

*Liliia Tsyganenko*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5014-9845>  
Izmail State University of Humanities, Ukraine

*Galina Oleinikova*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5483-1964>  
Izmail State University of Humanities, Ukraine

## MEMORY OF THE PAST IN THE MULTI-ETHNIC SPACE OF DANUBE CITIES\*

### Abstract

The article presents the issues of preserving the historical memory of the cities of Southern Bessarabia (the southwestern part of Odesa region, Ukraine). The specific features of the region's historical development, frequent changes in the state affiliation, intermixture and diversity of confessional and ethnographic aspects contributed to the formation of a special, multicultural and polyethnic habitat for the residents of this region. The region's cities, formed many centuries ago, demonstrate specific, often unique features of the memory of the past, embodied in the temples, street names, residential buildings, and administrative and fortification structures. The preservation of the urban memory and its popularisation serve as the foundation of human beings who are free from prejudice, protect their identity and are tolerant of their neighbours.

**Keywords:** Southern Bessarabia, memory, regional cities, monuments, churches, mosque

### INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of a city as a subject of historical and philosophical analysis has gained relevance due to the popularity of the idea of a city's axiological significance in contemporary culture. The search

---

\* The Editorial Board of *APH* expresses their gratitude to Dr Natalia Królikowska-Jedlińska for the linguistic consultation of Turkish and Ottoman terms.

for meaningful values of human existence, orientation and motivation of human life made it necessary to reconstruct and rethink the past.

The problem of memory became one of the central questions in the humanities. The cultural space of the city supports and activates the vital activity of urban territories and fills the life-world of citizens with special meaning and values aimed at implementing essential plans and strategies in the urban environment.

In modern research studies of the cultural characteristics of urban space, attention is increasingly drawn to its deployment, structure, tension, density, and saturation. Postmodern approaches and the involvement of historians of cultural studies in investigating the theme of cities made it possible to significantly enrich historical research methodology and fully reveal 'the cultural component' of the urban space.<sup>1</sup>

As applied to the city, a particular category of social memory can be distinguished – the city's memory. Preservation of the urban memory of the past is a peculiar phenomenon inherent in urban society. This complex socio-cultural formation includes museums, archives, cultural institutions and the historical monuments of urban architecture.<sup>2</sup>

The urban memory creates public consciousness and contributes to the appearance of crucial unifying elements. The specific differences between the urban mode of settlement and the rural one (location of state and local authorities; concentration of socio-political life and the most important institutions of government; concentration of cultural, scientific and educational institutions) determine the unique role of the city as a space for the historical memory of a society.

Urban memory differs from historical memory, with all the difficulties of accurately defining the latter, by its location in space; its significance for modern research is determined by the fact that urbanisation processes have accelerated many times in recent decades.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Galina Oleinikova, 'A Synergetic Approach of the Multicultural Space of the World', *Danubius Supliment*, xxxv (2017), 151–9.

<sup>2</sup> Эди Сайко В., *Город как особый организм и фактор социокультурного развития. Город как социокультурное явление исторического процесса* (Москва, 1995), 11–44.

<sup>3</sup> Вероника Туркина and Елена Антонова, 'Как работает память в городе', *Colloquium – Journal*, xlv, 21 (2019), 28–30; Людмила Н. Мазур, 'Образ прошлого: формирование исторической памяти', *Известия Уральского федерального университета*, сер. 2, гуманитарные науки, схvii, 3 (2013), 243–56; Иван Гурьянов,

The urban memory of the past in the space of a modern city is embodied in buildings and structures that act as the most iconic and large-scale symbols and artefacts of the past: parks, bridges, city halls, churches, courtyards, streets, squares, etc.<sup>4</sup>

Today, there is an increasing interest in the history and culture of small homelands, including the history of regional (small) cities.

The growth of urbanisation in the modern world leads to the migration of a significant number of people to large cities, which contributes to the gradual assimilation of ethnic cultures and languages due to the specifics of life in larger urban centres. It manifests itself in the absence of common memory, a phenomenon which, unfortunately, is a reality, characteristic of big cities, since migrations to a big city, by definition, are connected with uprooting from the existing community and the need to develop new, shared memory.

