

# On the Nation's Margins.

## Territorial and Urban Policies during the Romanian Administration of Southern Dobrudja (1913-1940)

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In the year 1913, rather by historical accident than through long-term political action, Romania incorporated Southern Dobrudja, better known in Romanian as the "Cadrilater."<sup>1</sup> The Bulgarian actions in the Second Balkan War gave Romania, who had stayed neutral during the first regional conflagration, the opportunity to invade its southern neighbor by surprise and decisively contribute to its defeat. Although the annexation of the Cadrilater had never been an openly stated objective of the Romanian government, it fitted quite conveniently the country's growing ambitions towards "regional power" status.

Through the subsequent Treaty of Bucharest, Romania took control over a 7,565 sq. km territory (Fig. 1), with an all but negligible Romanian population: for 1912 sources indicate a total population of 282,778 inhabitants, out of which 136,224 Turks and Tatars, 121,925 Bulgarians, 11,024 Gypsies, 6,602 Romanians (only 2.33% of the total population) and 7,003 various other nationalities (Gagauz, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Russians, Germans, etc.).<sup>2</sup>



Fig. 1. Southern Dobrudja (the "Cadrilater") after 1913

- 1 This paper uses Romanian names for all locations, except for those in anglicized form that are already in common use. For most towns and villages, upon first appearance in the text or footnotes, the current Bulgarian name (in English transliteration) is also given in square brackets.
- 2 C. Brătescu, "Populația Cadrilaterului între anii 1878 și 1938," *Analele Dobrogei* XIX, II (1938), 192. Bulgarian statistics from the same period (Romanski, 1910) give slightly different figures, as they count Turks and Tatars separately, thus giving Bulgarians a relative majority.

Twenty-seven years later, when, through the Treaty of Craiova (1940), Romania gave the Cadrilater back to Bulgaria, the demographics (from a 1938 Romanian source) revealed the following: total population – 372,058 inhabitants, out of which 150,763 Bulgarians (holding a relative majority), 108,404 Romanians (29.14% of the total population), 96,869 Turks and Tatars (less than the Romanian population) and 16,022 other nationalities.<sup>3</sup>

How has this dramatic demographic shift occurred in just twenty-seven years? To what extent was it the result of a centralized colonization policy and what were the other factors? And, finally, how does this shift look like from a territorial perspective, at various scales, and to what extent were territorial and urban policies instrumental in the Romanian project for the Cadrilater? This last inquiry is the main research question of this paper.

### Premises: previous experience and integrative discourse

The challenge of integrating the Cadrilater was not the first one of its kind that Romanian authorities had to tackle around the turn of the century. Just north of the new province lay Northern Dobrudja, a land gained by Romania in 1878, through the Treaty of Berlin. Initially, the country (both its administration and the public opinion) was quite reluctant to accept this new territory, as it came as a “forced exchange” (imposed by Tsarist Russia) against Southern Bessarabia, which was much more important for Romanians, at least at a symbolic level. But the political authorities tried to make the best of it, and embarked on an ambitious integration project, combining demographic measures (colonization) with political and administrative ones (special legal status for Dobrudja and its population)<sup>4</sup> and with extensive infrastructure and economic investments (the Cernavodă railway complex and Constanța harbor being the most important). After a few decades, the project turned out to be, from a Romanian national standpoint, a success:<sup>5</sup> Romanian population numerically surpassed all the other ethnic communities (Fig. 2), and Northern Dobrudja was an integral part of the economic, territorial and administrative national systems.

In theory, the experience gained through this endeavor should have revealed itself useful in the integration of the Cadrilater. In practice, there were at least two fundamental differences between the two cases, which turned out to be decisive: on the one hand, Northern Dobrudja already had a significant Romanian population (albeit not a majority) by the time of its annexation;<sup>6</sup> on the other hand, Northern Dobrudja had been, for the first thirty-five years, the only “new” territory of the Kingdom of Romania, which meant that all integration efforts were directed (and specially tailored) towards it. In a completely different context, just five years after gaining the Cadrilater, Romania’s territory expanded dramatically as a consequence of the Versailles Treaties, with the new provinces of Transylvania, Banat, Bessarabia, and Bukovina, each of these provinces deemed more important for the country, both in the national narrative and in practical aspects, than the Cadrilater.

At a discursive level, Romania has tried to integrate the Cadrilater in the great historical narrative of the nation: a Roman[ian] territory since its beginnings, that had been forcefully taken out of the nation and that now needed to be “reminded” of its roots. The discourse unfolded in two directions. The first regarded the Cadrilater as a historically prosperous Latin province, having

3 Ibid., 199. These figures should be taken with caution, as they are provided by a source (Constantin Brătescu) whose nationalistic agenda is well known.

4 For details, see Constantin Iordachi, “«La Californie des Roumains». L’intégration de la Dobrudja du Nord à la Roumanie, 1878-1913,” *Balkanologie* VI, 1-2 (2002), 167-197.

5 Of course, less so from the standpoint of other ethnic groups. For the case of the Muslim population of Northern Dobrudja and its part in this process, see Cătălina Hunt, “«Speaking National» in Dobruca. Muslim Adaptation to Romanian Policies between 1878 and 1914,” *Revue des études sud-est européennes* LII, 1-4 (2014), 145-169 and Cătălina Hunt, “«Seeing Like a State»: Romanian Policies in Northern Dobruca and the Muslims, 1878-1914,” *Studia et Documenta Turcologica* 1 (2013), 55-86.

6 Ibid., 171. The initial exact share of the Romanian population (in 1878 Northern Dobrudja) is still unclear, as it varies greatly according to different sources, with a fair estimate around 30%

