

## CONSIDERATIONS ON THE ROLE OF THE OLD ROUTES IN THE SOCIAL-ECONOMIC LIFE OF OLTENIA

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**Abstract:** Being situated at the convergence of some important civilisations, the region of Oltenia was crossed by a complex network of roads. These had a significant role in the socio-economical development of Oltenia, in the shaping and the evolution of the settlement network, especially in the intersection points. The road network that crossed Oltenia includes those *great routes of the country* or the *official routes*, well known, and *less known routes*, the so-called traditional roads.

Along the centuries, the travelling axis have maintained a permanent connection with each other, in all the provinces of the country, but also between them and the exterior of Romania.

**Keywords:** Oltenia, old roads, human settlements, economy, trade.

Situated in the south-west part of the country, in an area that offered favourable living conditions, Oltenia has known an uninterrupted autochthonous autonomy, starting in the Neolithic Age and continued till present. The natural background of the region, having all the forms of relief (mountains, hills, plains) that descend in steps from the north to the south, along with the role of connecting bridge between the lands from the north of Carpathians and those from the southern Danube, is situated amongst the factors that created the premises for the development, since ancient times, of a strong communication network, either on land or on water, which allowed, among others, the profitability of the merchandise. As P. P. Panaitescu shows, highlighting the role of the forms of relief in economy, “The circulation of goods in the age of the free communities and before the forming of the feudalism, is due to the way the land is displayed, on different geographic regions, positioned one after the others: mountains with pastures and woods, hills with orchards and vineyards, valleys and the plain for farming, ponds with fish, forests for timber and coal. This economic differentiation brings the exchange of goods”<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> P. P. Panaitescu, *Introducere la istoria culturii românești*, Bucharest, Editura Științifică Press, 1969, p. 153.

Along the time, Oltenia was crossed by common roads, those *great routes of the country* or the *official routes*, well known, and *less known routes*, the so-called traditional roads<sup>2</sup>. The ones from the first category were connecting the cities, the boroughs, the citadels and the villages among each other, being known to all and always crossed, unlike the less known routes, which sometimes had fluctuant, hidden directions, their itinerary being tightly connected to certain occupations or trade. The both categories of routes had an important role not only addressing the social-economic life of the Romanian provinces, but the genesis of certain social and working traditions as well.

Being situated at the convergence of some important civilisations, the region of Oltenia was crossed by a complex network of roads. It seems that they are from a pre-Roman period, as N. Iorga notes in his writings: “judging by the roads we have nowadays, one might think that we have been initiated in the advantages presented by the access to civilisation for a short period of time...; nonetheless, we belong to a population who have travelled on very old roads, even older than the admirable Roman roads”<sup>3</sup>. A further evidence is the fact that “when the Romans entered the Dacians’ country, they found trade routes which, evidently, were not similar to the Roman roads, but the traders were satisfied with less than the legionaries, and they discovered that the local population was already familiar with this proof of civilisation that is the road”<sup>4</sup>.

For the period of the Dacian state, the road network is less known, due to the lacunary character of the archaeological research done for this period of time, along with the lack of the historic sources. Better preserved are the proofs from the Roman domination, a people well-known for being experienced in this area: “One of the Roman specialisations, constituting a title of glory nonetheless, were the roads. ...These routes represent one of the essential elements that explain the spreading and the duration of the Roman domination. When conquering a country, the first thing they would build were the camps and the roads: thus, the defence places and the roads on which the army and then the traders, the colonists and the officials could travel ...”<sup>5</sup>.

The Romans built important roads on the valleys of the rivers Olt, Jiu, along the Danube, precisely for keeping a steadfast and permanent connection between the Getae-Dacian citadels from Oltenia and those from Orăștie Mountains, along with the territories from the south of the river. Studying Tabula Peutingeriana (fig. no. 1), there can be noticed, for Oltenia, the Roman road Drobeta – Romula (a Roman city in Dacia, identified on the territory of the village of Reșca, Dobrosloveni commune, Olt County) that was crossing the province from the west to the east. Another

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<sup>2</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, Paul Simionescu, *Drumuri și popasuri străvechi*, Bucharest, Albatros Press, 1974, p. 12.

