

ETHNIC TATARS IN ROMANIA
ROMANYA'DAKİ ETNİK TATARLAR

Abstract

The ever multiethnic region of the Romanian Dobrudja (i.e. North-Dobrudja) shelters a national minority of a decreasing number known as Dobrudjan Tatar, a historical diaspora of the Crimean Tatar ethnicity. After a troubled past which repeatedly found Tatars on often disputed imperial borderlands, where they were subsequently pushed onto the front line of political struggles, and having survived the vindictive wrath of the Soviets and their satellites, today – between redefined interethnic dynamics – we witness a period of identity-building and the revival of Turko-Tatar ethno-cultural life.

Yet their survival as a distinct ethnic group seems far from assured. Confined between the influences of the Romanian majority community and the commercially and culturally omnipresent Turks (to whom they are bound by a much cherished kinship), but lacking a strong cultural hinterland, it remains to be seen what new shapes their ethno-cultural existence shall assume.

Faced with the all too likely prospect of assimilation by the Romanian or Turkish community, young Tatar intellectuals assumed the struggle of national revival reclaiming their roots on ancestral lands from which they were almost irrevocably alienated by the nationalistic autarchy of past regimes. After offering a short description of the main aspects of Tatars' community life, the author makes an attempt to highlight the most relevant shortcomings of their national movement to conclude that the most compelling task to be tackled is the revitalisation of the Tatar literary language and language identity.

Key Words

Romania, Dobrudja, Lower-Danube region, minority, diaspora, acculturation, identity-building, assimilation, language revival

Özet

Romanya'nın tarih boyunca çok uluslu Dobruca bölgesinde (Kuzey Dobruca'da) yaşayan Dobruca Tatarları, hazin bir geçmişe sahip olan Kırım Tatarları'nın sayısı gittikçe azalan tarihî bir diasporasıdır. Tarihte sık sık savaştan imparatorlukların hep sınır bölgelerinde bulunan Tatarlar, asırlarca halkların çatışma noktasındayken, değişik kültürel etkiler arasında yaşamaktaydı. Bugün, komünist hükümetin gaddarlığından kurtulmuş Romanya Tatarları, yakın zamanlarda Sovyetler ve onların uydularının sürgünlerinden dönmüş kardeşleriyle yeniden belirlenmiş etnik ve siyasi bir çevrede Türk-Tatar etno-kültürel bir hayatın canlanması sürecini yaşamaktalar.

Romen veya Türk toplumuna asimile olma ihtimali yüksek iken, Tatar aydınlarının yeni nesli milli kültür ve kimliklerini canlandırma mücadelesini üstlenmiş ve önceki milliyetçi rejimler tarafından, atalarının yaşadıkları bu bölgede yabancı muamelesine tabi tutulan Tatarlar için yeni bir milli kimlik oluşturmaya çalışıyor.

Buna rağmen ayrı bir etnik grup olarak hayatta kalmaları pek kesin değil. Çoğunluk olan Romenler ile ticari ve kültürel açıdan her yerde hazır ve nazır olan Türk akrabalarının etkileri arasında, siyasi açıdan etkin olabilecekleri bir ana vatandan da mahrum olan Tatarların geleceği ve devam ettirecekleri etno-kültürel yaşamları da belirsiz.

Tatar toplum hayatını temel açılarıyla kısaca tanıtmaya çalışan yazar sonuç olarak en acil görevlerden birinin Tatar yazı dilinin ve dil kimliğinin canlandırılması olduğunu belirtmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Romanya, Dobruca, Aşağı Tuna bölgesi, azınlık, diaspora, kültürel uyum, kimlik oluşturma, asimilasyon, dil canlanması

Dobrudjan Tatars are a branch of Crimean Tatars, who due to historical reasons, discussed only briefly in this study, live in the historical region of Dobrudja (Romanian *Dobrogea*, Turkish *Dobruca*), today shared by Romania and Bulgaria. It is situated between the lower Danube River and the Black Sea, and includes the Danube Delta, the Romanian coast, and the northernmost part of the Bulgarian coast. Only small fragments of an unrevealed number of this Dobrudjan ethnic group live in Bulgaria. Our review is thus based on data collected about the less obscure Romanian part.

According to the widely accepted view on the toponym, *Dobrudja* derives from the Turkish rendition of the Slavic *Dobrotiça*, the name of an early Bulgarian ruler (sometimes mentioned as Dobrotiç, son of a presumably Turk ruler called Balık, Menabıt 2006: 8-9).

Ethnonym

We come across the Tatar ethnonym in some of the earliest Turkic sources. In the 8th century Köl Tigin inscription of the Orkhon Turkic group, we read about the *Otuz Tatar* tribal confederacy. Tatars are also mentioned in the work of Mahmud al-Kashgari (11th century) as one of the Turkic tribes. Later *Tatar* became more broadly used creating some confusion in the identification of its bearers, but by the time of the Golden Horde (after 1245), the Tatar name was attributed to all non-Mongolian peoples within the empire (that is the vast majority), and later exclusively to the Turkic peoples dominating in number.

