

Bilder aus der Dobrudscha 1916-1918, Imagini din Dobrogea 1916-1918, translation by Gustav Rückert (Constanța: Ex Ponto, 2011), 374pp., ISBN: 978-606-598-073-0

by Costel COROBAN*

Almost a century ago, during World War I, Germany and her allies had occupied Dobruja for two consecutive years (from 1916 to 1918). The fact that during this relatively short period the Germans found the time required to publish a 400 pages-long illustrated monograph of the region¹ tells us much about their level of civilization. Another proof is that earlier this year, by the grace of Mister Gustav Rückert and under the aegis of the German Democratic Forum of Constanța², a translation of this very interesting collection of early XXth century images and studies of Dobruja has been fully translated in Romania and published. Recently, more and more information regarding this part of Romania during the Great War has become available to Romanian researchers³, which is an encouraging and inspiring fact.

The translation benefits from an “Introductory Word” signed by the reputed Dobrujan historians Professor Dr. Valentin Ciorbea and Dr.



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¹ Deutsche Etappe Verwaltung in der Dobrudscha, *Bilder aus der Dobrudscha*, Constanța, 1918.

² And also under the aegis of the Center for the Study and Research of the History and Civilization of the Black Sea Area (part of “Ovidius” University of Constanța), and of the “Ovidius” Association of Archivists and Friends of the Archives in Constanța.

³ See, for example, Costel Coroban, *The Scottish Women’s Hospitals in Romania during World War I*, in „The Valahian Journal of Historical Studies” No. 14, December 2010, pp. 53-69.

Constantin Cheramidoglu. The ending of the volume brings forward a very rich and valuable “Bibliography of the Dobrujan Germans” thanks to Professor Vasile Ciobanu, one of the most prolific researchers of Romania’s Germans.

The volume itself is a richly illustrated collection of studies signed by seven personalities of German science who happened to be serving in the Army at that time. The opening study is entitled “Overview of the Geology of Dobruja” (p. 1-32), being signed by Professor Freiherr von Huene from the University of Tübingen, who at the time was serving in the engineer troops. The author’s enthusiasm and interest is remarkable, as are his accurate references to the history of the region under scrutiny.

Robert Ritter von Dombrowsky – who confesses that during his youth he considered Dobruja “as synonymous with El Dorado” (p. 32) – is the author of the second study: “The Mammals and Birds of Dobruja”. He is followed by Dr. R. Marcus, lieutenant in the engineer troops, who is the author of two contributions: “The Danube and the Black Sea” (p. 45-69), and “Fishing in Dobruja” (p. 70-91). A thorough researcher, Dr. Marcus proves to understand very well the important geopolitical role of the Danube and the Black Sea in the history and Dobruja, and furthermore offers enlightening information on all the aspects of the life of local fishermen.

The Principal of the Economic High School of Bucharest, Dr. H. Südhof, emphasizes “The Economic Importance of Dobruja” by discussing the mostly agricultural and livestock-related character of the local occupations, while also offering interesting details on the surfaces of arable lands. His study is followed by that of the famous archaeologist Professor Carl Schuchhardt – director of the Ethnography Museum in Berlin –, whose “Archaeological Researches in Dobruja” (p. 110-130) represents one of the best documented parts of the volume. Professor Schuchhardt discusses mostly about Trajan’s wave, the monument from Adamclisi and the excavations done at Cernavoda and Constanta in 1917. The same author also signs “A Trip into Dobruja 32 Years Ago” (p. 293-315), which is an interesting account of his first periegesis of the area.

The largest contribution to the volume belongs to Dr. Paul Traeger of Zelendorf-Berlin and is entitled “Studies on Dobruja” (p. 131-292). It is the result of an assiduous research of the area, which unsurprisingly focuses on the Germans of Dobruja. For this, Dr. Paul Traeger is rightfully considered the founder of Dobruja’s German studies. Undoubtedly one of the most copious parts of the volume is where Dr. Traeger describes the Russian “Skoptsy”⁴ sect (p. 203-210). Besides discussing their dubious morals which most of the time recommended castration (both for men and females – sic!) and purposes, we also find out that when the photographer asked a Skoptsy man and woman to

⁴ In Romanian, “scopiți”.

stay close to one another in order to photograph them, they were so baffled that ran away in response!

Moving on, the last article in the volume offers the German perspective of the “Campaign in Dobruja. War Reports from the German Army Headquarters”. This is a recollection of the war activity and confrontations taking place in Dobruja between the allied Ruso-Serbo-Romanian troops on one hand and the Central Powers forces on the other hand. In the end I would like to assure the reader – whether a researcher, an inhabitant of Dobruja or a history amateur – of the uniqueness and value of the volume under scrutiny here. If you will not let yourself be convinced by the abundance of interesting information offered by this book (being almost impossible not to identify yourself with at least one of the ethnic group present at that time in Dobruja), then you must rest assured because you are bound to be mesmerized by the 328 high-quality pictures included therein. In conclusion allow me to repeat my gratitude for the translator and sponsors of this splendid project, and assure them that their praiseworthy “deed” only goes on to strengthen Dobruja’s reputation of multicultural heaven.