

The Avatars of the *Miri*¹ Land Regime in Post-Ottoman Dobrudja: Judicial Formulas and Ethno-Political Interests

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Abstract

Our study deals with the ways in which the Romanian and Bulgarian authorities have coped, after 1878, in Northern and Southern Dobrudja, with the Ottoman legacy in regards to land owning, particularly, the distinction between full property (*mülk*) and long lease (*miri*) property. These policies could be connected with the efforts of these two modern national states towards internal consolidation. The main sources we have used are, on one hand, a series of controversial Romanian and Bulgarian thematic brochures and articles from the Interwar period and, on the other hand, several papers and general works published by prestigious scholars, from the Western world, specialized in Balkan and Oriental studies. We have also included a few judicial sources in our research. In the absence of totally new elements, this endeavour's originality lies in the attempt to present a general, systematic, and critical view of the objective information, and, starting from these, of the biased, unavoidably controversial interpretations related to the topic. The Romanian state chose a direct and effective way of combining the ethnic homogenization from Dobrudja with the necessity of modernizing state institutions, namely, that of unconditionally transforming the *miri* properties in full private properties in maximum 20 years. The Bulgarian state permitted the seizure and partition of former Turkish properties and deliberately avoided to explicitly abolish the *miri* land regime. This term was sporadically mentioned in post-Ottoman Bulgarian laws and judicial studies, especially until 1892, but even after 1904. The resulting ambiguity, which was useful for Bulgarians after 1878, when they seized Turkish properties, would turn against them after 1913, when Southern Dobrudja was annexed by Romania.

Keywords: land laws, Dobrudja, *mülk*, *miri*, Ottoman legacy, national integration, land seizure, colonization.

The modern Balkans were undeniably influenced by the Ottoman legacy too, in terms of the evolution of the land ownership regime, as agriculture continued to be the principal economical activity for most of the inhabitants until the mid 20th century.

After the continued expansion of the Ottoman state during the classic Middle Ages (roughly from 1300 until 1600), the Empire underwent through an extensive process of feudalization. This meant that the local leaders (*Pashas*) strengthened their power at the expense of the Sultans' authority. Moreover, the *Timar* properties, whose ownership depended on providing military and civil service, were transformed into unconditional hereditary properties (*Chiflik*). These two complementary phenomena reached a climax at the end of the 18th and the start of the 19th century (Veinstein 1989/2001: 275-279).

During the first decades of the 19th century, the *Chifliks* started being converted into capitalist-like farms (Mehmed 1976: 317), a trend that was confirmed by changes in the theory and practice of the Ottoman land laws during age of the *Tanzimat* (1839-1876) and then, during that of the "Young Turks". Still, feudal practices continued until the Kemalist revolution.

Thus, the Ottoman Land Law, brought forward on 7 *Ramadhan* 1274 (April 21st 1858), stipulated the existence of five types of land ownerships (*mülk*, *miri*, *metruké*, *mevkufel/vakuf*, and *mewat*), as well as the distinction between the full properties – *mülk*, and long land-leasing properties – *miri*. Most of the arable land from the Empire was set up as *miri*: namely, the state was considered their rightful owner and the tenant, in exchange for an yearly tax and for the obligation to farm the land, could use it, pass it down to the next generation, or even sell it, but only with the authorities' approval. If a *miri* property remained uncultivated for three years, then the tenant would lose any rights over the land, which was

¹ In French, Romanian and Bulgarian, the accepted form of the term is *mirié*

reacquired by the state².

The general tendency of lessening the practical differences between the *mülk* and the *miri* properties was accelerated through a series of amendments concerning the 1858 Land Law during the last decade of the *Tanzimat* (1867, 1869, 1872, 1874, 1876). Most of these were aimed at abolishing some particular obligations for *miri* tenants and the regulations from 1874 stipulated that also the transactions of *mülk* land should be registered by the State. In fact, until the uniformization of the two land ownership systems in 1926, the most obvious discrepancy separating them was that of inheritance rights. Contrary to the recommendation from the *Shari'a*, in the case of *miri* properties, women had equal rights with men, thus ignoring the traditional 2:1 ration in favor of the latter (Eisenman 1978: 62-63; Amawi 1996: 156-157).