During the national emancipation movement of the 19th century led by a Crimean elite, aiming to differentiate themselves from Ottoman Turks (who did not widely refer to themselves as Turk at that time), the ethnonym of *Turk-Tatar* was put into use. This was later prohibited by the Bolshevik regime. Around that time 'Crimean Tatar' became widely accepted. In the meantime, further complicating the issue, on Romanian soil, the foundations were laid for a common Turko-Tatar identity. In the historical process ethnonyms like *Romanian Turk*, *Dobrudjan Tatar*, *Turk-Tatar* and others came into consideration.

A Historical Sketch

What makes the Tatars special as a Turkic ethnic group in this geographic context is that the beginning of their ethno-genesis long preceded the Ottoman occupation of Southeast Europe, unlike in the case of Rumelian Turks in general. Their ancestors had been living here for centuries before Anatolian settlers completed the Dobrudjan Tatar ethnic build-up. This is why we are due to give a short review of the history of Tatar people, and their ethnic components.

An important first note on the history of Dobrudja would have to be that it must be viewed within the frames of a larger geographic context. When a given land falls into the meeting point of different polities for centuries, being the subject of so many territorial disputes, events of relatively distant places will equally affect on a local scale. Dobrudja itself has been dominated or coveted mainly by Balkans powers in the Middle Ages, but the adjacent

Budjak¹ was a well known natural passing point of oriental migrating people to the Lower Danube, and while the Danube often served as a natural border, it never presented an insurmountable barrier to migrants or political ambitions. Moreover, as Spinei remarks:

“South of the Danube, the steppe climate and vegetation continue to the centre and the south of the Dobrudja. It was not by accident that the animalbreeding tribes in the north-Pontic regions were steadily attracted by the environment of the Dobrudjan Plateau, which closely resembles the native places of those pastoralists, so that the Greek and Roman authors used the name of Scythia Minor for today’s Dobrudja, in considering it an extension of the north-east territories” (Spinei 2009: 39).

Given its border land qualities Dobrudja often served as a buffer zone of disputed allegiance. The age-long cultural and ethnic diversity of the region stands witness to this fact.

Some authors claim that Turkic peoples have been living here for millennia.² It would be safe to say that Onoghur Bulgars opened the long row of consequent Turkic settlers, facing the Avar Turks’ khaganate at the Danube line. Their rule in the Northeast Balkans started in the 7th century, but during the following centuries Bulgarians competed with the Byzantium to dominate the lands around the western coast of the Black Sea. In the 10th century, new waves of Inner Asian nomads reached the Danubian-Pontus area, first bringing the dominance of the Kipchak Pechenegs, followed by the closely related tribes of the Cumans, and in smaller number Oghuz tribesmen.

The increasing need for grazing fields among nomad pastoralists of the steppe consequently drew tribes and confederacies against one another, thus, by rule tribes and splinter groups on the losing side were pushed onto the periphery of the steppe to cause havoc in neighbored agriculturalist communities or undertake service as mercenaries in the suzerainty of one or another state. Furthermore, the fact that Eastern European states were always trying to harness the nomads’ fighting skills and agility against each other (a habit, that all too often turned against them), with the prospect of loot and service constantly drew new nomads to their borders. These groups, weakened by constant belligerence, were eventually settled and christened by the Byzantium.

In the 13th century the Mongolian invasion and the formation of the Golden Horde brought about new waves of Inner Asian nomads. Some, like Cumans, were seeking shelter in the Crimean mountains, on the Balkans or as far as in the Hungarian Kingdom. They became active components in the social-ethnic buildup of these lands, consequently they had their role in the formation of the Crimean Tatar ethnicity.

¹ The historical *Budjak* [Bucak] region lies north from Dobrudja, over the Danube stretching to the Dniester river, corresponding to the historical Basarabia and today’s South Basarabia. The toponym comes from the Turkish word *bucak* ‘corner’ or ‘triangle’.

² This seems far-fetched a statement, since the Turkic ethnicity of the Scythians is not generally accepted (in fact, mostly refuted). There is no consensus on the language or ethnicity of the Huns either, many times quoted among the early Turkic rulers of the Lower Danube.

Even from the beginning, the neighbored Western Ulus was home to a predominantly Turkic population that quickly assimilated the largely outnumbered Mongolian elite, forming a people generally regarded to as *Tatar*. The vernacular was Turkic of the Kipchak kind, and the literary language they used between the 15th-19th centuries was the Middle-Turkic *Chaghatay*.

In the 13th century the exiled Selchuk sultan, *İzzeddin Keykavüs* settled here with a large entourage. Around the same time, in the sixties of the century, he was followed by his uncle, the mythical religious leader *Sarı Saltuk Baba*, with a group of followers numbering about 12,000. Their colony is said to have established itself around Babadag in the Kavurna Country. It is safe to presume that by this time, there was a constant Anatolian population influx, which brought about the appearance of Islam on these lands. The settling of these Turcoman groups was supported by the first Muslim Golden Horde Khan, Berke. One can not emphasize enough the enormous importance of Islam in the ethno-genesis of Tatars, as it not only led to breaking with Mongolian state tradition, but it also resisted slavification and it still confers an important factor of Tatar identity (Gemil 2003: 36).