Despite the leading role of bigger cities, the fact that a part of the country's population resides in 'small' (regional) towns allows, to a certain extent, to better preserve both the national culture and the ethnocultural identity of the inhabitants. The advantage of regional centres is manifested in greater opportunities for preserving urban memory: the existence of local societies, with their traditions, legends and customs, is an important component of urban memory. This increases the importance of the historical and cultural urban heritage, which can become a key factor in forming a tolerant attitude between the representatives of various ethnic groups and denominations.

This article will not discuss the theoretical issues of a city's historical or cultural memory. The subject of our scientific inquiry is the preservation of historical memory in the multi-ethnic space of the regional towns of Southern Bessarabia.

---

'Городская память как метафора и как область исследований', *Научный электронный журнал Артикальт*, xvii, 1 (2015); Pierre Nora, *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire* (Oakland, CA, 1989); Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris, 1950), published in Russian as: 'Коллективная и историческая память', *Неприкосновенный запас*, 2 (2005), 16–50.

<sup>4</sup> Николай Л. Мысливец, 'Память о прошлом в пространстве современного города', *Социологический альманах*, 11 (2018), 107–13.

## II SOUTHERN BESSARABIA: THE PECULIARITY OF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Between the Black Sea, the Danube, the Prut and the Dniester rivers, there is a historical region called Bessarabia; most of its territory is now a part of Ukraine and Moldova. To this day, there is no agreement on the origin of the name Bessarabia and its recognition on the official level. The most common etymologies are: 1) the name comes from the name of the Wallachian governor Basarab I the Great (1289–1352); 2) an ethnotoponym derived from the Bess people, who lived in this area in the second–third centuries BC; 3) according to the Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Brockhaus and Efron,<sup>5</sup> in the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries, Bessarabia was the name of the part of present-day Romania (Wallachia with the Babadagh region along the Danube river); then the southern part of the interfluve of the Prut and the Dniester became to be known as Budjak; and after 1812 it was the name of the entire interfluve; on 16 May 1812 in Bucharest a peace treaty between the Ottoman and Russian empires was signed. The lands annexed to Russia in 1813 received the official name: ‘Bessarabian Oblast’.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Энциклопедический словарь Брокгауза и Ефрона*, iii: А (6), Бергер-Биси (Санкт-Петербург, 1891).

<sup>6</sup> Till now, historians still argue on the date of the official recognition of this name. Lev Berg believes that the origin of the name ‘Bessarabia’ has a diplomatic character. According to one of the articles of the Treaty of Tilsit (1807), which was signed by Napoleon and Alexander I, the Russian Empire decided to withdraw its troops from the territory of Wallachia and Moldova (which included the Bessarabian lands). During the following negotiations, the Russian representative pointed out that there was no mention of ‘Bessarabia’ in the treaty, and, therefore, the Russian Empire had the right to retain these territories. The Russian diplomats attributed to Bessarabia the lands between the Dniester and the Prut, including the territory of Budjak. The Moldovan historian Viktor Taki believes that the name of Bessarabia first appears in the diplomatic correspondence of Petr Rumyantsev during the Russian-Turkish war. The researcher Natalya Abakumova-Zabunova places the official emergence of this name in a later time. In 1806, the Russian army under the command of General Ivan Mikhelson, having crossed the Dniester, captured the Turkish fortresses of Hotin and Bender. At the same time, General Armand-Emmanuel du Plessis, duke de Richelieu, commander of the southern group of Russian troops, occupied Akkerman and Kilia. Bender, as well as Akkerman, Izmail and Kilia administrative communities, were attached to the Russian Empire

As part of the Bessarabian lands, the historical region of Budjak stands out, as it occupies the southern part of the Danube–Dniester interfluvium and the Black Sea. Today, it is the southwestern part of the Odesa region of Ukraine and the southern regions of Moldova. These lands are often also known as Southern Bessarabia.