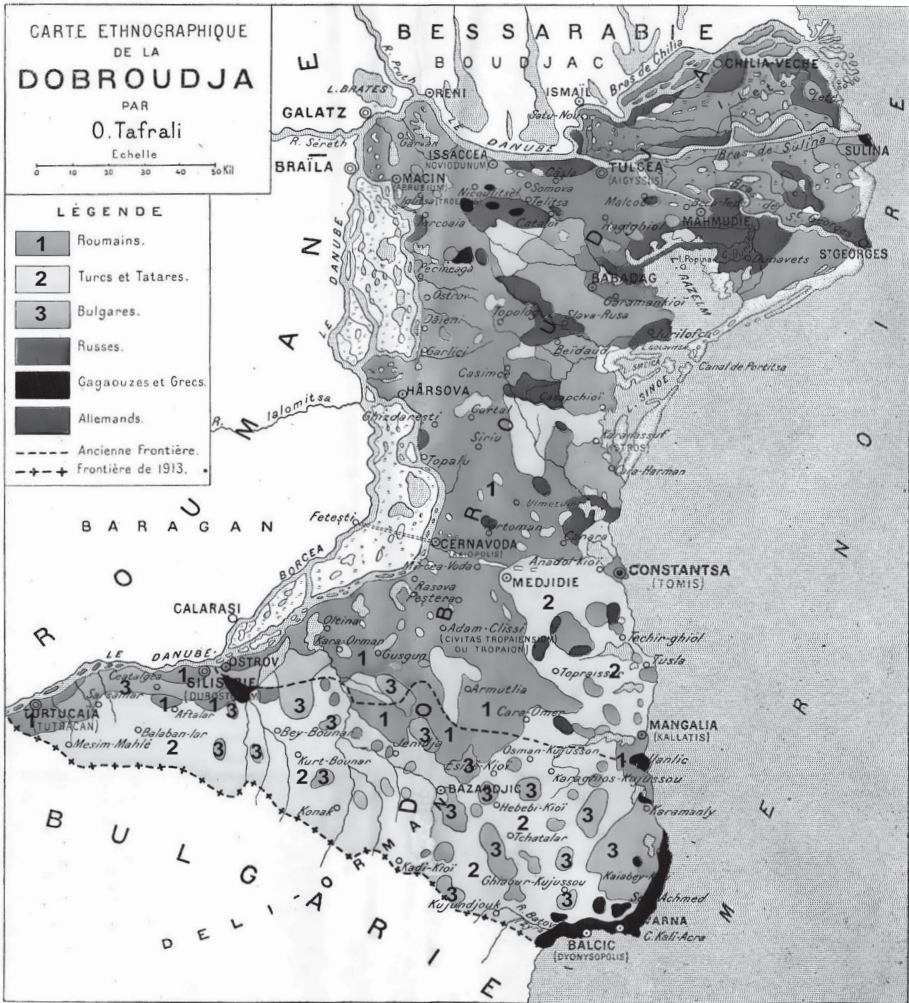


Fig. 2. Ethnic composition of Northern and Southern Dobrudja, 1918 (1-Romanians, 2-Turks and Tatars, 3-Bulgarians)

subsequently been brought to a state of decay and underdevelopment by centuries of Ottoman and decades of Bulgarian rule (the discourse was more directed against the latter, who had administered the province since 1878). The second considered the Cadrilater as an indispensable element in the contemporary economic and territorial national systems, with a geographic “predestination” for being Romanian.<sup>7</sup> Thus, it was not only a right, but a historical obligation for the Kingdom of Romania to assert its hold over the Cadrilater and to have it integrated with the rest of the country. It has to be said, though, that this discourse had less force than either the one having already invested Northern Dobrudja (“Old Dobrudja”) since 1878, or the ones which would later tackle the much more complex cases of the provinces integrated after 1918. Even in discursive terms, the Cadrilater turned out to be marginal.

7 The first direction is best illustrated by authors like G. Popa-Lisseanu (in his studies on ancient Greek and Roman cities in the Cadrilater), C. Brătescu (in the *Analele Dobrogei* series) and Em. Bucuța (in the *Coasta de Argint* series); the second one, by geographers Simion Mehedinti (“Deliormanul – O verigă între Carpați și țărmul Mării Negre,” *Analele Dobrogei* XIX, II (1938), 226-239) and Gh. Murgoci (*Țara Nouă. Dobrogea sudică și Deliormanul* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1913) and other).

### Initial legislative measures: citizenship and land ownership

In practice, the Romanian authorities did not do very much during the first decade following annexation.<sup>8</sup> Drawing on the already acquired experience from the case of Northern Dobruđa, a special law was passed quickly after annexation.<sup>9</sup> It regulated crucial aspects like acquiring citizenship and the attached rights, administrative, judicial and military organization, and land ownership. The long transitional period that was applied to new Romanian citizens in Northern Dobruđa (decades of limited electoral and civic rights) was absent in the case of the Cadrilater. All residents of the province, regardless of ethnic origin, automatically became Romanian citizens (if they did not explicitly refuse, in which case they had to sell all their property and leave), with full rights (except for the right to own land outside of the Cadrilater; in practice, this provision confined them to their homeland for an unlimited period of time as, having not yet proven themselves “Romanian enough”, they were still deemed “unsafe”).<sup>10</sup> By readily making the new citizens part of the political system, with the full rights that were initially denied to their Northern Dobruđan counterparts,<sup>11</sup> the authorities hoped to integrate them more quickly to the Romanian “nation” (both symbolically and practically).

Solving the land ownership problem has proved somewhat more complicated. The goal was to turn the traditional Ottoman property system (a well established and tested one, but quite “exotic” from a European Napoleonic perspective; this system had been more or less perpetuated, in various forms, by the Bulgarian administration after 1878) into a system compatible with Romanian legislation, and to make sure, all along the way, that the Romanian state gets the most out of this process and builds up a land reserve that would subsequently be used for national purposes (mainly for colonization). In practical terms, Romanian administration took over the former property of the Bulgarian state, schools and religious establishments, all communal property, forests, all bodies of water and natural resources. Moreover, the Romanian state was entitled to all private lands (*mülk*, in the Ottoman system) for which property could not be effectively proven by their apparent owners. A special situation was that of the former *mirië*<sup>12</sup> lands – owned by the Ottoman state but used or cultivated by Ottoman subjects in exchange for a specific fee. These lands became the full and exclusive property of their former users if the latter could prove their usage right (if not, the Romanian state took over the entire land) and if they ceded to the Romanian state one third of the land (or paid its value in money).<sup>13</sup> These legal provisions were quite similar to the ones enforced, in the previous decades, for Northern Dobruđa, with one crucial difference: ceding one third of the former *mirië* lands to the state and keeping the rest in full and perpetual property had not been an option in Northern Dobruđa, where the former *mirië* users could keep the entire plot only in exchange for a financial compensation of one third of its value.<sup>14</sup>

The application of this law had a dramatic impact on land ownership in the Cadrilater region. A 1938 statistic showed that, after the entire process was finished, the Romanian state came to own 417,332 hectares of land, representing about 57% out of the total area of the Cadrilater

8 During World War I, between 1916 and 1918, the Cadrilater, together with the whole of Dobruđa, were occupied and administered by Bulgaria.

9 “Lege pentru organizarea Dobrogei Nouă,” *Monitorul Oficial* 1bis (1/14 April 1914); until 1924, this law was modified two times, but its crucial provisions remained similar.

10 A. Pineta, “Cetățenia română în Dobrogea Nouă,” *Analele Dobrogei* XIX, II (1938), 158-166.

11 Citizens from Northern Dobruđa only received full electoral and political rights in 1912, almost thirty-five years after the 1878 annexation.

12 Romanian legislators use the term *mirië*, which is a French transliteration of the Ottoman word *miri*, used by Aristachi Bey, in his 1858 translation of the Ottoman Land Code for non-Ottoman speakers. I thank dr. Cătălina Hunt (Ohio State University) for pointing this out, as well as for all her other comments on an early version of this paper, presented at the 47th Annual Convention of the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies, Philadelphia, November 2015.

13 “Lege pentru organizarea Dobrogei Nouă,” Chap. VI, Art. 109-129.

14 lordachi, “«La Californie des Roumains»,” 183.

(732,317 hectares, excluding urban areas).<sup>15</sup> This situation also includes the lands transferred to public property as an effect of the Romanian Land Reform Act of 1918 (modified in 1921),<sup>16</sup> but these acts had minimal effects on land ownership in the Cadrilater, as they only expropriated estates exceeding 100 hectares, which were very scarce in this province.<sup>17</sup> These reforms created the conditions for a colonization process that would only gain momentum after 1925.