In Dobrudja raids of the Golden Horde, and its dominance in Northern Dobrudja resulted in the consolidation of a Kipchak-Turkic population. With the decline of the Golden Horde in the second half of the 14th century, the competition for political dominance over the region resulted in a century-long turmoil. In the 15th century, the Ottoman Empire, with the leadership of the akin Oghuz Turkic (Turkmen) people conquered Dobrudja. The conquest of the Balkans by the Ottoman Turks modified the ethnic composition of the territories under occupation; however it did not alter the Tatar demographic dominance of Dobrudja and the Bugeac throughout the Ottoman Era, confirmed by the 16th-18th century toponyms of *Tartaria*, *Terra Tartarorum* etc. (Gemil 2010: 21), and written sources. *Chitak/Chutak* Tatars are noted to reside here in the service of the Sultan in the 16th century (Chirtoagă 2003: 155), in fact, the first occurrence of the toponym *Dobrudja* in an Ottoman document dated from 1552 makes reference to “Dobruca Tatarları” (‘Dobrudjan Tatars’, Veliman 2003: 173). By the 17th century, a major turkification of the region ensued. To what extent this turkification was complete is debated by the often biased national historiographies. The Crimean and Anatolian influx of settlers into the Balkans continued with the assistance of the Porte.³

The first Noghay groups appeared in the *Budjak* (Romanian *Bugeac*, Turkish *Bucak*) in the sixties of the 16th century, searching for new pastures in a time of drought, that drew them away from the Volga region, where they had been living as Russian subjects. Some Crimeans

³ There is an ongoing academic dispute between Turkish and Balkans historians concerning the nature of turkification and islamisation of the Balkans under Ottoman reign in terms of historical demography. Turkish historians emphasize the paramount importance of Anatolian colonisation in the success of the long lasting dominance over Eastern European lands, while local historians tend to relativize the importance of colonization in favour of the theory of conversation of Balkan people in masses to Islam. It is not hard to see the agenda of proving the ‘blood kinship’ of Balkans Muslims to the majority population behind such conceptions (Eminov 2000: 131).

joined them, for their lands were affected by the drought as well. Although these so called *Budjak Tatars* are subsequently recolonised by the Porte into East, eventually they managed to form a couple of thousand strong community northeast from Dobrudja. In any case, already in the 16th century Georg Reicherstoffer claimed that the Budjak Tatars, responsible for a number of western raids during the Ottoman Era had about 500 farms (*sessiones*) (Spinei 2009: 198). The travel book of Evliya Çelebi, who travelled these parts in 1664 mentions the Dobrudjan Kara Murat, Bülbüller, Düğüncü (today Mihail Cogălniceanu, Ciocârlia de Jos with Ciocârlia de Sus and Nuntași correspondingly; Menabit 2006: IX) as settlements inhabited by Noghays inasmuch as by Tatars. For the Budjak he accounts of 200 settlements (Spinei 2009: 199).

The Crimean Khanate became the last independent stronghold of Tatars after the Russians sacked the successor states of the Golden Horde one by one. However, this era too came to end in 1783 starting the exodus of Tatars lasting till our days. Numerous groups of Tatar and Noghay refugees arrived due to these new historical developments on the Ottoman-Russian border. In 1784 the Noghay drew back from the adjacent Budjak region as a result of the Bucharest piece.⁴ With a significant part of the Ottoman-Russian wars between 1768 and 1829 being fought on Dobrudjan soil, large territories had become depopulated. In the 1850s and later the Ottoman repopulation program was fueled largely by Crimean settlers. After the war clandestine or legal emigration was tacitly encouraged by Russia, and the Porte aided immigrants as well. Of the almost 600 thousand emigrants about 120 thousand were settled in Dobrudja, where they were aided with stocks, free land and draft animals (Eminov 2000: 132). In 1856-1857, Crimeans settled mostly in present day Northeast Bulgaria; in 1861 Caucasian and Crimean groups refugiated here as a followup of the Crimean War (1853-1856). As Russians were recruiting amongst Tatars, many of them shipped out towards Dobrudja with Ottoman support, where most of them were stationed only temporarily on their way to Anatolia.

The Crimean newcomers designated themselves according to their origins or region of descent, consequently Kerç, Çongar, Tat, Noghay. Grouped between Constantza, Megidie and Mangalia, they established villages often named according to the Crimean settlements they had left. As mentioned earlier, only a part of Noghays came with Crimeans, some relocated from the Basarabian region of Budjak.

The end of Ottoman rule in the Balkans and elsewhere saw the termination of century long institutions and norms. The inhabitants of the ever multi-ethnic Lower Danube region suddenly found themselves in newly formed polities claiming to be nation states, and a part of the native communities were rendered alien in the perception of the prevailing nationalist dogma. As it is well known, after 1878, the Ottoman Empire lost these territories

⁴ The estimates for the Budjak Tatars and Noghays around the Russian conquest range from about a 40,000 to 100,000. In any case a part of the population settled here relatively late as result of the Ottoman mobilisation in preparation for the wars with Russia. The overwhelming majority fled to the Turks south of the Danube, while the few thousand people who staid behind were forcefully removed later by the Russian forces (Spinei 2009: 199).

to Russians, who marched right to Istanbul, driving yet another wave of refugees away from its home. Shortly after, Dobrudja was ceded to Romania while South Dobrudja became part of Bulgaria. This event also started the mass-emigration of Dobrudjan Muslims to Anatolia. In the short time span until 1899, an estimated 90.000 people left, leaving behind 182 villages practically desolated (Menlibay 2003: 238). Some of these refugees found shelter around Eskişehir already at this early date.⁵

In the new ethnic outline *Constantza* (Romanian *Constanța*, Turkish *Köstence*) become the main centre of the Tatar speaking population. Around this time Tatars are described as living mainly in the lowland areas, while Turks dominated the shore and the wooded parts.⁶ In the meantime the growing Romanian community was pushing forward from the Danube region.

