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ONCE UPON A TIME ADA KALEH: INTRODUCTION TO THE DANUBE SOCIETY, 17TH-20TH CENTURY[1]

David Do Paço

Abstract

This paper collects, reevaluates, and analyses data from linguistically different historiographical and archival materials about the economic, social, political, and cultural history of the Ada Kaleh Island from the late 17th century to the present. It explores Ada Kaleh's history through the light of the Habsburg-Ottoman relations as well as of anthropological studies on the former islanders conducted in recent decades. This essay argues that orientalism, nationalism, and military issues still significantly distorted Ada Kaleh's history. In this essay, I demonstrate Ada Kaleh was significant marketplace and a rhizome of a trans-imperial and trans-Danubian East- and Central-European society. I also envision Ada Kaleh as the symbol of the denial of the Ottoman contribution to European history. This paper eventually addresses methodological and historiographical issues about writing the history of Muslims in early modern and modern Europe.

Keywords: Ada Kaleh, Habsburg Empire, Ottoman Empire, Danube River, diaspora studies, international relations, nationalism, orientalism, capitalism, socialism

"Then let them run, or drown like rats"
(Ion Gheorghe Maurer)

Between 1964 and 1972, the construction of the hydroelectric dam downstream of the Iron Gates on the Danube River was a significant collaboration between Romania and Yugoslavia. It symbolized the political autonomy and energy independence of the two countries towards the USSR. It also led to a dramatic 40-meter rise in the water level of the Danube and the sinking of several islands, including Ada Kaleh, which was

dismantled in 1968 and engulfed in 1970. With Ada Kaleh disappeared the traces of a Danube and Muslim society that was maintained and prospered on the island since the 18th century. Ada Kaleh underwent successive changes of sovereignty, the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, and the affirmation of nationalism and its ethnoreligious justifications. Erasing Ada Kaleh implied canceling the Ottoman history in Central and South-Eastern Europe. This is claiming that there would have been no place for Ottoman memory and with it for the Muslim communities along the Danube. Nevertheless, for decades, Ada Kaleh's memory has been persisting; the fortified sandbank has been the object of special academic attention for almost 20 years.[2]

The history of Ada Kaleh is part of the history of lost Danube societies and a history of "Old Europe". The Danube territories of Bulgaria, Romania, and Serbia were the first form of social organization that preceded Mesopotamia and found its apogee in the Neolithic. The Iron Gates area presents numerous archaeological testimonies of this period, like the Serbian site of Lepenski Vir and the Romanian site of Schela Cladovei located about thirty kilometers downstream from Ada Kaleh. During these last decades, Old Europe's historians openly developed a counter-model to the rampant orientalism reactivated with force during the "Balkan wars". They emphasize the antiquity of the settlement, the existence of a relatively unified society, matriarchal, non-Christian and shaped by Mediterranean migrations. If the site of Ada Kaleh was inappropriate for the development of an Old European village – although it perfectly corresponded to the amphibian nature of this society – Eratosthenes mentioned the island as Yernis, and archaeologists confirm the ancient existence of a Roman fort in the 2nd century. Ada Kaleh was part of the history of the Danube as an element of the *Limes*. It was Tajan's bridge towards the conquest of the Dacians, and the latter's incorporation and romanization.[3]

More broadly, the history of Ada Kaleh informs the renewal of the history of Habsburg-Ottoman relations, which have surfed mainly on the wave of the artificial concept of the "clash of civilizations". The Danube border has long been wrongly reduced to the history of armed conflicts between Christian-ruled and Muslim-ruled societies. The emergence of a settlement in Ada Kaleh was partly the result of war. However, anthropology has, on the one hand, shown that there was nothing less evident than the association between an island society and its alleged isolation. On the other hand, the study of circulations in Central and Southeastern Europe has for the last decade brought to light the existence

of a trans-imperial society that maintained and adjusted according to or despite the movement of political and confessional borders. Ada Kaleh held a geographical and historical position of great interest that can in some way make it appears as a Gibraltar or a Tabarka of the Danube, a pivot between the Habsburg dominions, Rumelia and the Ottoman regencies of Transylvania and Wallachia, if not the rhizome of a trans-imperial society.[4]

Finally, the history of Ada Kaleh is a history of Muslims in early modern and modern Europe. It copes with strong methodological issues. In 1997, Mark Mazower made Ada Kaleh the "paradigm of forgetting" that would have characterized the treatment of minorities in 20th-century Europe. The engulfment of Ada Kaleh indirectly contributed to the denigration of Ottoman history, if not to its *damnatio memoriae* as the history of the trade diasporas of the region often reflects. This *damnatio memoriae* goes along with denying the ethnic cleansing of Muslims during the conquest of the Danube and Tisza rivers' Ottoman eyalets between 1684–1699 and 1717–1718. There is no doubt that if Ada Kaleh had not been an Ottoman stronghold with a bazaar and a mosque, but a traditional village of Orthodox Christians erected because of the persecution of a tyrannic paşa, the question of the preservation of the island and its inclusion into regional or national histories would have been asked more strongly, at the time of the construction of the Iron Gates Dam. The history of Ada Kaleh is a economic, social and political history of Europe. Numerous and different iconographic documents testify to a disappeared society. Studying Ada Kaleh is more specifically investigating the history of Muslims in Europe, but not as a charming anecdote or exception.[5]

Our knowledge about Ada Kaleh is mainly based on a few original research regularly mentioned, quoted, and largely plagiarized. The American historian Allen Z. Hertz is, until today, the scholar who produced the most reliable knowledge on 18th-century Ada Kaleh. Based on original Habsburg and Ottoman materials, his dissertation defended in 1973 at Columbia University shows the military and geopolitical importance of Ada Kaleh for central European powers. More recently, the unpublished theses of Mari Iancu or Daniela Tudosie are also essential contributions to the island's history in the 20th century and the making of the Adakalehzi diaspora. Other scholars produced original and solid analyses as the 19th-century Hungarian linguist and turkologist Inác Kúnos. I should also mention Philippe-Henri Blasen's remarkable and richly documented study of the paşa Mustafa Bego, who ruled Ada Kaleh for over six decades. I will further discuss the monograph of the Iman of the island Ali Ahmet,

published first in Romanian and German in 1936, which is a panegyric of the local entrepreneur Ali Kadir. Despite another form of nationalist bias, Turkish historians as Yıldırım Ağanoğlu also strongly contribute to a better understanding of the Ada Kaleh society, its demographic evolution, social life, and administrative status based on Ottoman documents, although their works are still largely confidential.[6]

Maps, engravings, postcards, and photographs from the 19th and early 20th centuries are available on social media and must be collected, categorized, and analyzed. They produce a public and decentralized history of Ada Kaleh. They are as valuable for historians as for analyzing contemporary representations of Ottoman Europe. I should mention the private collections of Christian Ellensohn and Gheorghe Bob, and the works of Iosif Berman (I. B. Urseanu), who followed the Romanian reporter Filip Brauner (F. Brunea-Fox) in his investigation; several are already published. Ada Kaleh was a tourist destination from the interwar period to the Cold War where people came for a cheap Oriental experience. Many of the photographs must, therefore, also be considered in the light of a population that was both an actor and aware of why they were visited. They performed an expected Orient that was perhaps not their own. Nevertheless, from the intersection of iconographic and more traditional materials, it is possible to develop a relevant interpretation of the history of Ada Kaleh.[7]

"The key to the Danube"

Like many territories in Central Europe, Ada Kaleh underwent successive sovereignty changes following the imprudent invitation that Southeast European rulers to the Ottoman sultan to get involved in their local political struggles. Ada Kaleh's history illustrates that the rise of the Ottoman Empire rested on brief alliances between dynamic and asymmetrically diverse households; a common fact in early modern Europe.[8]

