



The Region of Dobrudja from the Middle Ages to the end of Ottoman Rule

Summary :

The Ottoman military operations for the conquest of Dobrudja extended from 1388 to 1484; but it was in the early sixteenth century when the Ottoman-Turks managed to establish effective political control in the region. During the Ottoman rule, Dobrudja had a mixed population of Muslims, Romanians, Greeks, Armenians, Jews and other ethnic groups. Dobrudja was incorporated into Romania in 1878.

Other Names

Dobrogea, Dobrudza, Dobruca, Δοβρουτσά (Dovroutsá)

Geographical Location

Danube Delta, Black Sea

Historical Region

Land od Dobrotici

Administrative Dependence

1. Dobrudja

[*Dobrogea* in Romanian, *Добруджа* (transliterated *Dobrudzha*) in Bulgarian, *Dobruca* in Turkish, and *Δοβρουτσά* (transliterated *Dovroutsá*) in Greek.] In modern times, the name Dobrudja has referred to the territory between the Kilia arm of the Danube Delta to the north, the Black Sea to the east, maritime Danube (i.e. downstream of Silistria) to the west, and the rivers Beli Lom and Kamchiya (in the region of the Maritime Balkans) to the south. However, in mediaeval times, the name Dobrudja referred to only one part of today's region of the same name, namely to the 'land' of Dobrotici. Under Ottoman administration (from the fifteenth century to 1877/78), the use of this toponym was extended to designate the entire Istro-Pontic isthmus (i.e. today's Dobrudja).

2. The name

There have been many hypotheses about the origin of the name Dobrudja. Some rather fanciful theories derived the name from the Dobéres, an ancient population mentioned by Herodotus.¹ According to others, the toponym derived from terms describing the geographic and physical features of the territory: *dobro* (Sl.= good),² *dobriče* (Sl.= stony, infertile soil).³ Still other theories drew on the Turkic history of the territory between the Danube and the Sea, from the Avars and Bulgarians, in the sixth-seventh centuries A.D. up to the Pechenegs, Oghuzes and Kumans in the eleventh-twelfth centuries and the Seldjuks led by Izz ed-Din Kaikavus II and Sari Saltuk Dede in the thirteenth.⁴ The latter theories propose an old Turkic origin of the name derived from terms such as: Berġan/Burġn, mentioned by the twelfth-century Arab geographer Idrisi,⁵ or from a combination of *dhu* = leader with *bruġan* = *vallum*, *propugnaculum*.⁶

Other authors searched for the etymology in the name of an eponymous hero. The most likely choice has been the despot Dobrotici (approx. 1347-1386), the region's most famous political leader.⁷ All the theories around the name Dobrudja have swayed between a Slavic and a Turkic (or Slavicised Turkic) origin of the toponym. The explanation which derived the name of the land from the name of its leader, Dobrotici, also had to contend with the alternative Slavic, Turkic (Kuman), or Romanian origins proposed for this hero's name, an issue over which specialists have so far failed to reach an agreement. The tradition of naming a country after its leader or ruling dynasty was frequent among Turkic populations.

For instance, the Ottomans used this system to designate state names: *Aydın-ili*, *Shusmanos-ili*, *Boġdan-ili* (Moldavia) and *Alexa* (Mangop). The oldest written references to the 'land' of Dobrudja date back to the latter half of the fifteenth century and are to be



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found in the works of the Ottoman chroniclers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but not in the work of Aşıkpaşazade and Oruc bin Adil or in the anonymous chronicles published by Giese.⁸ The current phoneticism of the name Dobruđja-*Dobruca*-is also to be found in Ottoman sources, either in the works of chroniclers (*Dobruca-ili*, *Sahra-i Dobruca*) or in Ottoman registers (*Dobruca vilayeti*).⁹ Leunclavius mentioned a land called Dobritze.¹⁰ Names related to the meaning "land of Dobrotici" date from the latter half of the fourteenth century: "terra Dobroticii",¹¹ "terrarum Dobroticii despotus".¹² The Slavs used the designation *Dobroticetsvo zemlija* (land of Dobruđja). The Romanians on the left bank of the Danube used their own, Romanic, appellative: "Decinde" (Lat. *de-ecce-inde*), meaning the "land beyond (the Danube)" or even simply "Turkey".¹³ In the course of the "unifying" Ottoman domination (15th-19th centuries) the use of the name Dobruđja was extended to the space between the Danube and the Black Sea. Other well-known place names, such as Moldavia or Bessarabia, followed a similar pattern.¹⁴