The peculiarity of the region's historical development lies in its location – at the intersection of the main colonial migration and trade-economic flows. In ancient times, the Geto-Dacian, Scythian-Sarmatian tribes lived here; there were Greek, Roman, Slavic, and Genoese settlements; Pechenegs, Polovtsians, and Mongol-Tatars roamed. From the midpoint of the fourteenth century, these lands became part of the Moldavian principality, and from 1503 they were under the jurisdiction of the Ottoman Empire. In the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries, the Bessarabian steppes belonged to the Turks, Nogays, and Tatars. Still, after the signing of the Bucharest Peace Treaty of 1812, the region became part of the Russian Empire. A period of lack of stability followed: over the past 300 years, the state power over the area had changed as many as ten times: until 1806 – as a part of the Ottoman Empire; 1812–56 – the Russian Empire; since 1856 – the United Principality of Wallachia, Moldova and Romania; during the 1878–1917 period – the Russian Empire; in 1917–18 it was under the control of Sfatul Țării (Regional Council); from March 1918 to June 1940 and from July 1941 to August 1944 – the Romanian state; from June 1940 to July 1941 and from August 1944 – as a part of the Soviet Union; finally, from August 1991 – as a part of the independent Ukrainian state. Naturally, all this significantly impacted the regional towns' historical, cultural, and economic development.

One of the specific features of the historical development of Southern Bessarabia is the multicultural, polyethnic and multi-confessional composition of the regional population which includes the Ukrainians, Moldovans, Russians, Bulgarians, Gagauz, Albanians, Romanians, Tatars, Greeks, Poles, Armenians, Germans, Jews, and Roma. For several centuries, the region's inhabitants have been demonstrating examples of a tolerant coexistence in the regional society, preserving

---

and received the name of 'State Bessarabia' in the official documents. For more see Лілія Циганенко, *Дворянство Південної України (друга половина 18 ст. – 1917 р.): монографія* (Ізмаїл, 2009); Наталья Абакумова-Забунова, *Русское население городов Бессарабии 19 века* (Кишинёв, 2006).

their culture and language, beliefs and customs. The ethnic diversity of the regional population contributed to the spread of various religions and denominations. We find the evidence in one of the archival documents of 1847: “eight Orthodox churches, two Old Believers and one Armenian church, a stone Roman Catholic chapel, a brick Jewish synagogue with arcades all functioned in Izmail”.<sup>7</sup>

On Southern Bessarabia’s territory, no large cities or metropolises exist. The nearest large city – the region’s capital – is Odesa, located 240 km from the unofficial main centre of the region, the city of Izmail (the largest port in the area, the headquarters of the Danube Shipping Company, the cultural, economic and administrative centre). Several other towns represent the urban society: Belgorod-Dnestrovsky (Akkerman), which is world-famous due to its well-preserved fortress; Bolgrad, which is the centre of the Bulgarian diaspora in Ukraine; Vilkovo, nicknamed ‘The Ukrainian Venice’, a major centre of the Danube Old Believers; Kilia, the oldest city in Ukraine (more than two thousand years old), with a predominantly Ukrainian population; Reni, a port town, the centre of the Romanian and Moldova diaspora in Ukraine; Sarata, a former German colony, founded by a settler-colonist Ignaz Lindl; Tatarbunary, the name of which, Tatar-Bunar, literally translated to ‘Tatar well’, where, according to the German geographer Johann Thunman, the residence of the Polovets *khans* was located.

Of all the various manifestations of the memory in the multicultural territory of the Southern Bessarabian cities, the features of which we find in toponymy and cartography, architectural monuments, fortifications and necropolises, we will focus on the sacred cultural monuments of the regional cities, which are silent witnesses of the history of Southern Bessarabia.

The peculiarities of the historical development of the region, the difficult period of coexistence with the Ottoman socio-political system, the variety of ways, forms and methods of settlement and development of the area in the nineteenth century, along with the reasonable and relatively flexible policy of the tsarist government, determined the varied social and class structure of the population.<sup>8</sup> The populations

---

<sup>7</sup> Public Utility Service Izmail Archive, fond 54, Izmail City Police (1810–1918), op. 220, Statistical information on the state of population, industry, trade, and education (26 June 1847 – 9 March 1848), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Циганенко, *Дворянство Південної*, 131–4.

of different peoples in the region were in constant dynamic motion, characterised by quantitative variations.