### Reshaping the territory: colonization of the rural areas

As stated in the opening section of this paper, at the time of the annexation (1913), Romanians only represented 2.33% of the total population. About two thirds of this population (ca. 4,000 people) were concentrated in the city of Turtucaia [Tutrakan], on the Danube. In the rural areas, as well as in every city aside Turtucaia and Silistra [Silistra], Romanians were all but completely absent.<sup>18</sup> Only two villages in the entire province (each with less than 200 inhabitants) had Romanian majorities: Kalimok (near Turtucaia) and Embie-Mahle (lost somewhere between Balcic [Balchik] and Bazargic [Dobrich]).<sup>19</sup>

The two main ethnic groups (the Bulgarians and the Turks) were, from a territorial perspective, unevenly distributed. The Turks held a strong majority in the mountainous areas of the south-east, whilst the Bulgarians dominated villages in the north and in the south-west (mostly as a result of their own colonization policy, implemented after 1878). A small, but compact Gagauz population could be found on the Black Sea coast around Cavarna [Kavarna], and some isolated villages scattered all over the territory held other ethnic majorities (a few Tatar, one German, and one Russian).<sup>20</sup>

This situation changed very little in the first twelve years after 1913. As already stated above, Romania's entry into World War I, the Bulgarian reoccupation of the province and the more pressing preoccupation for other new territories immediately after 1918 are a few explanations for this situation. Although the 1914 special law for the Cadrilater and the 1921 Land Reform Act theoretically opened the way for Romanians from outside the province to settle here, there were only isolated instances of that happening.

After 1921, a few Romanian families for which the state could not find enough land in the Old Kingdom were redirected towards the Cadrilater, but the 1921 Land Reform Act did not generate enough land reserves here either. They settled in some already existing villages along the Danube, but few of them lasted more than a year or two.<sup>21</sup>

The first coordinated effort came in 1922, when thirteen military colonies were founded, harboring a total of 458 families. Each family was given a 25 hectares plot, which, according to the standards of the time, was a considerable area. We were able to identify eleven of these thirteen colonies based on a few detailed statistics as to the origin and occupation of the new population of the Cadrilater.<sup>22</sup> Their territorial distribution (Fig. 3) highlights some elements that point to

15 C. Filipescu, "Agricultura în Dobrogea Nouă," *Analele Dobrogei* XIX, III (1938), 23-24.

16 Decree no. 3697/1918 and Law of July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1921 ("Lege pentru reforma agrară din Oltenia, Muntenia, Moldova și Dobrogea").

17 C. Noe, "Colonizarea Cadrilaterului," *Sociologie Românească* III, 4-6 (1938), 122.

18 Murgoci, *Țara Nouă*, 29.

19 "Cadrilater – harta etnică după naționalitate conform datelor din recensământul bulgăresc din 1910," <http://historymaps.ro/?p=2936> (2.08.2016).

20 Ibid.

21 Noe, "Colonizarea Cadrilaterului," 121.

22 Central National Historical Archives, *Oficiul Național al Colonizării. Planuri de parcelare [National Colonization Office. Allotment Plans]*, Caliacra district, file 16/1931. Noe, "Colonizarea Cadrilaterului," 155-157. The names of the villages at that time were Aiorman [Stefanovo], Iaștăccilar [Odarts], Ceairlighiol [Senokos], Caraiapular [Dabrava], Vulturești [Sokolovo], Idris Cuius [Tsarichino], Rasoviceni [Gurkovo], Geaferli Luciorman [Trigorts], Duranlar [Belgun], Cloșca [Septemvriytsi] and Crișan [Rakovski]; we were unable to identify the last two colonies.

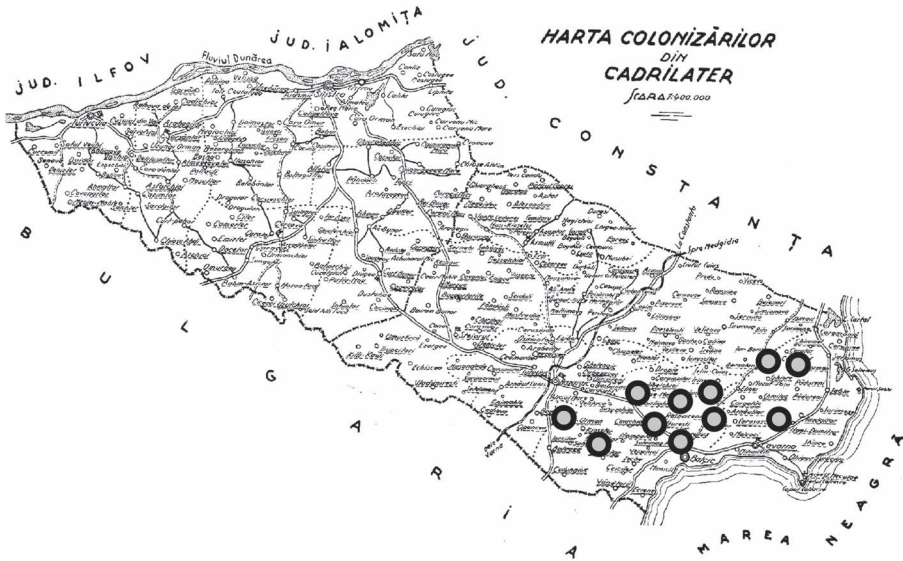


Fig. 3. Territorial distribution of the first military colonies (1922)

a coordinated policy: the colonies form a rather compact perimeter; they are placed close to the Bulgarian border, in an area of strategic and economic importance (the plains between Balci and Bazargic); they are implanted in an area previously dominated by the Bulgarian (and not the Turk) ethnic group. The morphology of these villages is typical for colonial settlements (in the Cadrilater and in general), exhibiting a planned grid pattern for the streets, plots of roughly similar size, and houses placed following a pre-established rule. Their hinterland still bears today the traces of the colonial division, as a majority of the agricultural plots have areas that are a multiple of 25 hectares.

The most important colonizing actions came after 1925. From a legislative point of view, they were facilitated by the 1924 amendments to the law of 1914, which speeded up the land ownership clarification process by imposing clear deadlines for anyone who might hold claims. But the main impulse came from abroad: the population displacements that followed World War I in the Balkan Peninsula created a difficult situation for the Aromanians (more specifically, for the Meglenites) residing in Greek Macedonia. Thus, through the effects of the Neuilly and Lausanne Conventions (1919 and 1923, respectively), over 1,300,000 Greeks joined their motherland, most of them being expelled from Turkey as part of an agreed population exchange. The majority were resettled by the Greek authorities in Macedonia and were given the lands formerly owned by the Turks who had been, simultaneously, themselves expelled. Through the effects of the agrarian reform in Greece, these lands were divided into small plots, thus seriously hindering the pastoral activities of the Aromanians residing in the region (previously driving their herds on these lands and paying a fee to the Turkish owners) and who were excluded from the benefits of the law.<sup>23</sup> This, in turn, drove the Aromanians to seek a better life in what they now considered to be “their homeland” and to ask the Romanian government to be allowed to resettle in Romania.

