The aim of this paper is to discern the insertion strategies of the waves of Bulgarian migrants who arrived in Wallachia in the first half of the nineteenth century, focusing on Teleorman County as a case study. The central contention is that the arrival of waves of Bulgarian migrants and the further consolidation and growth of their communities overlapped with the accelerated economic and urban development of the Wallachian principality. The Bulgarians made use of the incentives and opportunities generated by this wider process, and within two or three generations, they had integrated into Wallachian society. Moreover, though they lost their ethnic identity, they perceived their integration as a success. On the one hand, the Bulgarophone population was not exclusively focused on one type of modern economy linked to capitalism and social

3 According to the Ottoman traditional concept of state border, the Danube was a buffer area where people of various ethnicities were colonized (Popescu, "Ester au XVIIe siècle – nouvelles contributions," 193–94; Molnár, "Borders of the Ottoman Empire: Theoretical Questions and Solutions in Practice (1699–1856)," 34–44). Thus, alongside the refugees (most of whom were Bulgarian-speaking), Romanians crossed the Danube as well. See for instance, Romanski, *Bulgarite vuv Vlasbko i Moldova*, 70–76, 99–116.

4 The number of the Bulgarians in the nineteenth century in Wallachia, Moldova, and Transylvania was estimated at 800,000–900,000 (Trajkov and Jechev, *Bulgarskata emigratsija v Rumunija*, 154).

5 Velichi, "Emigrări la nord și la sud de Dunăre," 108.

6 *Ibid.*, 114.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Penelea-Filitti, *Les foires de la Valachie*, 66–67, 160–63.

modernization. Furthermore, as the geographic dictionary authored by Pandele Georgescu,⁹ a former Teleorman prefect, shows, the Bulgarophone migrants who settled in villages adapted to the local subsistence economy. However, the migrants adopted these strategies only as means of adapting. On the other hand, there was a current of modernizing ideas, the promoters of which were foreign landowners and traders, like, in Teleorman County, the Serbian prince Miloš Obrenović and the Bulgarian merchants. The coping strategies adopted by Bulgarian migrants were largely based on this newly emerging urban network and of their increasingly significant place in the trading exchanges. A good illustration of this fact (i.e. the importance of the emerging urban network in the coping strategies adopted by the Bulgarian migrants) is the foundation in 1834 of the town of Alexandria, in which Bulgarian traders played significant roles. In the second part of this article, I examine the case of Alexandria in connection with two stories of successful Bulgarophone families.

Settling the Migrants

Apparently, there was a locality with a Bulgarian population in Teleorman County before 1700, but scholars have not reached any consensus on which settlement it actually was.¹⁰ It is certain, however, that in this area, as in fact was the case in all of Wallachia, in the first years of the nineteenth century localities with Bulgarophone populations suddenly seemed to emerge. Thus, there is evidence of one locality in Teleorman County before 1739, one between 1769 and 1774, and one between 1793 and 1806, to which 23 were added between 1806 and 1814 and 19 between 1828 and 1834. The total number of settlements with inhabitants originating from the eastern side of the Danube, Bulgarians in their majority, in the counties in Wallachia in the same periods of time was 6, 32, 14, 174, and 198, respectively.¹¹ The aggregate number of 424 spots in all of Wallachia is impressive, even if we take into account the high mobility of the migrant population. This total number, as well as the evolution of the Bulgarophone population over the course of different time periods, proves that its emergence was caused by the Russo–Turkish wars of 1806–12 and 1828/29.

The reaction of the Wallachian administration was positive. With the assistance of the representatives of the Russian army, they attempted to keep the

9 Georgescu, *Dicționarul geografic*.

10 Stănescu and Preda, *Licuriu*. 29; Roman, “Așezări de bulgari,” 142.

11 *Ibid.*, 129.

migrants in Wallachia with various fiscal incentives, the most common of which was an exemption for up to 10 years from property taxes.¹² Still, these efforts were only partly successful, as only some of the Bulgarians decided to stay. The rest of them either returned to their homeland or was resettled by the Russian administration in southern Bessarabia.¹³

In addition to the upheavals caused by the wars, the policy of the Wallachian administration also facilitated the creation of this Trans-Danubian economic and social network. At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, the administration in Wallachia implemented a series of tax exemptions for commercial activities carried out in the capitals of the Ottoman rayas on the left side of the Danube, namely Brăila, Giurgiu, and Turnu, the commercial and social effects of which spread to the neighboring towns and townlets.¹⁴ Furthermore, due to the Adrianople Treaty and the liberalization of trade on the Danube in 1829, these commercial and urban centers spearheaded social and economic change on both sides of the Danube.¹⁵ As for Teleorman, pair cities on both sides of the Danube emerged and grew, such as Turnu–Nikopol and Zimnicea–Svištov.