Having gained control over Dobrudja, Romanian authorities took a series of legal and economic measures to favour newly arrived Romanian colonists, for instance by selling expropriated land exclusively to them (Kozak 2009: 11). This and other measures ultimately led to a significant decrease of the Muslim population.⁷ In the last two decades of the 19th century the Romanian population of Constantza thus grew fivefold, and by 1903 half of the 260.000 Dobrudjans were registered as Romanians, figures not fully corresponding to the timely registers of the Muftiate (Ülküsal 1966: 33-4). A report of the same year concludes,

⁵ We have a good sketch of the number of refugees via the Crimean events in Menlibay 2003: 1785-1788 (according to some, even from 1776): the precise number is unknown, but certainly thousands;
1789-1800: 500,000, of which only 300,000 are said to have survived the journey;
1812: Basarabia is occupied by Russia to the Prut rivers line, the number of refugees is unknown;
1815-1828: 200,000 refugees;
1860-1862: 227,687 refugees fleeing from the Crimean War;
1980: 18-20 thousand refugees (Menlibay 2003: 235). The numbers add up to nearly a million people.

⁶ A work of scientific rigour to be consulted on ethnic issues at this time, *Le Roumaine: Atlas Ethnographique* is a compilation of a number of older and more recent maps, aimed to contest the validity of the Teleki maps. Examining its pages it is easy to notice the obvious tendency of earlier cartographers to depict the Muslim population as a single bulk. Only the Elisee Reclus map takes account of the Tatar and Turkish communities as separate units. We have a detailed study of the 1844 census, which according to the Ottoman administrations' practise only registered Albanian Muslims by ethnicity, as some Albanians were of Christian faith. According to this census 76 % of the Dobrudjan population was Muslim (Doğru 2011: 252-253).

⁷ Similar attempts to 'homogenize the nation' and bring the demography of South Dobrudja – today pertaining to Bulgaria – closer to an ideal nation-state condition after WWI were not very successful. As noted by Eminov, the 1930 census registered only 21% Romanians in the two southern districts of Dobrudja, still outnumbered by both Turks and Bulgarians. It took a Turkish Romanian Convention besides the above mentioned measures, that facilitated their emigration to Turkey for the percentage of Turks and Tatars to decrease from the 21% of 1930 to 6-7% by 1948 (Eminov 200: 134).

that, during the same two decades, Romanians had gained the ownership of 397.787 acres of land, while 59.287 remained in the possession of Muslim proprietors (Ülküsal 1966: 44).

The proclamation of the Democratic Crimean Republic in 1917 only deepened Russia's mistrust towards the Muslims of the borderline, which eventually led to the tragedy of May 18th, 1944, when the Soviet authorities deported the entire Crimean Tatar community. Exiled mostly to the Uzbek SSR, about 45% of the deportees perished in the immediate aftermath. New waves of emigrants had reached Romania and Bulgaria previously in 1940, when South Dobrudja was annexed to Bulgaria⁸ and during the war, many of whom were later subjected to the constant harassment of the local politburos. Refugees faced the suspicion of the authorities and were sent to the German concentration camp situated at Constantza. At the liberation, the Soviets demanded that Romanians extradite Crimean 'desertors'. Those harbouring refugees were endangering their own and their families safety by not complying (Coman 2005a: 159). While during the time of Monarchy (1878-1944), Tatars had been represented by four, later by one deputy in the parliament, and the Mufti, conferred the title of Senator, was kept in place along with his four county Muftis (Bozkurt 2008: 12), from 1948 on Tatar intellectuals were being monitored and the hiding members of the Crimean Tatar Community were sought after (Coman 2005a: 163). Also, show trials were staged to convict Tatar intellectuals on false accusations of propaganda for the liberation of Crimea (Cojoc 2005: 163-4).

In the 20th century, the population changes went on under the supervision of the Romanian state. This process was sometimes coordinated according to interstate agreements: between 1935-1939 a Romanian-Turkish pact secured the emigration of about 10.000 Turks and Tatars to the Turkish Republic.

Today

In terms of ethnicity Crimean Tatars affiliate themselves to the same ethnical entity with all Tatars descending from the different successor states of the Golden Horde. Gemil estimates the total number of Tatars in the world to 12 millions, together with the 5-6 million Tatars of the Republic of Tataristan within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), added to his estimate of 4 to 5 million Tatars in Turkey and 1-1,5 million of the different post Soviet states. A quarter of a million people were reported to have returned to Crimea from deportation by 2003, and his estimate for Tatars in Romania was 35-40 thousand (Gemil 2003: 25).