3. A short history of Dobruđja in the middle ages

Historically, the region between maritime Danube, the Minor Balkans and the Black Sea was either a single imperial administrative entity (for instance in the Roman and Byzantine empires, and later in the Ottoman empire), or was divided into several local units (under Mongol or Byzantine domination). Alternatively, it merged with the state on the left bank of the Danube, *Țara Românească* (Wallachia). During the Greco-Roman and Byzantine periods, it was known as the province *Mykra Scythia*. The Greek geographer Strabo called it Scythia Minor under Roman administration (or simply Scythia, starting with the reign of Emperor Diocletian). Later, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, it was known as the theme *Paristrion or Paradunavion*, which meant 'the land *adjacent to* or *along* the Danube'.¹⁵ Under Byzantine control, or on the margins of the Byzantine empire, the space of today's Dobruđja comprised a multitude of local dominions. The Byzantine writer Anna Komnene mentioned tenth- and eleventh-century local leaders such as Tathos/Chalis (at Dârstor/Silistria), Satsa and Sesthlav (at Vicina).¹⁶ In the twelfth century there were several "Romanian lands" (Wallachia): one in the region of Silistria, one in the vicinity of Isaccea, one at Kilia, and one in the region of the maritime Balkans, on the seafront, at "Zagora", the place where the brothers Assan and Peter started the uprising which resulted in the creation of the Romanian-Bulgarian state of the Assenid dynasty (1186-1257).¹⁷

After the great Mongol invasion of Eastern Europe (1240-41), a large region, from the outflow of the Don to Constantinople and further east, towards Slovenia, was turned into tribute-paying dominions by the Tatars. The discovery of coins dating from circa 1300 led to the identification of statal entities controlled by the Mongols, but also by Byzantium, at Tulcea, Niculițel, Isaccea and Măcin.¹⁸ The restoration of Byzantine rule in the region of the lower Danube during the reign of Michael VIII Paleologus (1258-1282) led to consistent colonization of Byzantine-controlled areas in the land of Dobruđja/Dobruca ili by the Anatolian Turks of the Seldjukid Sultan Izz ed-Din Keykavus II.¹⁹ The companions and disciples of the dervish Sari Saltuk Dede, who arrived in the Istro-Pontic territories around these times, founded the town Babadag. Evliya Çelebi wrote about the merging of the Anatolians with the native Vlachs, which resulted in the Dobruđjan population known as *citaq*.²⁰

Fourteenth-century documents from the Patriarchate of Constantinople relating to its subordinate dioceses mention four emerging statal organizations. The one in the Danubian region downstream of Silistria (the region of the lakes and the Paristrion Islands) was under the ecclesiastic control of the Diocese of Vicina. This 'country' mediated the links between Wallachia and *Țara Cărvunei* (the land of Cărvuna). The earliest documentary evidence for '*Țara Cărvunei*' (Sl.= Korvinuska Khora or Carbona, as it was designated in Italian fourteenth-century sailing charts), is to be found in the Slavonic privilege issued by Ioan Assan II for the Ragusan merchants (1230-35).²¹ It was the most prominent and best-documented of the four states. A coastal area under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Varna and Cărvuna, the 'land of Cărvuna' was a Pontic principality dependent on Byzantium. Adjacent to Cărvuna was, to the south, 'Zagora', the dominion of Michael, the son-in-law of Dobrotici and the son of the Byzantine emperor Michael V Paleologus. 'Zagora' was located in the south-eastern zone of the Maritime Balkans, extending to the Gulf of Burgas.²² To the west was the despotate of Dârstor/Silistria ruled by Terter, son of Dobrotici.²³ After the assassination of Michael by Terter at Silistria (1376), Zagora was taken over by Dobrotici. Upon the latter's death (1386), the land of Silistria and the territories of Dobrotici (*terrae Dobroticii*) devolved to Mircea the Old (Mircea cel Bătrân), prince of Wallachia, and to Ioanco/Ivanco, a son of Dobrotici, lord of the harbour of Varna.²⁴



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In terms of institutions and civilization, these fourteenth-century Dobrudjan states were essentially Byzantine. The citadel of Silistria was led by a *kefalia*. Greek was the official language in Dobrudja. The Diocese of Vicina was led by Greek bishops. In 1379 the metropolitan of Varna became exarch of the Patriarch of Constantinople, and was in charge of some of the patriarchal castles, excepting Kilia. Dobrotici's title as 'despot' was conferred by Constantinople and his coins had inscriptions in the Greek language. When he took over Dobrudja, Mircea the Old kept and respected its Byzantine institutions.²⁵

4. The Ottoman conquest of Dobrudja

The current state of research does not yield a comprehensive and consistent image of the processes of the integration of the Dobrudjan region within the Ottoman state. Only a few milestones and stages in these processes are clear. The Ottoman conquests made during Ali Candarlu's campaign of 1388 against the dissidents of Pločnik (1387) – i.e. Shishman from the tsarate of Turnovo and Ioanco (*Dobrucaoğlu*), both vassals to the Ottomans – did not extend beyond the line Turtucaia/Tutrakan-Varna in the north. Silistria, defended by Mircea the Old, and Ioancu's Varna resisted Ali Candarlu's attack. The titles of Mircea the Old show that, by 1389, he held the *Podunavskim stranam* [the land of Podunavia = the land by the Danube]. In addition, by 1390-91, he was despot over Dobrotici's lands and master of [Dristra](#)/Silistria ('*terrarum Dobrodicii despotus et Tristri dominus*').

