

**ROMANIAN GRAIN MARKET
IN THE BRITISH RUSSOPHOBIA CONTEXT
(1829-1853)**

Cristian Constantin*

Abstract. *In this paper the author present the rivalry of the mouths of Danube market and the south Russian hinterland. The Russo-Turkish treaty of Adrianople (1829) marked the beginnings of a new era in the history of the Romanians, opening significant perspectives of political, institutional or national development, although Russia's status as protector of Wallachia and Moldavia overshadowed these prospects. The Danube River was the most appropriate artery for connect the Romanian market with central Europe, Black Sea and the Mediterranean markets. The Sulina channel was still the only way of access of commercial ships to and from the Danubian ports. Two cities, Galati in Moldavia and Braila in Wallachia, personify the interests and hopes of the principalities regarding the Danube. These ports are the result of the Romanian and British economic policies of this era.*

Keywords: *Braila, Galati, Odessa, grains, foreign trade, agriculture.*

* * *

Moldavia and Wallachia (The Danubian Principalities from 1859) had the chance of modernization after the Treaty at Adrianople in 1829 it took advantage of it, taking over the political Western model and connecting to the European economy. In the 1840-50s, Braila and Galati were among the greatest grain ports in the world. The sums necessary for modernization were obtained from economic activities, more numerous and important, and the agricultural exports played the

* Ph.D. Student, "The Lower Danube" University of Galați, constantin.p.cristian@gmail.com

primary role. Ștefan Zeletin's study on the beginning of capitalism and the emergence of the Romanian bourgeoisie generated much controversy at the time of publication. Among Zeletin's concerns was to prove that Romanian economic and political evolution was the result of becoming enmeshed at the beginning of the nineteenth century in global trade, whose symbol and engine was the British Empire¹. Zeletin's opinions can be easily understood by comparing the Romanian situation with the La Plata River region (Argentine, Uruguay) or the North Black Sea region. This region had a similar status in the world economy in the early and mid-nineteenth century, neutral economic zones supplying agricultural products to the great powers and benefiting from their rivalries.² Shortly after 1829, Danubian exports increased sufficiently to disturb economic and political circles in Russia.



Port of Braila in activity - in the middle of the 19 century
Source: Valeriu Avramescu Collection

An important consequence of the new British political initiative in South-Eastern Europe was the measure taken by Ambassador Stratford Canning – with the permission of the British authorities – to re-establish the Britain Consulate, close in 1816) in the Danubian Principalities with both a political and economic competence, as a point from which to observe the Russian's activities and also to promote more active trade in the

¹ Zeletin, 1925.

² Enache, 2013, 218.

Black Sea and on the Lower Danube. After the abolition of the monopoly exercised by the Levant Company, free enterprise on the part of all the merchants was to be encouraged and chiefly the Ionians, who were eager to establish flourishing business in that area.³

“The monopoly on merchandise and grain, the annual firmans that enumerated the goods requested from Constantinople, the tariffs fixed lower taxes for these articles than the current ones, the free supplies of butter, wood, wheat, sheep, horses, the privileges of Greek merchants, the produce seized by Turkish merchants from Rusciuk or wherever else are now fortunately all gone.”

(T. Lefebvre, 1857)⁴

The Treaty of Adrianople (2/14 September 1829) marked a decisive turning point in the economic history of the Lower Danubian area. From a commercial perspective, by article V of the main treaty the Romanian Principalities preserved “all privileges and immunities” and enjoyed “full liberty of commerce.” During the years 1828-1834, Walachia and Moldavia remained under Russian military occupation. Pavel Kiselev, the Russian Governor, introduced an administrative and legislative “constitution” known as the “Organic Statutes,” with a similar structure in the two provinces.⁵ Due to the reforms undertaken during the Russian occupation between 1829 and 1834, Moldavia and Wallachia gradually created their own system of border control, quarantines and passport checkpoints. The state imposed a stronger control over the circulation of people and goods between the two banks of the river, as well as a barrier against diseases.⁶ It was only after the 1829 that British trade with the Romanian Principalities received a formal structure. As one would expect, the most active trading centres were to be the Danubian ports of Braila and Galati, where British vice-consulates were soon established. The clearly defined intention of British Governments after 1829 was to counterbalance the distinct

³ Cernovodeanu, 1986, 34-36.