At the same time, the Wallachian administration also took a series of coherent steps in certain specific situations, such as the forced migration of the Bulgarophone population during the Russo–Turkish war of 1828/29 and the detailed regulations aimed at settling the immigrants coming from the right side of the Danube, which were debated and voted on in the Communal Assemblies of Moldova and Wallachia.¹⁶ They provided for the appointment of deputies of the immigrant Bulgarophone population who would participate in legislative assemblies and thus be able to present issues pertinent to this population. Later, the Bulgarophone population elected Vasil Nenovič, who was continuously and persistently active.¹⁷

The origin of these representatives is not accidental. The conditions favoring the development of trading activities in Wallachia, especially after 1829, enticed traders from the entire region of southeastern Europe.¹⁸ The Bulgarian

12 Romanski, *Bulgarite vuv Vlashko i Moldova*, 152–56.

13 Velichi, “Emigrarea bulgarilor in Țara Românească,” 52–54.

14 Kosev, Paskaleva and Diculescu, “Despre situația și activitatea economică,” 284–85.

15 Hardi, “Spatial structure and urban types,” 59–73.

16 Veliki and Trajkov, *Bulgarskata emigratsija vuv Valahija*, 84–88; Trajkov and Jechev, *Bulgarskata emigratsija v Rumunija*, 96ff.

17 Velichi, “Emigrări la nord și la sud de Dunăre,” 100–03.

18 Diculescu, Iancovici, Danielopolu and Popa, *Relațiile comerciale ale Țării Românești*.

merchants, who were important because of the size of the community they represented and their geographical proximity, played a significant role in the Wallachian economy and in internal and regional political networks. They often tried to change certain geopolitical contexts to their own advantage, for instance through their involvement in the events of the 1848 revolution in Wallachia.¹⁹ One might also think of the Georgiev brothers, very successful traders from Bucharest, who supported the unification of the two Romanian principalities after the Crimean War.²⁰

In addition to the upper stratum of immigrants who brought forward evolution strategies, many local landowners hired the majority of the Bulgarophone population to work on their estates, thus integrating them into the local traditional family-type economy. I identified local landowners in 10 villages populated by Bulgarian immigrants in Teleorman County in the 1830s.²¹ In only two of these villages were the Bulgarians settled on monastery properties. The rest of the properties were owned by higher-ranking or lower-ranking rulers (so-called “*dregători*”)²² or by their relatives.

Most of these landowners, who were Romanian ethnics, owed their position and wealth to the social shifts which took place at the end of the eighteenth century, brought about by the Phanariote reforms. Their upward move on the social ladder was due to their appointment as “*dregători*” by the Phanariote rulers. Still, there were among them people who were not Romanian, including Greeks, Serbs, or Bulgarians. They had all come into conflict with the local boyars and members of boyar families before the start of the Phanariote era at the beginning of the eighteenth century. There was an intense and explicit opposition by the boyars to the appointment of newcomers to positions in the administration, which found expression at the end of the eighteenth century in many memoirs and the taking of public stands.²³

The competition between these two top groups in Wallachian society was also based on the creation of often fictitious kinship and alliance networks intended to carry forward the surnames and properties. The cases of future

19 Velichi, “Bulgarii din Țara Românească,” 266–70.

20 Davidova, *Balkan transitions to modernity*, 47–48.

21 Mladenov, *Bulgarskrite govori v Rumunija*, 31–47; Donat, Pătroiu and Ciobotea, *Catagrafia obștească*, 70, 151–64.

22 For the definition of *dregători* see Sachelarie and Stoicescu, *Instituții feudale din Țările Române*, 174–75. Basically, they were state-appointed bureaucrats who in exchange for a given privilege performed various tasks in the local and central government.

23 Georgescu, *Istoria ideilor politice românești*, 187–88.

Wallachian rulers, such as Gheorghe Bibescu or Barbu Știrbei, who came to power after the removal in 1821 of the Phanariote rulers, are good examples in this respect. It should be added that the middle boyars used the same strategies.²⁴

The presence of the Bulgarian merchants in these kinds of social networks in Wallachia is significant because it promoted the integration of the two waves of Bulgarophone migrants in the first half of the nineteenth century.²⁵ Representatives like Vasil Nenovič belonged to a category well positioned in Wallachia's social and economic structure, and they acted as political, social, and economic mediators in the process of integrating the Bulgarian immigrants.²⁶ I will illustrate this in the case of Teleorman County with the examples of the Butculescu family, a native family which received many Bulgarian immigrants on its lands, and the Deșu family from Veliko Tŭrnovo, according to some sources, or Pleven, according to others. In the early nineteenth century, members of the two families began to marry.

The most prominent member of the Butculescu family was Marin (1760–1830), a resident of Rușii de Vede. Marin was a descendant of a modest family. His genealogy began with Mihai Butculescu (1505–68), also called Roșioru, an elite cavalry (*roșiori*) captain.²⁷ Marin was born in Slatina, in the neighboring Olt County. In 1799, he married Maria Mihăescu, from an Olt County family which had never had a prominent place in the ruling hierarchy. In 1800, Marin Butculescu was a middle treasurer (*biv trei vistiernic*). He then became a grand *serdar*, an army commander member of the group of Divan boyars. Marin funded the painting of a church in Rușii de Vede, in the founding of which his family had participated. The church had been erected in 1780 by Marin's father, Ion Butculescu, and his father's uncle, Radu Butculescu.²⁸ In 1811, Marin Butculescu moved the entire townlet to the opposite bank of the Vedea River to protect it from frequent flooding.²⁹ In 1829, Marin Butculescu was appointed prefect (*ispravnic*) of Olt County by the Russian administration, after having served as a tax executor (*mumbașir*) in the Russian army in 1828.

24 Iancu, "Defining the Patrimony," 56–60.

25 Velichi, "Emigrarea bulgarilor în Țara Românească," 48.

26 Romanski, *Bulgarite vuv Vlasbko i Moldova*, 376; Kosev, Paskaleva and Diclescu, "Despre situația și activitatea economică," 297.

