



Summary :

Small port on the northwest coast of the Black Sea until the middle of the 19th century, inhabited by Greeks, Turks, Rumanians, Bulgarians and Western Europeans. It became an important mercantile-shipping centre, especially after its annexation to Romania (1878), due to extensive infrastructure works carried out in the docks. As early as 1862, a significant Greek community lived in town, operating schools and a church. Constanța was also the place where the association "Elpis" was founded, one of the most active philanthropic and educational Greek associations in Romania, which constructed one of the first provincial theatres in the country.

Other Names

Kiustenge, Kiustendje, Constantza, Constantia, Κωνσταντζα

Geographical Location

Northwest coast of the Black Sea

Historical Region

Dobruja (Dobrogea in Romanian)

Administrative Dependence

Constanța prefecture

1. Human Geography

Constanța, known from the antiquity by the name [Tomis](#), is located in southern Dobrudja (Dobrogea in Romanian) on the northwest coast of the Black Sea, 280 km from Bucharest. North of the city lies the Techirghiol lake, known for its thermal springs. It is Romania's only port on the Black Sea, surrounded by plains and steppes. It is connected to the mainland via motorway and railway, constructed during the final decades of the 19th century.¹

The city's name probably originates from the corrupted pronunciation of the Byzantine name "Constantiana", given in honor of Constantia, sister of Constantine the Great. The Ottomans used the same name, slightly alternated: Küstence.²

In 1859, Constanța was a small town, with a population of ca. 3,000 residents. Greeks constituted the majority of the Christian population, while the Muslims were divided into two categories, Turks and [Tatars](#). A few Jews, Armenians, Germans and English were also located there.³ The population boomed after 1878 and the annexation of Dobrudja to Romania. Consequently, in 1896 10,419 people lived in Constanța, 2,519 of which were Romanians and 2,416 Greeks, while in 1900 the first had increased to 9,165 and the Greeks only to 2,517.⁴

From 1906 until the beginning of the Interwar period, many Greeks originating from the Greek communities on the Bulgarian coast of the Black Sea, like [Anchialos](#), [Mesimvria](#) and [Sozopolis](#), left their homes [as a result of anti-Greek persecutions](#) and relocated in Constanța. That means that the majority of Greeks living in Constanța, in contrast to the rest of the Greeks of Romania, did not originate from the Ionian Islands, like Kephallonia and Ithaca, but hailed from the Black Sea.⁵

A dense Greek population lived in the city during the Interwar period, despite the fact that many Greeks had been granted Romanian citizenship. Indicatively, in 1928 in a total of 41,000 inhabitants, the Greeks amounted to 3,130 constituting the second largest community in town after the Romanian one (28,700), while Constanța was also inhabited by many Armenians (2,015), Turks (2,003), Jews (1,050), and Bulgarians (1,037).⁶



2. History

In the middle of the 19th century, the maritime and mercantile importance of Constanța was rather small, especially compared to the other commercial centres of Dobruđja, like Silistria and [Tulcea](#). The city grew, up to a point, only after the Ottoman authorities assigned the British "Black Sea and Danube Company" the construction of a railway in the area and the execution of infrastructure works in the port.⁷

In 1877 Constanța was conquered by Russian troops and after the decisions taken in the Berlin Conference (1878) it was permanently ceded to Romania. During the following decades, it experienced a significant financial, demographical and cultural development. It became capital of the prefecture (județ) of the same name, as well as seat of other important cultural, military and financial authorities. The construction of the railway connecting Bucharest and Constanța, the bridge of Cernavodă, as well as the port works, also boosted the city's development.⁸

During of the period 1916-1918, Constanța, as well as the whole of Dobruđja, was occupied by German-Bulgarian troops and suffered extensive damage.⁹ The city was re-taken by the Romanians in 1918. The Interwar period was a time of intense financial and demographical development, as well as great tension. Economical terms changed, since not only commerce and shipping developed, but also industry and tourism (Mamaia resort). At the same time, however, the greater Dobruđja area was the centre of the Rumanian fascist movement (the Archangel Michael Legion) and a theatre of violent political conflict.¹⁰

During the Postwar period, and despite the new damage inflicted by the allies and the Soviet air-force, mainly at the port and the city quarters, Constanța developed as the country's main maritime, mercantile and shipyard centre. Nowadays, it is the second urban centre in Romania in regard to population and economy.