⁴ Lefebvre, 1858.

⁵ Ardeleanu, 2014, 54.

⁶ See Ștefan Petrescu, 2012, 97-116.

advantages held by Russia in this area, owing to the possession of the mouths of the Danube, as well as to the control which Russia exercised over international navigation on this river: even more since she also had great prospects of advancing towards the straits, thus endangering the precarious balance of power attained in the Eastern Question.⁷ “So, the British reply on economic grounds to Russian hegemony, consisted – among other things – in initiating an active trade with the Romanian Principalities.⁸”

David Urquhart played a major role in the genesis of British Russophobia in the nineteenth century. Talented pamphleteer and expert in Near Eastern affairs, he enjoyed a great public success during the period when Russian-British relations were affected by the conclusion of the Treaty of Unkiar-Skelleli (1833). With his Russophobic and Turcophilic sentiments development to an acute phase, he referred extensively in his writings to the Danube question, as it represented a good illustration of Russia's aggression to European trade. Thus, he considered that the enormous resources of Central and Eastern Europe, of the Danubian Principalities in the first place, and the navigation on the river aroused Russia's jealousy so that the latter employed ally convenient means to obstruct or block the increasing trade of her economic rivals. Russia's hold over the Danube Mouths was a perfect tool for accomplishing these malicious intentions, just as, consequently, the foreign response was to make the tsarist authorities respect the free navigation on international rivers, as settled by the 1815 Treaty of Vienna, or to find alternative routes to bring the Danubian produce to the European markets. Urquhart's brochure and the highly popular 'Portfolio' contributed enormously to popularising the Romanian question to the Western public.⁹

Romanian specialist in modern Romanian economic-history Constantin Ardeleanu in his book describes the Romanian agriculture in this mode: “The economy of the Romanian Principalities was determined by the character and structure of the local economy. Placed on difficult political coordinates, at the intersection of diverging imperial interests, the two provinces shared a favourable physical geography, taking into account the

⁷ See for detail in Paul Cernovodeanu, 1986, 51-97.

⁸ Cernovodeanu, 1986, 365.

⁹ See Ardeleanu, 2010, 337-352.

natural fertility of the land, Romanian's most valuable resource. The best soils for agriculture were the humus-rich chernozems, which account for large parts of the plain of Wallachia and Moldavia. Alongside this abundance of black earth, Romania agriculture enjoys a temperate climate, generally adequate precipitations averages, and a relatively long growing season. Contemporary sources are quasi-unanimous in considering agriculture as the "sole occupation" in the Danubian Principalities, and land cultivation its main competent¹⁰." In Wallachia, cultivated surfaces increased from about 511,000 ha in 1829 to 1,415,000 ha in 1863 and in Moldavia from 278,000 ha in 1829 to 1,000,000 ha in 1863.¹¹ The lack of a proper transport infrastructure strongly affected the development of Moldo-Wallachia's economy, the state of public roads being "deplorable". Land transportations of goods was made by ox or bullock driven carts, prepared by the peasants who carried their goods to the Danubian outlets. With productions increase and higher demands on Western markets, the transport of goods by professional carriers became a lucrative enterprise. Many carters established partnerships and made caravans, which advanced slowly towards the large Danubian ports. According to the Constantin Ardeleanu: "Nevertheless, land transportation remained extremely expensive, amounting to 10% and 40% of the products' market price. According to contemporary data, the cost of internal transport, on a distance of about 100 miles, was greater than that from Galati to London.¹²."