In the 15th century, known as Saan, the island was an outpost of Orșova and the kingdom of Hungary. The battle of Maritsa in 1371 and then that of Kosovo in 1389 had seen the kingdom of Hungary gradually involved in the Ottoman wars. In 1429, the regent of Hungary and Prince of Transylvania, John Hunyadi, militarized the Danube River border from Belgrade to Severin. He entrusted the positions to the Teutonic Order's Knights regiments based in Transylvania's cities. The Knights settled on

Saan in the ruins of the old Roman fortress. However, in 1432, Murad II's army swept away this position, and the island remained in an unclear border zone for a century.[9] In 1521, the entry of the Ottoman army in Orșova and the incorporation of Saan into the pașalik of Vidin followed Suleyman's military capture of Belgrade. After the battle of Mohacs in 1526 and the election of the prince of Transylvania, John Zsapoliayi as king of Hungary – and with Suleiman's support–the island's military functions decreased. The partition of the Hungarian kingdom in 1541 confirmed Saan's incorporation into the Ottoman lands. In 1660, the Ottoman derviș Evlyia Çelebi mentioned "the long island" (ada-yı kebîr), but did not consider it that important also he provided a lengthy description of Orșova. However, local populations exploited the site. It was suitable for fishing and was the first place where people could cross the Danube near the Iron Gates.[10] Over the early modern period, Ada-yı kebîr kept hence the pastoral function common to many islands on the Danube River and described in 1519–1520 by Selim I's lawyers: "there are some islands and lakes in the above-mentioned scales [of the Danube]. In winter, when the Danube is frozen, the unbelievers from Wallachia and Moldavia used to move their sheep to the lakes and islands and winter them there."[11]

The two-year occupation of the Iron Gates by the Habsburg troops (1688–1690) was challenged in 1689 by the reconquest of Orșova by the prince of Transylvania Imre Tököly mandated by Suleiman II "to clear the Danube as far as Belgrade". However, Tököly had to leave Orșova very quickly to join the Ottoman army at Niš. In 1690, General Luigi Ferdinando Count of Marsigli urged the *Hofkriegsrat* to close the Iron Gates because of the improvement of the Ottoman fluvial fleet. Marsigli informed Leopold I that he built and armed flying bridges[12]. In his *Stato Militare dell'Impero Ottomano*, he specifies:

> In 1690, as the Ottoman fleet appeared more numerous and better organized, I argued that it was necessary to oppose its progress by taking a position at the Cataracts of the Danube River on the small island. I had it fortified and called it *La Carolina* to honor Archduke Charles, now Emperor. This advice had its effect; the Turks could not fail to attack it. However, the accident that made Belgrade surrender made them abandon it after having closed the passage of the Danube for a long time during the same siege of Belgrade.[13]

La Carolina was not Ada-yı kebîr, but "a much smaller island less than two hundred meters upstream", as Hertz mentioned. However, the maps that Marsigli transmitted to the *Hofkriegsrat* designated Ada Kaleh as what Marsigli named "the island proposed for fortification, which the short amount of time does not permit, for its great size demands a considerable undertaking."[14] In October 1690, the Ottoman army took possession of Ada-yı kebîr and fired on the Habsburg Island that Marsigli fortified. After Belgrade's retrocession, the Ottomans laid the foundations of the fortress of Ada-yı kebîr, where 400 janissaries took a position.[15]

Fig 1. Map.[16]

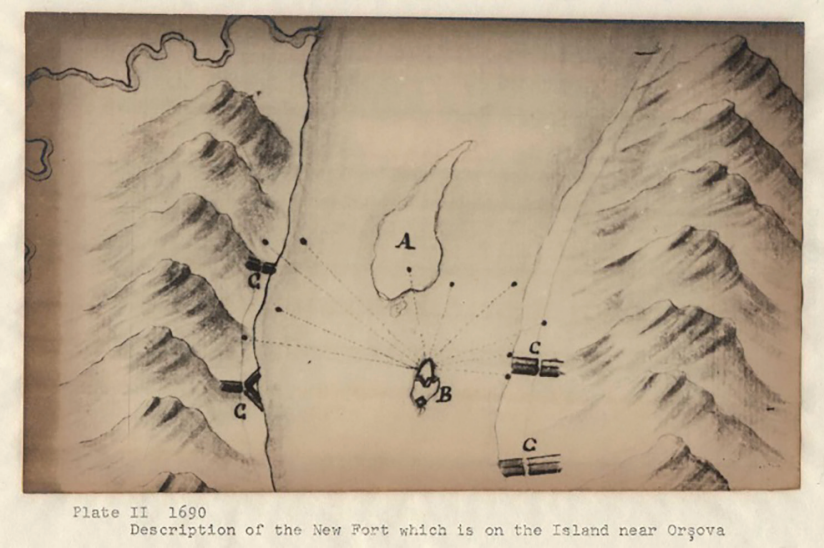


Plate II 1690
Description of the New Fort which is on the Island near Orşova

With the Treaty of Karlowitz (Sremski Karlovci) in 1699, Ada-yı kebîr became a refuge for Muslim populations driven out of the Danube and Tisza valleys by the Habsburg armies. Between 1684 and 1699, the conquest of the eyalets of Bude (Buda), Eğri (Eger), Varat (Oradea), Temesvár (Timișoara), Újvár (Uivar), and Kanije (Nagykanizsa) generated extreme violence against the Muslims. If the prisoners of war could receive protection because of the value of a possible ransom, others were massacred during the capture of the cities as in Neuhäusel (Nové Zámky, *Érsekújv*ár) in 1685 or evacuated and deported as in Lippa (Lipova) in

1688. The Imperial troops left the Muslims the choice of conversion or departure. Many went to Serbia and Bosnia. Some communities moved to strategic places in the Ottoman lands, notably at the Safavid border. Some remained on the Danube and joined the refugees and the Ottoman fort in Ada-yı kebîr. Their role was to protect the Ottoman Empire against the incursions of the Habsburgs and hajduks. Moreover, Ada-yı kebîr was close enough to the former Ottoman territories to allow for the hope of return throughout the century.[17]

Nevertheless, the new invasion of the eyalet of Temesvár in 1716 and the new capture of the city of Belgrade in 1718 – that the treaty of Passarowitz (Požarevac) confirmed in 1718 – entailed the annexation of the Banat, the eyalet of Belgrade, and Ada-yı kebîr by the Habsburg administration. The Habsburg domination continued until 1739, a period during which Habsburg engineers built a modern fortress. Under the supervision of Prince Eugene of Savoy, Ada-yı kebîr took the name of New Orșova. Eugene implemented Marsigli's plan. The island now controlled possible crossings of the Danube by the Ottoman troops and access to the Iron Gates from the east. In Serbia, it was also a period of severe de-Islamization and new expulsions of the Muslim populations. However, as the President of the *Hofkriegsrat,* Eugene of Savoy was responsible for the diplomatic and commercial relations with the Ottoman empire. He was fully aware of the interest represented by the economic networks developed by the Ottoman subjects in the region since the 16th century, and wished to maintain them and take advantage of them. Between 1718 and 1739, the period of the emergence of the Habsburg-Ottoman trade, The New Orșova became one of the Habsburgs' front posts for merchants from the Ottoman empire. The fortress served as a quarantine facility before taking the ferry to Orșova in the Banat.[18]

In 1738, during the new siege of Belgrade, the Ottoman army recaptured the island. One of the fortress' gates kept this inscription:

> Open is the way of glory/ To him who was glorious in deeds/ Similar to those of the old times of heroes./ His heart was pure and high-thinking,/ His will was great and powerful./ The defeater and the ruin of the enemies, The benefactor and protector of the people,/ His glory was doubled when he conquered this fortress,. And the frontiers of his country were enlarged/ Greatly as powerfully running torrent.? God save him from all evil. Because he has done much good in the world,/ He whom we are remembering today,/ That is to say Mahmud Khan. 1739.[19]