Aside from these social and judicial evolutions, the territory of the Empire was continually decreasing, Dobruđja being one the provinces that were lost after the events from 1875-1878. Towards the end of the Ottoman rule, this region had a population of 300,000 inhabitants, with a distinct ethnic and religious diversity, and with a slight majority of Muslim Turks, roughly 55-60% (Ungureanu 2009: 33).

The ethnic conceptualization of nation building, predominant in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, as well as the ethnic and religious diversity of the Dobruđjan population, made the integration of this province in either the Bulgarian or the Romanian state in 1878, a rather difficult matter. Following the Congress of Berlin, in the summer of 1878, most of Dobruđja (15,623 km²) was added to the Romanian territory (the northern and central regions with a mixed population) and the southern area, with an overwhelming majority of the Turkish-Tartar and Muslim population, became a part of the autonomous Principality of Bulgaria (Ungureanu 2009: 37-39).

This study deals with the ways in which the Romanian and Bulgarian authorities decided to cope with the issue of the Ottoman legacy regarding the land laws, particularly the situation of the *miri* properties in Northern and Southern Dobruđja in the decades after the province was divided between the two Southeastern European states.

The land ownership question in Dobruđja was one of paramount importance for both states, especially if we consider the perspective of colonizing this region and changing the ethno-demographic ratio, actions that can be regarded as essential for the integration of the northern and southern regions of the province in the Romanian and the Bulgarian national states. In regards to the regional demographics, we should mention that in 1880, the population density of the Dobruđjan territory, which became part of Romania, was of 10 inhabitants per km² (about 150,000 inhabitants for 15,623 km²) (Stănciugel & Bălașa 2005: 200-203), while in Romania itself (the state resulted after the unification of Moldavia and Wallachia, during 1856-1866) the density had already reached 34 inhabitants per km² since the previous generation (Hitchins 2004: 163).

However, not just regional demographics was important but also the Ottoman legacy. Maintaining the Ottoman land ownership system, despite its progress since the feudal age, would have been incompatible with both countries' aspirations for modernization and Europeanization. The Romanian authorities have found a direct and transparent way of combining the policy of institutional modernization with ethnic and political state interests in Dobruđja. The French colonial policy, which was enforced during 1830-1863 in Maghreb, had also addressed the issue of Ottoman land legislation and it served as an inspiration. More precisely, the Romanian laws of April 1880 and April 1882 provided the means for a transformation of *miri* properties in full properties, in exchange for a payment, which would be made in 15 years. On March 10th 1884, a legislative modification extended this reimbursement period to 20 years and decreased the amounts to be paid yearly. The 1884 regulations had also considered the possibility of a partial or full nationalization. Thus, according to article 14, inspired by article 68 of the Ottoman Land Law of 1858, those who did not pay the amounts due for three years would also lose their right of using the land in favor of the state. However, article 21 offered an alternative: giving up one third of the property, which exempted one from paying the redemption rates of 55 lei per hectare³.

Nevertheless, considering the relatively few *miri* properties out of the total arable land in northern Dobruđja, acknowledged as such by the Romanian authorities, the regulations concerning this type of properties did not play a significant role in creating a state land reserve in this region, or in making a future colonization possible. As claimed by

² See Kolaroff 1928: 77; Eisenman 1978: 53-63; Rădulescu & Bitoleanu 1998: 357; Islamoglu 2000: 53-63; Jorgens 2000; Anderson 2008.

³ Roman 1928: 285-286; Todorov 2007: 71-73; in 1884, in northern Wallachia, in the Mușcel County, one could buy a pair of oxen with 180 lei, a horse with 160 lei, a pig with 26 lei, a turkey with 3 lei, one kilogram of pork meat with 0.75 lei, one egg with 0.5 lei, one kilogram of cheese with 1.26 lei and one liter of cow milk 0.2 lei. See Mavrodin 2010: 497.