According to the 2012 official census, however, only 20.500 people claimed Tatar ethnicity, and 18.143 people named Tatar their first language (the Turkish community numbered

⁸ After the second Balkan War Southern Dobrudja became motive for continuous strife between Romania and Bulgaria: it was granted to Romania in 1913, captured by Bulgarian forces in 1916, but returned to Romania after the war. Finally, at September 6th 1940 it was ceded to Bulgaria with the frontiers still valid today (Eminov 2000: 133). Tatars and Turks came to Constantza that year to apply for Turkish visa and many of those who were rejected, never went home, but remained and integrated into the Romanian Tatar community.

28.200 people, of which 26.179 were native speakers). We have significantly different figures in earlier publications, e.g. Ülküsal mentions 150.000 Turks and Tatars, without reference to the time of the estimate, as noted by Jankowski, who records 45.000 Tatars (see Jankowski 1991), while Aksus' value is 80.00 for both communities. Without speculating too much about the reasons for the significant discrepancies in figures, we should mention the obvious fact of generation change (see the decline from 2002: 28.115 native Tatars with 21.272 speakers, respectively 32.098 native Turks and 23.935 first language Turkish speakers). It is interesting to note that Tatar organisations also register at least twice as many ethnic Tatars, e.g. 55.000 in 1992 as compared to the official number of 24.469.

The Turks and Tatars of Dobrudja are both Sunni Muslims. In 1992, they had 67 mosques and 38 imams practised in the community organised under the Romanian Muslim Muftiate, presently led by Mufti Iusuf Muurat. In the past twenty years, new sanctuaries were built or old ones renovated, and a young religious bureaucracy was trained with Romanian and Turkish support. Since the fall of communism, Turks and Tatars have been recognized as national minorities benefiting from various kinds of state support. Law no. 489/200719, enacted on January 8, 2007, on the freedom of religion and the general regime of religious denominations recognizes Islam as one of the 18 religious denominations operating in Romania (Kozak 2009: 12).

The Tatar population continues to reside mainly in and around the town of Constantza, namely in the villages of Karamurat, Hasança, Omurşa, Acıca, Mambetça, Musurat, Kocalak, Düğüncü, Endekkarakuyusu, Bülbüller, Karatay, Kobadin, Bayramdede Başpınar, Malçiova, Körçeşme, Taşpınar, Kara Ömer, Azaplar⁹ (Menabit 2006: 4). In addition, a larger number of ethnic Tatars live in the capital town of Bucharest. Noghays inhabit largely the same villages, as much as one can conclude from the scarce data.

Physical anthropologically speaking, the Tatar population is far from homogeneity. Especially those of inner Crimean or Noghay origins show Mongoloid features that set them apart from Anatolian and Rumelian Turks or Tats. We find a thorough description of Tatar demography in Ülküsal (2007: 42-9): Crimeans consist of Kerç (from the Crimean districts of Kerch and Kefe), and Çongar/Şongar (mainly from the Crimean Gözleve and Or). The later two exhibit some mongoloid features. They're usually regarded to as proper Crimeans, and settled here mostly after 1860. Tat (from the surroundings of Bahçesaray and Yalıboyu), described as having lighter tan and blue eyes more often; and Noghay from the neighbouring Budjak, Northern steppes of Crimea and the Azov Sea (from where they first came to Crimea and the Caucasus), characterised by more strikingly mongoloid features, and a dialect that stands closer to modern Kirghiz. In addition to those who became Russian subjects, they too are reported roughly wherever Tatars live in Anatolia (see Jankowski

⁹ Correspondingly Mihail Cogălniceanu, Valul lui Traian, Valea Seacă, Agigea, Straja, Movilița, Coșgalac, Nuntași, Valea Dacilor, Ciocârlia, Nisipari, Cobadin, Independența, Fintina Mare, Abrud, Tepeș Vodă, Silișteea, Negru Vodă, Tătarul in Romanian.

1991). As Henrik Jankowski writes in his description of Tatars and Noghays of Turkey, the two communities are so much interlinked that it is hard to make a distinction between them, although they do preserve the (often distorted) knowledge of distinct origins: Noghays claim Volga, Kuban, Caucasian or even Moskovite origins. On the other hand Turcophile Tatars tend to deny any affinity with Noghays.

Language

The Turkic dialects spoken today in Dobrudja pertain to two different groups of the Turkic languages: Oghuz (Southern Turkic) and Kipchak (Western Turkic). The Oghuz dialect is in fact spoken Turkish (also called Republican or Anatolian Turkish), while the second one is Tatar, often called *Tatar Turkish* (*Tatar Türkçesi*, *Türk Tatar Türkçesi*), of the Pontus-Caspic or Western Kipchak branch (Doerfer 1959: 369). The specific Noghay idiom of Tatar spoken by very few also has to be mentioned as one of the genuine Kipchak varieties of the language.

