



Summary :

The Greek diaspora on the Romanian coast of the Black Sea flourished especially during the 19th century, due to the development of the commercial and maritime economy. The most important Greek communities with churches and schools existed in Sulina, Constanța, Brăila and Galați.

Date

18th-20th century

Geographical Location

The Romanian coast of the Black Sea

1. Human Geography

The presence of Greek populations in the Principalities of the Danube (Wallachia and Moldavia), which in 1878 comprised the independent state of Romania, goes back to the beginning of the 18th century, when members of the [Phanariot](#) social group started ascending to the thrones of the Principalities (1711-1821). During the 19th century, Greek businessmen, merchants and shipowners settled in the ports of the Danube, as well as along the Romanian coast of the Black Sea; their existence on Romanian soil began declining at the middle of the 20th century. With the end of the Greek Civil War, new waves of emigration appeared, by Greek refugees this time. From the 1970's, Greek students attend Romanian medical schools and since the 1990's Greek enterprises have retained branches and offices in the most important economic centres of the country.

2. Demographic Features

According to the census of 1860, [Galați](#)'s population reached a total of 36,000 inhabitants, [Brăila](#)'s 26,000 and [Sulina](#)'s 3000 residents. Already by 1865, 13,000 Greeks were living in the Principalities, most of them being established in those three ports.¹ Consequently, 1/5 of the population of the Principalities' ports was comprised of Greeks. It is estimated that at the middle of the 19th century, the number of Greeks who resided there was probably reaching 35-40,000 persons, and at the end of the 19th century -in the heyday of the Greek presence in Romania- it approached the figure of 60,000.² A large portion of the Greek businessmen of the 19th century withdrew from the country at the beginning of the 20th century. Nevertheless, at the end of the Greek Civil War, in the late 1940's, 9000 Greeks arrived in Romania and stayed in the country until the early 1980's, when they extensively repatriated.³

At present, 2826 Greek enterprises exist in Romania, in which many Greeks are employed and live in the Romanian cities for a considerable time. It is also estimated that approximately 15,000 Greeks, mainly the descendants of members of the old Greek communities or of the political refugees from the Greek Civil War, still live in the country.⁴

3. History

As it was mentioned above, the governance of the Danubian Principalities (Moldavia and Wallachia) by members of the Phanariot families during the 18th c. attracted Greek populations. Despite the fact that the Greek War of Independence (1821) put an end into the rule of Phanariots and their courts, the cultivation of wheat transformed the Danube and its region into a [commercial and naval centre](#), which attracted a significant number of Greeks. The majority of the Greek immigrants settled in the ports of the Danube , after the "Treaty of Adrianople (Edirne)", in 1829, which opened the wheat market to other countries. Most of the Greek immigrants came from Macedonia, Epirus and the Ionian Islands, mainly from Ithaki and Kefalonia. [P. Argentis](#) and F. Sekiaris, both from [Chios](#), were two of the first who settled there. Moreover, members of the Greek commercial companies of [Rallis](#), Vouros, [Melas](#) and Xenou had been settled in the port of Brăila and sent cargos of wheat to Marseilles and the ports of Britain. The presence of the Greeks was reinforced number-wise and financially by the influx of a greater number of merchants, businessmen, maritime agents and employees in



the Greek enterprises. However, this development encountered many obstacles from the middle of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century and the inter-war years. Finally, at the end of the Second World War and after the prevalence of the communist regime, many Greeks abandoned Romania in the mid-1940's. Nevertheless, new waves of immigration from Greece appeared at the end of the decade after the Greek Civil War. It is estimated that around 9000 persons found refuge in Romania.⁵ Furthermore, Bucharest was the headquarters of the Greek Communist Party for a period of time.

In the 1980's, most of the political refugees repatriated, but the Greek presence in Romania was renewed by a new immigration wave comprised of students this time, who have been attending Romanian universities, mainly medical schools from the 1970's. Finally, many Greek enterprises started operating in the country in the 1990's.

One of the most important centres of the Greek community in Romania was the town of Sulina, where the services of the '[Danube European Committee](#)' were located. It was also the location of many commercial enterprises, which exported wheat to the Danube delta via river-boats. On the coastal part of the city, the buildings of the Committee were built, along with shipping agencies, hotels and coffee-shops. On the right bank of the river storehouses and huts comprised a separate settlement. In 1898, the journalist G. P. Paraskevopoulos, who had passed by the city, estimated the Greek population around 5-6000 persons,⁶ while an equivalent Greek population existed in Brăila. It is noteworthy that the Greek language in Sulina had evolved into a common language for the merchants and the seamen of the port, who were mainly English, Jewish, Romanian and Turkish. Paraskevopoulos again estimated the ships that had arrived at the port of Sulina in 1897 to be 544 English river-boats, 140 Russian, 110 Austrian and 100 Greek.⁷

[Constanța](#) was actually the sole port of Romania on the Black Sea. During the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th, the city was the summer resort of Romania, where many people gathered every summer season. Parallel to this, Costanța was the settlement of many Greeks who were involved in the import and export trade. The city was the gateway for the importation of goods by sea, as well for the exportation of products produced in the hinterland.