New Orșova then took the name of Ada Kaleh (the Fortress Island). Under the new Ottoman rule, the island incorporated the sanjak of Vidin. It connected to the Ottoman mainland with a floating bridge via the former Habsburg bastion of Fort Elisabeth (Sans-ı Kebir), built on the Serbian bank during the previous Habsburg occupation. The bridge remained until the Serbian army destroyed Sans-ı Kebir in 1878. It embodied the Sultan's sovereignty over the island and was a convenient facility for crossing the Danube's right arm.[20]

Nevertheless, for the *Hofkriegsrat*, Ada Kaleh was still perceived as an essential location to protect the Banat and especially the entrance to the Iron Gates. The fortress should allow the control of navigation on the Danube, which was one of the significant projects of Joseph II, and one of the reasons why he joined Catherine II in her war against the Ottoman empire and against his own administration. In 1789, Belgrade fell again, and Ada Kaleh came back under Habsburg military control before being returned to Selim III by the treaty of Sistova (Svishtov) in 1791. In 1790, the Habsburg cartographer Franz Johann Joseph von Reilly produced a map of Wallachia showing a new bridge connecting Ada Kaleh to Orșova. However, the existence of this bridge was improbable. The cartographer made a mistake in reporting the location of the bridge between Ada Kaleh and Sans-ı Kebir on the map. He could also have made it on purpose to claim the Habsburg sovereignty over the island. However, the peace and trade conference held in Sistova was the one that pushed the idea of freedom of trade and the commercial integration of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires the furthest. The meeting of Francis I with the governor of Ada Kaleh in Orșova in 1817 still showed the importance of the island and embodied the transition to a formal period of cooperation.[21]

Introducing Ada Kaleh as a crossroads would nevertheless be a cognitive bias. The crossroads metaphor validates academia's dependence on imperial visions and ethno-confessional assignments. Also, 18th-century Ada Kaleh was almost systematically mentioned only as a mono-confessional garrison of men. The irritation of Selim I's administration towards the shepherds who crossed and grazed their flocks at Ada Kaleh when the Danube was frozen, or the sentinels who "watched not so much the road as the river, and especially the Serbian and Wallachian smugglers" described by the French historian Victor Duruy in 1860, testify to a society that appropriated a trans-Danubian regional area.[22] At some points, empires were still outsiders, and their determination to establish borders continually clashed with the practices of locals who

appropriated and transformed territories according to their own economic and social agendas. Also, whether Habsburg or Ottoman, the garrison of Ada Kaleh regularly dealt with the semi-nomadic populations. They could control their movement or take advantage of them. The Romas from Orșova traded with the fortress of Ada Kaleh. The hajduks could occasionally serve as trading partners or auxiliary troops. Around 1800, the pașa of Orșova Recep Aga was even regularly accused of taking advantage of the disorder and supporting the incursions of the "bandits" to Wallachia and within the sanjak of Vidin.[23]

A co-ruled island and its political autonomy

Ada Kaleh entangled successively and then simultaneously several levels of protection. The island was claimed by the Habsburg and the Ottoman rulers, but its sociopolitical life strongly depended on cross-border and multiconnection local authorities, families and households' rivalries between Orșova, Belgrade and Vidin. During a decade, Ada Kaleh was even an autonomous territory with its own agenda.

During the Ottoman period, both the pașa of Vidin and the Habsburg military governor of Orșova developed economic and military cooperation on the Danube border of Belgrade between the Habsburg and Ottoman authorities in the mid-eighteenth century. As Benjamin Landais demonstrates, this cooperation was nothing but the norm. It aimed to protect both parties from the actions of the hajduks. It also aimed to prevent food crises, thus maintaining social peace on both sides of the border.[24] Besides, the voivode of Wallachia paid a part of the tribute due to the sultan in kind to provide the Ada Kaleh with food, in order to sustain the Ottoman garrison and its people.[25]

Also, in the second half of the 18th century, the border post of Mehadia, located on the Cerna River upstream from Orșova, was particularly active and attended by Ottoman merchants who crossed the Danube through the bridge between Sans-I Kebir to Ada Kaleh before taking the ferry to Orșova. After 1739, the lazaretto of Ada Kaleh moved to Mehadia. The first stop of the Ottoman merchants' trade was Temesvár. Some merchants continued their journeys to Vienna. The testimonies collected by the Habsburg administration in Vienna in 1767 from these merchants show that they were wealthy and influential.[26] The fortress of Ada Kaleh accommodated part of them and organized the transfer of their products

via Mehadia, which could sometimes take several days. The reception of these merchants and their numerous servants implies the existence of a whole local economy to accommodate and cater to them. The market gardening activity of the island was probably developed at that time to feed the soldiers and travelers visiting the fortress. This economy implied the presence of a much more diversified population than just soldiers like agricultural workers.[27]

Ada Kaleh belonged to Ottoman social geography that did not comply with the Danube border. It stood first and foremost at the heart of the circulation of Ottoman merchants that, throughout the 18th century, led to a form of commercial integration of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires. This phenomenon is invisible to researchers who fanatically insist on focusing on ethnicity and confessional affiliation. The obsession with the identity that characterizes the first generation of scholars in Greek trade diaspora studies has cast a shadow of ignorance over the complexity of the region's phenomena. Muslim, Jewish, Armenian, or Greek merchants from Vidin, Moscopoli (Moscopole), or Alaja (Alanja) conducted Ottoman trade through Ada Kaleh. These traders connected Ada Kaleh with Istanbul, Sofia, Temesvár, Pest, and Vienna. It was not uncommon to find these merchants in Leipzig, Nuremberg, or Warsaw.[28]

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the political and military elite of Ada Kaleh was deeply involved in trans-regional trade. Chiosa Mustafa Ağa was part of the Bosnia elite and took advantage of the annexation of Orșova to the Ottoman empire in 1739. He defended the Ottoman border and maintained an excellent commercial relationship with the Banat and Wallachia. In 1788, facing the Habsburg invasion, he retreated to Ada Kaleh, ruled by his brother-in-law Ibrahim Ağa. In 1791, the family returned to Orșova, and Chiosa Mustafa Ağa progressively left the command to his son Recep Ağa. The latter was born in Rudăria in the Țara Almăjului in 1770 and was mainly known for his good relationships with the Catholics of the sanjak of Orșova and the Orthodox of Belgrade. The church of Tufari represents him and his brother as community benefactors. As a pașa of Orșova until 1806 and of Ada Kaleh from 1806–1814, he had a very successful career. He also knew how to associate the hajduks and the Vlachs with his government, even if it had to impact the western territories of Wallachia. From Orșova and then Ada Kaleh, he played a significant role during the First Serbian Uprising.[29]

Ada Kaleh was indeed directly concerned with the revolt of the renegade janissaries (*dahijas*) against the pașa of Belgrade, Hacı Mustafa

Şinikoğlu. In the last decade of the 18th century, several *dahijas* found refuge in the neighboring sanjak of Vidin, where they served the dissident paşa Osman Pazvantoğlu. The defiance of the latter towards the paşa of Belgrade and the voivode of Wallachia strengthened the strategic and military role of Ada Kaleh. In 1799, the janissaries took over Belgrade and opposed both the representatives of Selim III and the Serbian nationalists. Their authoritarian policy led to the first Serbian uprising in February 1804. The Semlin (Zemun) conference of May 1804 acted the expulsion of the *dahijas* from the city. They thought they could find refuge in Ada Kaleh, where Ibrahim Ağa made them prisoners. Indeed, the paşa of Ada Kaleh informed Recep Ağa, who informed the restored government of Belgrade of the presence of four of those responsible for the "massacre of the 70 Serbian notables" and held responsible for the uprising. In July, a detachment went from Belgrade to Ada Kaleh and asked Ibrahim Ağa to behead and disperse the members of the Janissary bodies. The Semlin Conference gave all authority to the new paşa of Belgrade, Bekir Paşa, and put at his disposal 1,500 Serbian militiamen to do so. Far from being an act of national liberation and the compensation for the sufferings of an Ottoman "occupation", the massacre of the *dahijas* was quite a banal Ottoman event: a punitive measure taken by the paşa of Belgrade and supported by the local Muslim authorities towards Muslim political dissidents, and executed by the Serbian militia.[30]