27 Sturdza, *Familiele boierești din Moldova*, 623–38; Chefani-Pătrașcu, *Moșieri teleormăneni*, 62. Mihai Sturdza claims Butculescu died in 1632.

28 Stroescu, *Orașul Roșiorii de Vede*, 63.

29 *Ibid.*, 24.

Marin Butculescu had large properties in Teleorman and in the neighboring Argeş County as well, but he settled Bulgarophone refugees only on the two properties in Teleorman, in Sârbii Sfinţeşti, today Gratia, and Ţigăneşti Calomfireşti, near the future town of Alexandria.³⁰ The origins of the two Teleorman estates are indicative of the strategies of the Butculescu family: one had been inherited (the one located at Sârbii Sfinţeşti), while the other (Calomfireşti) had been purchased by him in 1808, partly from the common land owned by free peasants (*moşneni*) and partly from the Bucharest monastery of Cotroceni.³¹

One of Marin Butculescu's brothers, Gheorghe, born in 1765, also had a military position, that of *şetrar*, and was married to Manda Deşu, the daughter of Tudor Deşu, a Bulgarian settled as a *postelnic* in Ruşii de Vede at the end of the eighteenth century. Manda's brother was Andrei Deşu, also known as “the Serb from Târnova”.

Andrei Deşu (1786–1882) offers the best example of the insertion strategies of the Bulgarian ethnics in the Wallachian social hierarchy in the first half of the nineteenth century. The son of a Bulgarian ethnic settled in Ruşii de Vede at the end of the eighteenth century, Deşu extended its network of influence over the entire territory of the Wallachian principality. Deşu was appointed vice-treasurer (*vtori vistier*) by Grigore Ghica in 1827,³² against the backdrop of a large campaign aimed at “cleansing” the Wallachian administration of the Phanariote cadres.³³ Grigore Ghica the IVth became in 1822 the first native ruler after the end of Phanariote period, which had begun in Wallachia more than one century before (1716). Holding the position of vice-treasurer, in the 1830s, Deşu acted as a mediator between the immigrant Bulgarian traders and the local landowners by purchasing portions of the Brânceni and Smârdioasa estates. The Bulgarian traders who immigrated in 1830 together with those who had immigrated two decades earlier were aiming to found the town of Alexandria. Nevertheless, although they expressed a strong interest in the estates purchased by Deşu, they feared that Deşu would attempt to swindle them. The traders rejected the offer,

30 Donat, Pătroiu and Ciobotea et al., *Catagrafia obştească*, 152; Staicu, *Aşezările judeţului Teleorman*, 191.

31 Pascal, *Carte de hotărnicie*, 2.

32 Filitti, “Arhondologia Munteniei la 1822–1828,” 148.

33 Amongst 750 *dregători* enlisted in 1829, 342 were given their positions by Grigore Ghica. In this latter group, only 62 were foreigners, mainly Greeks, while 20 came from the big and middle boyar families, 110 from obscure boyar families, and 150 “new men...the trustees of the Principe Ghica and of the great boyars, the people educated in the Wallachian schools, etc.” (Filitti, “Arhondologia Munteniei la 1822–1828,” 152).

and Deșu was left with the estates.³⁴ But he sold them later to Miša Anastasiević, an important figure of Serbian immigration to Wallachia.³⁵

At the same time, Andrei Deșu became active in Wallachian politics in the first half of the nineteenth century. People said of him that he would have been a Wallachian or Serbian candidate for rule,³⁶ but that seems an exaggeration. However, there is a lot of data suggesting that he organized the revolts against Ottoman rule in Brăila in 1841–43. He would have been the main provider of funds, along with the Serbian envoys of Miloš Obrenović.³⁷ For these acts he was put in prison until 1848 at the Telega salt mine. This is why he did not participate in the 1848 revolution in Wallachia, but of his sons, Ionuț, a land leaseholder himself in Teleorman and holder of a minor administrative position (that of *pitar*), fired his weapon in 1848 at the Organic Regulations (hanging on a wall) in the main square in Rușii de Vede.³⁸

Still, in terms of family alliance strategies, Deșu preferred local connections, first with the Butculescu family, which, as mentioned above, was highly influential in Teleorman and, moreover, was important in the settlement of the Bulgarian immigrants. Also, Andrei Deșu became related through his wife, Bălașa, to another highly influential Teleorman family, the Depărățeanus. The three related families, Butculescu, Depărățeanu and Deșu, funded the construction of the main Rușii de Vede parish churches,³⁹ a very telling sign of their social position.

The case of Andrei Deșu illustrates the subsequent evolution of the Bulgarian ethnics against both the precise backdrop of the waves of Bulgarian immigrants and the larger backdrop of their adaptation to Wallachian society. They used the emerging urban network, the importance of trading exchanges, and new networks of power and influence. As we will see in the next sections, the opportunities these latter frames offered were used by the next generation of Bulgarian immigrants, though the social, political, and economic context changed. In this sense, the foundation of the town of Alexandria constitutes a telling example.

34 Velichi, “Emigrarea bulgarilor în Țara Românească,” 49.

35 About Miša Anastasiević (1803–1885) see Iancovici, “Din legăturile lui Miloș Obrenovici,” 164–66; Brătulescu, “Maiorul Mișa Anastasiević,” 274–75; Chefani-Pătrașcu, *Moșieri teleormăneni*, 42.