Table 1
Total Exports from the Danubian Ports.
Values sterling pounds 1837-1852

Year	Galati	Braila	Total
1837	120,213	113,481	233,694
1838	172,168	148,238	320,406
1839	280,713	297,206	577,919
1840	504,447	364,030	868,477
1841	189,036	255,610	414,646
1842	268,353	288,636	556,989
1843	225,345	449,556	674,901

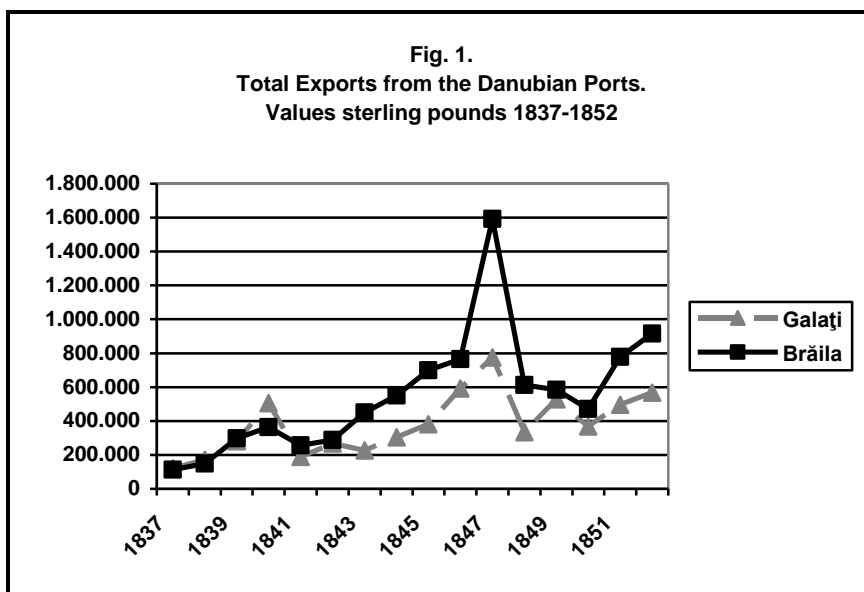
¹⁰ Ardeleanu, 1837, 4.

¹¹ Mureşan, 1995, 69; See also Marcel Emerit, 1937, 231.

¹² Ardeleanu, 2014, 99-100.

1844	303,885	551,044	854,929
1845	379,797	698,680	1,078,477
1846	592,578	764,909	1,357,487
1847	775,528	1,592,944	2,368,472
1848	333,271	611,958	945,229
1849	528,342	584,930	1,113,272
1850	367,700	472,012	839,712
1851	496,368	778,157	1,274,525
1852	567,110	916,933	1,484,043

Source: „Commerce of the Danube,” *Hunt’s Merchants’ Magazine and Commercial Review*, New York. t. XXVII. nr. 3. September 1852, 293.



The most important resource of the Wallachia and Moldavia, grain ranked first, by quantity and value, in the foreign trade of the two provinces. Although the diversity of cereals was larger (wheat, maize, rye, barley, oats, miller, buckwheat), the grain which secured the Principalities’ place on the international market were wheat and maize. In first half of the nineteenth century, the Moldavian grain was considered qualitatively superior to the Wallachian sort. In the period 1840-50, the progress of agriculture caused the amelioration of the quality of grain from Wallachia, which equals that of Odessa; it is already

similar to that of the Taganrog port.¹³ The rudimentary method of separating the grain from the chaff, by beating it out with horses, was also responsible for the low quality and dampness of goods; another shortcoming was derived from the method of preservation, as they were stored in earthen pots, dried by fire, which made them rather damp.

There were too many differences of size and hinterland between Braila/Galati and Odessa, as well as of political interest to create a veritable rivalry. The French diplomat Thouvenel also mentioned that Moldavian grains (the best Romanian assortment) was sold on the Western markets 4-5% cheaper than the Odessa sorts, and with the large number of ships calling at Braila and Galati, “these two cities are a redoubtable competitor for Odessa, hence Russia’s discontent and the obstacles which this power creates at the Danube.”¹⁴ Grain trade patterns during this period and the gliding scale system in use in the West did not allow the direct access of Eastern products to the British and northern markets. The deposit ports system, with the Mediterranean storing ports of Constantinople, Trieste, Marseille or Genoa, was almost compulsory during this period. But the Romanian Principalities were among the largest grain growing areas in the world, and the upsurge of exports from the Danube was recorded in almost all contemporary economic magazines¹⁵. The Odessa-Danube ports competition should be placed in its dynamic economic context as well: the expansion to South-eastern Europe of the modern world system and the shift from the medieval agriculture to that dominated by the rules of capitalist economy. The opening of new agricultural markets on the Black Sea coasts was concurrent with a significant demographic and industrial development in Western and Northern Europe, thus with an increasing need of foodstuffs. In only a few decades, the area completely reshaped its economic structure, so as to resist in this huge vortex represented by the capitalist world market. The Russian reaction to the increased Western economic involvement in the Romanian Principalities was to tighten her hold over the Lower Danube navigation, which

¹³ Ardeleanu, 2014, 101.