Their claims were answered by Al. Constantinescu (Ministry for Agriculture and Domains) who, through a 1925 decision, effectively opened the way for colonization of the Cadrilater for both Aromanians (after they would have obtained Romanian citizenship) and Romanians from the Old Kingdom. The decision stipulated that half of the estates owned by the state would be given to

<sup>23</sup> For details, see Emil Țircomnicu, “Macedo – Romanians and Romania: Historic and Cultural Aspects,” *Memoria Ethnologica* X, 34-35 (2010), 48-53.

each of the above-mentioned groups and that each colonist would be given 2,000 sq m of land in the village for building a house, 5 hectares of pasture and 10 hectares of farming land (15 hectares if he decided to settle in a border area).<sup>24</sup>

This decision represented the legal framework for all colonization until 1930, when a special law was passed,<sup>25</sup> establishing a “colonization fund”, composed of every piece of land suitable for colonization and owned by the state (after applying the provisions regarding land ownership of the 1914 and 1921 laws – see above). A special National Colonization Office was created, and specific criteria were established for selecting the colonists (preference given to young and educated people, disposing of the necessary material means). The law also contained provisions as to drafting “Colonization Plans” (establishing the structure of the new settlements, the land division and the areas reserved for public services) and to the dimensions of the endowed plots. The typical endowment for a farming colonist should have been a plot in the village of at most 5,000 sq.m for building a house and a farming plot outside the village of at most 15 ha. Non-farming colonists (artisans, clerks, etc.) should have been endowed with two plots in the village (both having at most 5,000 sq.m), one for housing and the other for gardening. Communal pasture should not have exceeded 2.5 hectares/family.<sup>26</sup>

The state sometimes also provided typified projects for houses and instructions as to how the houses should be placed with regard to the street and to the neighbors.<sup>27</sup> Colonization could lead to new settlements (of at least fifty families) or enlarge the existing ones. Also in 1930, a “Regulation for measuring, dividing and consolidating property” in the Cadrilater was approved,<sup>28</sup> thus giving the administration all the necessary instruments to encourage and control colonization.

Through the combined effects of these acts, the territorial structure of the Cadrilater was effectively redrawn. Lands having various destinations were consolidated (“amassed”) for efficiency purposes. The total area of the farming lands reserved for colonists (including lands already colonized before 1930) was 169,977 ha, representing almost a quarter of the total area of the province. Most of the remaining state property was reserved for communal pastures, either for colonists or for the existing inhabitants. The state also retained significant areas for foresting purposes.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps more than the settling itself of the colonists (who practically all left after 1940), this comprehensive restructuring of the territory, especially in the plain areas in the south-east of the province and in the Danubian region, was the most important and durable effect of the Romanian administration of the Cadrilater.

Until 1938 (when colonization was effectively over), the program had produced the following results: 279 “colonization centers” (either new settlements or extensions of existing villages) accommodating around 20,000 colonist families (about 6,000 Aromanian, 12,500 Romanian from the Old Kingdom and 1,500 Romanian from other provinces – Transylvania, Banat, Bukovina).<sup>30</sup> The demographic consequence to the ethnic makeup of the province was that, in 1938, Romanians amounted to around 30% of the total population<sup>31</sup> (compared to 2.33% in 1913).

A study of the structure and territorial distribution of the colonist settlements leads to a few interesting conclusions.

24 Government Minute no. 1698/13 June 1925, apud. Noe, “Colonizarea Cadrilaterului,” 138.

25 “Lege asupra colonizării,” *Monitorul Oficial* 157 (17 July 1930), subsequently modified in 1932 and 1933.

26 In practice, village plots ranged around 2,500 sq m, with a typical plot being 60x40 or 50x50 m. For many such examples, see Central National Historical Archives, *Oficiul Național al Colonizării. Planuri de parcelare* [National Colonization Office. Allotment Plans], Caliacra and Durustor districts.

27 Virgil Coman (coord.), *Dobrogea în arhivele românești. 1597-1989* (Bucharest: Ed. Etnologică, 2013), 446-447.

28 Filipescu, “Agricultura în Dobrogea Nouă,” 20-21.

29 Filipescu, “Agricultura în Dobrogea Nouă,” 23.

30 *Ibid.*, 26. Other estimates (Noe, “Colonizarea Cadrilaterului,” 154-157) are more conservative, placing the total number of colonist families at around 18,000.

31 Brătescu, “Populația Cadrilaterului,” 199 (this figure may be somewhat biased).

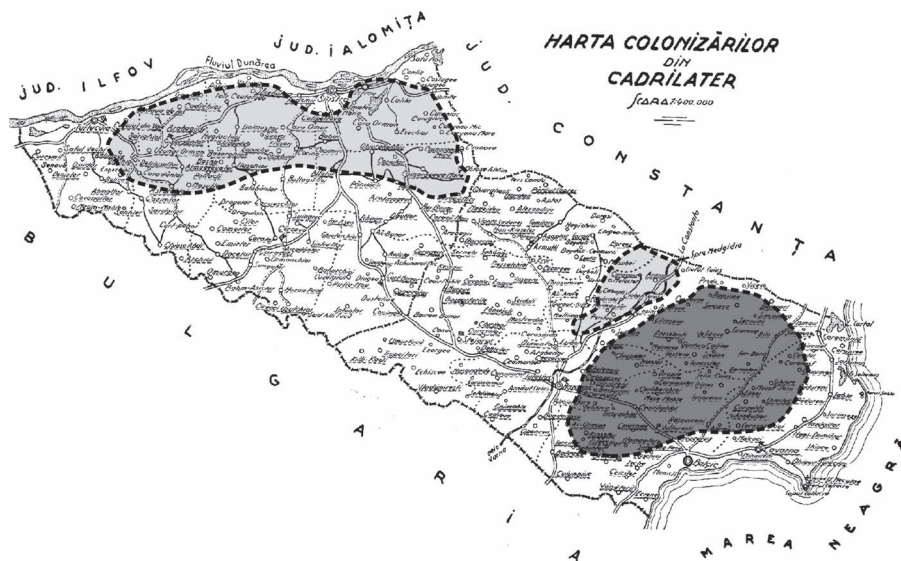


Fig. 4. Territorial and ethnic image of the first wave of colonization (before 1928). Light grey – predominantly Aromanian settlements; dark grey – predominantly Romanian settlements

The first wave of colonists (mostly Aromanian, coming between 1925 and 1928) settled either along the Danube, between Turtucaia and Silistra, or along the only railway line in the province, passing through Bazargic and reaching the Bulgarian frontier at Boteni [Novo Botevo] / Oborishte.<sup>32</sup> The (fewer, at this stage) Romanian colonists coming from the Old Kingdom settled mainly between Bazargic and Balçic, either near or within the thirteen existing military colonies established after 1922 (see above). (Fig. 4)

The second wave (mostly Romanians from the Old Kingdom, but also Aromanians and Romanians from other provinces) settled all around the province, usually within existing villages, in separate quarters, easily identifiable through their specific morphology. (Fig. 5)

The first wave targeted areas with a solid Bulgarian majority and with strategic importance.<sup>33</sup> Areas with Turkish majority were not affected at this time, as the Romanian administration considered the Turks a “safe” community, with no nationalist ambitions. After 1928, when significant parts of the Turkish population started leaving for Turkey, mainly as a result of Kemal Atatürk’s policies of encouraging their return to the “homeland”,<sup>34</sup> Romanian colonists took their place.

Establishing new settlements remained the exception. Out of the 279 colonization centers, only twelve villages had an exclusively Romanian (or Aromanian) population, thus identifying themselves as colonist settlements built *ex nihilo*.<sup>35</sup> The typical situation saw Romanian communities coexisting with the autochthonous population.

32 “Cadrilater – harta etnică 1930”; Noe, “Colonizarea Cadrilaterului,” Figs. 2 and 3.

33 Publicist Pamfil Șeicaru called these areas mainly colonized by Aromanians “levees of Romanian resistance.”

34 Apparently, until 1938, over 28,000 Turks and Tatars had emigrated to Turkey (Brătescu, “Populația Cadrilaterului,” 199).