As pointed out by Drimba in 1970, Tatar dialects of Romania correspond to those of Crimea. These dialects have been influenced more or less by Anatolian Turkish. The one spoken on the Crimean seashore was the most profoundly influenced, represented by the Tat idiom in Dobrudja. The so called ‘Northern Dialect’ shows the cleanest set of Kipchak features, while the Central Dialect unites Kipchak as much as Oghuz-like properties. This sketch shows the distribution of some characteristic Anatolian features:

	Old Turkic y-	Old Turkic t-	Rounded harmony	Personal pronouns in dative
Northern ‘steppe’ dialect	ǰ-	t-	weak	<i>maya ~ mā, saya ~ sā, uya</i>
Central dialect (or- ta yolaq ‘middle lane’)	y- ~ ǰ-	d- ~ t-		<i>maŋa, saŋa, oŋa</i>
Southern dialect	y-	d-	strong	<i>mana ~ mā, sana ~ sā, una ~ uya.</i>

(Berta 1998: 316)

The initial ǰ- (< OT y-) is a veritable “steppe” feature in Noghay that separates it from the Noghay language of the Northern Caucasus. Apart from the $\zeta > \varsigma$ shift also characteristic to Tatar, Noghay shows a $\varsigma > s$ change as well, e.g. *bas* ‘head’ ~ Tatar *baş*, *tas* ‘stone’ ~ Tatar *taş* etc. A tendency for assimilation is all in all more prevailing in Noghay. For example the *n*, *m* > *b*, *p* or *d*, *t* changes are the result of progressive assimilation in *etpesem* ‘wenn ich nicht tue’ < *ätmäsam*, *köresizbi* ‘seht ihr nicht?’ < *köräsizmi?* Suffix forms like +*DIŋ* for genitive (< +*nIŋ*, e.g. *köznüŋ* > *közdüŋ* ‘des Auges’), or +*DI* for accusative (< *nI*, e.g. *qızni* > *qızdı* ‘puellam’ [girl-ACC]) exhibit the same change. Labial attraction is strongest in Noghay: *şölgö* ~ *çölgä* ~ Turkish *çöle* ‘in die Wüste’, *üyünö* ‘in sein Haus’ ~ Turkish *evine*, *özünö* ~ *özünä* ‘ihm selbst’ etc. (Doerfer 1959: 375). These features prove a certain linguistic proximity of Noghay with the Aralo-Caspian Kipchak languages, especially Kirghiz.

At this moment Tatar, having literary traditions since the 19th century does not have a standard literary language, and, as minority languages generally, it shows a strong superstratum, in this case Romanian influence. Thus the majority of their publications appear in Turkish or Romanian.

Education

Local education was initially organised on religious grounds by the Ottoman bureaucracy. The Ottoman society itself was organized according to religious communities and no national or ethnic considerations were consulted in the process. In 1610, a Muslim Seminar opened its gates at Babadag. Moved to Megidia in 1901 as Muslim population became sparse in the old religious center, it finally was closed in 1967. In the time of Monarchy, elementary schools served wherever the Turko-Tatar population was denser. Today the Muslim Seminar of Megidia called *Kemal Atatürk National College*, reopened in 1996, is sponsored by the Turkish government.

In the inter-war period, the Muslim Democratic Front was established uniting Turk and Tatar intellectuals in its ranks, assuming mostly cultural goals. It was first renamed Turkish Democratic Front, later Turco-Tatar Democratic Commity, abolished eventually in 1953.¹⁰ During its short existence the community's cultural wing was involved in organizing a number of events of sports and folklore, and its documents hold evidence of two Tatar and one Turkish school (Coman 2005b: 190).

In 1948 a law on minority language education took effect. In 1949-50 teaching Turkish to Tatar children was prohibited, and Kazan Tatar was imposed instead, a language not less distant to the Dobrudjan Tatar vernacular, then Turkish. For a short time thereafter authors brought up by the generation of Mehmet Niyazi found the opportunity to publish in the new Tatar manuals (Bozkurt 2008: 11). For practical reasons, however, and due to the poor educational standards of minority schools, they were usually not the school of choice for parents. Tatar language teachers were instructed, and, until its closing in 1972, the Tatar Institute of the Bucharest Universities' Oriental Languages Faculty produced a couple of fruitful years.

It is important to note that Islam, an important basis of Turkish and Tatar identity, had many obstacles to surpass during the years of Communism in Romania, as other religions as well. The Communist regime promoted atheism and anti-clericalism and seriously curtailed native language media actively marginalising minority elites. As native language instruction gradually disappeared and the impact of religious institutions on public life diminished by

¹⁰ The most active leaders were of Tatar nationality at this time (Coman 2005b: 187, fn.4). Since World War II the most significant positions in religious and educational administration were held predominantly by Tatars privileged by the state over Turks because they were considered more loyal to the state, whereas Turks often consider Turkey their true homeland and aspire to eventually move there (Eminov 2000: 136). As much as Tatars feel strongly about Crimea as their homeland, they certainly don't claim affiliation to Ukraine or any other post Soviet state that shelters Tatar exiles.

the sixties, the assimilation of Dobrudjan Tatars accelerated to the brink of their disappearance as an ethnic community (Kozak 2009: 11).

After 1989, minority language education was reorganised in a more liberal manner. In their proclamation document, the Tatar union vows for native Tatar language and history education as well as for the general improvement of the communities educational level.