The destruction of the Bulgarian tsarate of Turnovo by Bayazid I *Ildırım* (1393) brought both Silistria and [Varna](#) within the boundaries of the Ottoman state. In 1395, Mircea joined forces with Sigismund of Luxemburg to attack the Ottomans in the *uc* of Deliorman, which lay to the north-east of Shishman's Bulgaria, in the lands of Dobrotici ('*ad partes Dobroticii*').²⁶ After the crusade of Nikopol (1396), Sigismund escaped on a ship bound for the mouth of the Danube (which means that the right bank of the Danube was not under Ottoman domination). The Tsarate of Vidin became the *sancak* of Vidin.

The severe internal crisis of the Ottoman state triggered by the defeat of Bayazid I at [Ankara](#) (1402) opened up new opportunities for resistance and reaction for Wallachia, which counted the right bank of Dobrudjan Danube among its territories. According to Evliya Celebi, 'during the war between Bayazid and Timur-Lenk, the princes of Wallachia and Moldavia occupied all the citadels this side of the Danube'.²⁷ The list of Mircea's titles on 23 November 1406 read as follows: 'Prince over all the land of Ungrovlachia and the lands across the mountains, and the lands lying towards the Tatars' regions, *ruler of both sides of Podunavia up to the great Sea, and master of the citadel of Dârstor* [Silistria].²⁸ This shows that Mircea had control over the Danubian banks of Dobrudja down to the river's flow into the Black Sea (this did not refer, however, to Kilia, but to the southern mouths of the river). The same titles for Mircea, to which was added the description 'master of many Turkish towns', appeared in documents of 1409, 1413, and 1415.²⁹ The fact that Wallachia was contiguous to the Black Sea is also attested by an observation around 1404 by Bishop John of Sultanieh ('next to the great, or Pontic, Sea, lies Wallachia').³⁰ The titles of Mircea the Old's son and successor, Mihail, in 1419 also testify to the same territorial coordinates of Wallachia and Dobrudja: 'ruler of both sides of Podunavia down to the great Sea and ruler of the citadel of Dârstor'.³¹

Owing to Mircea the Old's ceaseless manoeuvring in favour of Mehmed I's adversaries (one of whom was sheikh Bedreddin), the Sultan organized an expedition against Wallachia, dated variously by historians from 1416 to 1420. He found the citadels of Isaccea and Yeni-Sale in ruins, 'owing to the mindlessness of the Giaours'. After taking them over from Mircea, the Sultan had them rebuilt.³² It is not known how much of Dobrudja's territory was occupied by the sultan on this occasion. It is quite probable that, beside the two afore-mentioned citadels, this territory also included Babadag, the city of Sarı Saltuk Dede. A privilege granted to the Cozia Monastery in 1421 by Prince Radu Prasnaglava ('The Bald') established the monastery's right to fish in the lakes from Săpatu and down to the mouth of the river Ialomița, on the left bank of the Danube, in Wallachia.³³ During Mircea the Old's reign, this north-Danubian region was under the jurisdiction of the *kefalia* of Silistria. At the time of the 1421 privilege, the south-Danubian region of Silistria was under Ottoman control (in 1426 the Prince of Wallachia, Dan II, attacked and set fire to Silistria).³⁴

Jehan de Wavrin's account of the expedition of the Burgund flotilla on the Black Sea and the Danube (1445), after the crusade of Varna, suggests that [Mangalia](#), Lycostomo, [Brăila](#), Isaccea and Hârșova were not under Turkish domination.³⁵ The campaign in the



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winter of 1461/1462 led by Vlad Țepeș against the Ottoman military outfit on the Lower Danube shows that the Dobrudjan right bank, at Isaccea, Yeni-Sale and Silistria, was controlled by the Ottomans. And finally, a penal code (*kanun-name*) from the time of Sultan Bayazid II (1481-1512) mentions the fact that Varna, Balcik, [Kaliakra](#), Konsiçe (*sic!*) and Mankalya 'were annexed to the *liva* Silistria' (*ki terrakkîçün zabt olunan der liva-i Silistre*).³⁶ It would appear that, initially, the administrative organization of the littoral zones' differed from the continental zones. The account of the Ottoman Empire by Iacopo de Promontorio (circa 1475, according to his editor)³⁷ mentions a 'capitanate' of [Constantinople](#) during the reign of [Mehmed II](#), which comprised the littoral strip between Panidos (on [the Sea of Marmara](#)) and Varna. This region overlaps with the areas ceded to Byzantium under the treaty of 1403 by the son of Bayazid I, Süleyman çelebi, namely the littoral area between Panidos and Varna, which was probably an early Byzantine administrative organization of the Black Sea coast. According to the afore-mentioned *kanun*, the section of the coast from Varna to Mangalia (probably also including Constanța) appears to have belonged to the *sancak* of Silistria during the reign of Bayazid II, a sultan who also conquered the Moldavian towns of Kilia and Cetatea-Albă on behalf of the same *sancak* (1484). [Mesimvria](#) was still Byzantine in 1451.³⁸

The conquest of Kilia – the northernmost point of Dobrudja – in 1484³⁹, is widely considered as the completion of Ottoman rule over this region. However, in reality the situation was far more complex. The documents relating to the Ottoman political activities around this time are not sufficient for an understanding of the period, but the information they offer is complemented by that of Ottoman administrative acts regarding the organization of conquered territories in Dobrudja. The Ottomans are known to have respected two principles in the organization of conquered territories: one was the preservation, within a single Ottoman province, of pre-Ottoman state entities; the other was the integration within Ottoman administrative structures of the new territories in chronological order of their conquest.