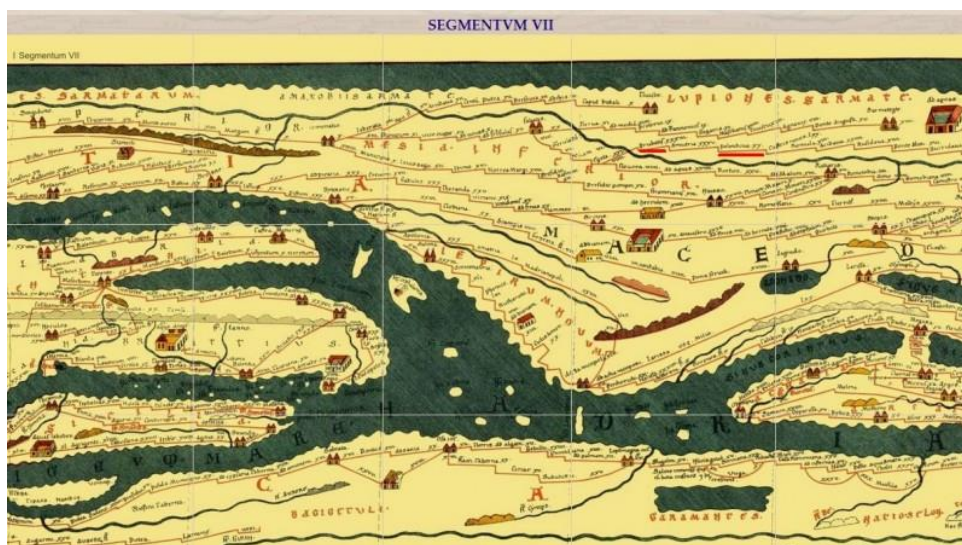
<sup>3</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Drumuri vechi*, Cultura Neamului Românesc, Bucharest, 1920, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Constantin C. Giurescu, *Istoria românilor*, vol. I, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, Bucharest, 1946, p. 153, apud Romulus Vulcănescu, Paul Simionescu, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

important Roman road was that along the Danube, between Drobeta and Giurgiu<sup>6</sup>, and another one was following the flow of the Olt river, through camps and settlements that were forming the well-known *limes alutan*<sup>7</sup>. Besides them, the territory of Oltenia was also crossed by secondary Roman roads.

On Tabula Peutingeriana, along the mentioned settlements, there are also others from the territory of the current area of Oltenia: Drubetis (Drobeta), Pelendova (Pelendava), Castris Novis (Castranova, Dolj County), Rusidava (next to Drăgășani, Vâlcea County) etc.



**Fig. no. 1.** Tabula Peutingeriana (fragment; underlined settlements: Drobeta and Pelendava).  
Source: <http://www.monumenteoltenia.ro/asezari-romane-oltenia-tabula-peutingeriana/>

These Roman roads, along other that started from the bank of the Danube towards the north, or the ones that were crossing the Pontic Dacia, were forming a network of connections, which demonstrates, for that period, a developed economic, political and military life. On the other side, the roads from the entire Romanised province were descending from the Danube and the shores of the Black Sea, or beyond the Carpathians toward the city of Rome, thus being connected by the great routes of the widely-spread empire<sup>8</sup>. They were ensuring the travelling of the people and the goods, taking the form of some important exchange routes on which especially the Greek and the Roman merchants were trading.

<sup>6</sup> Cezar Avram, Vladimir Osiac, Dinică Ciobotea, Virgil Joița, Ion Pătroi, Ileana Petrescu, *Istoria comerțului în sud-vestul României. Sec. VIII–XX*, Craiova, Editura de Sud Press, 1999, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> See more, Dumitru Tudor, *Oltenia romană*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, revised and completed, Bucharest, Academia RSR Press, 1968, p. 50 and next.

<sup>8</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, Paul Simionescu, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

In the category of the great, common routes that were crossing our country, implicitly Oltenia, can also be placed those that were descending along the great bodies of water connecting, through their woven fords and valleys, uniting, in the same time, important centres of the economic life. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the great commercial route of the people living in Brașov and Sibiu was heading towards the gangways of Danube, one of the destinations being Calafat as well<sup>9</sup>. Another route was descending from the mountains, towards Târgu Jiu, Severin, Calafat. From here, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, an important road was crossing Oltenia through Băilești, Craiova, Balș, and it was then orienting towards Transylvania, through Rm. Vâlcea and Căineni Pass<sup>10</sup>.