Other towns of minor significance for the Greek community of Romania were [Kavarna](#) and [Balchick](#) (Valtsikion) which Michael A. Dendias referred to in 1919. Greek populations involved in the naval and fishing economy were also settled in other ports and villages to the south of Constanța, like in the town of [Mangalia](#) (ancient [Callatis](#)).⁸

4. Economy

The Danubian Principalities had been for centuries the granary of the Ottoman Empire, providing [Constantinople](#) with wheat. The conveying of the wheat was done overland or overseas via ships under the flag of the Ottoman Empire, as the ships under foreign flags were banned from entering Bosphorus, until 1774. However, after the [Treaty of Küçük Kanyarca](#), in 1774, and the 'Treaty of Adrianople' (1829), foreign commercial ships were allowed to sail through the Bosphorus. The increase of the navigation in the Black Sea affected in a positive way the trade with the ports of the Black Sea, which resulted in the flourishing of the Balkan coast of the Black Sea, and, moreover, the increase in the arrivals of European ships resulted in the prospering of the wheat trade as well. In the period 1830-1914, 30-40% of the wheat exports from the Black Sea were carried out through the ports of the Principalities.⁹ The changes, which brought the Crimean War, increased considerably the proportion of the participation of the region in the international trade and maritime economy. Nevertheless, up till the middle of the 19th century the wheat production in the hinterland of Wallachia and Moldavia was conveyed to the coast of the Black Sea in order to be freighted onto boats under great difficulties. The part of the Danube which traversed the wheat-production areas was not navigable, thus creating obstacles to inland navigation. After the Crimean War, more precisely in 1856, the Danube European Committee was constituted by the Hapsburg Monarchy, Great Britain, Prussia, the Ottoman Empire, France, the Kingdom of Sardinia and Russia, with the aim of policing the region and regulating navigation. By mechanical means the Committee succeeded in deepening the river in order to be navigable for larger ships. Gradually, and up to 1902, when the deepening procedure was completed, Sulina evolved from a transit port on the estuary of the Danube River to a significant export trade centre. Parallel to this, the ports on the banks of the Danube, Galați, and Brăila, grew in significance.

In the beginning Sulina was a transit-port, which finally evolved into a significant export-trade port. Because of the sand-bar that existed at the entrance of the port and other difficulties in navigation, which occurred afterwards, the larger cargo ships were obliged



to be loaded there while the cargoes from Galați and Brăila were conveyed to the port of Sulina on large iron barges ('slepia'). At the beginning of the 1880's, the most significant owners of these iron barges, who were also owners of sea-going sail-boats, started investing in steam-ships. In the last third of the 19th century, the ports of the Danube were a key-post for Greek businessmen, whose family members were involved in trade, navigation and finance. The most eminent merchants and shipowners in the region were members of the [Theofilatos](#), [Stathatos](#), [Lykiardopoulos](#), [Embeirikos](#) and Valerianos families.

In Sulina many Greeks were also occupied as pilots, captains on harbour tugs and shipping agents. The ships which wished to enter the Danube used the navigators who lived in Sulina. These navigators undertook the task of piloting the ship through the shallow waters of the Danube to Brăila so that its cargo could be loaded. Every steam-boat had its agent in the city, whose task was to smooth out every difference that occurred between the captain and the shipping-company, to secure the right of way for the ship and, in general, to facilitate the sailing of the ship. The agents were obliged to be able to talk several languages, mainly English, and represented Greek as well as foreign steam-ships. At the port representatives of Greek merchant-houses were also active, supervising the freighting of the ships.

The Greeks of Romania, especially those in Brăila, Galați and Constanța, which were significant urban centres, were successfully involved in all aspects of the economy. Besides the wheat and lumber trade and maritime economy, they were also engaged in agriculture. Many were industrialists, tradesmen, bankers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, publishers, journalists, printers and employees.

Constanța, which flourished at the end of the 19th century, comprised a really special case in Romania. Constanța was a port for wheat exports and parallel to this its significance grew in particular when the Danube was inaccessible for the steamships during the winter. The wheat was conveyed to the port via small boats or overland, and then was loaded onto large steamships. Moreover, the port was an import centre of industrial products from Western Europe, as well of colonial products. The Greeks were involved in various activities in the commercial and business life of the city.