Marin Vlădescu-Olt, in the Constanța County, the Central Commission established that the *miri* properties accounted for 70,896 hectares and the *mülk* properties for 30,017 hectares. According to the same author, in the Tulcea County the first type of properties occupied an area of 57,669 hectares and the latter, just 12,717 hectares (Vlădescu-Olt 1908: 131-132). All in all, the *miri* properties acknowledged by the Romanian authorities accounted for 128,565 hectares out of 561,296 hectares, or 23% of the total arable area. We could also add the 42,724 hectares, which constituted the *mülk* properties (roughly 7.5%).

The *Vakufs* (arable lands administered by Muslim religious institutions) from Northern Dobruđa were most affected by Romanian regulations, as their area was limited to 10 hectares, according to the 1880 law, and the surplus entered the state's possession. The best-known example is that of Gazi Ali Pașa Mosk from Babadag, which, before 1877, managed several hundreds hectares (Cosutto 2001: 93).

Nonetheless, in many cases, the Ottoman land property documents either did not exist (not being issued in the first place, or they were destroyed during the 1877 military confrontations), or their content was too brief and imprecise. Moreover, the Romanian clerks were not familiar with the *Osmanli* language and writing and some did not even intend to fully uncover the documents presented to them for examination (Ülküsal 1966: 41-44). Although Romanian authorities have acted (at least in some circumstances) in an arbitrary manner when dealing with Ottoman property documents, the relative insignificance of the *miri* issue remained undisputed, because these were only particular instances of administrative abuse and not judicial subtleties or sophisms.

In the opinion of the Bulgarian historian Petăr Todorov, who mentioned three Romanian sources, the authorities from Bucharest seized during the first five or six years alone, after the enactment of the 1880 law, around 200,000 hectares of arable land, which represented *miri* and emigrants' properties (Todorov 2007: 72).

Unfortunately, the three Romanian sources Todorov designated, do not support such a claim, neither individually, nor collectively. Thus, Toma Ionescu estimated the land expropriations at 165,142 hectares, two thirds of which (104,550) were sold to settlers most likely during 1878-1908, or even 1878-1912 (Ionescu 1928: 278). Marin Vlădescu-Olt only mentioned the *miri* properties from Dobruđa, without referring to the nationalization rate, or to the origin of state owned arable lands (total or partial confiscations of *miri* properties, other expropriations, or country planning of non-arable lands, once owned by the Ottoman state). Moreover, he didn't indicate the exact extent of state owned arable lands, but gave more information about the land sales to people from Dobruđa and settlers: 400,542 hectares, out of which 260,163 were purchased by Romanian ethnics and 140,379 by Romanian citizens of other ethnicity (Vlădescu-Olt 1908: 7). Finally, in the study and at the page indicated by P. Todorov as a source, Colonel M. Ionescu-Dobrogeanu dealt with a completely different issue, namely, the agricultural modernization of Dobruđa from a technical perspective (Ionescu-Dobrogeanu 1904:702).

Coming back to demographics, according to the Romanian census of 1880, the population from Northern Dobruđa reached 147,247 inhabitants, with 44,354 Turks and Tartars (30.2%), 40,449 Romanians (27.5%), and 29,440 Bulgarians (19.9%). However, by 1913 the population had increased almost three times, reaching 384,430 inhabitants, with 216,425 Romanians (56.9%), 51,149 Bulgarians (13.4%), 41,442 Turks and Tartars (10.9%), 35,849 Russian populations (9.4%), 9,999 Greeks (2.6%) etc. The Romanians had become predominant in both counties from northern Dobruđa: 61.6% in Constanța and 51.5% in Tulcea (Rădulescu & Bitoleanu 1998: 360; Limona 2009: 25). Among the 200,000 Romanian inhabitants living in Dobruđa in 1913, only 24.2% were *dicieni* (descendants of Romanians from Dobruđa), the majority (39.5%) being *cojani* (from Wallachia and Oltenia), 21.8%, *mocani* (from Transylvania and Banat), 8%, Moldavians from the region between the Prut River and the Oriental Carpathians, and 5.6%, from Bessarabia (Iordache 2001: 63).

