

GEODEMOGRAPHICAL ASPECTS OF THE ARMENIAN POPULATION IN MOLDAVIA IN THE 19TH CENTURY

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Geodemographische Aspekte der Armenierbevölkerung vom Moldau im 19. Jahrhundert. Die Armenier stellt eine alte ethnische Gruppe auf das Gebiet von Moldau dar, weil die älteste urkundliche Erwähnung vom Anfang des 15. Jahrhunderts stammt. Es sind zahlreiche Charakterzüge dieser Bevölkerung zu vermerken, zwischen denen die Vorliebe für das Stadthabitat und die Wirtschafts- und Handelstätigkeiten. Betreffs ihre Demographie kann man eine relative Zahlstagnierung bemerken und ebenfalls eine Ausdauer der größten Gemeinschaften in den bedeutendsten Städte vom Nord- und Mittelmoldau sowie in zahlreiche Städte vom Südmoldau, wie Galați und Focșani. Am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts wurde ihre Konzentration in der Moldau = 55% aus der ganzen Armenierbevölkerung des Rumänischen Königreiches und in der Dobrudscha = 28% (besonders in den Hafenstädte Constanța und Tulcea) offenbar, in der Walachei die rumänischen Provinz mit der niedrigsten Armenierzahl darstellt.

The Armenians have been present on the historical territory of Moldavia from early times, the presence of their communities being traced back as early as the Middle Ages, both in the south-eastern part of Moldavia, in Chilia and Cetatea Albă and in the north, the Armenians in this region coming mainly from Poland and settling down in Suceava, Botoșani, Hotin, Iași, etc.

The preponderantly urban distribution of this population was noticeable even in 1803, when, according to the data registered in *Condica Liuzilor* (the Liuzilor Registrar), such communities lived in Roman – 104 families, Botoșani – 62 families, Chișinău – 44 families and Târgu Ocna – 7 families; however, some other Armenian communities might have existed as well, but without being either registered or mentioned by any census of the time.

As far as Iași, the Moldavian capital, is concerned, in the second half of the 18th century (1774), 114 Armenian families were registered here and according to the existing data of the period they were present mainly in the suburbs, e.g., Podu Vechi, Bărboi and Cărvăsăriei.

An attempt to identify the Armenians of Iași at the beginning of the 19th century (1808) was made by consulting the data provided by annual statistics, but the process itself proved to be rather difficult because these nationals were not grouped separately and most of them were not even mentioned by their own ethnic name; so, identification was frequently relied on suppositions that names were of Armenian origin (such as Ovanes, Garabet, Hacic, etc.), thus the results obtained are less reliable.

Important information comes also from some ecclesiastical statistics made at the beginning of the 19th century (between 1808 and 1812) during the Russian administration of the two Romanian Principalities; the above-mentioned statistics focused especially on the clergy, the monks and only occasionally on parishioners; in a statistics regarding the Armenian communities of Moldavian and Wallachian towns, one finds 1,159 families present in 13 Moldavian towns, attesting to the uninterrupted existence of some old Armenian groups in northern Moldavia was attested (Fig. 1): first and foremost in Botoșani – 328 families, then Roman, Iași, Cetatea Albă, as well as other urban communities with a certain trading leanings, for example in Focșani and Chișinău (surprisingly enough, Suceava was not

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mentioned, which may be either an omission or a reality, namely that the Armenian community had been regressing for some time.)