The concept of Tatar as a national language is largely disputed, and the polemic surrounding is often marked by ideological considerations. Especially publications originating from Turkey tend to name Turkish as Tatars' mother tongue, considering Tatar merely a dialect of it. Having no standardized native language manuals, Tatar leaders themselves chose to name their minority language Turkish during the post-communist educational reforms, though the elite and the community still shows some interest to revitalise the Tatar literary language in cooperation with their Crimean brethren. While Turkey generously sponsors Turko-Tatar institutions and education, it might impose its standards and patronising attitude upon an already well-educated and well-integrated community that has long asserted its identity, before ideas of widespread Turkish nationalism were conceived.

Today Tatars learn Turkish as a first (minority) language, although lately optional Tatar language education classes have been organised. Since October 2010, Tatar children of Medgidia have had a cabinet for teaching Tatar as an optional course at the M. Dragomirescu school. The course was initiated for fifteen 2nd grade pupils with the hope that more would join from those who study Turkish as a first language.¹¹

In September 2010, an international congress with the participation of Tatar leaders from Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and the Crimea debated the uniform adoption of a Latin alphabet for Crimean Tatar and the interchange of Tatar teachers was proposed.

Socio-political and cultural activities

At present, we witness a process of identity building aiming to challenge the disruptive results of the identity loss caused by Communism, when religious and ethno-cultural life was more or less curtailed. Romanization policies that started in the sixties were no doubt incomparably milder than the similar undertakings of the Balkan states. In fact, after the seventies, in an attempt to improve relations with the Islamic world, the state loosened its restrictions on Islam, and the organisational infrastructure of the Muftiate remained untouched (Eminov 2000: 134). Both founding members of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, tied together by significant economic interests, Romania and Turkey leave no loose ends when it comes to maintaining a good relationship, the beneficiary of which are all native Muslim communities. Supported by state funds and Turkish grants mainly the Dobrudjan Muslim community managed to initiate a veritable cultural and religious revival, the effect of which surpassed state boundaries during the past two decades, advocating the cause of Tatars worldwide.

¹¹ <http://www.cugetliber.ro/stiri-diverse-elevii-tatari-din-medgidia-au-de-saptamana-trecuta-un-cabinet-de-limba-materna-69914>

One major obstacle for a strong national identity is the fact, that Tatars lack a historiography of their own. So far historians of almost exclusively non Tatar origins have approached the issues of Tatar history from very diverse and subjective positions (Gemil 2003: 24). Romanian historiography promotes the idea of Dobrudja as Romanian land since the very beginning, alluding to the several short lived reigns of Mircea the Elder of Wallachia over these parts around the turn of the 15th century. Former and subsequent rules until the reunification were labelled acts of usurpation and oppression at the hand of cruel oriental oppressors. History manuals say little more about the Turco-Tatar Muslim past of Dobrudja (history conventions, the material of which figure in our bibliography and a manual on the history of Romanias' national minorities are meant to fill this void). Its annexation to Romania is perceived as an act of reunification with the mother country, and as ideals of a national homeland are reprojected onto the past, Turks and Tatars appear as oriental savages, ruthless invaders only to disturb the fated dominance of Romanian nation over these lands. Likewise, the few seemingly indubitable demographic data about the historical Dobrudja continue to be largely contested or omitted.

The pursuit for autarchy of nationalism is manifested in the changes rendered in traditional toponymia, as in the instances of *Hasança = Valul lui Traian*, *Endekkarakuyusu = Valea Dacilor*, *Bayramdede = Independența*, *Körçeşme = Țepeș Vodă* etc. Claiming monopoly over symbolic space authority has produced such place names of obvious ideological inspiration to replace communal remembrance with an imposed official history. Oral history is only poorly preserved, and in settlements of a long Muslim history Turco-Tatar inhabitants can hardly account for a street name or a park that bares remembrance to their past. Some of the scarce exceptions are upshots of friendly interstate gestures to Turkey rather than locals.

We have relatively few accounts about the culture and language of the local Turks and Tatars, the majority of earlier works being focused on folklore (Menabit 2006 gives a good bibliography of them), but initiatives are becoming more frequent. As a matter of fact, folklore festivals of the Turco-Tatar community have become a tradition, hosting guests mainly from Romania, Turkey, Crimea and Bulgaria (*Festivalul Internațional al Portului, Dansului și Cântecului Popular Turco – Tătar* i.e. "The International Festival of Traditional Turco-Tatar Wear, Dance and Music"). Dobrudjan Tatars are represented locally and abroad by young folklore groups, like the *Boztorgay Folklore Group* of Constantza and the *Karasu Folklore Group* of Megidia or others. Another happening hosted by the locals is the International Black Sea Wrestling Cup (*Uluslararası Karadeniz Güreş Kupası*), a championship of *küreş*, the national sport, where sportsman from the whole Tatar world of Tatar and non-Tatar ethnicity enroll.

Departments of Turkish studies pursue their activity on the Bucharest University and the Ovidius Universtity of Konstantza. The young Institute of Turkish and Central-Asian Studies at the Babeş Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca took up the task of tackling the issues of Tatar history, and books, conferences on Tatar history and culture do not lack either. A notable

new publication in this respect, a dictionary of Dobrudjan Crimean Tatar came out last year with the support of the Tatar party.¹²

The early days of the local Turco-Tatar journalism are marked by periodicals like *Dobruca Gazetesi* ('Dobrudjan Journal' 1884-1894), *Harekat* ('Movement' 1896), *Sadakat* ('Allegiance' 1897), *Emel* ('Ambition' 1930, rebrought into circulation) etc.¹³ *Karadeniz* ('Black Sea'), published by the Tatar party frequently offers articles and literature in Tatar language. In addition Facebook profiles, various Internet portals (e.g. www.tatar.ro, hayat.ro), and of course Radio T serves as local media, where news in Turkish, Romanian and Tatar have been broadcast since March 2009. *Nazar Look*, a bilingual journal in English and Dobrudjan Tatar appears monthly in print and on the Internet since January 2011.