Recep Ağa positioned Ada Kaleh in a complex system of loyalty to Istanbul, Đorđe Petrović (Karađorđe), and Tudor Vladimirescu. In 1813 Recep Ağa conquered Fethülislam (Kladovo) and Negotin and turned Ada Kaleh into the political center of a trans-Danubian province. On the one hand, the paşa of Ada Kaleh was an important ally as an influential Ottoman commander favorable to the Orthodox minority. On the other hand, the rise of Recep Ağa's family challenged the regional balance of powers as soon as the paşa of Ada Kaleh took control of Fethülislam and Negotin and monitored the navigation on the Danube and impacted the trade of Rusçuk (Ruse). In 1814, with the support of the voivode of Wallachia, the paşa of Rusçuk managed to arrest Recep Ağa and judge him for treason. However, Adem Ağa succeeded his brother as the paşa of Ada Kaleh and received Miloš Obrenović's support. This unsuccessful alliance led to the family's retreat to Vidin in 1816, and internal Ottoman rivalry put an end to the political rise of Ada Kaleh.[31]

The island's history intersected with the Serbian, Hungarian, and Romanian national fabric throughout the 19th century. After the death of

Recep Aga, the island slowly lost its political autonomy. While Ada Kaleh remained an Ottoman territory until 1920, the Habsburg administration progressively controlled it. Due to a long tradition, strong connection, and economic interests in the Hungarian trade, the Muslim islanders were much more welcoming to Hungarian refugees than Ottoman janissaries. The stay of Lajos Kossuth in Ada Kaleh in 1849 is even part of the island's mythology. After the Hungarian Diet voted for independence in 1848, and the subsequent repression of the Austrian Empire, Lajos Kossuth and his supporters found refuge in Ada Kaleh, where the governor of the fortress Mustafa Bego received them. Mustafa Bego acknowledged Kossuth as a head of state in exile but also nourished the memory of the Hungarian struggle for national independence.[32] The memory of Kossuth's visit was commonly built and maintained by the Muslim islanders and by the Hungarian nationalists as an anonymous Hungarian "Fellow of the Carpathian Society" reported it in 1881:

> It was near here that Kossuth, that ardent aspirant after political freedom, and the hero of the "War of Independence", fleeing from his pursuers, crossed the Danube and sought protection in Turkish territory. Before crossing the frontier, he threw himself down for the last time on the soil of his beloved Fatherland for which he had risked so much and fought so hard, pressed on it a sobbing, passionate kiss, and planting his foot on Turkish territory, became, as he himself so touchingly described it in the memories of his exile, "like a wrecked ship thrown up by the storm on a desert shore". A Turkish officer greeted him courteously in the name of Allah, led him to a place which he had kindly caused to be prepared for him to rest in for the night, under God's free heaven, and asked for his sword with downcast eyes, as if ashamed that a Turk should disarm a Hungarian. 'I unbuckled it', [Kossuth] writes, 'and gave it to him without uttering a word; my eyes filled with tears, and he, wishing me sound rest, left me alone with my sorrow'.[33]

In 1880, a commemorative inscription in German, Osmanli and Hungarian was placed in Ada Kaleh in memory of the welcome given to Kossuth by the still living paşa.[34] It was as much a statement of the gratitude of the Hungarians as it was the basis for the reincorporation of the island into the kingdom of St. Stephen.[35]

Indeed, relations between Austria-Hungary and Ada Kaleh were far from peaceful. From the late 1860s regular Hungarian troops were stationed in the fortress, and from 1877 the Austro-Hungarian army

properly occupied the island. The initial intention of the Habsburg administration was even to expel the island's population so much so that in March 1878 the Adakalehzis petitioned Francis Joseph and asked for permission to stay, or compensation for their agricultural properties and lost economic activity. During the war, Ada Kaleh became a refuge for Muslims forced out of Serbia and Bulgaria and between 1878 and 1913 its population almost doubled. Vienna anticipated a humanitarian crisis by advocating the relocation of the entire population of the island to Bosnia. Despite some attempts to organize the evacuation of the fortress and a confusion between the Habsburg and Ottoman administrations, the population refused to move, and the Treaty of Berlin settled the case. Nevertheless, in 1879 and 1905, the Hungarian occupation and the limited resources of the island led several families to ask for permission to emigrate. Ironically, this time both Istanbul and Vienna tried to dissuade them and sought to avoid an uncontrollable migration dynamic in the whole region. The problem could only increase since in 1905 18 new families from Rumelia fled the persecution and took the road to the stronghold. In 1906, the Divan finally organized the transfer of 69 families to Istanbul and Konya to release the demographic pressure on the island and release the tensions between its inhabitants.[36]

From 1878 to 1913, Ada Kaleh was properly co-ruled by the Habsburg and Ottoman authorities. The independence of Romania acknowledged in 1878 brought a new actor onto the Danube geopolitical scene. For Vienna and Istanbul, it remained more than essential to control "the key to the Danube" even outside of any legal framework. Also, in 1913, the Hungarian writer Zsigmond Szebők introduced the administrative specificities of Ada Kaleh in his novel *Dörmögő Dömötör*:

> Ada Kale belongs to Turkey […]. Ada Kale […] is inhabited by Turks, only the army is Hungarian, because, although the island belongs to Turkey, since Serbia gained its independence, it has nevertheless fallen so far away from the motherland, as a button that had been cut off the coat. So, Hungary undertook its defense.[37]

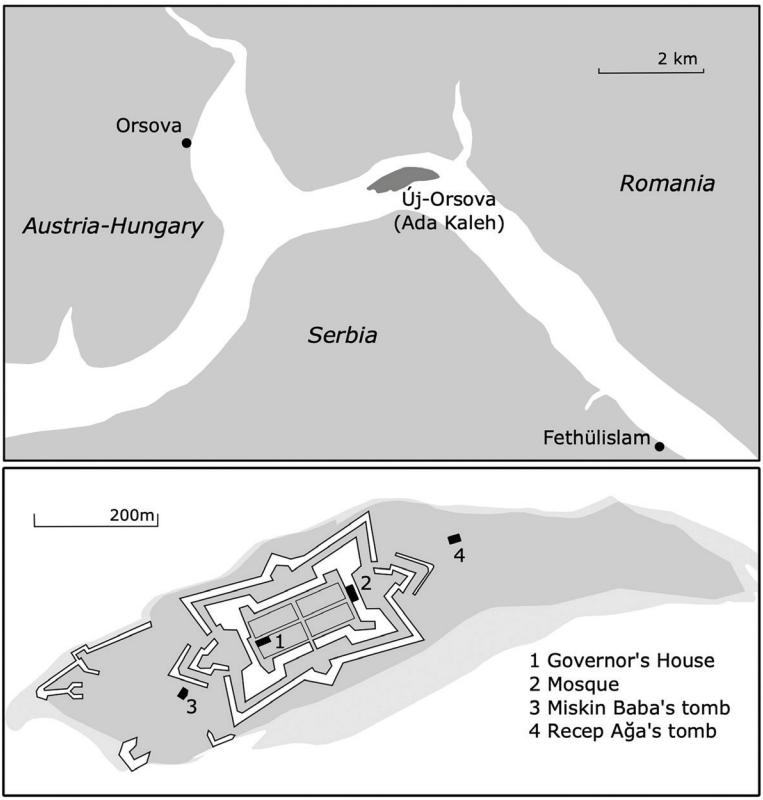
In 1878, Article 14 of the Treaty of Berlin explicitly confirmed that the "village of Adacali" belonged to the Ottoman Empire. However, even the international law did not agree on the island's fate, since Article 47 of the same treaty gave the new Danube Commission the responsibility of settling "the question of the sharing of waters and fisheries". On the one