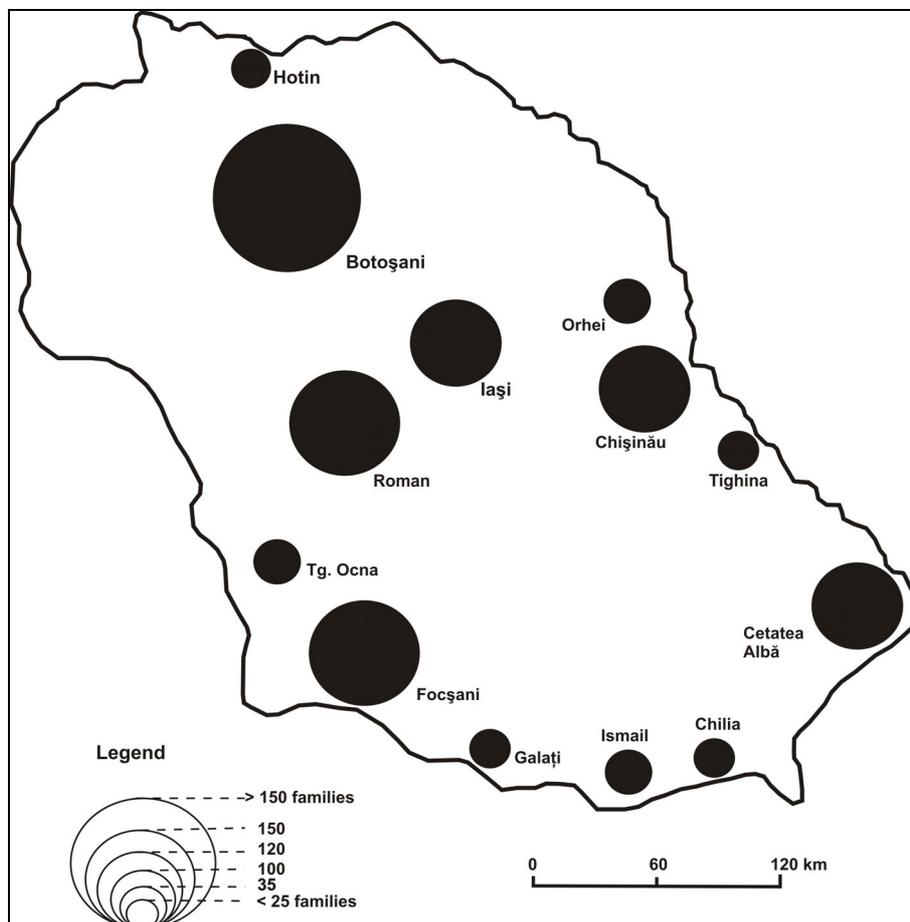


Fig. 1 – The distribution of Armenians in historical Moldavia at the beginning of the 19th century.

Towards the middle of the 19th century, the 1859 census confirmed (Fig. 2a) the presence of 3,161 Armenians in Moldavia, apart from another 274 who lived in Cahul and Ismail, that is in the south of Basarabia.

In the north, Botoșani continued to hold a leading position, which was obviously due to the strong Armenian community settled down in that town which was the county-capital. Some other counties like Roman (most Armenians lived in Roman city), Iași or Putna could be added to the list.

At the same time, Suceava registered a significant numerical decrease of what used to be one of the strongest and most numerous Armenian populations in Moldavia. This was the result of a series of factors e.g. the northern part of the old county of Suceava was incorporated into the Austrian Empire (the county capital, Suceava, where the greatest part of Armenians lived, now belonged to the Austrians); after 1775 some Armenian families migrated to Bucovina, which was also part of the Austrian Empire (and among others, at the end of the 18th century, the Armenians living in Moldavia lost the right of landowning), etc.

As a matter of fact, in the second half of the 19th century, a major decrease in the number of the Armenian population occurred throughout Bucovina – 1,710 Armenians being registered in 1869, and only 757 at the beginning of the 20th century, in 1900, which is less than half.

The first half of the 19th century witnessed both a numerical and economic growth of some southern Moldavian communities; here, besides the older Armenian nucleus in Focșani, the communities of Tecuci and especially of Galați became well-known, the latter due to the development of the town of Galați itself as Danubian port.

