

REVIEW

Filiz Tutku Aydın Bezikoğlu, Metin Omer, Edige Burak Atmaca, *Bir Zamanlar Dobruca. İki Dünya Savaşı Arasında Kırım Tatar Millî Hareketi. A fost cândva în Dobrogea. Mișcarea Națională Tătară Crimeeană în perioada interbelică. Once Upon a Time in Dobruja. The Crimean Tatar National Movement in the Interwar Period*, Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı, Ankara, 2023, 269 p.

The monograph concerning the Tatar national movement's relocation to Dobrogea after the political and ideological changes in Russia following the end of World War I stands as one of the most formidable works to have emerged in recent times. Archival investigations, a rich and evocative photographic collection, and perhaps most importantly, the reexamination of the communal developments of the Crimean Tatars in interwar Dobrogea, are the primary arguments that structure this volume, which is printed in an exceptional graphic form.

Filiz Tutku Aydın Bezikoğlu (Ankara Sosyal Bilimler Üniversitesi/Ankara Social Sciences University), Metin Omer (Ovidius University of Constanța), and Edige Burak Atmaca (Uniwersytet Warszawski/University of Warsaw) are three diligent and renowned researchers of the developments within the Tatar communities. They have combined their intellectual forces in the editorial project aimed at redefining the construction of Tatar's national identity during the 1930s in the Dobrogea region. It is important to emphasize that the documentary value of the volume is significantly supported by a photographic archive, largely circulated for the first time after its creation more than eight decades ago. Attention is also drawn to the research methodology applied by the three authors in this project. Specifically, the intrinsic link between this photographic archival base and the relevant analysis of the broader phenomena that shaped the evolution of Tatar communities between the Danube and the Black Sea is noteworthy. Additionally, the authors provide an in-depth examination of Tatar institutions in the 1930s and early 1940s.

This section primarily addresses the effects of European-oriented modernization, especially concerning the changes in the Republic of Turkey, emigration, the opening of democratization processes, and the connection of communities to the broader transformations in the host state (Romania). Oral history, which has some editorial precedents brought forward by the Institute for the Study of Minority Issues in Cluj Napoca (such as the 2016 volume edited by Adriana Cupcea, Manuela Marin, and Metin Omer titled "*The Muslim Seminary of Medgidia. Documents and Memory*") has been thoroughly reconsidered by the three authors. As a result of this effort, a clearer and more vividly colored picture of these Crimean Tatar communities in Dobrogea has emerged.

Conceptually, in the chapter titled "Kırım Tatar Millî Hareketinin Ortaya Çıkışı/ The Emergence of the Crimean Tatar National Movement", Filiz Tutku Aydın Bezikoğlu explores the ethnonyms "Crimean Tatars" and "Dobrujan Tatars," focusing on the political and ideological dynamics behind them (32 p.). She explains that the privileges granted by the Ottoman Empire to Muslim communities, such as military service, self-governance through their leaders, economic opportunities, and the millet system (a type of multicultural structure), helped preserve and even nurture Crimean Tatar culture in Dobruja, forming a microcosm.

Although these privileges were curtailed, and the Crimean Tatar population decreased during the Romanian administration (after 1878), Romania's relatively liberal and pluralistic environment – offering education, press freedom, associations, voting rights, and cultural liberties – enabled the Muslim community in Dobruja to modernize and rebuild its identity. Filiz Tutku Aydın Bezikoğlu concludes that Dobruja became the center of the national revival of the Crimean Tatar diaspora during the interwar period (17 p.).

She highlights the profiles of significant leaders and institutions, such as the Muslim Seminary of Medgidia, figures like Mehmet Niyazi and Selim Abdulachim, and the publication *Emel*, as evidence.

In the chapter dedicated to Mehmet Niyazi ("Romanya'daki Kırım Tatar Millî Hareketinin Ideoloğu/ Mehmet Niyazi: Ideologue of the Crimean Tatar National Movement in Romania"), researcher Metin Omer focuses on how Niyazi outlined the key identity coordinates of the Tatars in Dobrogea. This primarily occurred through civic initiatives that resulted in a reassessment of the community's identity memory, particularly with the resurgence of the idea of their homeland, Crimea, which by the 1920s had become part of the Soviet Union (73 p.).

A key site of memory for Niyazi is his funerary monument erected in 1932 in Medgidia. This monument was initiated by the group around the "*Emel*" magazine and thoroughly reexamined by Omer, who highlights the symbolic significance of the "*Tarak Tamga*". With the creation and commemoration of this monument, this symbol was used for the first time in the history of the Crimean Tatars (74 p.).