hand, Article 25 of the Treaty of Berlin delegated the administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Vienna, which also constituted a new legal framework for Ada Kaleh. On the other hand, if freedom of trade was guaranteed and migrations were under control, there was no reason to question what Vienna and Buda(-pest) claimed. The Danube Commission could only be satisfied that Ada Kaleh got the status of a free port. Nevertheless, in 1894 the Hungarian turkologist Ináč Kúnos reminded that an Ottoman consul based in Orșova represented the islanders, and this consul directly reported to the Ottoman ambassador in Vienna.[38] On 1 December 1911, *The Sun Pictorial Magazine* introduced Mustafa Bego – son of the previously mentioned character – as "decidedly the boss of the island" and emphasized its autonomy.[39] However, in 1913, and again in reaction of the migration crisis generated by the Balkan wars, Budapest recognized Ada Kaleh as a Hungarian municipality under the name of Újorșova (New Orșova). Like Orșova, it was part of the comitate of Krassó-Szörény. This was the unilateral decision of Budapest, without the consent of Vienna or Istanbul.[40]

A diverse Muslim society in Modern Europe

It is nevertheless possible to have a better idea of what Ada Kaleh and its population looked like in the 19th century. The citadel, the mosque, the derviș mausoleum, the bazar and the kemerfs became the *topoï* of the western travelers' orientalism. They nevertheless hosted a changing, diverse and dynamic Muslim society.

Fig. 2. Map of Ada Kaleh under the Hungarian occupation (by the author)



From the mid-19th century, the island was regularly described and became an orientalist cliché.[41] In 1860, during his trip from Paris to Bucharest, Duruy stopped in Orșova and from the pier, he described what he could see of the Ottoman Ada Kaleh:

> In the middle of the river, surrounded by a circle of high mountains, the New-Orșova, or, as the Turks call it, 'the citadel of the Island' (Adakaleè), raises its old fortress whose ramparts pierced with loopholes bathe their feet in the Danube. Two massive towers, a house of a nice appearance and the elegant minaret of its mosque, surrounded by a green mass of plum trees, surmount them. Under the sparkling sky, striped with long clouds

> that the setting sun reflected by the moving waves of the river, this island is a charming and mysterious aspect.[42]

Since the 19th century, the citadel, the mosque, the governor's house and the luxuriant vegetation were recurrent topoi of the description of the island. Contrary to Duruy, Jerrold crossed the Danube and gave a more precise idea of the island:

> The bazaar, with its little café tables under the acacias, its red-bricked paths, its low houses washed with brilliant blues and greens, its group of men and boys, its shop-keepers standing in their doorways fingering their "Tespis," or strings of beads, is a true and interesting glimpse of the Orient. The plain mosque, above one of the battered walls has little to show beyond a magnificent carpet covering its floor space, though outside is a picturesque roofed-in well, grown closely round with a wealth of vari-coloured convolvuluses, admiring which, in company with a Japanese visitor, I learned that in Japan as in England the flower is known as 'the morning glory.' A series oof embayed arches under the walls, all of the same crumbling red brick, known as the Kemerfs, suggest something of the security of the place in the old days when it was a powerful fort. Its military importance is still acknowledged by a small Austrian garrison being kept it. Despite this evidence of changed authority, it remains essentially Turkish.[43]

The streets had a commercial function; from the 18th century, they transformed the citadel into a bazaar. While hiking through Orșova heights, Duruy reported that "it looks like an immense caravanserai composed of a series of hallways opening on gardens, and whose roofs are dominated by a line of chimney pipes in reddish bricks, built in the shape of minarets."[44]. In 1913, Szebők wrote that:

> Most of it is occupied by the fortress, and inside the fortress, its streets, houses, and shops […]. The merchants sold their goods not in glass-door shops, but in an open bazaar. There they were squatting, under tent-like carpets, on soft Oriental carpets. There they were selling all kinds of sweets, trinkets, beautiful Oriental rugs. It was a real Turkish world.[45]

Visitors' focus on Ada Kaleh changed with the island's status. Before 1878, political buildings attracted the attention of travelers, such as the governor's house – built by Recep Aga – described by the Göttingen naturalist Carl Heinrich Edmund von Berg:

> His residence is very simple and in terrible shapes, like everything else in the fortress. It is located at the island's upper end, with a high floor for the stables that form a simple quadrilateral. To get up there, there was a path we find in our mountain villages to go to the stables, wooden warehouses with paving stones of the worst kind, full of holes and dirt between them. In front of the house were gathered several officers in very worn uniforms and non-regulatory dress, for example, barefoot, as well as many servants.[46]

After 1878 and the slow loss of political importance of Ada Kaleh after 1816, visitors partly, but not exclusively reported on Islamic places of worship. The mausoleum of Miskin Baba, protector of the city, was infrequently mentioned. For example, in 1934, Brunea-Fox described it as a

> grey and modest mausoleum, located right next to the pier, would not stop you for a moment from contemplating it if you did not know that this tall, rectangular stone, without any inscription, honors the memory of a just man venerated by the inhabitants for his life of integrity, for his extraordinary deeds.[47]

The mosque was located at the eastern end of the fortress and is nevertheless represented in many photos of the 20th century. Built on the bastion of the eastern gate of the fortress, it dominated the city. In 1860 the French engraver Dieudonné Auguste Lancelot – who traveled with Duruy – gave it almost the function of a lighthouse on the Danube. The mosque of Ada Kaleh was characterized by its baroque style, which connects it to central European material culture, so much its architecture differs from the mosques of the Balkans. It is most likely that the mosque was the former Franciscan church built by the Propaganda Fide during the Habsburg occupation in 1717–1738. It had the shape of a Christian Basilica topped with a "v" roof and not a dome. To reinforce the symbolic belonging of Ada Kaleh and its mosque to the material culture of central Europe, some iconographic sources represent the minaret as a simple chimney on the mosque's roof. Photographs from the early 20th century confirm, however, that the minaret was an architectural element by itself that rested on the southern wall of the mosque. The minaret was thus accessible from inside the mosque, and the adjoining nature of the two monuments confused an observer looking at Ada Kaleh from a little too far away. The sacred space was also composed of an external fountain for ablutions.[48]

There would be something vain in trying to establish the ethnic composition of Ada Kaleh. The Habsburg and Ottoman soldiers who occupied the fortress originated from different parts of their respective and asymmetrically diverse empires. Under Ottoman rule, islanders originated from the neighboring provinces with Hungarian, Slavic, Turkish, and Wallachian backgrounds. Not all of them were Muslims. An orthodox chapel is mentioned and was common in central European trading areas. In the 19th century, the Roma community from Orșova and the hajduks and the Vlachs settled temporarily on the island. The detachment of Hungarian soldiers followed the Hungarian occupation without mentioning their linguistic background. It would be reasonable to argue that they were Catholic, but even that is not obvious. The Hungarian army might have established the Orthodox chapel.[49]