Referring to the commercial routes that were crossing our territories, there ought to be mentioned the fact that they had a special influence on the forming of Wallachia and Moldavia: "(...) the road did not «create» the state, as the great historian (Nicolae Iorga, A/N) had said, overwhelmed by the exuberance of discovering a significant corelation in our history; and yet, it is not less true that the commercial route and the fight for its control was a decisive component of the final stage for the constituting of the feudal state, both in the case of Wallachia and Moldavia"<sup>11</sup>.

Far from what we are living today, the roads themselves were problematic, sometimes difficult to travel, a situation that imposed the building, along them, of some halting places. Around them, there appeared settlements that developed, transforming, once with the passing of the years, into boroughs or towns. Thus, the communication routes had a tremendous contribution in the development of the settlement network, along the relief and other characteristics of the natural environment (clime, water and pedological resources): "The creation of a system of settlements is the result of some complex relations in which the historical permanence of the transport networks played the role of essential premise"<sup>12</sup>.

Therefore, the human settlements appeared and developed not only in places proper for the dwelling, but also in spaces favourable to the connections, where there was also the possibility for the communication routes. As Cecilia Alinescu and Natalia Pașa note, for the region of Moldavia: "It is easy to understand how the long and meandering roads, once rather deserted, start to become scattered, little by little, with *halting places*, either temporary (*the fairs*), or permanent, similar to *the inns*, where the Galician, Armenian or Saxon, and seldom Moldavian merchants would find their shelter for resting, as it is understandable that these first human settlements, through the favourable situation created by the existence of the roads next to the water, later became the boroughs and the main and the customs cities of

<sup>9</sup> V. Petrișor, L. Mândroi, *Calafat. Trepte de istorie*, Craiova, Scrisul Românesc Press, 1977, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> Cezar Avram, Vladimir Osiac, Dinică Ciobotea, Virgil Joita, Ion Pătroi, Ileana Petrescu, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> Șerban Papacostea, *Geneza statului în evul mediu românesc. Studii critice*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia Press, 1988, p. 204.

<sup>12</sup> C. Tălângă, *Transporturile și sistemele de așezări din România*, Bucharest, Tehnică Press, 2000, p. 30.

the country”<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, the relation between the axes of transport and the areas of habitat is a reciprocal one, along the time, especially in the periods of political and economic stability, the ones in the first category manifesting their attraction.

Although the commercial roads usually generated inconveniences for the regions crossed by them, they had a special impact, especially in the area of the economic life: “the most important influence is that manifested in the economic field. On the route of the mentioned roads there were built inns, stage stations, customs, fairs, which involved the local population in commercial and manufacturing activities. ... The beneficial effects of these roads are represented by the faster economic development of the localities, to important urbanistic accomplishments, through civile and religious constructions: parish churches, mills, bridges, boyar manors”<sup>14</sup>.

The selling and the commercialising of the rural economy products have always constituted an essential component of the human communities. As P. P. Panaitescu mentions, “the rural home-made industry: the sewing of clothes, the building of the houses, the carpet making, the distaff, the peasant towels, the dyeing of cloth, the burning of pots, the shoeing of the horses, represent permanence in our history; the originality and the love for the beautiful that can be observed in the tools made by the Romanians, show a life led by a free people that enjoyed both the life and the work. Naturally, not all the necessary products are made in only one household, there are villages specialised in certain manufactured products: villages of potters, of doggers, of rowers, of sieve makers etc. Consequently, the village industry for the exchange, not only for the local needs, emerges as well as a primitive form of the economic life and implies the circulation of merchandises between villages, and on the fair occasions. It is previous to the moment when the exchange of manufactured goods from the boyars’ courts and in the cities appeared in history. The specialised industry of certain free communities implies, as primitive as it could be, not a life enclosed within the boundaries of villages, but a commercial circulation between villages, and even regions”<sup>15</sup>.