36 Stroescu, *Orașul Roșiori de Vede*, 63.

37 Trajkov and Jechev, *Bulgarskata emigratsija v Rumunija*, 248; Velichi, “Bulgares, serbes, grecs et roumains,” 256–60.

38 Stroescu, *Orașul Roșiori de Vede*, 65.

39 *Ibid.*, 63–66.

In Search of an Urban Life

In the second half of the nineteenth century there were no longer large waves of Bulgarian immigration across the Danube, in spite of the outbreak of two new Russo–Turkish wars between 1853 and 1856, the Crimean War, and the 1877/78 war. Having participated in these two wars, even indirectly, or in the preceding events, the Bulgarophone people already had important social and economic positions. Moreover, the powerful Bulgarian intellectual and economic diaspora in Wallachia ended up making a bridgehead for the Bulgarian movement for empowerment in the face of the domination of the Ottoman Empire, including through shadow governments capable of leading the new Bulgarian state.⁴⁰

Bulgarian immigrants held such important positions because they had adopted successful economic and social strategies, as shown in the previous section of this essay. After 1850, the second generation of immigrants would continue the same strategies, adapting them to new social contexts. One of the most efficient ways in which these strategies were used was through the settlement of the Bulgarian population in the Wallachian urban area. As I argued at the beginning of this paper, the case of Teleorman County is relevant in this respect.

Still, after 1850, the Bulgarian immigrants had to cope with two questions linked to the more general context of social change in the entire Wallachian principality. The first concerned the removal of the bureaucratic system of ranks and functions (*dregătorii*) of the Phanariote era. This measure, which was mentioned in the political program of the 1848 revolution in Wallachia, was achieved in the following decade in spite of the revolution's failure. A string of reforms implemented by Barbu Știrbei, the new Wallachian ruler, and the express introduction of these measures in the peace treaty signed after the Crimean War in 1856 led to the replacement of the Phanariote bureaucratic system by a model inspired by the modern bureaucracies of West European countries.⁴¹ The Bulgarian community of immigrants, which used (as exemplified by the case of Andrei Deșu) the Phanariote system of appointment in administrative positions, had to adapt its social strategies accordingly. And it did so successfully, engaging in local competitions for politic and bureaucratic positions. The cases mentioned below of the Repanovici and the Noica families are good examples of this.

40 Siupiur, *Intellectualii, elite*, 168–216.

41 Guțan, *Istoria administrației*, 23–24, 45ff.

The second aspect stems from the economic modernization of the Wallachian principality triggered by the post-1829 liberalization, which continued throughout the nineteenth century. The mushrooming of the trading network (a process in which Teleorman County occupied a leading place), the circulation of goods (including real estate properties), and the demand for monetary capital to fund such activities was exploited successfully by immigrants from southeastern European countries, including Bulgaria. One could mention, for instance, Serbian immigrants active in Teleorman County, such as the aforementioned Miša Anastasiević or the former Serbian ruler Miloš Obrenović, or even members of the other Serbian ruling family, Karageorgević. They all owned large estates purchased with funds obtained from various commercial activities, while another portion of the funds was lent, including the Wallachian government.⁴² Since the eighteenth century, loans had also been given to the boyars and the government by Bulgarian traders, a practice which continued into the next century.⁴³

The founding of the town of Alexandria illustrates and embodies the link between the migration of the Bulgarian population into Teleorman County and the shift of the region's political economy towards relative urbanization and the adoption of market economy relationships. The town was founded in 1834 with the active involvement of Bulgarian traders and craftsmen. The town's administration was made up from the outset of a group of 52 individuals, who pooled together the amount of money necessary to purchase the land on which the town was founded. Half of the founders originated from the townlet of Mavrodin, which itself had been founded in 1810 in part by traders who had immigrated from Svištov after the destruction of Svištov by fire. The other half originated from Zimnicea, where traders who had immigrated in 1810, also from Svištov, lived. The ethnicity of the town's founders is not mentioned. Some of the Alexandria monographers argue that they were Bulgarian,⁴⁴ although one finds among them people whose names sound Romanian and even Aromanian.⁴⁵ They had the official permission of the ruler Alexandru Ghica, who in 1840 issued a deed in which he acknowledged the privileges of the new town. As a matter of fact, the town's name was given in the honor of and as an act of gratitude for the ruler. The initial group was organized as a council with preferential rights

42 Chefani-Pătrașcu, *Moșieri teleormăneni*, 47; Iancovici, "Din legăturile lui Miloș Obrenovici," 164.

43 Iancu, "Stingerea familiei boierești," 182.

44 Catalina, *Orașul Alexandria*, 37, 79.

45 Nour, *Istoricul orașului Alexandria*, 50.

in favor of the founding members, such as the preemptive right, and collective decision-making procedures.