However, we should take seriously what all travelers wrote: Ada Kaleh was something else, mainly because Muslims were an essential part of the population. But Islam is a very diverse and dynamic world too, and Ada Kaleh reflected at least a part of this diversity. The census of 20 May 1913 helps us to get a more precise idea of the population. Ada Kaleh comprised 637 inhabitants divided into 171 households, and a third of the population was not born on the island (*Muhajir*). However, the new islanders mainly were women from neighboring territories and especially from Vidin for a third of them, but also from Niğbolu (Nikopol), Fethülislam (Kladovo), Turtukaya (Turtakan), Rusçuk, or Orșova. The Census gives us access to three generations of mobile women along the Danube. Also Hacer Hanım was born in Lom in 1856. She married the imam Hafız Mustafa Efendi and in the mid-1870s moved in Vidin, where in 1879 they had a daughter Mirat Hanım. Around 1900, the family moved to Ada Kaleh, where Mirat married a local carpenter. In 1913, Mirat had had a boy and a girl – Miraç and Emine – respectively born in Ada Kaleh in 1907 and 1911. Other women moved without their family, like Ayșe Hanım from Vidin, born in 1883. She moved to Ada Kaleh in 1900 after marrying merchant İsmail Nazmi Efendi. They had 5 children and 3 of them were receiving education when the census was conducted. Some families moved from Vidin like the shoemaker Hasan Ağa and his wife Hatice Hanım. They also had 5 children, the last one born in Ada Kaleh, the oldest in Vidin. Few came for Bosnia or Constanța. Others from diverse provinces of the Ottoman empire as far as Erzurum or Süleymaniye in Kurdistan.[50]

In the March 1878 petition sent to Vienna, the islanders introduced themselves in two categories: shop owners who lived in a house with a

garden, and farmers who lived in the Kemerfs. The 1913 census shows that the 70 boatmen represented the first professional group on the island, far above the 24 traders, the 13 coffee sellers who officiated on the ferries – and 6 other coffee makers on the island – , and the 12 cigarette manufacturers. Ada Kaleh had 2 imams and 1 muezzin, 1 teacher but 53 pupils, and diverse apprentices. The census also provides information about Mustafa Bego. He married Zekiye Hanım and they had at least one son also named Mustafa Bego, born in Ada Kaleh in 1868. The latter was a trader and lived with his wife Sıdıka Hanım, also from Ada Kaleh, and their five children. The two eldest were born in 1900 and were twins. The boy was a pupil, and the girl remained without any official occupation. The agricultural professions and fishing concerned only a few people, but poly-activity and women's occupations were not documented by the 1913 census. Zehlia Hanım was, for example, a 35-year-old single mother who lived in the Kemerfs with her 14-year-old daughter Zehra, with no official occupation. They probably worked as daily workers and horticultors.[51]

The islanders living in the Kemerfs represented 28% of the households and showed a profile that did not match traditional categories. Zehlia's case mentioned above is undoubtedly one of many examples of poverty. A single mother, she was living symbolically outside of the community. In Ada Kaleh's patriarchal society she was also blamed for her allegedly immoral behavior. 19th-century rural historians could associate Zehlia to a prostitute by her status within the community and the physical place where she lived. Another single mother, Ayşe Hanım, lived in the Kemerfs with her children, Gülzar and Sadryie, and two brothers from Tutrakan in Dobrudja with whom she had no legal or official family bond. The two brothers, Islam Efendi and Ilyas Efendi, were 23 and 13. They were educated, and respectively worked as cigarette maker and barber. What appeared as a form of concubinage might have explained the physical exclusion of the household from the community more than the relative economic poverty of its members. The census also shows few cases of single fathers as Ibrahim Ağa, who lived in the Kemerfs with his son Hasan. However, as an ağa he was regarded as a respectable man, undoubtedly because of his former military occupation. He was 48 in 1913, and defined himself as a daily worker (*Amele*). His 10-year-old son was a student. The poverty of the people who lived in the Kemerfs was not that obvious. Moreover, the already mentioned imam from Vidin Hafız Mustafa Efendi was living in the Kemerfs with his wife, although their daughter, who married an Adakalehzi, was living in the fortress. The fact that one imam

lived in the Kemerfs and another in the fortress invites us to describe Ada Kaleh as composed of two distinct communities. Marriage made it possible to move from one community to the other.[52]

World War I finally challenged the trans-imperial identity of Ada Kaleh. The Corfu Declaration of 1917, which denied the existence of Islam in the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and the population exchanges between Bulgaria and Turkey left little chance for the inhabitants of Ada Kaleh to find their place in Yugoslavia or Bulgaria. In 1920, Ada Kaleh's fate depended on the Treaty of Trianon. This was de facto recognition that the island had become a Hungarian dominion, even though, in 1923, Turkey continued to claim sovereignty over it. Istanbul/Ankara and Bucharest claimed to be responding to the islanders' wishes. The Romanian diplomat Constantin Diamandi explained that:

> At the same time, the Romanian government, spontaneously, on the amendments to the Constitution, in order to show a special solicitude to the Romanian subjects of Islamic religion, granted, at the request of our president of the council, a right of parity to the leaders of the Islamic religion in Romania to appear by right as members of the Romanian Senate.[53]

This constitutional reform amplified the respect for religious tolerance guaranteed by the signatory states of the Treaty of Berlin. Indeed, after the conquest of Dobruja and the incorporation of its northern part into Romania, the Ottoman Empire obtained from the international community the guarantee of the public practice of Islam. In 1910, King Carol I ordered the construction of a new mosque in Constanța that he inaugurated it in 1913 with the Ottoman ambassador. After World War I, Romania was the region's most favorable Christian-ruled state to Islam. However, the Romanian military presence on the island since 1919 probably left no choice to the Adakalehzis.[54]

The tobacco age: Ada Kaleh as a brand

From 1923 until the island disappeared, Ada Kaleh's inhabitants went from being a legal majority to a legally protected minority. Some of them left for Istanbul or Thrace. The repression or the fear of the repression of Islam undoubtedly motivated these departures. However, Muslim families from Bosnia continued to settle in Ada Kaleh – and Dobrudja –, where they could benefit from legal recognition of the religion and protection of

their religious practices. Carol I's politics of difference towards Muslims permitted the relatively smooth incorporation of Ada Kaleh into the kingdom.[55]

Ada Kaleh even legitimized the Romanian monarchy, primarily through the figure of Miskin Baba and his history told by Ali Ahmet in 1936. Ahmet's book illustrated a rich series of studies on the history and economic development of Ada Kaleh, specific to the interwar period. Coming from a wealthy family from the Khanate of Bukhara, Miskin Baba received in a dream the command of Allah to leave his possessions and distribute his fortune to the poor and then to leave for an island in the middle of the Danube. It was at this price that his soul could rest in peace. Miskin Baba arrived in Ada Kaleh in 1786. He distinguished himself by teaching Islam and his thaumaturgical power: he cured the sick and restored fertility to women. He also contributed to the Golden Age of Ada Kaleh as a contemporary of Recep Aga and Mustafa Bego. He was buried in 1857 and became the tutelary figure of the local Muslim community. Ali Ahmet claimed Miskin Baba appeared in a dream to the most pious inhabitants of the city, and the saint would have predicted the visit of Carol II of Romania, which indeed occurred in 1931 – three years before the first mention of the prediction by the imam. The island's memory thus played its part in legitimizing the Romanian dynasty in the hearts of the city's inhabitants again.[56]

Despite its growing political insignificance, Ada Kaleh knew a specific economic development in the interwar period. The fortress was a famous tourist destination where European travelers came to enjoy artificial and cheap fragments of "the East", a certain idea of what was the Ottoman Empire. In 1911, Jerrold noted that "Ada Kaleh has taken on the ways of a 'show place' and is on the look-out for strangers."[57] As early as the 1930s, the island welcomed more than 15,000 tourists annually and was a favorite destination for school trips in Romania. This touristification was a chance to maintain the island's memory as Ali Ahmet did. Ada Kaleh's imam played an essential role in the commercial promotion of his island:

> The stores have names like "Oriental Bazaar" or names similar to those in Istanbul: "Kapali Cearși", "Bezestan", and others […] As for products, pipes, water pipes, household items, children's toys, bracelets, earrings, and rings, all labelled "Ada-Kaleh", are purchased. There are two restaurants; coffee shops are every few steps. Two factories produce the famous Rahat (Turkish delights) of Ada-Kaleh.[58]