¹⁴ Thouvenel, *La Hongrie et la Valachie*, III, 834-835 *apud*. C. Ardeleanu, 2014, 120.

¹⁵ Ardeleanu, 2014, 118. See for an opposite view Bogdan Murgescu, 2010; Ardeleanu, 2012, 43-74.

foreign diplomats reported as highly detrimental to the commercial enterprises in the ports of Braila and Galati.

Table 2
Wheat Exports from the Danubian Ports (1837-1852)
Quantities (in quarters) and Values (in sterling pounds)

Port	Galati			Braila		
	Quantity (quarters)	Average price (shillings)	Total value (pounds)	Quantity (quarters)	Average price (shillings)	Total value (pounds)
1837	98,380	15	73,785	75,792	14	53,054
1838	171,813	16	137,450	61,524	15	46,143
1839	150,378	24	180,454	143,184	-	-
1840	230,568	26	299,738	132,596	24	159,115
1841	100,855	24	121,026	84,692	22	93,161
1842	154,675	21	162,409	160,121	20	160,121
1843	107,634	17	91,489	322,343	16	257,874
1844	166,535	16	133,228	347,888	17	295,705
1845	180,032	24	216,038	314,940	23	362,181
1846	110,902	27	149,718	327,526	26	425,784
1847	180,860	32	289,376	390,818	30	586,227
1848	113,605	22	124,966	159,484	20	159,484
1849	183,797	23	199,867	117,346	20	117,346
1850	140,652	23	161,750	283,290	19	269,126
1851	134,474	21	141,198	283,106	18	254,795
1852	187,555	22	206,311	343,584	20	343,584

Source: Cernovodeanu, Marinescu, Gavrilă, 1978, 635-639. Cernovodeanu, Marinescu, 1979, 716-717 (percentage and totals recalculated by Constantin Ardeleanu. in Ardeleanu, 2014, 266).

Table 3
Maize Exports from the Danubian Ports (1837-1852)
Quantities (in quarters) and Values (in sterling pounds)

Port	Galati			Braila		
	Quantity (quarters)	Average price (shillings)	Total value (pounds)	Quantity (quarters)	Average price (shillings)	Total value (pounds)
1837	86,964	8	34,786	24,313	8	9,725
1838	58,374	8	23,350	37,200	8	14,880
1839	128,649	12	77,189	57,172	-	-
1840	189,037	17	160,681	68,586	16	54,869
1841	35,394	16	28,315	26,818	15	20,114
1842	93,531	12	56,119	10,221	11	5,622
1843	140,662	10	70,331	121,309	9 s/ 6 d	57,622

1844	174,023	11	95,713	128,221	10 s/ 6 d	67,316
1845	157,101	13	102,116	124,714	12	74,828
1846	336,627	20	336,627	163,145	19	154,988
1847	318,605	25	398,256	619,115	25	773,894
1848	143,727	19	136,541	292,115	18	262,904
1849	258,763	18	232,887	332,532	16	266,026
1850	122,875	18	110,588	149,734	15 s/ 6 d	116,044
1851	350,682	16	280,546	646,617	12 s/ 6 d	404,136
1852	329,279	16 s/ 6 d	271,655	725,259	13 s/ 6 d	489,550

Source: Cernovodeanu, Marinescu, Gavrilă, 1978, 635-639. Cernovodeanu, Marinescu, 1979, 716-717 (percentage and totals recalculated by Constantin Ardeleanu. în Ardeleanu, 2014, 267).