The ratio of the Bulgarian population from Northern Dobruđa dwindled, even if their numbers rose by 70% during 33 years (1880-1913). This paradox proves yet once again the true scale of the colonization initiated by the Romanian authorities. According to the historian Žeko Popov, around 10,000 Bulgarians had left Northern Dobruđa, forcibly, or by their own choice, soon after 1878 (Popov 1991:11). Nevertheless, 15,000 Bulgarians (the 10,000 inhabitants and their descendants) would not have had a significant impact on the ethno-demographic situation of the region in 1913.

The decreasing of the Turkish Muslims population was not the effect of a deliberate and systematic policy of the Romanian authorities. Still, confronted with a change in laws and habits as well as with the venality and abuses of local officials, many had decided to emigrate (Ülküsal 1966:24-44; Ekrem 1994: 86-90).

A statistic from 1908 showed that in Constanța County, the Romanians owned 260,163 hectares of arable land (65% of the total) and non-Romanians held 140,379 hectares (35%). In the other county from Romanian Dobruđa – Tulcea, the situation was exactly the opposite; the Romanians owned 57,341 hectares (35.7%) out of the total 160,654 hectares of arable land. Thus, in Northern Dobruđa, the Romanians had in possession 317,504 hectares from a total of 561,296, or 56.5% (Vlădescu-Olt 1908: 132).

Still, the Bulgarian peasants enjoyed a relative prosperity. A Romanian statistic, which was used three decades later by the Bulgarian jurist and propagandist Ivan St. Penakov (1883-1971), revealed that in 1906, in the Tulcea County, the 9,742 Romanian households, had a combined area of 97,000 hectares (on average, 10 hectares for each), whereas the 5,794 Bulgarian households totaled 85,504 hectares (14.75 hectares for each) (Penakov 1939: 20). "The Bulgarians made good use, more than the Romanians, of the law regulations concerning the land ownership there (in Northern Dobrudja). They seized more lands than our people because they are more parsimonious and more avid for lands", stated the Macedo-Romanian lawyer Achile N. Pineta (1882-1953) in a speech held in the Assembly of Deputies in April 1922 (D.A.D.-S.O. 1921-1922: 347).

In view of the above, we can agree William Miller's conclusion that the process of ethnic Romanization in Northern Dobrudja after 1878 relied on material arguments such as the development of transportation routes (maritime and terrestrial) and soil enhancing operations (Miller 1927: 393), and less on arable parcels confiscation.

Consequently, three decades after Romania had gained Northern Dobrudja, the region was fully integrated in the national state and in 1909, it was granted the right of representation in the Parliament. The Ottoman land system and the *miri* topic definitely belonged to the past. Anyway, the granting of full political rights to the population from Northern Dobrudja in 1909 was made only after the Romanian ethnic, social and economic elements in the province had become predominant.

Contrary to the Romanian approach, after 1878, the Bulgarian state chose a slower and more sinuous path for transforming *miri* properties into full properties. Hence, in rural areas, the Turkish properties (*Chiflik*) were split between Bulgarian peasants. Many Muslims (Turks, Tartars, and Circassians) left the country and their attempts to return were met with hostility by the Bulgarian population who had been marginalized and oppressed for almost five centuries (Jelavich I 1983/2000: 324-325).