3. Economy

3.1. Agriculture - animal husbandry

The steppes around Constanța were mostly suitable for pasture, activity that had developed especially during the Late Ottoman period, and not really for wheat crops, although that kind of agriculture also developed, mainly after the annexation of the area to Romania.

3.2. Manufacturing - industry

For years, the first and only industry in Constanța was a machine work-shop of the English railway company. From the late 19th century onwards, the city, as well as most of the Romanian ports, showed signs of industrial development, since a few industries were founded, mainly in the comestibles market (ie. flour, barley purification), as well as small oil refineries. Very few Greek emigrants invested in the secondary sector of economy. Among the exceptions was V. P. Maroulis, who owned a flour-industry from 1880.¹¹

During the Interwar period, in the context of the city's general financial development, the number of industrial sites also increased, mainly in heavy industry sectors (shipyards, machine work-shops).

3.3. Commerce

The importance of Constanța lay mainly in the role it played in the network of Romania's commercial centres. Constanța was essentially the only seaside port of the country and, consequently, the only one that had constant ship traffic even during the winter, when the Danubian ports like Tulcea, [Brăila](#) and [Galați](#) were cut-off because of the frozen river.

Initially, the port operated in a limited manner, because of the inadequacy of storage areas and the fact that the port was not safe. Gradually, however, and after the great infrastructural works constructed by the Romanian government under the supervision of the



celebrated mechanic Anghel Saligny (1854-1925), during the last two decades of the 19th century and until World War I, Constanța became the country's main oil export centre, an essential import centre, especially concerning colonial products, while it played a significant part in the distribution of wheat and timber, successfully contesting the Danubian ports.¹²

4. Society - Institutions - Administration

4.1. Administration

During the Ottoman period, Constanța was a **müdürlük**, part of the Tulcea **kaymakamlık**, while after the annexation of Dobruđa to Romania, it became capital of the prefecture (judet) of the same name.

The Christian Orthodox population of Constanța appear to have acquired some kind of communal rights as early as the beginning of the 19th century, despite the fact that actual communal institutions were not constituted until the middle of the century, when the first church was built in town (1862).¹³ In 1874 the community's first statute was composed, where it was specified that its highest authorities would be the council of elders (*dimogerontia*) as well as a four-member committee, while special committees were founded for ecclesiastical and educational issues. The statute was revised in 1929 and 1938.¹⁴

The community had been recognized by the Romanian government de facto from 1880 and de jure since the Greek-Romanian commercial agreement of 1900.¹⁵

4.2. Social stratification

The Greeks of Constanța belonged to various social strata and practiced many different professions. Many were merchants, both wholesale merchants exporting and importing colonial products and small-time traders, some were manufacturers, while there were also various clerks, doctors and lawyers. Naturally, a large proportion of the Greek emigrants belonged to lower strata (seamen, port workers, factory workers).¹⁶

With regard to the communal affairs, a leading group was unofficially formed, consisting of grand-merchants and industrialists, as well as educated members of the bourgeoisie of the city, such as doctors and lawyers. Its most characteristic figure was Alexandros Tsitsilianopoulos, a grand-merchant from Volos, who served many years as the community's president.

4.3. Religion

In 1862, the first wooden Orthodox church of the city, dedicated to the Transfiguration of Christ Savior, was constructed on land donated by the grand-merchant Oikonomou from Trieste; on the same property the Greek school was also built later. Since the Transfiguration was the only Orthodox church, it was also frequented by the other Christian Orthodox of Constanța, notably Bulgarians and Romanians. Moreover, thanks to the contribution of [Georgios Zarifis](#), banker from [Constantinople \(Istanbul\)](#), and K. Ch. Telesos, the Porte offered the community the land on which a stone church was built during the period 1865-1868. The construction was made possible thanks to the contribution of [the metropolitan of Drystra](#) Dionysius, and especially thanks to the archimandrite Philippos Tzoulatis, who gathered donations from Greeks all over Europe, but mainly England (Liverpool, London, Manchester).