5. The Ottoman administrative organization of Dobrudja

During the entire period of Ottoman administration (from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries), the territory of Dobrudja was part of the *sancak*, later the *eyelet*, of Silistria, within the *beylerbeylik* of Rumelia. By analogy with better-studied regions, one can presuppose a period when Dobrudja was an *uc-beylik*, meaning a peripheral, borderland area with a high degree of autonomy.⁴⁰

There are very few records from the first century of the great Ottoman conquests (from the late fourteenth to the late fifteenth century), both for the Dobrudjan areas and for other regions of Rumelia.⁴¹ The records from the years 1530/31⁴² offers, among other information, valuable suggestions concerning the succession of Ottoman conquests on Dobrudja's territory in the fifteenth century.

In the 1530 *defter*, the territory of today's Dobrudja covers by the three *kazas* of Hırsova (today's Hârșova), Varna and Silistria.⁴³ The *kaza* of Hârșova comprised the Dobrudjan area north of the Karasu valley and the *vallum* system dotting the coast of the Black Sea at Gargalık (today's Corbu) and Karaharman (today's Vadu). It then ran along the western side to the great lakes of the Razelm complex, by the town of Ester and the castle of Yeni-Sale, and right to the most famous centre of Islam, Babadag, located on the trans-Dobrudjan route. In north-eastern Dobrudja, it comprised the small market-towns Beștepe, Tulcea, Isaccea and Măcin, and in the west, it extended from the commercial river-way Piuva Petri/Floci-Hârșova to Cernavodă/Boğaz-köy (*Karasu-boğazı* in the *defter*).

South of the Karasu valley, the Dobrudjan space was divided into two *kazas*: in the west, adjacent to the Danube, the *kaza* of Silistria; in the east, towards the sea coast, the *kaza* of Varna. The latter covered the Pontic coast from the *iskele* (harbour) Constanța (*Köstence iskelesi*) in the north, and the entire coast-line, via the lake Techirghiol (*Tekfurgölü*) area and down to Mangalia and hence southwards, below Varna (including the ports Keligra *iskelesi*/Caliacra, Balçik *iskelesi*/Balcik, Varna *iskelesi* and the villages Ecrene and Galata Varnei/Kalana). Its southernmost limit was beyond the Kamchiya river, that is to say some way below the estuary of the river Defne, guarded in the north by the citadel of Varna and in the south by Galata (near Varna).

The *kaza* of Silistria bordered the *kaza* of Varna in the west, from Kara-su (today's Medgidia), continuing along the Danubian strip between Ion Corvin/ Kuzgun-pınarı, Adamclisi and the area around Ostrov and Silistria. The *kaza* of Silistria was bordered to the south by the *kaza* of Provadia, and to the west by the *sancak* of Nikopol. The three Ottoman administrative entities presented in the



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defter for the year 1530/31 were identical with the ones represented in the *defter* for 1526-1529.