These violent ethnic evolutions, which also occurred in Southern Dobrudja, were a violation of article 12 from the Berlin Peace Treaty: "Muslim proprietors or others who may take up their abode outside the Principality may continue to hold there their real property, by farming it out, or having it administered by third parties. A Turkish-Bulgarian Commission shall be appointed to settle, within a period of two years, all questions relative to the mod of alienation, working, or use on the account of the Ottoman Government, of property belonging to the State and religious foundation (*vakifs*), as well as of the question regarding the interests of private persons engaged therein." (Turan 1998: 201).

The mixt Bulgarian-Turkish Commission, which met between 1880 and 1885 and had 85 sessions, failed to find a resolution for the issues it was supposed to solve. Out of the 71 sessions taking place until August 1883, 56 dealt with the *miri* properties and the rest with *vakifs*. Time was on the Bulgarian side, whose representatives demanded that full property rights over *miri* lands that had just come into the possession of the autonomous Principality of Bulgaria should be transferred *ipso facto* from the Ottoman Empire to the new political entity. However, the Ottoman opposition was unefficient, since the land seizures and devastations of Muslim places of worship continued (Turan 1998: 202-203).

At the same time with the decline of the Turkish (and other Muslims too) population and land ownership, the term *miri* was used fewer and fewer times in the Bulgarian laws and jurisprudence, but no laws or regulations had explicitly stated neither the dissolution of the *miri* system, nor its transformation into a full property system, in accordance with the Western modern principles.

Still, in Eastern Rumelia the situation was different, because shortly before its reunification with Bulgaria, sultan Abdul Hamid had promulgated on July 15th 1885, a *hattiheimaium*, which simply transformed the *miri* properties from the province into *mülk* (full) properties (Roman 1928: 281). This rather ambiguous situation gave way to different interpretations in Bulgarian media during 1878-1913 but these disputes were important just at a theoretical level. After 1913, as Romania gained Southern Dobrudja, the *miri* issue became an important one, with many practical consequences, a topic that provoked fierce controversy opposing Romania to Bulgaria but also between Romanians, promoters or critics of state projects meant to colonize the southern part of the region⁴.

Especially for the period 1878-1892, Romanian nationalist authors could mention a series of Bulgarian references

⁴ Out of the many contributions on this topic we could mention:

–for the Bulgarian perspective: Kolarov 1928; Toşev 1925; Toşev 1928; Penakov 1929a;

–for the Romanian perspective: Zamfirolu 1919; Roman, Brătescu 1921: 17-32; Pineta 1922; Pineta 1924;

–for the pro-Bulgarian perspective of some Romanian politicians, jurists and publicists: Penakov 1929b.

In time, some authors have changed their viewpoints (Pineta, Zamfirolu) although the data itself remained unchanged. Relevant for the discussion are also the Romanian parliamentary debates on the enactment of laws concerning the real estate properties from Southern Dobrudja (March 1914, July 1921, April 1922, April 1924).

to the existence of the *miri* land regime in (Northern) Bulgaria. Thus, in 1928, Toma Ionescu cited the "Law for the Household and *Chiflik* Lands" enacted by the Bulgarian Parliament on February 5th 1885, according to which only those who had taken possession of *miri* lands in the ways specified by the Ottoman law were entitled to own *miri* properties (Ionescu 1928: 264-265). In a brochure published in the autumn of 1921, Ioan N. Roman and Constantin Brătescu mentioned a few directives of the Sofia Court of Cassation from 1890-1891 (Roman & Brătescu 1921: 17-18). In 1925, the Aromanian lawyer Achile N. Pineta drafted an index with 86 decisions of the Sofia Court of Cassation for 1884-1899, among which 44 were related to the period 1892-1899. These proved the existence of *miri* properties (Pineta 1922: 114-115). The Bulgarian response could largely be expressed in the words of Ivan St. Penakov (1929b): "Without explicitly abolishing the *miri* property system, in fact, the new legislation (after 1878, our note) suggested this" (p. ix).