### III THE TRACES OF TURKISH HERITAGE IN SOUTHERN BESSARABIAN CITIES

In August 1484, the Moldova garrison of the Ak-Libo fortress was forced to capitulate to the Ottoman troops, after which the fort was renamed Akkerman, and from 1503 to 1812, almost the entire territory of Budjak fell under the control of the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman conquest of Southern Bessarabia in 1484 led not only to a new wave of Islamisation of the region (after the short Golden Horde period), but also to the formation of new cities and settlements. Recently, Andrey Krasnozhon (South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University, Ukraine) and Mehmed Tütüncü (Dutch Center for Arab and Turkish Studies, SOTA) managed to find the decree of Sultan Murad III of 14 November 1589 about giving the property of Mehmed Habishi Agha of extensive lands in the Lower Danube region to the chief court administrator (*kızlar ağa*). The document also contains a command to form the crossing “in the ‘Izmail Gechidi’ area and to settle a city and a marina wharf nearby”.<sup>9</sup> According to the researchers, this document is a true masterpiece of Ottoman calligraphy art.<sup>10</sup> The administration of the new city, which had initially been named Mehmedabad, was based on the principles of Muslim law – by religious clergy and civil administration. The archival sources testify that since its foundation, the city had been multicultural: in July 1591, most of the quarters were inhabited by the Christian population – the Wallachians, Armenians, Greeks, Moldavians, Bulgarians; and three-quarters were Muslim, inhabited by the Turks and Tatars.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Mehmed Tütüncü and Andrew Krasnozhon, *Місто Ізмаїл та його фортифікація/ The Ismail City and Its Fortification (in the sources of 16th–19th centuries)* (Odesa, 2020), 80.

<sup>10</sup> Mikhail Ahsonuk, ‘Baghdad on the Danube’ – Izmail has a birth certificate. It is a firman by the Ottoman Sultan Murad III, <https://islam.in.ua/ru/istoriya/bagdad-na-dunae-izmail-imeet-svidetelstvo-o-rozhdennii-eto-firman-osmanskogo-sultana-murada>. The original decree of the sultan, being found in Berlin: a 6-kilogram scroll, more than 5 meters long and half a meter wide. And the insured value of the document, written in golden ink, exceeds 1.5 million euros!

<sup>11</sup> Tütüncü and Krasnozhon, *Місто Ізмаїл*, 81, 97.



Fig. 1. Turkish Mosque, Izmail, Ukraine; photo by Tripadvisor, [https://www.tripadvisor.ru/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g777828-d9466810-i233509356-Diorama\\_Sturm\\_Fortress\\_of\\_Izmail-Izmail\\_Odessa\\_Oblast.html](https://www.tripadvisor.ru/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g777828-d9466810-i233509356-Diorama_Sturm_Fortress_of_Izmail-Izmail_Odessa_Oblast.html)

Unfortunately, most of the medieval architectural structures of Izmail are now destroyed. But only the coeval of the ancient Izmail, the so-called ‘Small’ or ‘Lead Mosque’, as the local Christian residents called it at the end of the eighteenth century, has survived in its original form. Today, it is the only late-sixteenth-century Turkish place of worship that has stayed in the south of the Odesa region (Fig. 1).

The mosque was erected on the banks of the Danube in 1590 by order of the city founder, Mehmed-Agha. It was constructed by builders from Istanbul, probably under the direction of the famous architect Davud Agha. The architectural appearance of the mosque is quite austere and simple, a reflection of the Sinanovite trend in Ottoman architecture. The mosque’s dome is crowned by the crescent-shaped finial called in Turkish *alem*. The building is relatively small – it can host no more than a hundred people.

The porch of Izmail mosque features three elegant lancet arches supported by four round marble columns. The bases of the columns are made of bronze. On the left one, there is a unique graffiti inscription. By closer examination, it turned out that the inscription was an actual cryptogram. Mehmet Tütüncü translated it as follows: “Look for the date of the Tatar uprising in the word gained”. According to him, it is the so-called *abyad*, or a number encoded in the letter, meaning the word ‘surplus’. Each letter corresponds to a number. They add up to 1114, the year of the Hijra, corresponding to the period between 27 May 1702 and 16 May 1703. This uprising of the Budjak Tatars terrified the Ottoman government, not only because of the siege or capture of major Turkish cities in the region, but also due to the Turkish troops marching to Istanbul. The rebels were waiting for the Danube to freeze



to cross it on the ice. In the end, the empire's capital was saved by the weather: the winter was too warm, and the river did not freeze.<sup>12</sup> The mosque's walls were initially plastered inside and painted with Oriental ornamental designs – arabesques. The fragments of the plant ornamentation, the main motives of which are the leaf and the flexible, curly stem of the pea, are preserved in the mosque to this day.<sup>13</sup>

After 1810, the mosque was 're-baptised' by the Russian authorities into the Orthodox Church of the Exaltation of the Cross. In 1812, the nearby minaret was destroyed, and the frescos on the walls, which had survived over half a millennium, were changed into Orthodox biblical scenes. In 1973, the diorama 'Storm of the Izmil Fortress' was opened in the mosque, and it has existed till now.