Thus, regardless the nature of products (domestic, from the household, hand-made, agricultural or pastoral), their commercialisation assumed the shifting towards and from the sale centres outside the village or the area, an action that usually took place along some *traditional routes*. These roads, less common and less known, but with a significant socio-economical and cultural significance,

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<sup>13</sup> Cecilia Alinescu, Natalia Paşa, *Vechi drumuri moldoveneşti*, in “Anuarul de geografie și antropogeografie”, 1914–1915, pp. 4–5, apud Romulus Vulcănescu, Paul Simionescu, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Emil Lupu, *Câteva drumuri comerciale și orașe medievale de la curbura Carpaților (Buzău și Râmnicu Sărat până în secolul al XVI-lea)*, in “Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor Istorice”, Year XIX, no. 1–2, 2008, pp. 3–4, available on [https://www.academia.edu/628182/C%C3%A2teva\\_drumuri\\_comerciale\\_%C5%9Fi\\_ora%C5%9Fe\\_medievale\\_de\\_la\\_Curbura\\_Carpa%C5%A3ilor\\_Buz%C4%83u\\_%C5%9Fi\\_R%C3%A2mnicu\\_S%C4%83rat\\_p%C3%A2n%C4%83\\_%C3%AE\\_n\\_secolul\\_XVI\\_](https://www.academia.edu/628182/C%C3%A2teva_drumuri_comerciale_%C5%9Fi_ora%C5%9Fe_medievale_de_la_Curbura_Carpa%C5%A3ilor_Buz%C4%83u_%C5%9Fi_R%C3%A2mnicu_S%C4%83rat_p%C3%A2n%C4%83_%C3%AE_n_secolul_XVI_), accessed on 12.07.2021.

<sup>15</sup> P. P. Panaitescu, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

would form a network on the entire territory of the country: “Hidden and safe, «hugging» the village, oftentimes fluctuant, especially connected to the occupations and the crafts of the peasant community, they used to have different purposes than the great, common roads... Built in a manner that, through their itinerary, managed to be hidden from the normal circuit of the great roads, they lived their own historical life”<sup>16</sup>. Their denominations were connected to occupations or crafts, according to the specific of the products that were transported.

Analysing the maps, there can be noticed that these roads “appear to be crossing each other on the chart, made of broken lines, which were indeed of this shape, because, not being paved, they were following the most convenient land areas and, when an obstacle would appear, a hillock or a cluster of vegetation, or a marshy region, they were avoided by creating a large curve or sometimes a right angle. Sometimes, the detour was even larger, for safety reasons, towards more secure places”<sup>17</sup>.

In the category of the roads connected to occupations, there can be included the traditional routes, connected to agriculture, crossed only seasonally by the free peasants for different works outside the village area, or for selling the products, and pastoral or transhumance routes. Related to this, there can be mentioned the salters’ road, that is, the route on which the people would transport the salt outside the area of exploitation, the woodcutters’ road, on which they would carry down the cut or wrought wood, necessary for building the houses, the traders’ roads, the roads on the water, or for rafting etc. Among the craftsmen’ roads, there are worth mentioned: the wire-makers’ road, tub-makers’ road from Apuseni Mountains, the road of the potters, of the trough-makers from Vâlcea, of the Gipsy wood-cutlery makers, of the lime-dealers etc. The travelling on these roads was done for selling the products in the villages situated on the terraces, in boroughs and fairs.

An important category of ancient, traditional roads is made of the *salt roads*. Starting from the exploitation point of the sub-mountainous region of Oltenia, they were descending towards the Danube, to the selling points, on several routes. According to the documentary sources, in Oltenia, there were many salt roads. One of them was separating itself from Drumul Dealului (Hill Road) at Radovan and was reaching Calafat through Perișor-Giubega-Galicea Mare, and another is that probably serving the communes from the Danube bank, ascending towards the north, through Măceșu de Jos, Segarcea, to Podari, where it was crossing with Drumul Dealului<sup>18</sup> (Drumul Dealului had its route along the actual Calafat-Băilești-Radovan-Podari-Craiova main road).

Nevertheless, the most famous category of traditional roads is made of the *old pastoral roads*, either the ones for the local pastoralism, or the so-called

<sup>16</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, Paul Simionescu, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> Mara N. Popp, *Drumuri și ocupațiuni vechi în Țările Românești*, BSRRG, volume LVII, Bucharest, 1938, p. 272.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 275–276.

transhumance roads, which developed tightly connected to pastoralism, one of the occupations that developed intensively in the Middle Ages. On this occasion, there is implied the shifting not only for the commercialisation of the products, but also the direct implication of the productive activity.