An important stage, but, as we shall see, not a final one, for the modernization of the Bulgarian land legislation, would be the "Law on property, goods and servitudes", adopted in February 1904, after 12 years of proposals, counterproposals and delays, and applied since September 1st, the same year. In the meantime, the Turkish population continued to lose its importance, both at a demographic level and in terms of its socioeconomic status. According to Stevan K. Pavlowitch (1999/2002) "it's estimated that until 1880, both in Bulgaria and in Eastern Rumelia too, less than 25% of arable land was owned by the Turks so that until 1900 this figure would further decrease to less than 15%" (p. 139).

Although, the 1904 law represented, all in all, a step forward, there were further discussions and contradictory speculations regarding the continuity of the *miri* system. During the summer of 1907, the members of the Liberal Cabinet led by Petăr Todorov Gudev, addressed a reverential letter to Ferdinand I of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha (1887-1918), on his 20th year of reign, in which the law adopted three years before, under the government of Rajčo Stojanov Petrov, was seen as the end of all Ottoman judicial legacies in the Bulgarian land owning system (Pineta 1922:129-130). On the other hand, also in 1907, in a classic monograph on Bulgaria, Leon de Launay stated that: "Theoretically, the State is the universal land owner; in legal terms, the rightful owner is, in fact, just a perpetual and hereditary worker" (p. 404). Therefore, the law was open to more than one interpretation.

Those authors who viewed the 1904 law as acknowledging full property rights for *miri* land owners (farmers) relied on three aspects: the legal provision, which stated that "from that point on, *miri* properties would no longer be acquired in Bulgaria"; the fact that the law made no reference to arable lands as State property, or to the limitations and conditions specific for *miri* lands in the traditional Ottoman law; and on article 326, the last from the law, which eliminated all other provisions in effect on September 1st 1904, when the new law came into force (Penakov 1929: 2-8).

However, the three arguments are not immune to attacks. Thus, the usage of the future tense and the principle that laws do not apply retroactively, confirmed by explicit declarations of Minister N. Ghenadiev, recorded in the proceedings' minutes, could make one believe that the law prohibited only the creation of some new *miri* properties on state owned lands (R.N.A.-B., fond *Stoica Vasile*, d. I/116, l.122-123).

The absence of further specifications in the law makes it essentially, an *ex silentio* argument, as I. N. Roman and Constantin Brătescu noticed, and therefore not a very reliable one (Roman & Brătescu 1921: 28-31). Furthermore, the situation could be compared with that from Ottoman Turkey, where the demise of attributes characteristic for *miri* properties did not actually mean that the system itself disappeared, at least not until its explicit denouncing in 1926.

Finally, the last article of the 1904 law revoked only the previous ordinary regulations, not the general view on the land ownership system, which had been inherited from Ottoman Empire and integrated in the Bulgarian judicial traditions.

Achile Pineta has actually identified one decision of the Sofia Court of Cassation (472/June 25th 1910) confirming the existence of the *miri* land regime. The Bulgarian Supreme Court had explicitly invalidated a local court's decision, which had set a 15 years period for the foreclosure of property rights for a small parcel, but the Supreme Court concluded that was a *miri* property for which the foreclosure period was set at 10 years (Pineta 1924: 113-114). Interestingly, I. N. Roman showed that there were less than 10 years between September 1st 1904 and April 1914, when the first Romanian law on the organization of the territory gained in 1913 was enacted, so that farmers on *miri* lands from Southern Dobrudja could not claim the foreclosure period for the state had expired, in order to become full owners of the lands they (had) cultivated (Roman 1928: 293-294).

Leaving aside some of the judicial aspects of the issue, the population from Southern Dobrudja had undergone through some considerable changes. The Turkish Muslim population, which was predominant in 1877, continually decreased in numbers during the following years. In the eve of Southern Dobrudja's annexation to Romania (1913), the Bulgarians were still outnumbered by the Turks in the region, but the former represented 43% of the total population (Ungureanu 2009: 54, 76-77). Nevertheless, despite the fact that they were still numerically inferior to the Turkish-Tartar population, the Bulgarians from Southern Dobrudja dominated the socioeconomic life of the region. According to Ivan

Penakov, the Bulgarians owned three quarters of all the arable lands in the region and controlled, almost entirely, the specialized economic sectors, such as industry, trade and banking system (Penakov 1940: 25).