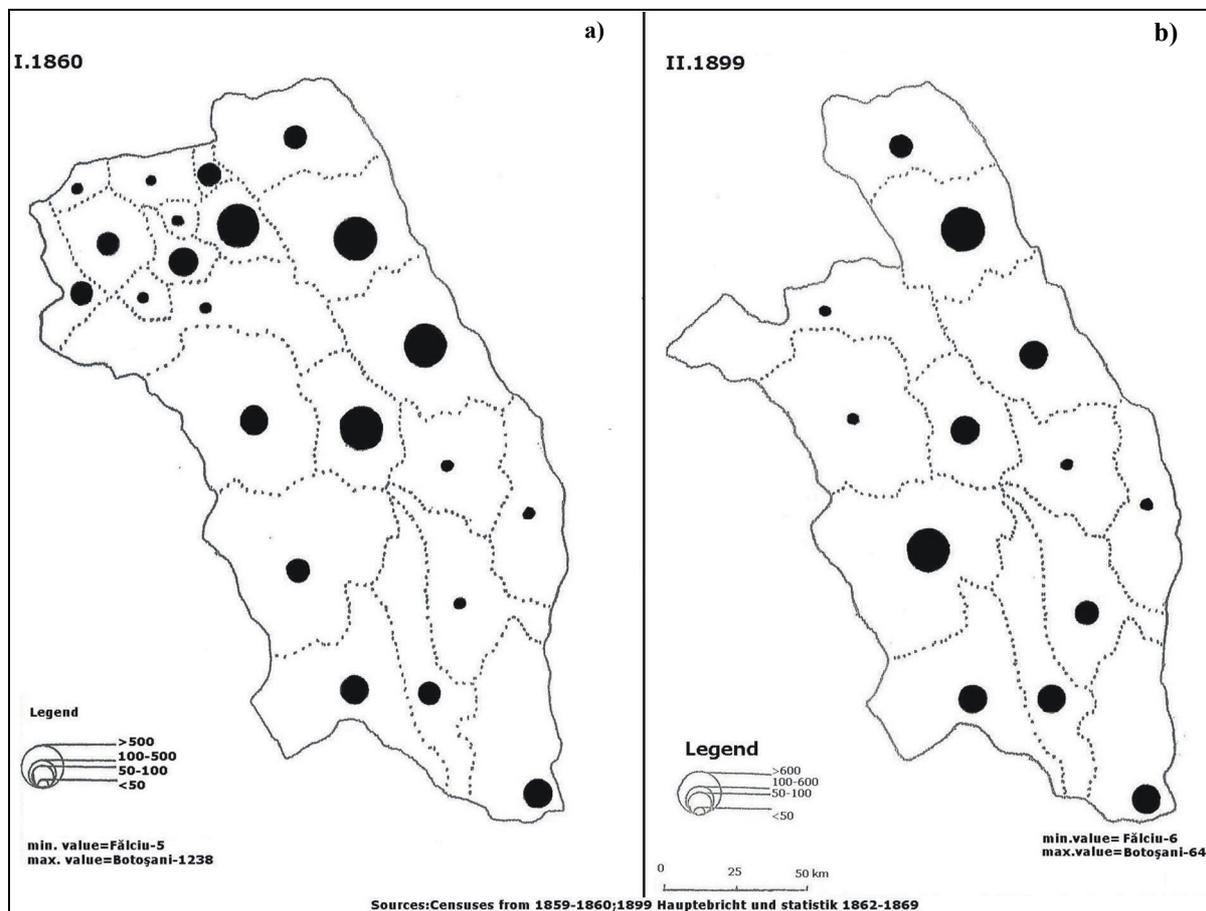


Fig. 2 – The distribution of Armenians in Moldavia, in: a) 1860; b) 1899.

Thus, it became more than obvious that just like in the case of Jews, Armenian groups displayed a tendency to move towards the south of Moldavia or even farther, to Wallachia.

It is worth mentioning that, in the process of their migration, Armenians chose to settle down in the most important towns of these regions. Towards the end of the 19th century, this population in Moldavia was almost the same as that registered 4 decades before – 3,181 in 1889, a figure which definitely placed Moldavia on a leading position (ahead of all the other Romanian provinces) with 55% of its population of Armenian origin.

The county distribution of the Armenian population was quite similar to that of the previous situation (1859), which meant that there were still important Armenian communities in the counties of Botoșani, Putna or Roman and smaller ones in Vaslui, Fălciu, Suceava, etc. (Fig. 2b).

However, several major changes occurred and they affected mainly the counties of Botoșani, Iași or Roman, which despite maintaining a leading position, registered a significant decrease of this ethnicity - Botoșani (649 Armenians in 1899), Roman, etc. On the other hand, there were counties (Bacău, Putna or Covurlui) in which their numbers would increase.

This phenomenon revealed a certain tendency of Armenian people to move from the northern regions, where they used to form a great majority, towards the southern parts, at the same time becoming more homogeneous numerically in the largest towns of Moldavia.

Their eagerness to become part of the urban habitat was due primarily to urban economic activities, a feature traceable to the end of the 19th century as well – approximately 70% of these nationals choosing to live in the urban settlements of Moldavia, especially in the county-capitals: Botoșani, Focșani, Roman, Galați and Iași, obviously exceptions did exist. For example, in Bacău County - the most important Armenian community lived in Târgu Ocna (304 people), whereas in Putna County, besides the Focșani community consisting of 327 Armenians, there still was another one at Panciu (125 people), similarly important.