Alexander Kuzev's study on sixteenth-century Dobrudja⁴⁴ demonstrated the overlap between the borders of the *kaza* of Varna and the despotate of Dobrotici. From the viewpoint of ecclesiastic geography, this territory was controlled by the [Diocese of Varna](#). Kuzev established the limits of the *kaza* of Varna on the basis of place names from the *defter* of 1573. At that time, the *kaza* of Varna extended along the littoral, from the Kamchiya river up to Yılanlık (Vama Veche), south of [Mangalia](#). By comparing this source with the register of 1530/31, it is evident that, fifty years earlier, the *kaza* of Varna comprised a much larger territory in the north, including both Mangalia and the *iskele* (harbour) [Constanța](#) (*Köstence*). With respect to inland areas, there were no essential differences between the two sources. The register of 1530/31, older than the one used by Kuzev, offers, therefore, a more accurate picture of the 'first stage' of Ottoman organization in Dobrudja. The southern limit of the *kaza* of Varna was the same in 1530/31 and in 1573 – as established by Alexander Kuzev – namely the Kamchiya river, on both of its banks. However, it is well-known that, in the south, at the time of their greatest expansion, the territory of Dobrotici extended beyond this line. One has to consider the fact that Dobrotici's dominion resulted from the juxtaposition of several regions, most probably with different administrative status (*terrae Dobroticii*). The 'land of Cărvuna' was its patrimonial territory, founded on Byzantine traditions and ecclesiastically dependent on the Metropolitanate of Varna (and Cărvuna, at some point). The most important territory in the dominion was the maritime boundaries around Varna and the Cape Caliakra. Having succeeded his brother, Balica, to the throne of Cărvuna, around the year 1347 Dobrotici extended the maritime boundaries of his state to include the ports of Venzina/Vicina, Kozeakon/Obzor and Emmona/Emine.⁴⁵ Prior to the death of the *arkhon* Balica, Dobrotici had ruled temporarily over Midiye, a citadel near Constantinople, next to Cape Karaburun.⁴⁶ The greatest littoral extension of Dobrotici's despotate (down to Midiye) appears, according to the 1490/91 *defter*, to coincide with the southern limit of the *sancak* of Silistria. After the assassination of his son-in-law, Michael, the latter's *Zagora*, together with Messimvria, were taken over by Dobrotici. In the 1530 *defter*, the port of Mesimvria did not form a separate *kaza*, but belonged to the *kaza* of Rus-Kasri. Thus organized, the territory is reminiscent of Michael's *Zagora*, i.e. the south-eastern part of the Maritime Balkans, down to the Gulf of [Burgas](#). Mesimvria was to be claimed by the Wallachian Prince Mircea the Old, in his capacity as ruler of Dobrotici's lands, a claim which put him on a collision course with Byzantium.⁴⁷

The stable nucleus of the dominions of Dobrotici was comprised of what was then called 'Dobrudja' and what the Ottomans included within the *kaza* of Varna. In narrative and chancellery sources this region was described as: a dry, semi-desert steppe⁴⁸, a littoral strip, with a northern limit around the village of Gura Dobrogei (Mouth of Dobrudja)⁴⁹, and a southern limit approximately at Bazargic-Provadia.⁵⁰ These boundaries correspond with those of the *kaza* of Varna as they appear in the 1530/31 register. The 'land of Terter', the son of Dobrotici, i.e. the 'land of Silistria', can be seen to overlap with the boundaries of the *kaza* Silistria.⁵¹ Dobrotici's more 'casual' dominions were part of various *kazas* of the *sancak* of Silistria. The *sancak* of Silistria comprised a variety of territories and political entities: 'Dobrotici's Dobrudja', Michael's *Zagora*, the Danubian land of Terter at Silistria, some regions of Turnovo Bulgaria's north-east, the ancient Turko-Tatar towns Yeni-Sale, Isaccea and Babadag, and the primary Danubian zone between the lowlands of Hârșova, Măcin, [Tulcea](#) and Karaharman/Vadu. To this stable area of the *sancak* of Silistria were added, over time (between 1484-1538), the Moldavian towns of Kilia and Cetatea Albă and the left bank of the Danube from up north of the mouth of the river Ialomița to the Siret river (after 1538, the *kaza* of Brăila).

The status of Dobrudja's northern part – i.e. the *kaza* of Hârșova in the 1530 *defter* – is less clear. The oldest known written record for this *kaza* dates back to 1502/1503⁵² (whereas the *kazas* of Silistria and Varna were mentioned in the 1490-91 *defter*). We can, therefore, suppose that effective political control over this area was established in the early sixteenth century. Its periphery (the area Babadag-Yeni-Sale), was incorporated into the centre (the region between Hârșova and Karaharman), which was probably under the control of Wallachia. This entity formed the *kaza* of Hârșova. In the 1573 *defter*, following some restructuring, Dobrudja's northern part, which included the towns of Măcin, Garvăn, Isaccea, Tulcea and Beștepe, was assigned to a separate *kaza*, the *kaza* of Isaccea⁵³, while the remaining areas came to be known as the *kaza* of Hârșova-Babadag. The fact that Ottoman rule over northern Dobrudja (north of the Karasu valley) started later than over the areas south of the valley is also illustrated by the routes followed by Ottoman troops crossing Dobrudja. During the campaign of Mehmed II against Stephen the Great (1476), the campaign of Bayazid II against Kilia and Cetatea-Albă (1484), and that of Süleyman *Kanunî* against the Prince of Moldavia, Petru Rareș (1538), troops



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crossed 'maritime Dobruđja' (the *kaza* of Varna) towards Isaccea, along the route Balcik-Kavarna-Papazlık-Tatlıcak (today's 23 August)-Süt-köy(today's Ovidiu)-Ester (Târgșor)-Sarı-Saltuk-Baba (Babadag)-Isaccea.⁵⁴ However, Sultan Osman II, on his way to the citadel Hotin (1621), crossed through the middle of Dobruđja via a different route: Provadia-Hacıođlu-pazarı (Bazargic)-Kara-su (Medgidia)-Babadag-Isaccea.⁵⁵ Subsequent Ottoman campaigns in Poland and in Moldavian areas (1672 and in 1711)⁵⁶ were conducted along the same trans-Dobruđjan route (*şahrak*, the route of the imperial campaigns, as recorded in the writings of Evliya Çelebi). Presumably, the route *via* Kara-su/Medgidia (Babadag-Isaccea), into the area of the *kaza* of Hârșova came into use after the takeover and organization of northern Dobruđja. A *kaza* with the name Karasu-Tekfugölu, the capital of which was the town Kara-su, started to be mentioned in Ottoman documents only towards the mid-sixteenth century.⁵⁷ In the seventeenth century, Dobruđja comprised the following *kazas*: Hacı-ođlu-pazarı, Silistra, Aydos, Ahyolu ([Anchialos](#), Pomorie), Varna, Balcik, Mangalia, Kara-su, çardak, Babadag and a '*nahiye Dobruca*' (which included several villages located approximately to the south-east of Silistria).⁵⁸