Another urban project, this time a failed one which nevertheless merits mention, since in a way it mirrors the foundation of Alexandria, was the aforementioned attempt to establish a town on a portion of the Mavrodin estate by the Serbian prince Miloš Obrenović.⁴⁶ Mavrodin was established as a townlet in 1810, when the *șetrar* Constantin Mavrodin won, after a long lasting and extremely controversial trial, portions of the surrounding estates. By establishing the townlet, he thought, as Constantin Gane puts it in his work dedicated to the Mavrodin family (a family with many branches), of helping “the poor Shishtovians,” but he had in mind the idea of profiting from tax cuts for goods sold there.⁴⁷ In 1825, Constantin Mavrodin died suddenly, and the estate was taken over in exchange for a debt by a man named Hristofor Sachelarie, who was married to a member of the Bălăceanu family, to whom the Mavrodin family was related. The two families also owned neighboring estates in the northern part of Teleorman County. Sachelarie sold the estate in 1835 to prince Miloš Obrenović. The prince had a cadastral survey made in 1850 for his share of the Mavrodin estate with the intention of building a new urban settlement. He submitted an application to the Romanian government in 1860, but the spot he had requested was not given governmental approval. Instead, a nearby place on the right bank of the Vedeia river was offered as the new site. Land sale announcements in the Official Gazette followed. The name of the new town should have been Cuza, after the name of the ruler of the two Romanian principalities, which had just been unified. But the ruler disagreed. Miloš died in 1860, and his son Mihail carried on with the project, which was continued under the name town Buzescu. But Mihail was assassinated in 1868, and the project failed. In 1885, Mavrodin was a village inhabited by only 320 families.⁴⁸

Having as the town of Alexandria as a center, the Bulgarians succeeded in gaining top positions in the social and economic life of local society. The town enjoyed considerable local autonomy until the administrative reform of 1864.⁴⁹ Instruction in most of the schools was in Bulgarian, and this reflected

46 Staicu, *Așezările județului Teleorman*, 54; Chefani-Pătrașcu, *Moșieri teleormăneni*, 47ff.

47 Gane, *Neamurile Mavrodinești*, 36.

48 Pătrănescu, *Monografia comunei Buzescu*, 45ff. Another town that Bulgarian migrants attempted to found was Noul Sliven (New Sliven), near Ploiești. The same Hristofor Sachelarie intervened for land acquisition (Velichi, “Emigrarea bulgarilor din Sliven,” 302–08).

49 Trajkov and Jechev, *Bulgarskata emigratsija v Rumunija*, 124.

the predominance of the Bulgarian population in the town.⁵⁰ On the one hand, the Bulgarian population was cosmopolitan, with connections throughout southeastern Europe. This explains why education here was organized by figures like Hristo Zlatovič.⁵¹ On the other hand, there was an internal conflict with regard to attitudes towards Ottoman power between the radical Bulgarian groups, represented by Hristo Botev (who taught in the school) and some traders on the one hand and the descendants of the *čiorbadžia*, traders themselves as well, but mostly landowners, on the other.⁵²

After 1875, the majority of the population became Romanian and Romanian cultural institutions developed.⁵³ Subsequent demands by the Bulgarian population to reinstate education in Bulgarian were turned down.⁵⁴ Under these circumstances and after the declaration of the Bulgarian autonomous state, which polarized a segment of the Bulgarian local elite, the Bulgarophone population, descendants of the immigrants who came in the first half of the nineteenth century from Alexandria and all of Teleorman County, preferred to declare themselves Romanians. This decision seems to have been strictly pragmatic, motivated by the political strategies of property capitalization and social development.⁵⁵ Whatever the case, they proved successful once again. Two cases of Alexandria families support this argument: the Repanovici family and the Noica/Noikov family, both of which contributed to the town's foundation in 1834.

50 Georgescu, *Dicționarul geografic*, 8–9; Catalina, *Orasul Alexandria*, 79. In 1844, a Bulgarian primary school functioned in Alexandria, where Mihail Hristidi/Hristov was one of the instructors (Trajkov and Jechev, *Bulgarskata emigratsija v Rumunija*, 295). The brothers Mihail and Simeon Hristidi were born in Stara Zagora and finished secondary school in Athena. They taught Greek in Bucharest and edited several books there as well (Ibid., 311; Davidova, *Balkan transitions to modernity*, 145–46).

51 He was the director of the Bulgarian school in Alexandria between 1855 and 1874. Zlatovič born in Provadia, near Varna, in 1816. He graduated in Athens, got Greek citizenship, and was hired in the 1840s in the service of the Greek government. He knew Romanian, as he had finished the Greek primary school in Bucharest. Between 1845 and 1853, he taught in Šumen and Anhialo (today Pomorje) (Gelețu, *Aspecte ale tradiției bulgare*, 24; Trajkov and Jechev, *Bulgarskata emigratsija*, 295; Siupiur, *Bulgarskata emigrantska inteligentsija*, 215). After 1858, in accordance with Wallachian legislation, they maintained 44 Bulgarian schools to the north of the Danube (Ibid., 30).

52 Gelețu, *Aspecte ale tradiției bulgare*, 12–13. According some authors, the weak participation of the population of Alexandria in the 1848 revolution was due at least in part to this conservative attitude (Velichi, “Bulgarii,” 270).