Towards the end of the 19th century, of all the 5,787 Armenians living in the Romanian Kingdom, almost 55% settled in Moldavia (3,181), 28% in Dobrogea (1,630) and only 17% in Wallachia. All these figures prove that this population viewed Moldavia as one of their favourite regions to settle in (Fig. 3).

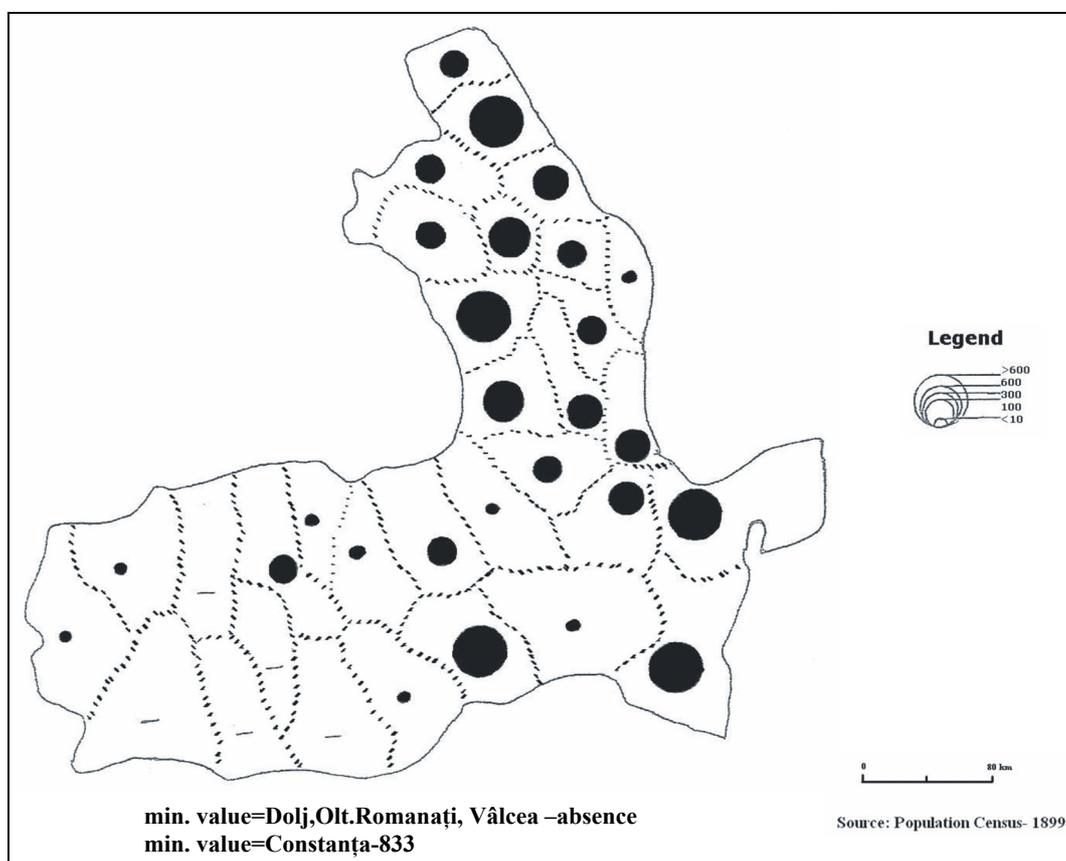


Fig. 3 – The distribution of Armenians in the Romanian Kingdom at the end of the 19th century.

The counties in which a greater number of Armenians lived at that time, were in Dobrogea: Constanța – 833 and Tulcea – 797 due mainly to the port-cities of Constanța (472 people – 56.6%) and Tulcea (245 people – 30.7%); other towns were Babadag (218 people), Sulina (154) and Medgidia (34); in all these settlements they were involved especially in trade.

A few other Moldavian counties can be added to the previously mentioned ones: Botoșani, Bacău and Putna. Here, just like in all the other cases studied, Armenians were preponderantly townsfolk.

In Wallachia, the only county where Armenians were found in large numbers was Ilfov due to their community in Bucharest.

Brăila is another county worth mentioning alongside Ilfov, with 249 Armenians being registered (242 of them in the town of Brăila alone).

In Ilfov, as well as in Brăila, the same trading activities determined this population to choose the urban habitat.

In other counties e.g. Olt, Romanați, Vâlcea, etc. there were very few Armenians (frequently no more than 10 people) or even absent from the statistics of the time.

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