There is an ongoing argument about the future of Izmil Small Mosque. The Turkish authorities put forward a concept of restoring the mosque and constructing a new building for the 'Storm of the Izmil Fortress' diorama. In June 2020, the Turkish architect Emin Yilmaz presented his own version of the reconstruction of the Leaden Mosque in the *International Journal of Turkish Studies*.<sup>14</sup> However, the concept has both its supporters and opponents.

The Small Turkish Mosque, as an architectural monument of the sixteenth century, is protected by the state. In 2007, on the territory adjacent to the mosque, the archaeological excavations by the Institute of Archeology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, led by Igor Sapozhnikov,<sup>15</sup> unearthed the foundation of a minaret. Unfortunately, they could determine neither the date of construction nor the date of the destruction of the structure.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Sergei Dibrov, 'The Black people quarter in Kiliya, the murder in the Izmil coffee house and the Tatar cipher: what the Ottoman tombstones said': <https://dumskaya.net/news/kofeynya-v-izmaile-vizir-v-benderah-negrityanski-086394/> [Accessed: 7 Dec. 2022].

<sup>13</sup> Turkish mosque. Ismail in buildings, <http://gorod24.info/izmail-v-obektive/1027-turetskaya-mechet-pravoslavnyj-khram-muzejnij-ob-ekt-tri-voploshcheniya-za-pyat-stoletij> [Accessed: 20 Dec. 2022].

<sup>14</sup> Игорь Огнев, 'Ислам, имам и мечет в Измаиле', <https://bessarabia.ua/istoriya/islam-imam-i-mechet-v-izmaile/> [Accessed: 7 Dec. 2022].

<sup>15</sup> Игорь Сапожников, 'Здание мечети пророка Муххамеда в Измаиле: новые факты и интерпретации', *Материалы по археологии Северного Причерноморья*, 9 (Одесса, 2009), 243–68.

<sup>16</sup> Игорь Бутров, 'Что скрывает за собой холст диорамы?', [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4AXJPq\\_Jls](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4AXJPq_Jls) [Accessed: 7 Dec. 2022].

One of the city's memory objects relating to the so-called Turkish period of its history is the area of the former Izmail fortress. The majestic and tragic fate of these events has been depicted in the articles, monographs and studies.<sup>17</sup> It should be stated that, under the terms of the Paris Peace Treaty of 1856, the fortress of Izmail had been destroyed and the walls blown up. But, despite this, the remaining foundations of the walls and bastions, ditches and ramparts, as well as the fortress gates, remain, as mute witnesses of the former grandeur of the fortification. The area of the former fortress, as well as the minaret, is controlled by the Izmail memorial park-museum called 'Fortress'; its task is to study, preserve and revive the Izmail fortress as an object of the cultural heritage of Ukraine.

On the banks of the Kilia and Stepovoy, branches of the Danube River, we find one of the oldest towns of Ukraine, Kilia, called by some historians 'the city of Achilles'. One particular legend says that the city was founded by Alexander the Great himself in 335 BC. The city, which was strategically positioned, later fell into the hands of the Byzantines. In the eleventh century, they built a fortress called 'Lycost' [jaws of a wolf]; later, the town became subject to the Genoese rule.<sup>18</sup>

It is worth mentioning that in 1484 Kilia and its neighbouring areas were the first territories in the North-Eastern Black Sea Region that became part of the Ottoman Empire – the so-called *Kilia rayia*. This administrative unit was the only Ottoman possession at the mouth of the Lower Danube for a long time. Without going into details and peculiarities of the Ottoman rule in the lands of Southern Bessarabia, it should be noted that grandiose construction projects were carried out during the period. Thus, by the personal command of Sultan Bayazid II,