53 Georgescu, *Dicționarul geografic*, 8–9.

54 Mladenov, Jechev and Njagulov, *Bulgarite v Rumunija*, 102, 149–50.

55 On the local politics see my article, Șerban, “Obrazat na bulgarite v mestnite vestnitsi;”, 235–49.

Apparently, Avram Repanovici was the most enthusiastic of Alexandria's founders, since he was the first person to erect his house on the territory of the future town. He also immigrated after the destruction of Svištov in 1810, and along with Genku Noikov/Noica and a few other representatives, in 1832 he negotiated the purchase of the land on which the town was built. Thus, he was one of the town's founders.⁵⁶ His son Anghel Repanovici took over his father's business, by the mid-1860s he had become the most important merchant in Alexandria.⁵⁷ His commercial connections included business with the Georgiev brothers in Bucharest.⁵⁸ Still, he did not go beyond strictly commercial relations, as he did not extend his economic activities with agricultural land purchases. Anghel Repanovici got involved politically, developing connections with the Bulgarian radical militant Giorgi S. Rakovski, whom he supported in his work as editor of the newspaper *Budušnost* ("The Future"). He did not espouse radical options, however, and between 1870 and 1873 he was the town's mayor.⁵⁹

After 1880, Repanovici was a member of the Conservative Party, on behalf of which he ran several times in the local elections. As someone who held an important position in the party's local branch, he was elected municipal council chair between 1889 and 1891, and he wrote a series of articles on the town's Bulgarian past for the local party gazette, *Vedea*. The local liberal opponents often stigmatized him, referring to his ethnic origin and the links he maintained with Bulgarians from across the Danube.⁶⁰

Much like Andrei Deșu in Rușii de Vede, Anghel Repanovici remained a notable of the town in which he lived, Alexandria. Although the socio-political contexts are profoundly different in the two cases, they are examples of the plasticity and adaptability of the strategies espoused by the members of the two waves of Bulgarian immigrants in the first half of the nineteenth century to the north of the Danube. I conclude this paper with the case of the Noica family, descendants of Genku Noikov/Noica, himself a founder of the town of Alexandria. This case also constitutes an example of the various adaptation strategies adopted by the Bulgarian immigrants, from family alliances to competition for political positions and the accumulation of land.

56 Trajkov and Jechev, *Bulgarskata emigratsija v Rumunija*, 126; Nour, *Istoricul orașului Alexandria*, 20

57 Trajkov and Jechev, *Bulgarskata emigratsija v Rumunija*, 141, 192.

58 Ibid., 192; Kosev, Paskaleva and Diculescu, "Despre situația și activitatea economică," 328–29.

59 Trajkov and Jechev, *Bulgarskata emigratsija v Rumunija*, 141. Mladenov, Jechev and Njagulov, *Bulgarite v Rumunija*, 24.

60 *Jos reacțiunea*, nos. 17 iunie 1890, 22 iulie 1890.

From Merchant to Landowner

The Noica family became famous because of Constantin Noica (1909–87), a philosopher and prominent personality in Romanian public life. He and his family's biography deserve consideration, even if Constantin Noica himself ignored this subject. Genku, his great grandfather, was among the participants in the foundation of the town of Alexandria, as Constantin Noica himself confessed.⁶¹ In truth, Genku Ilie Noica (1790–1858)⁶² is at the top of the list of the 52 traders and craftsmen who founded the town. Genku Noica came from the aforementioned Mavrodin, a townlet at the time, where he settled after immigrating along with a significant group of merchants after the destruction of Svištov in 1810.⁶³

Seemingly, Genku Noica's ethnicity was more a matter of trajectory than inheritance. Some of the authors of local monographs contend that he was of purely Bulgarian origins (though they offer no persuasive arguments in support of this contention), i.e. part of the significant group of Bulgarians who founded the town of Alexandria.⁶⁴ What really matters, however, is that Genku Noica was strongly attached to the Bulgarian national cause, since his name was on the list of those who in 1842 ordered the book authored by I.N.Velinin, *Zaradi vŭzrozhdenie noi bolgarskoj slovenosti ili nauki* ("For the rebirth of the new Bulgarian literature and sciences").⁶⁵ The book had been translated from Russian into Bulgarian, and it was intended to mobilize the Bulgarian intelligentsia which had emigrated to Wallachia. At the same time, Genku Noica knew Bulgarian, and he drew up the town's administrative deeds.⁶⁶

It was also argued that Genku Noica was an Aromanian,⁶⁷ and that he had been adopted by a Romanian family from Svištov, Ilie and Anica Dogaru.

61 Liiceanu, *Jurnalul de la Păltiniș*, 188.

62 Chefani-Pătrașcu, *Moșieri*, 55.

63 Noica, *Neamul Noica*, 13–17.

64 Gelelețu, *Aspecte ale tradiției bulgare*, 8. The name Noikov was common at the time among Bulgarian migrants (Veliki, "Materiali ot rumunski arhivi," 258).

65 Mladenov, Jechev and Njagulov, *Bulgarite v Rumunija*, 68. The acquisition of the Bulgarian books was very common at the time in the entire Balkan space, representing a "symbolic geography of the Bulgarian identity" (Davidova, *Balkan transitions to modernity*, 145–46). The book in question was bought by 377 persons from 6 Wallachian towns (Bucharest, Brăila, Galați, Craiova, Ploiești, Alexandria) and one Moldovian (Focșani). The number of volumes purchased was 1,290 (Mladenov, Jechev and Njagulov, *Bulgarite v Rumunija*, 60–69).

66 Noica, *Neamul Noica*, 17.

67 *Ibid.*, 13.