35 The names of these villages are General Dragalina [now, disappeared], General Praporgescu [Tsenovich], Gramoștea [Bogorovo], Nicu Filipescu [Polyana], Regele Mihai I [now, a suburb of Alfatar], Frașari [Polkovnik Lambrinovo], Satu Vechiu [Staro Selo], Florica, Sf. Nicolae, Negreni, Titu Maiorescu and Regina Maria [now, a suburb of Balçik] (most of them being Aromanian colonization centers, with Frașari as the first exclusively Aromanian village in Cadrilater and Regina Maria as the largest one) (“Cadrilater – harta etnică 1930”; Brătescu, “Populația Cadrilaterului,” 200).



Fig. 5. New colonist settlement near existing village: the case on the village of Arman [Kardam] and the new Mircea Vodă colony. Initial allotment plan (above) and present situation (below). Continuous line – Mircea Vodă colony; dashed line – initial village of Arman [Kardam]

Coexistence with Bulgarian communities has sometimes proven itself difficult, especially for Aromanians, as Bulgarians exhibited a form of passive resistance to colonization, either by various forms of civil disobedience or by aiding and harboring members of the clandestine Revolutionary Dobrudjan Internal Organization (Bulgarian “comitagii”) entering the Cadrilater from Bulgaria and mounting attacks against Romanian gendarmes or civilian population.<sup>36</sup>

Obviously, the policy of the Romanian authorities has been to break the ethnic unity of as many settlements as possible, in order to insure a Romanian presence all over the Cadrilater, thus preventing other ethnic groups (especially the Bulgarians) from forming pockets of resistance. Apparently, from the 1930 census figures, the desired threshold was, at this early stage, about 25% of the population of a given village.<sup>37</sup> Also, a Romanian presence, even in minority, gave the administration the opportunity to build Romanian churches and schools, thus ensuring the long term development conditions for this ethnic group.<sup>38</sup>

The territory of the Cadrilater was also symbolically invested by means of nationalizing the Bulgarian or Turkish names of existing settlements (the Bulgarian administration having done the same between 1878 and 1913 with the original Turkish names), along with the baptizing of new settlements. Many of these new names had strong national connotations, referring to symbolic figures or events of the national narrative or to important contemporary personalities.<sup>39</sup> Some of the other changes either possibly pointed to the place of origin of the colonists or represented Romanian names for occupations and elements of the natural or built environment.<sup>40</sup> The most striking example is changing the name of the largest city of the province from Dobrich (after the Bulgarian historical national figure of Dobrotitsa) to a more neutral adaptation of its Turkish name – Bazargic (Bazarcik, “little market” in Turkish).

### Investing in integration: territorial networks of infrastructure

In 1913, when the Cadrilater was annexed by Romania, the province was poorly equipped with railways and roads. Only 16 km of railway existed, the section of the Bazargic - Varna line (built in 1911) that remained north of the new border.<sup>41</sup> Roads were also scarce, with the network being centered on the two main cities (Silistra and Bazargic). A 1913 map, just prior to the annexation, shows the major infrastructure:<sup>42</sup> a road along the Danube (Turtucaia - Silistra), its continuation towards the south-east (Silistra - Bazargic - Balcic) and four links going to (and beyond) the new frontier, respectively from Turtucaia (towards Rusciuk), Accadânlar [Dulovo] (towards Shumla), Bazargic and Balcic (both towards Varna). A network of roads of lesser importance was also present, mainly in the plain area between Bazargic and the old Romanian border and along the Black Sea coast. In all, the communication network was conceived following a pattern suitable for a marginal territory of the Bulgarian Principality, oriented towards the south and ignoring all connections with Northern Dobrudja or the rest of the Romanian Old Kingdom. Naval

36 The Cocina [Profesor Ishirkovo] incident in 1927, when the Aromanian colonists exerted savage reprisals on local Bulgarian civilian population after an attack by the “comitagii” remains notorious.

37 “Cadrilater – harta etnică 1930”.

38 According to a 1938 statistic, the total area of the land owned by the state and reserved for building schools was 4,080 ha, with another 3,017 ha reserved for churches (Filipescu, “Agricultura în Dobrogea Nouă,” 24). According to another source, between 1919 and 1940 74 schools were built in the villages of the Durustor district (which had 114 colonization centers) (Coman, *Dobrogea în arhivele românești*, 478-481).

39 Cloșca, Crișan, Mircea Vodă, Constantin Sandu Aldea, Dragoș Vodă, Sever Rădulescu, Brâncoveni, General Stan Poetaș, I.G. Duca, I.C. Brătianu, Unirea, Titu Maiorescu, Vladimirești, Regina Maria, General Dragalina, General Praporgescu, Gramoștea, Nicu Filipescu, Regele Mihai I (Brătescul, “Populația Cadrilaterului,” 200).

40 Dropia, Vânători, Vișoara, Băjenari, Alexandria, Prisăcani, Pădureni, Stejaru, Stâncă, Vulturești, Brazda, Hotarele, Vâltoarea, Gârlița, Popina, etc. (Ibid.)

41 Toader Popescu, *Proiectul feroviar românesc (1842-1916)* (Bucharest: Simetria, 2014), 79.

42 Murgoci, *Țara Nouă*, 4.

infrastructure was also poor, with primitive and small harbors in Balcic and Cavarna. From a Bulgarian perspective, this could be explained by the presence, just south of the new border, of the port of Varna, which needed no competition in its hinterland.

Romanian investment in territorial infrastructure has been very energetic in the immediate aftermath of the annexation (1913-1916) and, comparatively, quite poor after World War I. During the First Balkan War (1912), in which Romania remained neutral, the special railroads division of the army had built, very quickly, a line from Medgidia to Cobadin, linking the border area of Northern Dobrudja to the main Bucharest - Cernavodă - Constanța line. The next natural step, coming immediately after the takeover of the Cadrilater, was to connect this line to the existing Bulgarian-built Varna - Bazargic railway. Thus, in 1915 the Cobadin - Bazargic line was inaugurated, integrating the province in the national network.<sup>43</sup> This would remain the only effective Romanian investment in railway infrastructure within the Cadrilater until the province was lost in 1940. Other projects and intentions have existed, but none were implemented. They will be discussed in this chapter.

The investments in the road network exhibit a similar situation. Immediately after annexation, significant funds were allocated to its modernization and completion. Between 1913 and 1916, in the Caliacra district<sup>44</sup> alone, more than 160 km of new roads were built,<sup>45</sup> including the crucial link between Bazargic and the old border with Romania (near the village of Arman), along the railway line that was being constructed simultaneously. For comparison purposes, this represents around double the length of the main roads being built, in the same district, during the entire interwar period (85 km).<sup>46</sup> The only important investment after 1918 has been the coastal link between Balcic and Mangalia (via Cavarna), owing, no doubt, to the growing importance of the city of Balcic (see final chapter of this paper).