Cultural relations have been established with towns populated by Turks and Tatars from other countries.¹⁴ Turkish foundations and institutions (like the Turkish General Consulate at Constantza) and Tatar communities from abroad regularly cooperate with locals, all the more important for Tatars of Bulgaria, who, unlike those in Romania, lack entirely the support of the state. On 29 December 1989, days after the fall of the Communist regime the Muslim Turkish Democratic Union of Romania was established, predecessor of both UDTR (Turkish Democratic Union of Romania), the later established on 23rd July, 1990, after a 1990, after a party split three months earlier. They assume no political objective, their articulated aim being the protection and conservation of cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic identity and material values. The youth wing of the party bears the name of Ismail Gaspirali. The two unions agreed in 1995 to cooperate under the aegis of the Turkish and Tatar Federation, the achievements of which remain controversial. The current UDTTMR president is Gelil Eserghep, and the party delegates a deputy to the Romanian Parliament in the person of Varol Amet. The party motto is *Dilde, fikirde, işte birlik!* 'Unity in language, thinking and work', words borrowed from the great Crimean journalist, politician and intellectual İsmail Gaspiralı, founder of the Crimean *Terciman* newspaper published between 1883-1918.

The 'Dobrudjan model of inter-ethnic cohabitation': Integration or assimilation?

The phrase of 'Dobrudjan model of inter-ethnic cohabitation' has become a commonplace of journalism and political rhetoric in Romania and especially Dobrudja, often quoted by

¹² Saim Osman Karahan 2012: *Dobruca Kırım Tatar Ağzı Sözlüğü. Dicționarul Graiului Tătar Dobrogean*. Constanța, ISBN: 978-606-598-188-1 (<http://sozluk.vatankirim.net/hakkinda.htm>).

¹³ Ignac Kúnos performed studies amongst Crimean war captives in camp of Esztergom, Hungary during World War I. He accounts about a banned monthly periodical that circulated hand to hand amongst the inmates called *Kiçiren Cuvatkiç* ('A Little Consolation'), written in the Tatar literary language established by Ismail Bey Gasprinski (Gaspirali) and his fellow intellectuals. He also mentioned, how the Noghay group distinguished itself from Tatars by its peculiar dialect, marked especially by differences in spelling (Tasnadi 2003: 166).

¹⁴ <http://www.cugetliber.ro/stiri-diverse-tinerii-tatari-din-medgidia-promotorii-infratirilor-intre-localit-ati-72176>

UDTTMR officials as a local aim and success. For while inter-ethnic tensions have not seized in some other parts of the country, in the rich mosaic of Dobrudjan cultures a relative harmony seems to persist. Undoubtedly, Dobrudja has been home to many ethnic groups during its history, and the fact is not less true today. As a part of the local ethnic variety Dobrudjan Tatars seem well integrated into Romanian society. But as fewer and fewer people assert Tatar nationality in recent censuses, a concern arises whether this actually means the endgame of a final assimilation.

Generally speaking those who actively engage in Tatar community life have a good knowledge of their common Crimean origin, an attitude they try to distribute among those of their kin, enforcing their sense of Tatar ethnic affiliation. They commemorate the national tragedy of May 18th 1944, assume solidarity with repatriated Crimean Tatars and collect funds for their cause. They celebrate the traditional religious and national feasts together, in addition to the Holiday of Tatar Language (on May 5th, since November 2010) and the Holiday of Romanian Tatar Community (December 13th, since 2006) recently recognized by the Romanian state. Active Romanian assimilationism no longer poses a threat to the survival of the Muslim Tatar society. Still, with the diminution of the importance of religion and lacking knowledge of the ancestral culture, the youth exhibits a higher tendency to affiliate with Romanians.

Even more importantly the Turkish minority language education, the overwhelming influence of Turkish institutions and patronage, the common religion make Tatars susceptible to assimilation into the Turkish community. Religion, as an ethnic integrating factor served them well in their survival as a nationality in the past, when facing Russian or Romanian assimilationism because it provided an essential dividing criteria in self determination. However in the Turkish – Tatar equation the religious factor of Islam proves neutral. When reckoning the future of Tatar as a distinct language inevitably one has to consider the question of language *Hinterland*: in the initial phases of rebuilding the Tatar literary language, lacking a mother country in the political sense of the word it is expected that the language, culture and identity will draw closer to Turkish (Eker 2006: 95-96). With few Tatars having a proficiency in their ancestral language and the growing influence of Turkish, linguistic assimilation seems imminent even with a possible preservation of national identity. Their Turkification has been going on since the Pan-Turkic ideas inspired by the Gaspıralı generation spread, and the process may be completed by the influence of modern day popular culture.

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