Genku was the biological son of Anghel Gigantu, a brother-in-law of Anica. The Gigantu family was Aromanian, according to an oral statement made by Emanuel Văcăreanu (1884–1916), the first person to draw up the Noica family tree. Ilie Dogaru acknowledged the adoption through a testament clause dated February 10, 1825.⁶⁸ The Dogaru family emigrated from Svištov to Zimnicea and then to Mavrodin, where Genku came into conflict with his adoptive father. He subsequently left for Alexandria.

Genku Noica had two wives, Niculina,⁶⁹ with whom he had three daughters, and Maria Constantinescu. Neither of Genku's wives had prestigious social backgrounds. Iacovache, born in 1828 in Mavrodin, was Genku Noica's son from his second marriage.⁷⁰ In the testament concluded on February 1, 1857, the three daughters from his first marriage are mentioned, namely, Paraschiva, Teodosia, and Chiriaca. According to the will, he “[bequeathed] them movable assets and money, as much as I wish, and I agree with my sons-in-law according to the customs, by means of marriage contracts... as per my sons-in-law's desire, and no other movable or immovable asset can be taken.” At the same time, he left Iacovache, his only son from his second marriage, “all the movable and immovable assets... and he will have to pay to whomever I owe something and receive from whomever owes me... and must organize and pay for my funeral and memorial services up to three years from my death.”⁷¹ The bequeathed assets are not mentioned, but as I discuss below, when Iacovache died in 1890, a hotel that his father had left him in 1857 still existed.⁷²

If Genku Noica's ethnic origin is uncertain or simply multiple, since he belonged to a southeastern European culture in which multiethnic identities were not rare, especially with regard to elites, his son Iovache Noica nonetheless came to be one of the Teleorman liberal leaders in the 1880s. The notice of his death published in the local liberal journal *Jos reacțiunea* on October 14, 1890 (Iacovache died on October 5) says almost everything about the “adoption” of the Noica family: “He (Iacovache Noica) was a significant landowner with many town assets as well, he served twice as a deputy in the Parliament, a knight of the

68 DJANTr, Fond “Paraschiv Noica,” doss. 1/1992.

69 His first wife, *Niculina* “*Sârba*” [Niculina, the “Serb”] was definitely Bulgarian (personal communication with Ms. Sanda Stavrescu).

70 Noica, *Neamul Noica*, 22–28.

71 DJANTr, Fond “Paraschiv Noica,” doss. 2/1992.

72 Noica, *Neamul Noica*, 22. Genku Noica/Noikov preferred to lease the land only, while his son Iacovache decided to buy big properties. Thus, Iacovache “makes the step from leaseholder to landowner” (Chefani-Pătrașcu, *Moșieri teleormăneni*, 56).

Royal House of Romania, and vice-chair of our local committee.” Unlike cases such as that of the conservative deputy Anghel Dumitrescu, who was censured in the local liberal press for having Bulgarian origins,⁷³ Iacovache Noica’s ethnic origin was not questioned. Iacovache Noica was married twice,⁷⁴ fathered 17 children, had daughters-in law, sons-in-law, etc. about whom one finds many references in the local press, including the conservative press. We can infer that he was a highly reputed local figure and had extended family connections.

In addition to being a political personality, he was also a real estate investor. The division of his inheritance in 1892, two years after death, reveals that Iacovache had accumulated significant and large land acreage, two estates—Frăsinetu and Schitu/Poienari, the first of 1,700 ha, the second of 570—a hotel in Alexandria (as it so happens, the only one in town), a residential house also in Alexandria, and granaries in the city of Giurgiu. This inheritance would be split in 12 equal portions, 9 corresponding to the two estates and three to the other three properties, and would be divided up by lots by the legal heirs.⁷⁵ The resolve to invest in land seems to have been one of Iacovache’s later decisions. The first plots of the Frăsinetu estate were bought in 1881,⁷⁶ through the purchase was only completed in 1888, when Iacovache acquired the debts that the previous owners had to the Rural Credit House.⁷⁷

Among Iacovache Noica’s sons, three continued their father’s strategy, following both a political career and making investments meant to capitalize their wealth. Two of these sons, Andrei and Paraschiv, were initially members of the liberal party, though they switched sides and went over to the conservatives. Andrei Noica became conservative in 1897.⁷⁸ He then served twice as the mayor of Alexandria,⁷⁹ while Paraschiv Noica was already a member of the conservative party. Grigore Noica, Constantin’s father, opted for the conservatives from the very beginning. But he was not as dedicated to politics as his other two brothers.

73 *Ecoul Teleormanului*, no. 24, January 1888.

74 According to the family oral testimonies, his second wife, Maria, was the daughter of Petre Căncea, a merchant who also fled from Svištov and participated in the founding of Alexandria. Still, his name is not found on the town’s list of founders, since he moved to Moldova and added to the original family name, which was very close to the Bulgarian name Kanchov, the name Ornescu, after the locality in which he settled (Noica, *Neamul Noica*, 30).

75 DJANTr, Fond “Paraschiv Noica,” doss. 9/1892, 2–6.

76 Nica, *Studiu monografic*, 92ff.

77 DJANTr, Fond “Paraschiv Noica,” doss. 9/1892, 7–12.

78 The news appeared in the Conservative newspaper *Vedea*, no. 12, October 1897.

79 Cristea, Țânțăreanu and Avram, *Alexandria*, 24.

He authored articles on agriculture in the conservative newspaper *Alexandria*, which was published for a short period of time in 1903, and he also edited an independent agronomical journal intended for the large landowners of Teleorman County.