Air traffic infrastructure was also introduced to the Cadrilater through the construction of two small airports, in Bazargic and Balcic, mainly operating for touristic purposes in summertime, with links to Constanța and Bucharest.<sup>47</sup>

As for the maritime harbor infrastructure, the only major investment was undertaken in Balcic, where, after 1934, some specific works have been started, but never completed.<sup>48</sup> This investment would have had a strategic importance for the entire province as, together with the hypothetical construction of a Bazargic - Balcic railway (see below), it would have insured that agricultural products could be exported, with lower transport costs, via Balcic and not via Constanța, thus making local farmers more competitive on the market.<sup>49</sup>

The most ambitious, but unaccomplished projects have been drafted for the railway network. Immediately after the annexation of the Cadrilater, the engineer B.G. Assan published a study in a technical journal,<sup>50</sup> proposing three lines to be built in the following years: Turtucaia - Bazargic - Balcic, Silistra - Bazargic and Cobadin - Bazargic (the only one that was effectively built, two years later). Assan argued that the most urgent one would be Turtucaia - Bazargic - Balcic, with a tunnel under the Danube between Turtucaia and Oltenița linking it to the national network.<sup>51</sup> Beside its obvious military importance, this line would have doubled (but on a shorter distance) the existing Bulgarian line from Rusciuk to Varna, thus shifting

43 Popescu, *Proiectul feroviar*, 79.

44 The eastern half of the Cadrilater.

45 C. Budeanu, Alexandrina Petrescu, "Realizări tehnice și economice în Cadrilaterul dobrogean," *Analele Dobrogei XIX*, III (1938), 43.

46 *Ibid.*, 44. According to the same statistic, no important ("national") roads have been built in the other district of the Cadrilater (Durustor) between 1913 and 1940.

47 *Ibid.*, 45.

48 Virgil Cotovu, "Instalațiile pentru navigația maritimă pe coastele Cadrilaterului," *Analele Dobrogei XIX*, III (1938), 53-57.

49 Emanoil Bucuța, "Podul Balcicului," *Coasta de Argint I*, 10 (1928), 1.

50 B.G. Assan, "Liniile ferate în Dobrogea Nouă," *Buletinul Societății Politehnice XXIX*, 9-10 (1913), 604-607.

51 The Bucharest - Oltenița line had recently been inaugurated (1910).

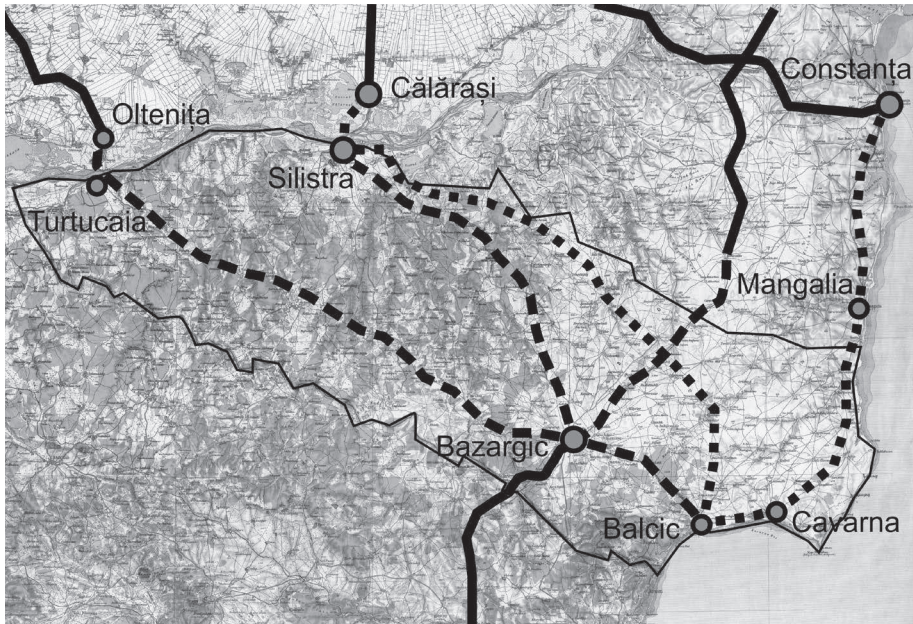


Fig. 6. Existing railways (1913) and subsequent expansion proposals. Continuous line – existing network (1913); dashed line – B.G. Assan proposal (1913); dotted line – M. Tudoran proposal (1934)

the commercial interest from the port of Varna to that of Balcic. The line from Bazargic (or the nearby village of Ghelengic [Pobeda]) to Balcic came into attention again in 1922, being included in a set of nation-wide proposals drafted by engineer N. Petculescu.<sup>52</sup> A different and more complex proposal came in 1934 when, again within a proposal at a national scale, engineer M. Tudoran suggested a line along the Black Sea coast (Mangalia - Cavarna - Balcic), with touristic and economic benefits and, on a longer term, a more expensive Balcic - Arman - Ostrov - Silistra line, with a bridge over the Danube towards Călărași (the Turtucaia - Oltenița tunnel proposal was scrapped by Tudoran)<sup>53</sup> (Fig. 6). Tudoran also insisted on increasing the capacity of the Boteni / Oborishte railway border crossing, to the detriment of a possible Giurgiu - Rusciuk bridge, that would have favored the Black Sea port of Varna (linked to Rusciuk by rail) in its regional competition with Constanța.

None of these projects were ever built. The attention and financial resources of the Romanian railway administration (C.F.R.) were directed elsewhere, and the Cadrilater was not a priority. Even the pressures and financial contributions of the local elites (in 1923, the inhabitants of Balcic privately financed, with 200,000 lei, the technical study for the Bazargic - Balcic line)<sup>54</sup> were insufficient in changing this reality.

Aside from the initial accomplishments, coming immediately after annexation and motivated mainly by strategic and military considerations, in the interwar period Romanian central authorities did not invest much in developing the territorial infrastructure of the Cadrilater (which was already below the national average, both in terms of quality and quantity). This contributed to the perpetuation of the chronic economic backwardness of this province (especially of its rural agricultural areas), to the missing of important development opportunities and to the reinforcement of its image as a marginal land, not only in economic terms.

52 N.I. Petculescu, *Problema C.F.R.* (Bucharest: Cultura Națională, 1922), 77-78.

53 M. Tudoran, *Orientarea, sistematizarea și complectarea rețelei C.F.R.* (Bucharest: Imprimeria Căilor Ferate, 1934), 113-144.

54 N. Papahagi, "Balcicul balnear și economic," *Coasta de Argint* I, 2 (1928), 2.

### The urban façade: cities, architecture and urban life

As already indicated, the initial urban Romanian population in Cadrilater was insignificant, with the notable exception of the border towns of Turtucaia (where it held a relative majority – about 40%) and, to a much lesser extent, Silistra (315 Romanians prior to 1913). For instance, in Balcic the Bulgarian census of 1910 only counted seventeen ethnic Romanians, and in Cavarna only five.<sup>55</sup> The Romanian census of 1930 recorded a quite different situation, especially for the three cities in the Caliacra district:<sup>56</sup> in Balcic, Bazargic and Cavarna, Romanians already made up around 15% of the population, and this figure continued to increase slowly until 1940. Who were these new inhabitants? On the one hand, they were representatives of the new administration: teachers, doctors, public clerks, etc. On the other hand, they were artisans and merchants trying to forge a place for themselves among their Turk and Bulgarian counterparts. And finally (and that is especially true for the city of Balcic), some of them were non-permanent residents, owning property in these cities and living there for only a few months every year.