The Greek church remained the only Orthodox one in the city for quite some time. It was not until 1895 that the Romanian cathedral was built, while in 1907 the Bulgarian church was constructed. For the religious needs of the Protestant and Catholic population, respective churches were built. Finally, there were two mosques operating in the city, since a significant number of Muslims resided in Constanța.¹⁷

5. Education



A Greek school, presumably an all-boys one, had been founded as early as the beginning of the 1860s under the community's supervision. At the same time, some other private schools were operating, like the one organised by the scholar Dionysios Kontogeorgis from Lefkada and his father Panos, ex-professor in the Ionian Academy, assisted probably by the director of the English railway company.¹⁸

However, essential progress for the community's education was only achieved after the city was annexed by Romania. The schools that had been closed down during the war (1877-1878) reopened in 1879 and were reorganised from 1881 to 1885 by Dr Antonios Economou, a future Professor in Thessaloniki. At the end of the ninth decade of the 19th century, the construction of a two-storey school building was completed, while a six-class (or even seven-class at times) all-girls elementary school was also operative on a regular basis. The schools were closed down by degree from the Romanian government only during the period 1905-1908 when the Greek-Romanian diplomatic relations had ceased, as well as between 1916 and 1918 because of the German-Bulgarian occupation.¹⁹

During the Interwar period, the Greek community's administration attempted to ameliorate the level of the offered education in order to face the heavy competition by public schools. Between 1824 and 1926, two classes of a Commercial School were introduced, while in 1934-1953 and until the first post-war years a classical gymnasium was founded, recognized by the Greek government, with a gym and a small library, whose educators had studied in Athens or Constantinople. Children of poor emigrants attended for free.²⁰

Let it be noted here that in Constanța, contrary to what was happening in the other important communities in Romania like Brăila and Galați, no "private" Greek schools were founded, probably because a large proportion of the Greeks there had been granted Romanian citizenship, hence their children could attend public schools.

From Constanța's annexation to Romania onwards, a network of public educational establishments gradually developed, including elementary schools for boys as well as girls, a lyceum (the "Mircea cel Bătrîn", founded in 1896, that became one of the finest educational institutions in the country), a Pedagogic College and a higher Commercial Academy for boys (founded in 1903), while a few private Romanian schools also existed. During the Interwar period, the Romanian public educational system showed signs of even greater growth, since professional colleges were also founded, such as the Nautical Academy.²¹

The Greeks notwithstanding, the city's other religious or ethnic minorities had founded schools, almost always elementary ones. Consequently, as early as the last decade of the 19th century, schools were operating, usually mixed, for Bulgarians, Armenians and Germans, as well as Albanians (adult education), while on occasion many Muslim educational institutions had been organised, as well as a couple of Jewish ones.²²

6. Associations

During the Late Ottoman period, and in contrast to what the case was in the other Greek communities of [Dobrudja](#), like [Sulina](#) or Tulcea, no [Greek associations](#) appear to have been founded in Constanța and educational matters had remained under communal control.

In 1890, however, the Greek association "Elpis" ("Hope") was founded. It distinguished itself for the multitude of its activities. It founded a reading-study and club for the emigrants, while it financially supported on a regular basis the two communal Greek schools. At the same time, it cared for the city's poor population "regardless of ethnicity, religion and gender", according to its statute.²³ Remarkable was also the association's activity culture-wise. In 1898 it constructed the first theatre in the city, built by the French architect L. Piver. On its stage, except for amateur theatrical groups consisting of Greek emigrants, plays were performed by troupes from Greece, amateurs from the rest of the city's communities and, naturally, all the Romanian troupes visiting Constanța.

Part of the association also was the "Philanthropic Fellowship of Ladies", founded in 1915 and systematically involved in helping indigent emigrants and their children. At last, "child" of the "Elpis" association was the football club of the same name, one of the most celebrated ones in Romania during the Interwar period having won championships.²⁴



The importance of the association, whose members were furthermore the most prominent emigrants, was recognized by the communal statute of 1929, where it was stated that its president became de jure member of the communal council. Moreover, the most esteemed members of the community involved themselves with the Association, even though during its first years it was dominated mostly by young, educated Greek emigrants.²⁵

7. Publishing

During the Ottoman period probably no Greek printing houses existed in Constanța. However, in the decades that followed the annexation of Dobruđja to Romania, the city became a notable printing centre, not only for Romanian publications, but also Turkish, Bulgarian and, up to a point, Greek ones as well.