5. Community Life

The Greek communities of Romania and of the coastal ports and those of the Danubian Principalities in specific had high living and cultural standards. As mentioned previously, the most eminent communities were founded at the ports of Brăila, Galați, Constanța, Sulina, Giurgiu on the Upper Danube, [Tulcea](#) on the estuary of the river, as well as in Bucharest, the capital of Romania. The Greek communities were meticulously organised, having their own churches and [schools](#), [associations](#), libraries and [newspapers](#).

Some Greeks were actively involved in the political scene of Romania, Apostolos Arsakis being the most notable case, as he had been minister of Foreign Affairs. This development was also assisted by the expansion of the Greek press in those regions and by the printing of many Greek books and later, during the second half of the 19th century, the printing of newspapers. Generally, the Greek presence in Romania had been rather eminent and the Greek language quite widespread, at times, in culture as well as in trade.

It is noteworthy that the Greek community in Sulina had established a church and schools, while there also existed a vice-consulate. In Constanța lived 3000 Greeks at the end of the 19th century, whose origins were mainly from the Pontus, but also from cities of the Black Sea, like [Anchialos](#), [Mesimvria](#), Vasilikos, and [Varna](#), cities which were passed on to Bulgaria in 1878.¹⁰ The Greek community was numerous and economically prosperous; the Greek church was built in 1868, and at the beginning of the 20th century two schools were functioning, as well as a theatre, where Greek and Romanian companies gave performances. In addition, the Greeks of the city had established a philological society named 'Elpis' (Hope) and the women of the Greek community had established a charity society.¹¹

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Quotations

An autobiographical text of Yankos Danielopoulos from Vasiliko of Eastern Rumelia, concerning Constanța during the interwar period:

«Καθώς η Κωνσταντζα αναπτυσσόταν συνέχεια –ήταν το μόνο λιμάνι στη Μαύρη Θάλασσα, κι όταν πάγωνε ο Δούναβης κι έκλεινε για μήνες το Γαλάτσι, όλα τα βαπόρια εδώ φόρτωναν και ξεφόρτωναν– ο πληθυσμός αύξανε αλματωδώς και το χρήμα έρχεε μαζί με τα σάγια και τα πετρέλαια.

Η παροικία μας, δίχως υπερβολή, ήταν η πιο ανθηρή ελληνική παροικία της μεταπολεμικής Ρουμανίας. Είχαμε μια ωραία εκκλησία, χτισμένη το 1868, είχαμε δύο σχολεία κι ένα θέατρο, το μοναδικό στην πόλη, που ανήκε στον φιλολογικό σύλλογο «Ελπίς». Όλοι οι ρουμανικοί θίασοι που έρχονταν να δώσουν παραστάσεις νοίκιαζαν το δικό μας θέατρο κι έτσι ο σύλλογος είχε ένα καλό έσοδο από κει.

Στο σαλόνι του θεάτρου, το τμήμα Φιλοπτώχων Κυριών οργάνωνε συχνά τσάγια και, κάθε Σάββατο παρά Σάββατο, χορευτικές εσπερίδες, όπου συγκεντρωνόταν το άνθος της επαρχιακής κοινωνίας με τον κοσμοπολίτικο αέρα του διεθνούς λιμανιού. Οι ομογενείς μεγάλεμποροι και οι εφοπλιστές, άνθρωποι πολυταξιδεμένοι κι εκλεπτυσμένοι στο έπακρο, η «χρυσή» νεολαία του '20 με τις τρέλες και το αστείρευτο κέφι της, τα κομψά πλουσιοκόριτσα και οι Ρουμάνοι αξιωματικοί που φλέρταραν με πάθος τις Ελληνοπούλες. Εκείνο τον καιρό οι αξιωματικοί αποτελούσαν την αφρόκριμα της ρουμανικής κοινωνίας. Φορούσαν πάντα πούδρες και αρώματα, έσφιγγαν τη μέση τους με κορσέδες και κυκλοφορούσαν με ύφος τουλάχιστον αυτοκρατορικό. Επεδίωκαν με κάθε τρόπο να συγγενέψουν με τους Έλληνες, γι' αυτό και γίνονταν πολλές κουμπαριές. Κολακεύονταν με την παρέα μας, κυνηγούσαν τα κορίτσια μας κι ήθελαν τα παιδιά τους να πάρουν ελληνική μόρφωση. Συχνά άκουγες λοιπόν ονόματα όπως Σωκράτης Ποπέσκου, Αχιλλέας Βασιλέσκου, Πλάτων Μαριανέσκου».

Κορομηλά, Μ., *Ευτυχισμένος που έκανε το ταξίδι του Οδυσσέα* (Athens 2005), p. 157.