The relation between the apparent rise of the Bulgarian population, both at a demographic and socioeconomic level, and the preservation of a certain ambiguity towards the Ottoman heritage in terms of land owning system, especially the case of *miri* properties, could not be downplayed as a mere chronological parallelism. By deliberately not providing a definitive, *de jure* resolution to the *miri* issue, the Bulgarian leaders had actually preserved some means of action against the Turkish minority, but also against other possible outcasts within state borders. Quite a few authors noticed this. Among them, a certain I. Sarmanioti, an Aromanian lawyer, who, during a meeting held in Balchick, in 1929, stated that: "The Bulgarians took the lands from the Turkish state and then seized them from the Turks; they did not change the Turkish laws. Therefore, the lands from Quadrilater belonged to the Bulgarian state and once the province was annexed, they became the possession of the Romanian state!"(R.N.A.-B. fond *Diracția Generală a Poliției*. d. 194/1929, I.37).

This ambiguity proved to be a powerful double-edged sword, one that would pass into the hands of the Romanian state in 1913, alongside with Southern Dobrudja. We shall discuss the evolution of the land regime in Southern Dobrudja during the Romanian administration (1913-1916, 1919-1940) in a subsequent study.

However, we cannot conclude our analysis without mentioning the fact that the Romanian special legislation constantly referred to the ambiguous Turkish-Bulgarian judicial legacy. Until 1924, Romanian lawmakers modified the regime of land ownership in Southern Dobrudja no fewer than four times (in April 1914, July 1921, April 1922 and April 1924), constantly invoking the judicial situation from 1913, which was ambiguous enough to be relentlessly interpreted. These interpretations either favoured the state (the 1914, 1922 and especially the 1924 law), or the farmers (the 1921 law)⁵. Between 1925 and 1940, in a relatively secure legislative context, the Romanian authorities would inconsistently and incoherently guide the colonization of the region.

To sum up, we can state that during 1873-1913, with different means, adapted to difficult circumstances, both Romania and Bulgaria have used the Ottoman judicial legacy related to land ownership in order to mitigate the effects of other aspects of the Ottoman legacy, especially ethnic, demographic and social, which had an impact upon the consolidation of their own national states. Thus, the Romanian state took control over a limited number of arable lands in Northern Dobrudja, or it acquired sums of money, set unilaterally, in exchange for the explicit transformation of *miri* properties into full properties. In (Northern) Bulgaria, where there was a *de facto* process of liquidation of Turkish properties, the authorities preferred to preserve *de jure* a certain degree of ambiguity regarding the *miri* regime as a weapon against the Muslim minority. This is exactly what sultan Abdul Hamid had tried to avoid for the Muslims from Eastern Rumelia when enacting the July 15th 1885 law and what the Romanian authorities would try to use, ineffectively and inconsistently, to their advantage when Southern Dobrudja was a part of Romania.

List of Abbreviations Used in the Text and References

Arab Women 1996 = *Arab Women between defiance and restraint*, edited by Suha Sabbagh, New York, Interlink Publishing Group.

BHR = "Bulgarian Historical Review", Sofia.

d. = dossier

D.A.D.-S.O. 1914 = *Dezbaterile Adunării Deputaților* [The Debates from the Deputies' Assembly], *Sesiunea Ordinară 1914* [The Ordinary Session 1914], Bucharest, National Printing Press.

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l. = leaf.

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⁵ The full text of the four laws is available in: *D. A. D.-S. O. 1914*: 360-386; *R.N.A., fond Parlament, dossier 1902*, l. 2-10; 1955, l. 178; 2062, l. 338-340.

p. = page.

R.N.A.-B. = Romanian National Archives, Bucharest.

Trans. = Translated by.

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