The goal of the Romanian administration in the urban centers of the Cadrilater has not necessarily been to replace the existing ethnic communities or to change the urban image. On the contrary, their exotic nature was appreciated. The aim was rather to create a local Romanian economic, political and cultural elite who, whilst remaining in quantitative minority, would be able to imagine, implement and lead a process of urban modernization mirroring the one already unfolding in Romanian cities since the final decades of the 19th century. In the urban milieu of the Cadrilater, Romanians saw themselves as having a civilizing mission, as the imaginary associated with these Bulgarian dominated cities was one of backwardness. At the same time, the romantic and exotic aura of the cultural landscape (especially on the Black Sea coast) have led to attributing to representatives of the local population some of the characteristics of “noble savages.” The unacknowledged, but existing inferiority complex experienced by Romanians in the newly acquired cities of Transylvania and Banat was turning into a superiority complex in the Cadrilater.

The two largest urban centers in the Caliacra district both acquired “systematization plans”<sup>57</sup> drafted by some of the most important planners of the day. Cincinat Sfințescu – the founding father of Romanian scientific urban planning, author of the first general plan for Bucharest in 1914-1919 – began work on the systematization plan for Bazargic in 1929 and only completed it in 1936, after a long interruption.<sup>58</sup> Duiliu Marcu – one of the most important Romanian interwar architects and leader of the team that drafted the second systematization plan for Bucharest in 1935 – also drafted the plan for Balcic in 1937 (together with Iosif Bedeus).<sup>59</sup> These plans (especially the one for Bazargic) were extremely comprehensive and represented state-of-the-art documents, promoted as models of good practice (Fig. 7). They included functional zoning principles, building regulations, provisions for traffic, housing, public buildings, parks, conservation of valuable buildings or landscapes, as well as financial dispositions.

The new public buildings were also crucial in promoting the image of Romanian driven modernity. In Bazargic, these new buildings included an administrative palace, the local branch of the National Bank, a hospital, an airport, high schools, schools, markets, etc. The city was also electrified in 1937. In Balcic, the administration built a new town hall, a casino, a museum, a hospital, as well as other commercial and military constructions. Electrification came in 1933.<sup>60</sup>

The image of these buildings is very telling as to the Romanian dual attitude towards cities in the Cadrilater: on the one hand, modernity, with its familiar and specific Romanian image, heavily contaminated by Art Deco, as in the project for the administrative palace in Bazargic; on the other hand, tradition, in its local, exotic and picturesque image, with Oriental and Balkan

55 Murgoci, *Țara Nouă*, 29.

56 *Recensământul general al populației României din 29 decembrie 1930*, vol. IX (Bucharest, 1940), 388-389.

57 The Romanian name for regulatory and prospective plans for cities in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

58 Cincinat Sfințescu, “Sistemizarea orașului Bazargic,” *Urbanismul* XV, 1-2 (1938), 3-40.

59 Central National Historical Archives, *Duiliu Marcu* fund, file 35.

60 Budeanu, Petrescu, “Realizări tehnice și economice,” 48-50.



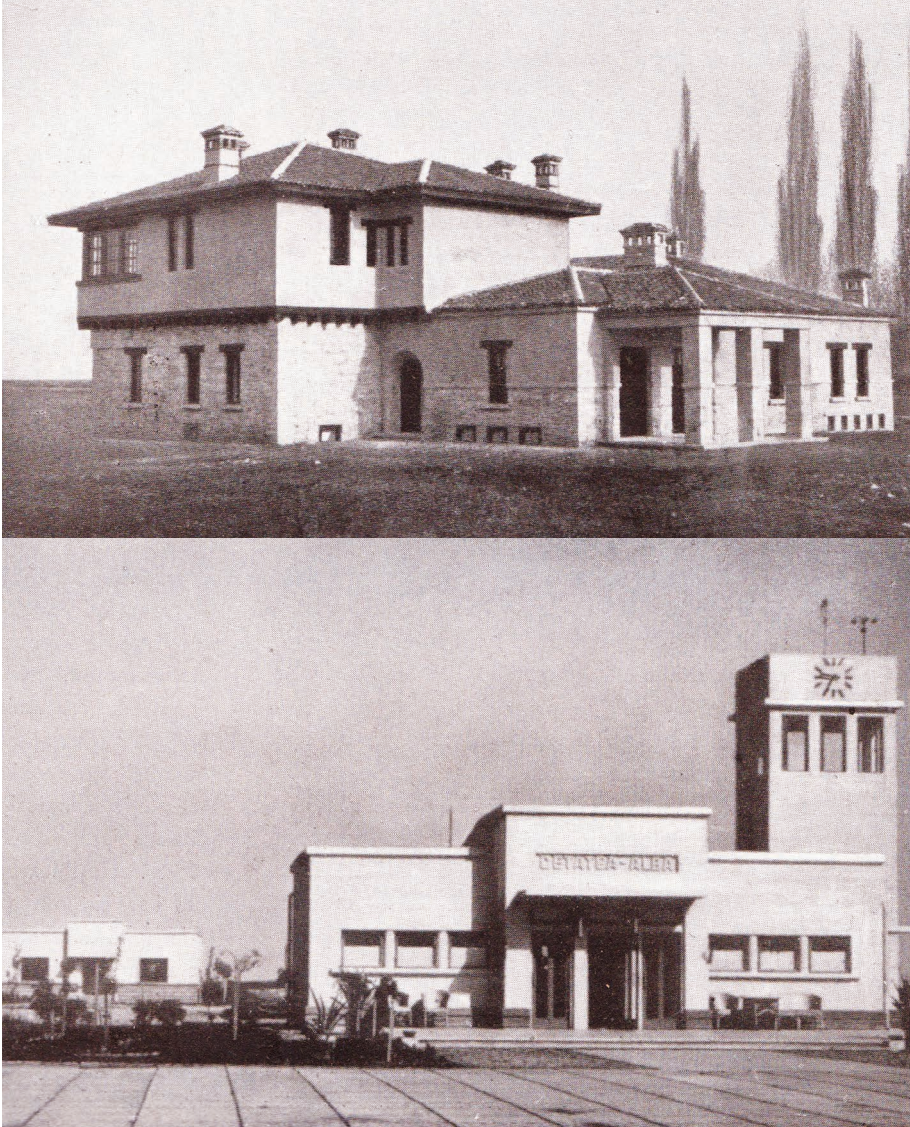


Fig. 8. Architect C. Dragu, airports in Balcic (above) and in Cetatea Albă (below)

The selection of topics for the important public commemorative monuments erected in the Cadrilater during the interwar years is also significant. With the late exception of the monument dedicated to King Ferdinand in Silistra (1938), they all celebrate local heroes or events, or people associated with them: monuments dedicated to local war heroes in Bazargic and Cavarna, a monument to Queen Marie in Balcic, a bust of Nicolae Filipescu in Bazargic, a monument to G. Murgoci in Balcic.<sup>62</sup> It seems that even national symbols had difficulties penetrating the Cadrilater.

<sup>62</sup> Budeanu, Petrescu, "Realizări tehnice și economice," 49.