Historical research demonstrated that “The Romanians have always been, contrary to the opinion of some ignorant scholars, considerate people who would raise cattle and farm... They belong to the north-Balkan and Dacian-Roman economical type, characterised through the intensive cattle and sheep raising, done steadfastly, combined with the agriculture reduced to the consumption needs of the communities. The relative economical value of the two main factors of the economy is in favour of cattle raising ... Romanian pastoralism has always been connected to a stable centre, unlike the itinerant pastoralism of the nomad people. For sheep raising, there appears the transhumance (in the summer at the mountainside, in the winter in the village or next to the ponds), but this economic form was not the most important and older either, in the Romanian traditional economy...”<sup>19</sup>. Cattle raising in the region between the Carpathians and the Danube is deeply rooted, the transhumance forming an element of permanence “because its causes are natural”: in the summer, the grass from the mountainside is looked for, while in the winter, it is replaced by the hayfields. Moreover, the circumstances of the transhumance in the watery regions show the fact that the forage from here cannot be used by the nomads, but it implies a previous preparation done by the sedentary population<sup>20</sup>.

Descending from the mountainous regions, the transhumance routes would reach the field areas, and those of the Danube ponds. In one of the studies referring to the phenomenon of transhumance in the Western Oltenia, Romulus Vulcănescu mentions that, in this region, the transhumant pastoralism increased especially in the 14<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the shepherds from Transylvania settled, temporary or permanently, with or without their flocks, on these territories<sup>21</sup>. It took impressive forms in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when “all the mountains are descending to Blahnița”, as people dwelling in the Danube meadow would say.

The same author, divided the transhumance roads into two categories: endless roads (those that they would cross each year, from summer to winter and return) and ended roads (the ones on which the shepherds stopped from this oscillation and settled in stable places). The endless roads were the ones of some professional shepherds that gave up pastoralism despite the facilities they were offered for settling down in those regions, while the ended roads belonged to the professional shepherds who did not renounce the transhumant pastoralism and began farming<sup>22</sup>.

The endless roads (the so-called sheep roads) had an important share in Western Oltenia, where the transhumant pastoralism was more intense. There, the

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<sup>19</sup> P. P. Panaitescu, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 146.

<sup>21</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, *Cartografierea etnografică a transhumaței în Oltenia de Vest*, in “Revista de etnografie și folclor”, year IX, no. 1, Bucharest, 1964, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 25.

roads would descend from Mehedinți Mountains towards Danube meadow, as numerous routes taken by the shepherds. One of them, called “the shelter route” by the local people, starts from beneath Râu Șes Mountain, Cerna valley, passes by Șiroca, Cerneți, Șimian, Rogova, from where it divides in several routes, one of them reaching Calafat, through Cetate-Hunia-Maglavit (fig. no. 2). From beneath Godeanu Mountain, there was began the sheep road, called “the shortest road”, through Cloșani gorge, then Ponoarele, Bala, Malovăț, to the Danube meadow.

The third one was starting as two routes: from beneath Osla Mănăstirească Mountain, respectively from Arcanul, which were merging at Tismana-Ungureni and then descending to Godinești-Rocșoreni, from where, towards the Danube meadow, there are divided several roads<sup>23</sup>. One of them is oriented towards the Danube meadow, crossing through the localities Bălăcița-Oprișor-Gemeni-Cetate. In its turn, this one too, has several derivations (shortcuts) through Bălăcița-Verbița-Plenița-Risipiți-Dobridor-Moțăței-Hunia-Maglavit or through Gemeni-Dobridor-Moțăței-Hunia (fig. no. 2).

All these traditional routes belong to the category of the village economic roads of special importance, considering that, through them, the rural merchandise would circulate, thus ensuring the rendering valuable of the peasants’ goods. In a further back period of time, the sheep roads did not stop in the Danube meadow, but they were crossing beyond, in Bulgaria and in Serbia.