Table 4
Wheat Exports from the Danubian Ports to Great Britain (1844-1852)
Quantities (in quarters) and Values (in sterling pounds)

Port	Galati			Braila			
	Year	Quantity (quarters)	Price(£)	%	Quantity (quarters)	Price (£)	%
1844		1,326	1,061	0.80	18,607	15,816	5.35
1845		2,328	2,794	1.29	17,917	20,605	5.69
1846		-	-	-	2,653	3,449	0.81
1847		23,281	37,250	12.87	-	-	-
1848		31,702	34,872	27.91	6,305	6,305	3.95
1849		47,405	54,516	27.28	4,655	4,655	3.97
1850		78,871	90,702	56.08	83,113	78,957	29.34
1851		35,368	37,316	26.30	100,593	90,534	35.53
1852		98,586	108,445	52.26	85,336	85,336	24.84

Source: Cernovodeanu, Marinescu, Gavrilă, 1978, 635-639. Cernovodeanu, Marinescu, 1979, 716-717 (percentage and totals recalculated by Constantin Ardeleanu. in Ardeleanu, 2014, 267).

Table 5
Maize Exports from the Danubian Ports to Great Britain (1844-1852)
Quantities (in quarters) and Values (in sterling pounds)

Port	Galati			Braila			
	Year	Quantity (quarters)	Price(£)	%	Quantity (quarters)	Price(£)	%
1844		4,724	2,598	2.71	698	366	0.54
1845		735	478	0.47	7,704	4,622	6.18
1846		52,863	52,863	15.70	4,228	4,017	2.59
1847		176,878	221,098	55.52	0	0	0
1848		95,497	90,722	66.44	120,640	108,576	41.30
1849		163,671	147,304	63.25	168,161	134,529	50.57
1850		82,810	74,529	67.39	64,055	49,643	42.78

1851	295,200	236,160	84.18	286,882	179,301	44.37
1852	28,550	23,554	8.67	337,948	228,115	46.60

Source: Cernovodeanu, Marinescu, Gavrilă, 1978, 635-639. Cernovodeanu, Marinescu, 1979, 716-717 (percentage and totals recalculated by Constantin Ardeleanu. in Ardeleanu, 2014, 267).

Starting with the 1830s, the Danubian an increasingly frequent destination for British and European entrepreneurs who had discovered their great commercial prospects. After 1829, the Romanian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia witnessed a veritable commercial revolution. The abolishment of the Porte’s relative commercial “monopoly” and the almost simultaneous introduction of steam navigation on the Danube (1830) turned the Danubian ports of Braila and Galati into important suppliers of grains on the European markets, but also into large importers of industrial goods from western countries. The Principalities and the Caucasus became. The Principalities found some advantages in the extension and diversification of their trade relations, in spite of the inequitable position in which they were placed vis-à-vis the great powers, not only as political dependences on the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, Wallachia and Moldavia undertook to ensure an active trade, chiefly along the Danube, the main artery. Through the ports of Braila (in 1836) and Galati (in 1837) were exported the natural resources of the Romanian lands, namely their food products and their cattle, in exchange for high quality manufactures, which their own industry, then at its very beginning, could not provide. The first British commercial Company in the Danubian Principalities, headed by George Bell and Andrew Lockhart Anderson failed to bankruptcy in 1836, due to some Russian obstructive measures against the foreign vessels in the Danube Delta and also to some unhappy financial speculations. Many Romanian merchants were ruined also this failure.¹⁶

Organised in commercial houses, the merchants served as partners or agents of the most important company from Marseille, Trieste, Vienna, Leipzig, Constantinople and London. In an area where capitalist instruments were still at the beginnings, these businessmen were “at the same time bankers, merchants,

¹⁶ See for detail: Part one, Chaper III in Ardeleanu, 2014, 95-117.

exchange agents, traders for import and export, but more than anything they are middlemen.”¹⁷

In 6 August 1847 the English Ambassador Colquhoun describe de Romanian agriculture and the foreign trade in this mode: “It is certain that the immensely high prices obtained this year for Agriculture Produce of all kinds have accounted the Wallachian Boiar from the Torper & Inactivity in which he has hitherto exposed; he is now making great efforts to increase the Produce of his Estates, in which he will doubtless succeed, for the Country is capable of yielding twenty times, the present amount. It becomes therefore of vital Importance, not to the Provinces alone, but the Purchasers, that no Impediments which can be removed, should be allowed to exist in the High Road by which this Produce must pass.”¹⁸ In the 1829-1853 periods the economic environment at the Mouths of Danube ports was completely changed.