As early as 1881, the largest Greek publishing house, the "Typo-lithography of P.M. Pestemaltzioglou" located in Brăila, had founded a branch in Constanța, while Greek books were also printed by Romanian printing houses ("Dimitriu Nicolaescu"). From the beginning of the 20th century, the printing house-bookstore of Ch. Vourlis ("Ovidius") also operated.²⁶ Greek publishing activity intensified during the Interwar period, when some journals and calendars were also printed, as well as quite a few books. The most celebrated journal of literary context was *Thaleia* (1923-1924), published under the direction of the local scholar Ektor Sarafidis. Some of the Romanian newspapers, however, were also published by Greeks, like *Dobrogea Juna*, one of the most significant and long-lived newspapers of the area (1904-1944), directed by Constantin N. Sarry.²⁷ The status attributed to newspapers published by Greeks indicates the high degree of their integration in the local community.

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 2. Μεγάλη Ελληνική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια 15 (Αθήνα 1931), p. 555, see entry «Κωνσταντζα» (Μ.Ν. Δημόπουλος). Also see Browning, R.,- Kazhdan, A., *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 3 (New York 1991), p. 2092, see entry "Tomis".
 3. Μάνεσης, Σ., «Η ελληνική κοινότης Κωνσταντζης Ρουμανίας», *Mélanges offerts à Octave et Melpo Merlier II* (Αθήνα 1952), pp. 84-85. In 1866, the British Vice-Consul mentions that 3500 lived in Constanța, 1500 of whom were Tatars, 500 were Turks and 1500 Christians, "mainly Greeks". See Foreign Office Annual Series. vol. 10. Report by Mr. Vice-Consul F.F. Sankey on the Trade and Commerce of Kustendji for the year 1866, pp. 332-333.
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 6. Μάνεσης, Σ., «Η ελληνική κοινότης Κωνσταντζης Ρουμανίας», *Mélanges offerts à Octave et Melpo Merlier II* (Αθήνα 1952), pp. 101-102.
 7. Μάνεσης, Σ., «Η ελληνική κοινότης Κωνσταντζης Ρουμανίας», *Mélanges offerts à Octave et Melpo Merlier II* (Αθήνα 1952), p. 99 and Foreign Office Annual Series. vol. 18. Report by Mr. Vice-Consul F.F. Sankey on the Trade and Commerce of Kustendji for the year 1871, pp. 835-836.
 8. Rădulescu, A.,-Bitoleanu, I., *Istoria Dobrogei* (Constanța 1998), pp. 366-369. For details, see Covaceff, P., *Portul Constanța. Portul lui Anghel Saligny* (Constanța 2004).
 9. Rădulescu, A.,-Bitoleanu, I., *Istoria Dobrogei* (Constanța 1998), pp. 384-393.



10. Rădulescu, A.,-Bitoleanu, I., *Istoria Dobrogei* (Constanța 1998), pp. 409-412, 426-428.
11. *Ancheta Industrială din 1901-1902, Industria Mare* (București 1902), p. 33 and Păianu, N.I., *Industria Mare 1866-1906* (București 1906).
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15. Streit, G., *Mémoire sur la question des Communautés Helléniques en Roumanie* (Athènes 1905), p. 27.
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18. Μάνεσης, Σ., «Η ελληνική κοινότης Κωνσταντζης Ρουμανίας», *Mélanges offerts à Octave et Melpo Merlier II* (Αθήνα 1952), pp. 92-93. A Romanian source records that a Greek communal all-girls school had been founded as early as 1866, see. Râșcanu, Gh., *Istoricul invăṭ ământului particular în România din timpurile cele mai vechi până în zilele noastre* (București 1906), p. 192.
19. Μάνεσης, Σ., «Η ελληνική κοινότης Κωνσταντζης Ρουμανίας», *Mélanges offerts à Octave et Melpo Merlier II* (Αθήνα 1952), pp. 93-94 and Μεταξάς-Λασκαράτος, Δ., *Ελληνικά παροικία Ρωσσίας και Ρωμουνίας* (Βραί λα 1900), p. 119.
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21. Rădulescu, A.,-Bitoleanu, I., *Istoria Dobrogei* (Constanța 1998), pp. 393-395, 442-444 and Lăpușan, A.,-Lăpușan Șt.,-Stănescu Gh., *Constanța a* (Constanța 2005), pp. 32-35, 82. Also see Râșcanu, Gh., *Istoricul invăṭ ământului particular în România din timpurile cele mai vechi până în zilele noastre* (București 1906), p. 225.
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25. *Κανονισμός της εν Κωνσταντζη ελληνικής κοινότητος* (Constanța 1929), p. 29. Compare to Μάνεσης, Σ., «Η ελληνική κοινότης Κωνσταντζης Ρουμανίας», *Mélanges offerts à Octave et Melpo Merlier II* (Αθήνα 1952), p. 106.
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Glossary :