Northern Dobruđja - the areas on the right bank of the Danube, between the mouth of the river Ialomița and the outflow of the Siret and down to 'the great Sea' - had maintained, as early as the fourteenth century, close links with Wallachia as well as with the province of Silistria and Păcu, the region of the 'Paristriian islands'. The trade privileges given to the merchants of Brașov (Kronstadt) - one granted in 1358 by the King of Hungary Louis I of Anjou, and another issued in 1368 by Prince Vlaicu of Wallachia⁵⁹ (completed by the entitlement granted by the Hungarian king to the merchants of Brașov, trading in the 'state' of *Demeter princeps tartarorum*) - all suggest a land corresponding to Wallachia on the right bank of the Danube, in Dobruđja, a region which permitted access to the sea, the target area of major international commerce. Integrated within Wallachia in circumstances that have yet to be clarified, and then lost definitively to the Ottomans in the early sixteenth century (in stages that remain equally unclear), the particularities of this area were to be preserved by the Ottomans, who organized there a *kaza* presided over by the citadel of Hârșova. Towards the mid-sixteenth century, after the annexation of Brăila and the creation of the *kaza* of the same name (on the shores of the Morass of Brăila), a new Metropolitanate of Proilava was created. The Metropolitan See of Proilava had under its jurisdiction an area consisting of the villages around the Morass of Brăila and on the banks of Dobruđjan Danube, as well as the 'Christian *reaya*' of 'Ottoman Moldavia', i.e. the *sancak* Bender-Akkerman. The Metropolitan See of Proilava was mentioned in lists of bishoprics under the Constantinopolitan Patriarch, before the sees of Ungrovlachia and Moldovlachia, which had obviously been created earlier. This justified an important hypothesis, according to which the Metropolitanate of Proilava was a revival, in a different historical context, of the Metropolitanate of Vicina.⁶⁰

At the end of the sixteenth century (1599), as a consequence of Cossack incursions and of the wars led by the Wallachian Prince Michael the Brave in the Danubian areas, the Porte decided to elevate the *sancak* of Silistria to the rank of *eyalet/beglerbeglik* of Silistria-Özü. In the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries, this *eyalet* comprised the following *sancaks*: Nikopol, Silistria, Bender-Akkerman, Ochakov, Kilburun and Dođan.⁶¹ In the context of the reforming policies initiated by Sultan Abdülmecit (1839-1861) in the [Tanzimat](#) period, Dobruđja was incorporated (1864-1878) into the newly-created province of the Danube (*Tuna vilayet*).

6. Ottoman Dobruđja in the 17th – 19th centuries

Under Ottoman rule, Dobruđja enjoyed a great deal of attention owing to its strategic location as a border region (*serhad*). In the context of the sixteenth-century wars, those of with the Wallachians, Moldavians and their allies, and also of the Ottoman-Christian thirteen-years war (1593-1606), old citadels were restored and new ones built. Thus, Osman II (1604-1622) built the citadel of Tulcea, while the *kapudan* Çelebi Hasan-paşa built the citadel of Isaccea. Murad IV (1612-1640) built the citadel of Karaharman and started the fortifications of Babadag (which were never completed). In terms of ownership rights, in Dobruđja the towns and some farming estates were reserved for the sultan as *khass-i humayun* (imperial domain). They could temporarily be transferred by the sultan to members of his family or to high dignitaries, who were allowed to turn them into *wakfs*. Among the best-known *wakfs* were those at Babadag, founded by Bayazid II for the mausoleum/*türbe* of Sarı Saltık Baba, and the one created in the seventeenth century by Ali paşa for the town mosque. Also well-known were the *wakf* at Isaccea founded by Osman II for the local citadel, the *wakf* of Sultan Selim II's daughter (1566-1574) at Mangalia, and the *wakfs* said by Evliya Çelebi to have existed at Silistria and Tulcea.⁶²



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The penal codes (*kanun*) offers a comprehensive picture of the institutional, economic, military and social outlines of Ottoman Dobrudja, where pre-Ottoman local institutions were embedded within the customary Ottoman civil-administrative and military structures. From an economic perspective, sixteenth-century *kanuns* show that Dobrudja's towns, ports and market towns were integrated in the empire's economy as producers and suppliers of farming produce, as well as transit centres for the produce of the Southern Mediterranean and Pontic areas, on the one hand, and for goods coming from Central and North-Eastern Europe, on the other.