Thus, the wide surfaces of pastures and hayfields from the Danube meadow constituted important spaces for livestock raising, not only for the local population, but also for the shepherds from Transylvania. They created, both for themselves and their animals, shelters, called sheep-pens. In the seventh decade of the last century, in the Danube meadow, there was a great number of such sheep-pens. For example, in the south of Băilești Field, there were 30 of them, next to the villages of Piscu Vechi and Poiana Mare, 37 next to the villages of Negoii and Rast, 29 on the south of Bistreț Lake etc.<sup>24</sup>.

In time, the transhumance led either to the settling of the “Hungarian” population in the area, thus generating new settlements, or they increased the population of other already existing villages. Some of the Transylvanian shepherds that were travelling on such roads, taking advantage of the fiscal facilities offered by the big landowners, settled in different places from Danube meadow or on the great transhumance roads where they started to take up farming, and, secondly, a local pastoralism. Such a settlement, formed within the transhumance process, is Băilești<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, Paul Simionescu, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>24</sup> \*\*\*, *Geografia Văii Dunării Românești*, Bucharest, Academia R.S.R. Press, 1969, p. 420.

<sup>25</sup> According to a legend, the name Băilești could be connected to the name of a shepherd called Băilă from Mărginimea Sibiului who, during his transhumance process settled in the eastern side of the actual precincts of the locality, laying the foundation of a settlement that carries his name (Alexandru F. Dinu, Nicolae C. Miu, *Băilești, o lume ... sub soarele câmpiei*, Craiova, MJM Publishing, 2006, p. 65).





Fig. no. 2. Transhumance routes in Western Oltenia.  
 Source: Romulus Vulcănescu, 1964.

Moreover, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were the villages of Lipovu Românesc (Romanian Lipovu) and Lipovu Unguresc (Hungarian Lipovu). Thus, between the years 1815 and 1820, the fluxes of Transylvanian emigrants formed the hamlet of Hungarian Lipovu (later become Lipovu Ungureni), and the village of Lipovu received the denomination of Lipovu Românesc<sup>26</sup>.

The historic documents bring evidence on the existence, in the studied area, of some roads, or fragments of these that were related to the practicing of certain *trades*. Such roads represented an important category of itineraries, of a special economic value. Generally, the traders would start from the villages or the specialised centres they lived in, towards the places where they could sell their products, especially the hilly regions, towards the field-area ones.

Consequently, there ought to be mentioned the potter roads, which followed more or less fixed routes. They would descend from the hilly area of Oltenia, where, along the time, there appeared villages where people became specialised in practicing this trade (such as Arcani, Dobrița, Runc, Stroești – in the north of Gorj, Horezu, Vâlcea County, Oboga, Olt County) towards the boroughs, the villages or other well-known places, for selling the merchandise. For example, the potters from Gorj and Vâlcea would come to the organised fairs from Craiova, Dr. Tr. Severin, Calafat, Slatina, Pitești, Bucharest. The craftsmen from the villages of Arcani and Stroești used to exchange, most of the times, their products with grains, travelling on several routes. One of them was crossing Negomir, Borăscu, Strehaia, Fântâna Domnească, Devesel, Pristol, Izimșa, Cetate, Maglavit, Tunarii Vechi, and another one, coming from Strehaia, would go through Plenița-Galicea Mare-Plosca then, further on, it would cross over Desnățui<sup>27</sup>. There should also be added the route that started from Strehaia as well, and would head towards Dăbuleni.

Other traders, such as the Gipsy wood-cutlery makers from Vâlcea, had as starting point the specialised village they lived in, would travel the country on routes afferent to the great communication routes, would halt in before-known boroughs and fairs, reaching the plains. In the same time, with their carts filled, especially with dowry trunks, they would travel all over the lanes of the villages or hamlets.

All these traditional routes had their importance in the socio-economic life, along with the political and cultural existence of the Romanian provincialities. On these roads, the commerce thrived, as well as the circulation of the traditional economy goods, the cultural circulation between the Romanian regions, between the Romanians and the neighbouring countries.

The communication network was developed in time, once with the development of the society. Significant changes in the dynamic of the transports

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<sup>26</sup> Avram Cezar (coord.), *Dicționarul istoric al localităților din județul Dolj (D–M)*, Craiova, Alma Press, 2004, p. 274.