All three brothers were interested in capitalist investments in agriculture. In order to settle their father's bequest and also to avoid having to fragment the estates, Andrei and Paraschiv Noica purchased half of the Vitănești estate, which they ceded to their elder brother Grigore in 1904 in exchange for 280 ha as inheritance rights from their father.⁸⁰ One year after having acquired the Vitănești estate, Grigore Noica married Clementța Casassovici, who would later give birth to Constantin Noica.⁸¹ Whether intentionally or not, here too family affiliation was decisive. Clementța's paternal grandfather was Ivanciu Casassovici, an Aromanian trader, according to the family history, and also a founder of the town of Alexandria after his 1810 emigration from Svištov to Zimnicea.⁸² The Vitănești property was enlarged by Grigore Noica up to almost 2,000 ha, and it proved sufficient to sustain the family, which would live partly in the countryside and partly in Bucharest.⁸³

The exchange with Grigore was for the estates from the Frășinet village. These estates were first purchased by Iacovache Noica in 1881. Andrei and Paraschiv owned this property jointly, as they did in the case of other properties as well, until 1917. The division was forced by the arrest of the two brothers, who chose to remain at their estates after the government retreated to Iași as Romania became involved in World War I.⁸⁴ As it so happens, Andrei Noica died a year later. The division deed included, along with the Frășinet estate (which had been reunited by means of agreements like the ones concluded with Grigore), other land properties acquired together by the two brothers: two estates in the neighboring Vlașca County with an aggregate area of 4,250 ha, two other estates in Teleorman County with an aggregate area of 1,420 ha, a mill and the Alexandria residence and hotel inherited from Iacovache, which had been overhauled and extended.⁸⁵

80 Pascal, *Carte de botărnicie*, 4ff.

81 The wedding is announced in the liberal newspaper *Alegătorul liber*, no. 1, May 1905.

82 Gherman, "Inginerul Corneliu Casassovici," 391–92.

83 Chefani-Pătrașcu, *Moșieri teleormăneni*, 61.

84 *Ibid.*, 59.

85 DJANTr, Fond "Paraschiv Noica," doss. 20/1917.

The difference between the properties owned by the grandfather, Genku, the father, Iacovache, and the three brothers, Andrei, Paraschiv, and Grigore, illustrates the success of the Noica family's economic strategies. Moreover, Iacovache's sons engaged in local matrimonial alliances meant to strengthen and stabilize their growth. Grigore married a descendant of the Cassasovici family (a founding family of Alexandria which enjoyed similar success in climbing the social ladder), and Andrei Noica and Dimitrie Noica (the latter also a son of Iacovache) married either members of former local boyar families, such as Depărățeanu and Burcă of Roșiori de Vede, or members of economically successful families, such as the Capră family, a former land leaseholder family members of which in 1900 worked large properties in Teleorman County.⁸⁶ The Noica family case is also significant as an example of the traditional pattern of Bulgarian migration across the Danube as workers on agricultural holdings. Paraschiv Noica, for instance, often hired Bulgarian workers skilled in handling water extraction hydraulic equipment to work on his estates.⁸⁷

Conclusion

The main stimulating factor which made the Bulgarophone population settle permanently in Teleorman County, as it did in all of Wallachia after 1800, was its inclusion in the area's political economy and urbanizing social milieu. On the one hand, it was the active policy of the Wallachian government to integrate the Bulgarian migrants. As I have shown at the beginning of the first section in this article, the government took a range of measures to keep the Bulgarian migrants on Wallachian lands. This is even more obvious in the case of the second wave of migrants, whose arrival overlapped with the economic liberalization underway after the Adrianopole Treaty. The reasons for these policies were economic, but not related to the development of the rural areas and agriculture. The main target of the government policies was rather the groups of merchants, big leaseholders, and intellectuals who were able to participate actively in the

86 Chefani-Pătrașcu, *Moșieri teleormăneni*, 62.

87 Nica, *Studiu monografic complex*, 150. The local newspapers around 1900 are full of information about more or less illegal Danube crossings by the Bulgarian workers who sought to find employment on the big estates. The policies of the Romanian government reflect this situation, as well. For instance, around 1910, the main river firms which brought the migrant workers from the southern side of the Danube in Teleorman County were controlled by Bulgarians. This fact enraged the boatmen from Romania, and the Bucharest government was obliged to intervene and mediate in the conflicts (DJANG, Fond Inspecția Fluvială, doss. 9/1910, doss. 13/1911).

urban and capitalist development of the principality. In this respect, the case of Teleorman County is telling, since at the time it was one of the most urbanized Wallachian counties. On the other hand, the Bulgarophone population easily entered the dense fabric of social and economic relations created by the vertical stratification of the landowners, land workers, and rural dwellers and also by the horizontal relationships of the large landowners. This population was made up of “common people” hired as tenants or simple agricultural workers and individuals engaged in land-related commercial and ownership relations. Particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century, this latter group became significant landowners who often hired members of the Bulgarophone population, either locals or migrants coming from the far side of the Danube. The motives brought forward by the novel economic relations gave rise in the first half of the century to collective projects undertaken by the Bulgarophone economic and social elites, such as the project of founding urban centers. This is how the town of Alexandria took shape, creating opportunities which were used by the Bulgarophones in the second half of nineteenth century to forge new adaptation strategies.

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