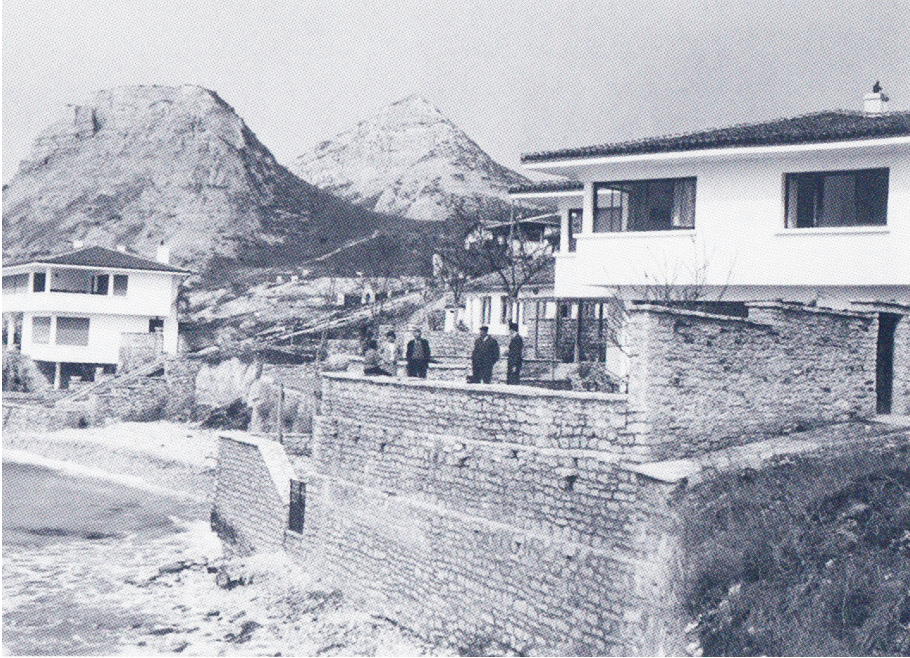


Fig. 9. Arch. Henrieta Delavrancea Gibory, Constantiniu Villa (left) and Pillat Villa (right), Balcic

The case of Balcic is, in all respects, a special one. The spectacular natural settings drew the interest of Queen Marie of Romania who, in 1924, decided to have a summer residence build for her here. She entrusted young architect Emil Guneş with this mission. The palace bears a very clear oriental mark, as do all other buildings erected in the complex. The Turkish inspired minaret is the emblematic element in that respect. It even bears a Turkish name – *Tenha Juvah* (The Quiet Nest).<sup>63</sup>

In the following years, encouraged by the proximity of the royal family (in a phenomenon similar to the one taking place in the mountain resort of Sinaia half a century earlier), members of the political and cultural elite (writers, artists, architects) flocked to Balcic.<sup>64</sup> The local administration started allotting and selling its lands at relatively low prices, generally to members of the Romanian upper class.<sup>65</sup>

Over 50 holiday residences were built in the next fifteen years, most of them designed by Romanian architect Henrieta Delavrancea Gibory (around twenty houses),<sup>66</sup> but also by other well known architects (Duiliu Marcu, Paul Smărăndescu and others). These houses (especially the ones designed by Delavrancea) hold a very particular image, combining local morphology and usage of materials (low pitched roofs, cantilevered volumes, minaret-like towers, local stone) with modernist principles and elements (horizontal windows, large terraces, clear white volumes, free plan) (Fig. 9). This synthetic approach to tradition and modernity is characteristic for the interwar professional activity of Henrieta Delavrancea Gibory (not only in Balcic) and of a group of young architects she was part of (G.M. Cantacuzino, Octav Doicescu and others). It also proved very suitable for the case of Balcic, combining the imaginary representations associated to

63 Lucian Boia, *Balcic. Micul paradis al României Mari*, (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2014), 51-57.

64 There even seems to have existed an executive decision to move the capital of the Caliacra district from Bazargic to Balcic (Royal Decree no. 2465/1925), but it was never effectively implemented (Coman, *Dobrogea în arhivele românești*, 365-366).

65 *Ibid.*, 40.

66 For details, see Militza Sion, *Henrieta Delavrancea Gibory. Arhitectură 1930-1940* (Bucharest: Simetria, 2009).

both the local and picturesque building and urban tradition and to the civilizing and modernizing mission self-assumed by the Romanian social superstructure.

Representatives of the local administration were quick in trying to exploit the special situation of Balcic. Playing on maintaining a traditional urban image while simultaneously encouraging economic development (which had been very poor since the railway passing through Bazargic was built and since, consequently, Balcic lost its commercial importance), mayor Octavian Moșescu has acted both ways: he modernized the city through electrification, encouraged the establishment of a “Free Balcic University,” called – together with writer and journalist Emanoil Bucuța – for a railway bridge at Turtucaia and for a line linking it to Balcic,<sup>67</sup> while, at the same time, trying to establish a local “artistic committee” that would oversee all building activity in order to preserve the picturesque image of the city.<sup>68</sup>

But the large scale public investments Moșescu and Bucuța were calling for never came, and the development of Balcic harbor was never finalized. Much of the perceived well-being of Balcic has been an imaginary construct, a façade based on the only resource that the administration was capable of effectively exploiting: the picturesque setting.

Integrating the Cadrilater (both symbolically and functionally) within the narratives and the structures of the Romanian nation-state initially promised to be a relatively straightforward endeavor. The experience acquired during the quite similar, and overall successful, process of integration / assimilation in the case of Northern Dobruđa was supposed to be decisively helpful. It all started seemingly well, with the 1914 ground setting law for organizing the new province replicating the provisions of the similar previous law for Northern Dobruđa, while correcting what had proved to be wrong or inapplicable. Investments in crucial infrastructure (railways, roads) were quick to come, and the province seemed to be set for a smooth integration process.

Things changed dramatically after World War I. The Cadrilater was no longer the only territory requiring integration and nation-building. On the contrary, it appeared to be the least important of them all. Romanian authorities probably thought that simply continuing to replicate the Northern Dobruđan model with minimal supervision and adaptation would automatically solve the problem, and consequently concentrated their attention and resources on the much more complex cases of Transylvania, Banat, Bukovina, and Bessarabia.

Gradually, the process started to go wrong. Incoming colonists arrived late and in insufficient numbers. Local population exhibited a stronger resistance to colonization than expected. In the absence of heavy investments in infrastructure, economic development lagged behind, both in rural and urban areas. Individual and small group initiatives were not sufficient to compensate for the state’s lack of action. The Cadrilater remained marginal in all respects. The superiority complex of the urban elites only widened the gap between the Romanian newcomers and the local population, who never really felt as being part of the Romanian nation. Although some local (apparent) success stories did exist, they were not enough to achieve effective integration. Territorial and urban policies and projects, mostly drafted by the authorities in Bucharest, were often unconvincingly implemented. And, finally and most importantly, there was not enough time for doing all that had to be done. The Cadrilater was a promising national project that ultimately failed.

In 1940, when the province was lost, the event did not stir nearly as much emotion and national turmoil as did the (quasi)simultaneous losses of Bessarabia and of half of Bukovina and Transylvania. Only a fitting marginal reaction for the loss of a marginal territory, whose integration had never been a real priority for the Romanian Kingdom.

67 Bucuța, “Podul Balcicului,” 1. Bucuța claimed that Balcic should win the regional competition with Cavarna and should play for the Cadrilater the role Constanța had played for Northern Dobruđa. To that effect, Bucuța stated, a railway bridge at Turtucaia was a crucial and indispensable investment, that should be undertaken by the central authorities in Bucharest.

68 Boia, *Balcic*, 105.

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- Fig.1: România după al Doilea Război Balcanic [Romania after the Second Balkan War] (1913 p.q. map); author's highlighting.
- Fig.2: Carte Ethnographique de la Dobroudja par O. Tafarli [Ethnographic Map of Dobrudja by O. Tafarli] (1918); author's highlighting.
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