<sup>27</sup> Vasile Cărăbiș, *Olăria din Arcani și Stroești – jud. Gorj*, in “*Revista de etnografie și folclor*”, volume XVI, no. 3, 1971, pp. 231–236, apud Romulus Vulcănescu, Paul Simionescu, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

and the defining of the road network were registered started with the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when, after the Treaty of Adrianopole (1829), the commerce on the Danube was liberalised. In other words, it opened the Danube ports and gangways towards the international commerce, but only on addressing the villages that were in good relations with the Ottoman Empire, the suzerain power<sup>28</sup>. Although it had a limited character, the freedom of commerce given to Wallachia and Moldavia was beneficial for the economy of the two principalities. Under these circumstances, the Danube gangways and ports could carry on their activity in the area of grain and livestock trade. Thus, the Danube, a river that confers uniformity to the European economic life, was both a limes and a border, and also a bridge for the economic relations of the communities living on its both banks. On the left bank of the river, there appeared and developed many gangways and ports, such as Calafat, Bechet, Turnu Severin, Vârciorova etc. Through these customs, there were made commercial exchanges with Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece, Austro-Hungary, and farther countries, as Germany and Belgium.

The age of the organic regulations was one marked by continuous efforts for improving the quality of the roads, as much as they were, at that time, a significant factor in the circulation of goods, and “the only means that could trigger the useful advancement for both the peasants’ needs and for the travellers, and the commerce, useful for the well-being of the country”<sup>29</sup>. The great roads of the country would be administrated by the state, unlike the smaller ones that used to connect the villages, which were maintained functional by the peasants.

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were started the works for building the main road that went from Dolj to Mehedinți and farther, by the Danube, through Orșova, towards Banat<sup>30</sup>. Moreover, there was given special attention to the maintenance of the commercial roads that connected Oltenia and the Romanian province across the mountains, as well as between the Danube ports and the most important point of the country, roads that would facilitate the selling of the Balkan products in our country. There was consolidated, for example, “the road that passes by the side of Calafat gangway, from the west towards the Bechet gangway”, the road that would come from the mountainous counties, through Craiova, and that would head to the ponds, for the fish commerce, the route of Calafat – Dr. Tr. Severin etc.<sup>31</sup>.

The improvement of the communication network was intensified in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, thorough the construction of some roads and the consolidation of others, facilitating both the raw-material and goods transport towards the cities, communes or villages, along with the access of the dwellers towards their working places, or

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<sup>28</sup> *Regulamentul Organic* (Organic Regulation), Bucharest, 1847, p. 174.

<sup>29</sup> Cezar Avram, Vladimir Osiac, Dinică Ciobotea, Virgil Joița, Ion Pătroi, Ileana Petrescu, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 176.

the urban centres. The topographic map from the beginning of this century shows a configuration of routes that corresponds to the actual one.

Nowadays, the improvement of the means of transport, on roads, on rail or on the water, from the local ones to the national and international importance ones, constitutes an intensive preoccupation, imposed by the requests of the society. Besides the extension and the modernisation of the road network, a special attention is given to the Danube River, whose navigable route is part of the pan-European Rhine-Danube corridor that connects the cities of Strasbourg and Mannheim with the Black Sea. The development of this corridor has become of a strategic importance for the Romanian Government, taking into account the improvement and the modernisation of its infrastructure. For this reason, in order to make the traffic across the Danube towards Bulgaria fluid, at Calafat-Vidin customs point, there was built a bridge<sup>32</sup>, its financing being ensured through programmes of the European Union, of the European Investment Bank, along with the governments of the two countries.

Thus, as a conclusion, it might be said that the roads, the communication routes in general, had a significant role in the socio-economical development of Oltenia, in the shaping and the evolution of the settlement network, especially in the intersection points. Along the centuries, the travelling axis have maintained a permanent connection with each other, in all the provinces of the country, but also between them and the exterior of Romania. The presence of the roads generated the emerging of the boroughs, which constituted themselves in important trade centres, with huge influence on the neighbouring settlements. The contacts generated by the spread circulation of the traders that would halt in the boroughs had a major cultural role, as well as a social one, on addressing the mentality, and, not lastly, in the artistic field, concerning the aesthetics.

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<sup>32</sup> The bridge, inaugurated in 2013, has a length of 1,917 km, includes 4 lanes and a railway.