Metin Omer also offers a fundamental reconsideration of the evolution of the Dobrujan Tatar community through his analysis of a core identity institution, the Muslim Seminary of Medgidia ("Mecidiye Müslüman Semineri: Dobruca'da Kırım Tatar Millî Hareketinin Eğitim Merkezi/ Medgidia Muslim Seminary: The Educational Center of the Crimean Tatar National Movement"). Established in 1889, the seminary became one of the most enduring institutions of the Muslim communities in Romania, particularly in Dobrogea, functioning until 1967 in Babadag and then Medgidia – two cities foundational to the Turkish and Tatar identity.

Metin Omer emphasizes that the seminary provided education and influenced ideas and intellectual currents designed to bridge the gaps between Muslim communities and the new administrative, political, and ideological realities in Romania from the late 19th century onwards. He delves into the thematic content of religious subjects taught at the seminary during the interwar decades and World War II, noting how these curricula were influenced by the reforms of Mustafa Kemal adopted in the Republic of Turkey (89 and 92 pp.).

Edige Burak Atmaca's research highlights the role of Müstecip Ülküsal in shaping the Tatar identity and culture in Dobruja. In the chapter titled "*Dobruca'daki Uyanışta Müstecip Ülküsal'ın Rolü ve Emel Dergisi'nin Önemi/ The Role of Müstecip Ülküsal in Raising Awareness in Dobruja and the Significance of Emel,*" Atmaca provides a thorough examination of Ülküsal's contributions and the impact of the *Emel* magazine. Atmaca asserts that *Emel* played a critical role in the intellectual and ideological competition within Muslim communities in Romania and served as a driving force for both identity construction and modernization.

Atmaca emphasizes Ülküsal's efforts in uniting Crimean Tatars and Turkish communities by fostering relationships not only with the Romanian state and political parties but also with Turkey. Ülküsal's diplomacy helped raise awareness for the Tatar cause and promoted a tolerant perspective toward the community (111 p.).

Moreover, Atmaca explores the relationship between Tatar leaders and institutions in Romania with their counterparts in Poland during the 1930s - an under-explored topic in Romanian academic literature. One notable example is a detailed chapter about a 1937 visit by the *Dobruja Turkish Cultural Society* to Poland, which sheds light on bilateral relations between Bucharest and Warsaw during the interwar period ("*Dobruca Türk Hars Cemiyetinin Polonya Ziyareti/ Dobruja Turkish Cultural Society's Visit to Poland,*" (143-171 pp.). This research underlines the transnational connections and the significance of cultural diplomacy in the development of minority identities during a transformative period for the Crimean Tatar diaspora in Dobruja.

Filiz Tutku Aydın Bezikoğlu's research on the oral history of the Crimean Tatar communities in Dobruja stands out as an exemplary piece of scholarship in an otherwise challenging field of study. In her chapter titled "*Dobruca'da Kültürel ve Geleneksel Yaşam/ The Traditional and Cultural Life in Dobruja*" (173-239 pp.), she skillfully reconstructs the cultural and traditional life of the Tatar communities by drawing on family memories and rich photographic archives. This material, often preserved exclusively through oral traditions, is deftly used to bring to life the socio-cultural dynamics of these communities.

Bezikoğlu argues that "*all the customs and traditions that made up the traditional life of the Crimean Tatars in Dobruja were a continuation of those from Crimea*". However, she also notes that these elements gradually evolved, adopting specific

characteristics due to interactions with the majority Romanian community and other ethnic groups in the region (173 p.). Her work, therefore, not only serves as a testament to the historical continuity of the Tatar communities but also highlights the unique transformations that arose from their integration within the multicultural landscape of Dobruja. Through her rigorous methodology, she successfully valorizes institutional traditions and communal practices, setting a new standard for research in this domain.

Another necessary chapter of the volume, dedicated to the emigration of Dobruja Tatars from Romania to Turkey, is authored by Metin Omer (*"Romanya'dan Türkiye'ye Göçler/ Migration From Romania To Turkey"*, 241-263 pp.). Omer establishes that this phenomenon, which was a continuous process during the interwar period, can be analyzed from at least four key perspectives: (1) that of the Turkish-Tatar community, (2) the Romanian state, (3) the Ottoman Empire and later the Republic of Turkey, and (4) Romanian-Turkish relations (246 p.).

Following the signing of the Emigration Convention concerning the Turkish population of Dobruja on September 4, 1936, departures from Dobruja intensified compared to previous periods. As a result, Omer writes, significant communities of Crimean Tatars from Dobruja settled in Turkey, maintaining continuous ties that became a bridge between Ankara and Bucharest (263 p.).

This volume is one of the most successful, well-documented, and captivating scholarly accounts of the daily life of Dobruja Tatars, the evolution of Crimean Tatar community identity in the province between the Danube and the sea, and institutional history between the two World Wars. The merit lies not only in the professional experience of the three authors but also in the valuable documentary materials introduced into scientific circulation.

Florin Anghel*

* "Ovidius" University of Constanța, Romania. fl_anghel@yahoo.com