The material culture keeps the traces of these metal boxes with oriental ornaments and intended to contain jam, Turkish delights, or tobacco. However, the duty-free status also fostered tourism in Ada Kaleh and generated poor working conditions for the islanders.[59]

During this period, Ada Kaleh became strongly dependent on the tobacco industry. The island maintained and developed a craft and then the industrial activity of cigarette production. Adakalehzi worked for several brands including *Regia Monopolului Statului* and *Musulmane*. The islanders describe them as poor quality, as F. Brunea-Fox: "I do not appreciate cigarettes and island shit! They are not to my taste". In 1934, in his article "Ali Kadri 'Sultanul' din Ada Kaleh", F. Brunea-Fox offered a radically different perspective on the interwar Ada Kaleh craft industry, the condition of life, and social inequality on the island despite the significant fiscal advantages granted by the Romanian government in 1924 and confirmed by Carol II in 1931. The Romanian policies towards Ada Kaleh followed the former privileges granted by the Ottoman sultan to the islanders, especially the regular delivery of tobacco.[60] However, the industrial production of cigarettes and the increasing social inequality and poor redistribution of massive benefits generated social tensions and anger against the successful entrepreneur Ali Kadri. F. Brunea-Fox introduced the situation this way:

> So, when the Ada Kaleh delegation visited the newsroom to provide us with the first sensational clues about Ali Kadri's miraculous existence, I suddenly got the picture. Down – we have to repeat – six hundred Turks in skin and bones; up – the "Sultan" Ali Kadri, the chairman of the *Musulmane* joint-stock company, the 'royal privilege' escamoteur, the owner of the restaurant, several cafés, the formidable business 'Brasseur', the owner of the twenty-four-room palace, the friend of politicians, etc. etc. Notice that even the nouns used in the last line contrast not only linguistically but also socially. To go from 'skin and bones' to 'castellan' requires at least a revolution […]. Hundreds of people live like troglodytes in the undergrounds of the ancient and charred fortresses with which the island is sown; on the same patch of land surrounded by water stands a sumptuous palace like in fairy tales, inhabited by a single man […].
>
> Almost 650 souls are like slaves to the interest of a fool, are lesser-known details. Not many ears have heard the echoes of their grievances. By nature, and because of other psycho… gendarme complexes, the Turks of Ada Kaleh are not prone to vehemence. If some of them had not learned from the Severin truck drivers, from the Orșova porters, the value of vigorous protests, it is sure that the voice of the workers' demands would remain unheard.[61]

A decade was enough to make Kadri's fortune. In 1924, the Romanian government allowed the Ada Kaleh community to import two wagons of duty-free tobacco. Kadri delivered the petition to the government and took advantage of the situation by organizing the import, the transformation of tobacco into cigarettes, and their commercialization. The economic focus of Ada Kaleh also shifted from Orșova to Severin, better connected with Bucharest and more suitable for industry. Kadri diversified his activities in Băile Herculane, Severin and Craiova. While the legend perpetuated by the imam Ali Ahmet claimed that Kadri was among the poorest inhabitants of the island, "the sultan of Ada Kaleh" comforted his success and social position with three successive marriages. In 1931, after the prolongation and extension of the fiscal privilege, the inhabitants of Ada Kaleh set up a corporation, but access to the banks depended on Kadri's connections, and Kadri imposed himself as the principal investor. Then he could control the newly established *Muslumane*, the joint-stock company he ruled with his clique. Every year, the company distributed modest dividends to the islanders, but since none had access to the accountability of the company, none could contest Kadri's governance and money diversion. Ali Ahmet even introduced Kadri as a benefactor of the island comparable to Miskin Baba to comfort his legitimacy and make his fast change of social condition accepted by the believers. However, despite Kadri's extorsion, *Musulmane* progressively transformed Ada Kaleh with a new square, paved alleys, new houses and schools, partial access to electricity.

> The capital of Ali Kadri and his consorts on the board of directors: brothers, relatives, straw men; the capital resulting from almost ten years of trafficking thousands of kilos of sugar bought tax-free but sold to merchants on the other side of the Danube at fabulous profits; the capital resulting from tons of coffee, tobacco, spirits, even from the beads, the various oriental objects "made in Ada Kaleh"![62]

Kadri turned the island into a brand and contributed to restoring Ada Kaleh to its former role as a free port; the success of *Musulmane* created a dense curtain that maintained the illusion of a fabulous and universal success in Bucharest. It also prevented the islanders from asserting their rights and limiting their economic dependence on Kadri.[63]

National integration and community erasure

During the interwar period, Ada Kaleh knew also an economic and cultural romanianization, but its real impact is hard to assess. The ethnic diversity of the Muslim community remained strong until the evacuation of the island. In the 1960s, Albanian, Anatolian, Bosnian and Tatar Muslim ways of life coexisted, mixed, and reciprocally influenced. This was particularly obvious regarding women's outfits. Niqab, çarşaf, modernized traditional costumes, or modern outfits simultaneously coexisted in Ada Kaleh. Besides, from the 1930s, Muslim men began to marry Christian and Jewish women. After 1944, Muslim women could marry Romanian men too. In 1953, 30% of Muslim men married Romanian, Hungarian or Serbian women. In 1957 and 1965 they were more than 40%. In 1967, during one of the last ethnographic campaigns led in Ada Kaleh, the Romanian scholar Liviu Marcu reported the testimony of a 17-year-old saleswoman:

> Nowadays people have gone modern, they don't consider religion when they get married; if they get along, they get married. Only the old people care about it. Since the war, things have changed, and young people marry for love. Nowadays, everyone works, so that even wealth no longer matters.[64]

The war fostered the secularization of Ada Kaleh society, especially the freedom to choose a partner, divorce, or live in concubinage. Besides, there was no polygamy in Ada Kaleh. The preservation of a system of vendetta transferred from Albania, Bosnia and Serbia – and in complete opposition to the *shari'a* – also testified to the development of a mixed Islam specific to the Slavic societies of Southeast Europe. Ada Kaleh was a society of the Danube. Its socio-economic dynamics did not fit in with how political, religious, and scientific institutions perceived it. However, it was also a society full of resources that adapted to the different powers that pretended to govern.[65]

Broadly, Adakalehzis supported and took advantage of the Romanian state. After World War II, Ada Kaleh's pupils went to secondary school in Orșova or Turnu Severin, in Romanian institutions. They were Romanian speakers. The son of the last imam himself confessed that he could not read the Koran because it was in Arabic. The role of the memory of Miskin Baba in the legitimization of the Romanian royal power – in particular of the person of Carol II – explains in part the hostility of the islanders

towards the communist regime. However, the association of Islam with Romanian nationalism and the defense of the kingdom was not questioned in 1944 when the Imam of Ada Kaleh – certainly Ali Ahmet – joined the Catholic and Orthodox priests of Orșova to bless the Romanian troops ready to leave to reconquer Transylvania, after the sudden opportunistic and radical shift of Bucharest. The most explicit symbol of Ada Kaleh's romanianization was certainly that throughout the 20th century, the island turned its back on the territories it was part of for centuries. After the war, the proximity of Ada Kaleh to the Yugoslav border forced Belgrade to place barbed wire along the right bank of the Danube. This went as far as a curfew was implemented from 08.00 p.m. on the northern arm of the river, restricting the water sports activities developed by the village boatman, Ahmed Engur. The testimony of Ahmed's wife, Mioara Engur, received by the British journalist Nick Thorpe, even compared the island to a camp from which it was impossible to escape.[66]