	dimogerontia Communal authority consisting of the elected community officials, known as <i>archontes</i> (potentates), <i>proestoi</i> (notables), <i>epitropoi</i> (wardens), <i>dimogerontes</i> or simply <i>gerontes</i> (elders).
	kaymakamlık Ottoman administrative unit that replaced the kaza during the late Ottoman Period, after the administrative reforms of 1864.
	müdürlük Small administrative unit in the late Ottoman Empire, subdistrict of a kaymakamlık, under the jurisdiction of a müdür.

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Quotations

From the Regulations of the Greek Community in Constanța, 1929

ΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΟΝ Α'

Σκοπός

Άρθρ. 1ον - Ἡ Ἑλληνική Κοινότης Κωνσταντζης ἀπαρτιζομένη ἐκ πάντων τῶν ἐνταῦθα ἐγκατεστημένων Ἑλλήνων σκοπὸν ἔχει:

α) Τὴν συντήρησιν, Διοίκησιν, Διαχειρίσιν καὶ βελτιώσιν τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Αὐτῆς Ναοῦ «Ἡ Μεταμόρφωσις», ἀνεγνωρισμένου ὄντος ὡς ἠθικοῦ (νομικοῦ) Προσώπου ὑπὸ τοῦ Ρουμανικοῦ Κράτους διὰ τοῦ ἀπὸ 19ης Δεκεμβρίου τοῦ 1900 εἰδικοῦ, μεταξὺ Ἑλλάδος καὶ Ρουμανίας πρωτοκόλλου μετὰ τῶν ἐκπαιδευτικῶν, φιλεκπαιδευτικῶν καὶ φιλανθρωπικῶν ἰδρυμάτων ὡς καὶ πάσης τῆς παρουσίας καὶ μελλούσης κινήτης τε καὶ ἀκινήτου Αὐτῆς Περιουσίας καὶ

β) Τὴν Ἑλληνοπρεπῆ ἠθικὴν καὶ κοινωνικὴν προαγωγὴν τῶν μελῶν Αὐτῆς, ἐντὸς τῶν ὁρίων τῶν Ρουμανικῶν Νόμων.

Άρθρ. 2ον – Πᾶς Ἑλληὴν ἐπὶ διείτιαν διαμείνας ἐν τῇ πόλει ταύτῃ καὶ ἐγκατεστημένος ἐνταῦθα, ἔξασκῶν ἔντιμόν τι ἐπάγγελμα, ἐγγράφεται αὐτοδικαίως εἰς τὸ Μητρώον τῆς Κοινότητος καὶ θεωρεῖται μέλος αὐτῆς.

Source: *Κανονισμός της εν Κωνσταντζη ελληνικής κοινότητος* (Constanța 1929), p. 3.

Auxiliary Catalogues

Presidents of the Greek Community of Constanța

D. Benderlis, 1863

Menelaos Negrepointis, 1864

Filippos Tzoulatis, 1865

Nikolaos Makris, 1866

Nikolaos Syllavotianos, 1867

Parth. Kanakis, 1868

N. D. Sotiropoulos, 1869-1870

D. Neokosmos, 1871

Dimitrios Iordanou, 1872-1873

Georgios Karydias (from Varna), 1874-1880

Dimitrios Alexandridis, 1881

Ioannis Makris, 1882-1885



Alexandros Tsitsilianopoulos (from Volos), 1885-1908

Ioannis Psaraffis and Nik. Kopsidas (from Constantinople), 1908-1909

Andr. Georgiadis, 1909

Lask. Laskaridis, 1910-1912

Stamos Mavrogiannis, 1913

Spyr. Makris, 1914-1916

Dim. Svoronos, 1918

Georgios Papazoglou, 1920-1931

Source: Μάνεσης, Στ., «Η ελληνική κοινότητα Κωνσταντζης Ρουμανίας», *Mélanges offerts à Octave et Melpo Merlier II* (Athens 1952), p. 108.