

The port of Sulina and the Danubian trade (1829-1853)

Constantin Ardeleanu

Following the Peace of Adrianople (1829), Moldavia and Wallachia became significant actors in the European grain trade. However, their increasing prospects were greatly affected by a large diversity of natural or artificial obstacles, tolerated by the Russian authorities controlling the Danube Delta, which connected the Principalities to the Black Sea trade routes. The Sulina mouth and branch, the only navigable channel, was in a difficult state, the shallow water inside the bar, the numerous shoals and the torturous course being serious obstacles to navigation. Similarly, the imposition of severe quarantine regulations offered the Russians a perfect pretext to interfere and hinder navigation with the arbitrary and abusive attitude of gunboats' masters. Thus, as it was crucial for vessels to take pilots on board when sailing to the Romanian outlets of Galatz and Braila, a small town sprang at Sulina, containing a population that lived exclusively from shipping. Without terrestrial roads to the mainland, with the statute of a veritable island, placed at the very end of the Russian Empire, everything orbited at Sulina around the port – the source of huge profits derived from activities such as towing, transshipment, piloting, dislodging grounded vessels etc. On the basis of contemporary documents, this paper aims to present the emergence of Sulina and its economic importance in the period prior the Crimean War, when Sulina got an unwanted fame after Admiral Hyde Parker's son died in the siege of the port by the British navy. Detailed statistics will refer to the quantitative dimensions of shipping, with information on flags, crews, tonnage, ports of call, goods transported etc.