After World War II, supporters of the socialist regime relayed on F. Brunea-Fox's reportage and claimed a significant improvement in the Adakalehzis' condition of life. For example, in 1961, the Romanian journalist Ilie Purcaru compared the inhabitants of Ada Kaleh to savages living in kemerfs before the installation of the new regime, which certainly reflected the way Bucharest perceived the islanders, but only concerned a quarter of the islanders in 1913. The memories of the last generation of islanders show the relative disinterest of the communists and the lack of communication between Ada Kaleh and Bucharest. The cooperation between Belgrade and Bucharest put an end to the island's history. In 1966, the project to build the first Iron Gates dam accompanied a plan to move the island of Ada Kaleh to the island of Șimian, near Turnu Severin. Between 1962 and 1965, the Institute of Architecture in Bucharest assessed the island's material heritage and proposed to transfer several buildings to Șimian. Several ethnologic missions also recorded the social practices, the language, and the music of the last inhabitants. The transfer to Șimian was to be accompanied by a significant improvement in the community's living conditions, which benefited from the free electricity the dam would supply. At first, the project seemed sincere since the tomb of Miskin Baba was moved to the island. Nevertheless, the project stopped there. In 1968, Ada Kaleh was dynamited and then submerged in 1971.[67]

After 1968, the dispersion of the Adakalehzis generated certain forms of diasporic practices. In the absence of refuge, the population of Ada Kaleh dispersed. Turkey offered hospitality to the islanders, and

some settled again in Istanbul or Thrace. However, the families of Ada Kaleh essentially followed the economic and migratory circuits already established and moved to Orșova and Turnu Severin, sometimes with the hope of seeing the project of the island of Șimian succeed. A Muslim community – certainly Tartars with ancestors from Dobruja – took a part of the mosque's carpet to install it in Constanța. Others joined the Muslim community of Babadağ close to the Danube Delta.

Fig. 3. Ada Kaleh Carpet in the Carol I Mosque in Constanța, 10 July 2020 (photo by the author)

The memorial reinvention of Ada Kaleh – both memorial and physical – is an expected feature of the diaspora.[68] This process of atlanticization promotes the memory of a lost paradise and properly of an island that would have been like an Islamic paradise. Gheorghe Bob is a former island inhabitant who established one of the most important private collections of postcards and photographs. He cultivates the memory of a paradisiac garden that he tries to duplicate in his new home. In 2019, one of the Norwegian President's Medals went to Silvia Michaela Diaconu's

architectural project entitled "The Enchanted Gardens of Ada Kaleh". Diaconu translated into an architectural language the photographs, testimonies, and objects she collected to restore a representation of a lost paradise. As the ethnographer Bercovici indicates about Bob: "it is very important to point out that this person is part of the small number of Romanians who lived on the island and that, despite his ethnicity, he is the most active islander in the task of recovering the memory of Ada Kaleh". At some point, it won't be irrelevant to consider that the memorial association of Ada Kaleh with a "lost paradise" could be the ultimate form of Orientalism from which the history of the island suffers.[69]

Ada Kaleh's Muslim memory is indeed not that obvious. Of course, the mosque Carol I in Constanța keeps and exhibits the carpet of the former Ada Kaleh's mosque, but the carpet does not fit and is fragile, expansive to restore, and bulky. The Muslim community in Constanța would have nothing against getting rid of it. The oral memory of Miskin Baba strongly depends on the legend written by Ali Ahmet and maintained by the last imams of the island. It is not more religious than municipal.[70] The mausoleum was transferred into Șimian, but it is also slowly disappearing by lack of care. The last islanders are much keener to identify themselves according to their professional activities and the impact the tobacco industry had on their respective lives than their religious belonging. The boatman Ahmed Engur watched the demolition of Ada Kaleh from the bank of Orșova, and according to his testimony, the mosque and its minaret were the first buildings to be dynamited. The mosque determined the status of the city and demolishing the mosque first was for the Romanian authorities the most straightforward way to say that Adakalehzi civic community did not exist anymore. Engur's feelings were particularly hurt when the community moved the graveyard from Ada Kaleh to Șimian: "Everything was moved, bones and grave-stones and everything went to Șimian, but no one knows who is who now. We moved them piece by piece, but the authorities mixed them all up. Now people say there are bones lying all over the island."[71]

This is a family memory, nothing more. Thorpe's interview emphasizes the sadness of the few remaining practices of remembrance that remains. The journalist wrote: "Down in Orșova, Erwin[72] sometimes takes former inhabitants of the island out in his boat, right over the place where the island lies, deep beneath the waves. Do they pray? I ask. 'No, they just sit quietly. Or scatter flowers on the water."[73]

There is a discrepancy between the increasing academic interest in Ada Kaleh's history and the resignation of the inhabitants. There is no Adakalehzi diaspora, meaning no community of dispersed people who try to maintain a specific linguistic and religious bond and who is animated by the hope of returning to a homeland. Scholars have the memory of the last inhabitants at their disposal, already very old for most of them. The transmission and the adhesion of the younger generations to the legacy they received remain still today to be explored. However, Ada Kaleh is now an opportunity for scholars to challenge culturalist and nationalist narratives in central Europe. It is a political opportunity to illustrate the environmental and cultural impact of non-democratic top-down policies. It is also a literary and artistic opportunity: historians do not own the past alone, and Ada Kaleh seems to be a fantastic source of creativity, and artistic inspiration, such as Atlantis was.

Conclusion

The history of Ada Kaleh is an invitation to go beyond a Habsburg-Ottoman history exclusively seen as a confrontation between empires and religions. Early modern Ada Kaleh played a significant role in the circulation of civilians in the Danube area. The islanders were soldiers, refugees, shepherds, farmers, occasional itinerant merchants, or wealthy international traders. The island was characterized by the Habsburg fortress incorporated into the Ottoman military system after 1738, but also by a lazaret, a market, and a local production of fruits and vegetables. The rise to power of Recep Aga illustrated the complex entanglement of community solidarities and clientelism between Orșova, Belgrade and Vidin. It also showed how Ada Kaleh was in a strategic position in the Habsburg-Ottoman relations, the Ottoman Empire, and the competition between the local political authorities. The pașa of Ada Kaleh could control the navigation on the Danube River and determine access to the resources of this trade.

Such a complex system of solidarity between empires, communities, and households also invites us to go beyond national narratives on the region. The pașas of Ada Kaleh and Orșova provided essential support to the legitimate political authority in Belgrade and its allies, i.e. the Orthodox elite. Ada Kaleh loyalty was rewarded by the Serb national leaders when Recep Aga was opportunistically challenged by the pașa of Rusçuk and

the voivode of Wallachia. Ada Kaleh also provided Lajos Kossuth and the Hungarian independentists with recognition and support. Mustafa Bego received Kossuth as a head of state. At some point after 1878, the Hungarian government regarded Ada Kaleh as Mustafa Bego's property and as an autonomous province in the Ottoman Empire. It was only after the death of the iconic paşa that Ada Kaleh was incorporated into the comitate of Krassó-Szörény for a very brief period. The relative religious toleration of the new Romanian state and the island's military occupation during World War I turned Ada Kaleh into a Romanian island. Again, the political and religious authorities played their part; they reinvented the island's past to meet the expectation of the new regime.

Finally, the history of 20th-century Ada Kaleh goes way beyond that the dominant and naïve Orientalism that public narratives vehiculate. The fiscal paradise that Ada Kaleh was benefited only to few people and maintained the islanders in poverty while social inequality rapidly increased. Despite the interwar tourist rush, Ada Kaleh's population was progressively marginalized to the extent that no choice was left to the islanders when Bucharest and Belgrade implemented the Iron Gates Hydroelectric Dam's plan. Few missions recorded the memory and heritage of the island, and few efforts were made to transfer the island to Șimian and preserve this part of European Ottoman history. The economic, social, and cultural resources of Ada Kaleh seem to have been exhausted so much that it is barely difficult today to evoke an Adakalehzi diaspora.

Endnotes

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