

ARIADNEplus PROJECT: A BRIEF ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPORT REGARDING THE OTTOMAN HERITAGE IN DOBRUJA, ROMANIA^{1†}

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Abstract. This text is a report on the archaeological surveys enabled by the ARIADNEplus project and dedicated to the Ottoman mosques and Muslim cemeteries in Dobruja (eastern Romania), mainly in rural areas, a category of monuments usually neglected by both archaeological research and official heritage policies. In total, 80 mosques and Muslim cemeteries were identified, mapped, and documented within the project. The report focuses on the assessment of the past, present, and future dangers that threaten Ottoman cultural heritage in the study-region. We argue that Muslim mosques and cemeteries represent one of the last and most enduring material memories of the Ottoman past in the contemporary Dobrujan landscape, but they are a heritage in constant danger of destruction.

Rezumat. Textul de față este un raport privind cercetările arheologice de teren prilejuite de proiectul ARIADNEplus și dedicate geamiilor și cimitirelor musulmane otomane din Dobrogea (estul României), cu precădere din zonele rurale, o categorie de monumente cel mai adesea trecută cu vederea atât de cercetarea arheologică, cât și de politicile oficiale ale patrimoniului. În total, în cadrul proiectului au fost identificate, cartate și documentate 80 de geamii și cimitire musulmane. Raportul pune accentul pe evaluarea pericolelor trecute, prezente și viitoare ce amenință patrimoniul material otoman din regiunea studiată. Susținem că geamiile și cimitirele musulmane reprezintă una dintre ultimele și cele mai durabile memorii materiale ale trecutului otoman din peisajul dobrogean contemporan, dar sunt un patrimoniu aflat în permanent pericol de distrugere.

Introduction: a neglected heritage

For almost five hundred years, Dobruja, a region located in the north-east corner of the Balkan Peninsula, between the Danube and the Black Sea, was part of the Ottoman Empire (fig. 1). After the region was conquered by the Ottomans in the late 14th-early 15th century, Dobruja remained under Ottoman rule until the Russian-Romanian-Ottoman War of 1877-1878. Following the Berlin Peace Treaty of 1878, Romania obtained not only independence from the Ottoman Empire, becoming in 1881 the Kingdom of Romania, but also most of the territory of Dobruja. Thus, within Romania's borders there was included a region with one of the most ethnically diverse populations in Europe (no fewer than 13 ethnic groups),² in which Muslims continued to constitute the majority, despite the massive migration caused by the war.³ Together with the annexation of Dobruja, a rich Ottoman cultural heritage was integrated in the new Romanian state – houses, schools, public baths, fountains, mosques, cemeteries, etc., all of them considered emblematic for the ethnic, cultural, and religious landscape of Dobruja. However, the Ottoman heritage of Dobruja, like that of other regions of modern Romania that were part of the Ottoman Empire (either directly or as vassal states), was subsequently neglected, the main cause being the structuring of Romanian state policy by nationalist ideologies – whether it is the Old Kingdom (1881-1918), Greater Romania (1918-1940), or communist Romania (1945-1989) –, doubled by an Orientalist attitude⁴ towards the Ottoman past, which associated this period almost exclusively with oppression and backwardness. As Lópoez *et al.* noted,

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² Turks, Tatars, Romanians, Bulgarians, Russians, Greeks, Armenians, Serbs, Jews, Germans, Italians, Albanians, and Arabs.

³ Iordachi 2002, pp. 1, 8.

⁴ *Sensu* Said 1979.