7. The Population

The population varied greatly in terms of religion and ethnicity: it included both Muslims and [Christians](#), natives and colonists. The latter comprised groups forcibly re-settled by the Ottomans by deportation (*sürgün*), as well as voluntary migrants such as the Italians, Ragusans (who established communities at Silistria, Varna and Babadag) and Jews, who were attracted by trade opportunities. The earliest inhabitants included autochthonous Romanians and Romanian migrants from *Eflak* (Wallachia), *Boğdan* (Moldavia) and *Erdel* (Transylvania), Greeks, Turks (from Anatolia and the Balkans), [Tatars](#) (both Crimean and Nogay), who either arrived there in the thirteenth century or who were sent there later by the Ottomans, in XVth and XVIth centuries, Armenians, Jews, Russians, and [Bulgarians](#). The *kanun-names* recorded the special status of some groups such as the *yürük* or *evlad-ı fatihân*, the Gypsies/*çingane*, *kıbtıyan*. Starting with the seventeenth century, Dobrudja became the arena of major military confrontations: early seventeenth-century Cossack raids, the wars between the Romanian principalities and the Ottomans from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, as well as the Russo-Austrian-Turkish wars of the eighteenth century. These events disrupted road transport and economic activities, and depopulated villages and towns. In order to offset the population decline in the empire by encouraging migration and settlement, a decree issued during the [Tanzimat](#) period (and sanctioned by the Sultan on 9 March 1857), offered important guarantees and incentives to migrants, irrespective of ethnicity or faith. As a result, the nineteenth century saw the arrival in Dobrudja of new and large groups of population - both Christian and Muslim - from Central Europe, Russia and the Balkans: Germans, Italians, Dalmatians, Bulgarians, Russians, Lipovans, Zaporozh'e Cossacks, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Hungarians, Arabs (largely Syrians), [Laz](#), Kurds, etc.⁶³ Sulina, for instance, prior to 1877, had a mixed population of Italians, Albanians, Germans, Austrians, Poles, English, French, Danes and even Persians.⁶⁴

The Romanian population was highly stable and was denser in villages on the right bank of the Danube (Niculițel, Isaccea, Tulcea, along the Karasu valley, Silistria). It grew with the arrival of nomadic shepherds, seasonal workers and refugees from the Romanian lands. The continuous movements of the Romanian population across the Danube is illustrated by toponymic doublets on both banks of the river (Coslugea-Coslogeni, Vlahchioi-Vlăheni, Satu-Nou-Satnoeni). The future Marshal von Moltke observed in 1841 that, in demographic terms, the Romanians came second to the Tatars, but ahead of both Bulgarians and Turks.⁶⁵ According to the statistics compiled by the agronomist Ion Ionescu de la Brad (1850), the ethnic Romanians represented over a half of the entire population in the census. Most Bulgarians – with the exception of older groups living generally in towns - settled in Dobrudja later, in the nineteenth century⁶⁶. Such settlement was voluntary or was the result of dislocations caused by the Russo-Turkish wars (starting with that of 1806-1812 and up to the Russo-Romanian-Turkish war of 1877-78). In some Bulgarian schools (Măcin, Silistria) education was in Romanian or Greek. In 1870, when the Ottomans granted [the Bulgarian church independence](#) from the [Patriarchate of Constantinople](#), a Bulgarian archbishopric was created with the seat at Silistria. However, the Greeks and Romanians in Northern Dobrudja remained under the authority of the Greek Archdiocese of Tulcea/Tulça (subordinate to the Greek Patriarchate of Constantinople).

The [Greeks mainly populated the major commercial centres](#): Silistria, Constanța, [Sulina](#). But, there is also evidence of their presence in rural areas, for instance in a fishing village by the Danube called Greci (i.e. 'Greeks' in Romanian). Starting with 1859, the charity registers of the church in Azaclău (in northern Dobrudja) suggest that they chose either to keep their ethnic identity or to intergrate into the Romanian population.⁶⁷ The majority came from the islands of the Archipelago and from the Ionian Islands and ran major businesses, owned ships or dominated minor urban trade. In the nineteenth century Silistria had a school and a church founded with support from Bishop Dionysius and the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Also, in the nineteenth century, a Greek Orthodox church catered for the faithful in Sulina, while in Constanța an imperial *firman* decreed the creation of a Greek church, one of the city's



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major buildings. In Mangalia's old church, a Greek-language inscription on a coffin, dated 1685, is one of many sources indicating the long history of Greek communities in Dobrudja. It reads: 'Here rests the late *jupan* (archon) Belisarios'.⁶⁸ Babadag and Tulcea had Armenian communities, founded in the first half of the nineteenth century.