A very dynamic commercial class, made up of active merchants enjoying a privileged status, took control an entire economic chain. The strain induced by revolutionary events of 1848-1849, as well as the deepening of the Eastern Crisis, owing to the deterioration in Turkish-Russian relations, also contributed for the progressive worsening of relations between Russia and Great Britain (the being supporter of Ottoman integrity). This also resulted in grave problems for the trade of the Mouths of Danube in 1853. The sharpening of antagonism between the great powers led to the outbreak of the Crimean War, which ended, as it is known, with the defeat of Tsarist Russia¹⁹.

In conclusion, after the Treaty of Adrianople the economic structure of the North Black Sea region adapted to feed this grain frenzy. In Moldavia and Wallachia, the treaty of Adrianople abolished all former obligations to supply the Porte with grain and other commodities, and Danubian products could be sold freely, according to free market rules. In the next decades, the two states imposed a coherent policy meant to favour production and encourage foreign trade by means of a low tariff, and Danubian grain started to compete against the Russian cereals.

¹⁷ Lefebvre, *Etudes*, 313, *apud*. Ardeleanu, 2014, 78-79.

¹⁸ P.R.O. F.O., Turkey, dos. 78/696, f. 74 and 76, *apud*. P. Cernovodeanu, 1986, 116-117.

¹⁹ C. Ardeleanu, 2012, 43-74.

References

The National Archives of the United Kingdom: P.R.O. F.O, Turkey, dos. 78/696, f. 74-76.

Anagnosti, Michel. *La Valachie et la Moldavie*. Paris, 1837.

Ardeleanu, Constantin. "The Danube Navigation in the Making of David Urquhart's Russophobia (1833-1837)." In: *Transylvanian Review*, vol. XIX, supplement no. 5, 2010, 337-352.

Idem. *Gurile Dunării – o problemă europeană. Comerț și navigație la Dunărea de jos în surse contemporane (1829-1853)*. Braila: Editura Istros, 2012.

Idem. *International Trade and Diplomacy at the Lower Danube: the Sulina Question and the Economic Premises of the Crimean War (1829–1853)*. Braila: Editura Istros, 2014.

Cernovodeanu, Paul. *Relațiile comerciale româno-engleze în contextul politicii orientale a Marii Britanii (1803-1878)*. Cluj: Editura Dacia, 1986.

Idem; Marinescu, Beatrice; Gavrilă, Irina. "Comerțul britanic prin Galați și Brăila între 1837-1852". In: *Revista de istorie*, XXXI no. 4, 1978, 629-650.

Idem, Eadem. „British trade in the Danubian ports of Galatz and Braila between 1837 and 1853.” In: *Journal of European Economic History*, t. VIII, 3, 1979, 704-741.

Commerce of the Danube,” *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review*, New York. t. XXVII. nr. 3. September 1852.

Emerit, Marcel. *Les paysans roumains, depuis le Traite d'Andrinople jusqu'a la liberation des terres (1829-1864): Etude d'histoire sociale*. Paris, 1937.

Enache, George. "The Lower Danube and the Rio de la Plata Region in the Modern Age: Contrasted Perspectives on their Economic and Political Evolution." In: *Transylvanian Review*, Vol. XXII Supplement No 2, 2013, *Economic and Social Evolutions at the Crossroads of the World-System. Eastern and Central Europe from the Early Modern Age to the Twentieth Century*, edited by Iosif Marin Balog, Rudolf Gräf, Cristian Luca.

Lefebvre, Thibault. *Etudes diplomatiques et économiques sur la Valachie*. Paris, 1858.

Mureșan, Maria. *Istoria economiei. Epoca modernă și contemporană*. Bucharest, 1995.

Murgescu, Bogdan. *România și Europa. Acumularea decalajelor economice: 1500-2010*. Bucharest: Polirom, 2010.

Petrescu, Ștefan. "Migrație și carantine în porturile dunărene: controlul documentelor de călătorie în epoca Regulamentelor Organice." In: *Studii și materiale de istorie modernă*, XXV, 2012, 97-116.

Zeletin, Ștefan. *Burghezia română. Originea și rolul ei istoric*. Bucharest, 1925.