From Russia came the Zaporozh'e Cossacks (once Empress Catherine II abolished their autonomy in 1775), Ruthenians (Ukrainians from Austrian-controlled areas, who arrived after the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-1829) and Lipovans (Old Believers, who opposed Peter the Great's reforms), who arrived in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, German settlers arrived and created colonies structured around religious criteria. The Evangelist/Lutheran migrants from Russia or western Prussia settled in the village Atmagea, while the Catholic Germans from southern Germany settled in the village Malcoci.

The Muslims were the privileged group. According to seventeenth-century registers, the Turks and Tatars were the most numerous ethnic group in the central and southern areas of Dobrudja. Others Muslim groups were re-settled in the nineteenth century: Tatars from Kuban colonized the region of the Danube Delta after the 1768-1774 war, while Crimean Tatars arrived in the same areas after the Russian annexation of the Khanate of [Crimea](#) (1783). The seventh decade of the nineteenth century saw the arrival in Dobrudja of [Circassian](#) refugees arriving from the North Caucasus (after 1864). Owing to their military skills, they were granted comparatively more privileges than other Ottoman subjects and were re-settled in the forested area of Babadag. After the war of 1877-78, they left Dobrudja and settled in other regions of the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁹

8. The end of Ottoman domination in Dobrudja

The Russo-Turkish wars of the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries (starting with the earliest invasion of the Dobrudjan territory by Russian troops in 1770) led to the depopulation and economic destabilisation of the region. The occupation of 1829 was especially destructive, leading to major shifts of population and to the ruin of many towns and villages. The town of Kara-su, which had flourished in previous centuries as a north-south transit point of the Dobrudja, was almost totally destroyed. Consequently, the Sultans Mahmud II (1837) and Abdülmedjid (1846) visited Dobrudja personally in order to take the necessary measures to re-populate the province and re-organize its economy. The Romanian expert Ion Ionescu de la Brad was a member of one such mission of reconstruction. After the [Crimean War](#), around 60,000 Tatars and Circassians from the Crimea and the Caucasus were re-located in Dobrudja. On the ruins of the market town Kara-su, the Crimean Tatars built a town, called Medciyiye (today's Medgidia) in honour of the sultan who offered them asylum. In 1857-1860, an English company – the *Danube and Black Sea Company Ltd* – built the shortest railway line which linked the Danube and the Black Sea (between Cernavoda/Boğaz-köy and Constanța/Köstence).

The peace treaty of Adrianople (1829) ceded the Mouth of the Danube to the Russian Empire but, after the Crimean War (1856), Russia lost territory it had been granted at the Danube Delta. In the aftermath of the [Russo-Turkish war](#) of 1877-78, by the Treaty of Berlin (13 July 1878), Dobrudja was incorporated into the Romanian state, with the exception of the areas south of Silistria (Southern Dobrudja), which became part of the principality of Bulgaria, under Ottoman suzerainty. On 14 November 1878, addressing the Romanian troops overseeing the take-over of Dobrudja according to the provisions of the Berlin Treaty, Carol of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, Prince of Romania, the future King Carol I (1881), summed up thus his views on what Romanian sovereignty over this territory should mean: 'Soldiers!..you will arrive in Dobrudja not as conquerors, but as friends, as brethren of the inhabitants.. You will also find inhabitants of other ethnicities and other faiths...you will find Muslims, whose customs are different from ours; I strongly recommend that you respect their faith'⁷⁰.

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Glossary :

	Bulgarian issue The Bulgarian struggle for ecclesiastical autonomy. Since the 1850's the Bulgarians claimed the establishment of an autonomous church (exarchate) which would retain typical relationship with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The latter opposed to this movement as its role had been undermined. After long lasting negotiations and the failure of any attempt for reconciliation, an Ottoman firman promulgated in 1870 established the Bulgarian exarchate, although the Patriarchate declared the Exarchate schismatic. Naturally, the main character of the struggle of the Bulgarians for ecclesiastical independence was not religious. It was bounded to the Bulgarian nationalism emerged at that time and had clear political dimension (Bulgarian political independence).
	firman



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In the Ottoman Empire, an imperial edict or commission signed and sealed by the Sultan.

 [kaza](#)

The basic grade of the Ottoman provincial administration. It included the surrounding region of a city or a town. During the late Ottoman Period it is identified with the kaymakamlık.

 [sancak \(liva\)](#)

Medium sized unit of provincial administration of the Ottoman state, throughout its history. A subdivision of the early Ottoman eyalet (or beylerbeylik) and the later Ottoman vilayet. In the late Ottoman Period it was known also as mutasarrıflık.

 [vilayet \(valilik\)](#)

The larger administrative unit in the Ottoman provincial administration system. The large provinces of the Ottoman Empire were previously called eyalet. The new regulation of 1864 introduced the vilayet as an equivalent of the French département - albeit of smaller size. The governor of the vilayet was called vali and had extensive authority.

 [wakf \(vakif\)](#)

A foundation, a grant of land or other source of income, including tax revenues, which was considered to be dedicated according to the sacred law (şeriat) and was used for religious and charitable purposes.

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