---

<sup>17</sup> Игорь Сапожников and Сергей Аргатюк, 'Конец эпохи крепостей в Северо-Западном Причерноморье: вторая половина 1820-х – начало 1860-х годов', *Scriporium nostrum* (2017), 158–95; Игорь Сапожников, 'Материалы для изучения крепостей Бессарабии (1807-1820 гг.)', *Tyragetia. Serie nouă* (2016), 97–116; Виталий С. Калмыков, 'Цена взятия Измаила в 1790 г.: размышления над книгой М.К. Чинякова "Суворов и Измаил" (Москва, 2017)', *Локус: люди, общество, культура, смыслы*, 1 (2020), 164–7; Наталья Польщикова and Ирина Георгица, 'Памятники культовой архитектуры XIX в. Измаила', <http://mх.ogasa.org.ua/bitstream/123456789/3429/1/ПАМЯТНИКИ%20КУЛЬТОВОЙ%20АРХИТЕКТУРЫ%20XIX%20в..pdf> [Accessed: 7 Dec. 2022].

<sup>18</sup> Галина Олейнікова, 'Лексико-семантичні аспекти топоніміки Буджацького регіону', in *Буджацький фронтір у дзеркалі сучасної гуманітаристики* (Ізмаїл, 2021), 61–3.

the construction of the main mosque began in Kilia (the city had 17 mosques in all), followed by the restoration of the fortifications of the fortress damaged by the siege, construction of Turkish baths, *madrasa* [school], and a *caravanserai* [roadside inn].

Kilia fortress is one of the most important outposts of the Ottoman Empire on the Lower Danube. During more than 300 years of Turkish rule in the region, this fortress was rebuilt and reconstructed several times. The thick, 10–12 meters high walls, the deep and wide moats were supposed to act as passive defences. According to Bishop Stanislav, who visited Kilia in 1659, 1,208 houses were inhabited by 6,230 people stationed in the fortress and outposts. But the time has not been kind to the Kilia fortress. It was utterly destroyed during the Russian-Turkish wars at the turn of the nineteenth century. Today on the site of the fortress, there is a port, an elevator and a town park. Only two town ponds, which appeared on the site of former moats, remind us of the once powerful fortification.

When the Ottoman Empire conquered lands on the banks of the Lower Danube, the majority of the multi-ethnic population of the area faced serious consequences: every non-Muslim man from the age of 14 had to pay a large number of taxes and performed many duties (the number of taxes and duties was close to a hundred); they were not allowed to settle in the town, bear arms, build houses higher than those of the Turks, etc.<sup>19</sup>

In 1647, with the help of Vasile Lupu (the ruler of the land of Moldova), the Church of St. Nicholas was built in Kilia in the place of the destroyed Christian church, which is considered one of the oldest Orthodox places of worship in Southern Bessarabia. According to legends, the Turks forbade the construction of tall buildings, and Christian temples should not have been higher than the raised scimitar of a Turkish rider on horseback. That is why the temple was tiny and low-rise, with a discrete exterior. It almost blended in with the surrounding landscape. The church was a three-part building without domes, typical of the church architecture of Moldova of the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries; it was built of hewn limestone, with brick-plinth vaults and arches. Its plan is rectangular, with a semi-circular apse. The peculiarity of this church lies in its semi-subterranean structure: the building is embedded more than 2 meters into the ground, and

---

<sup>19</sup> Борис Райнов, *История Килии*, і (Измаил, 2008), 86.

a seven-step staircase leads into it. Apollon Skalkovsky, a well-known expert on the history of the region, remarked in his book *Измаильское градоначальство в 1847 г.* [Izmail City Hall in 1847]: "... the most curious thing in Kilia suburb is the ancient Church of St. Nicholas, which is half-underground, according to Christian churches' tradition in *partibus infidelium*..."<sup>20</sup>

Having survived the Ottoman rule, numerous wars and destruction, the Church of St. Nicholas was turned into a warehouse during the Soviet times. The church was ruined and looted. It served as coal storage, was subsequently abandoned and became a garbage dump. The church bell was used on the local ferry. The marble veneer was removed. No marble slabs were left in the church, which once had covered the entire floor. The reconstruction of the church did not begin until the 1990s. In 1993, after a long time of neglect and desolation, Divine Liturgy was held again under the ancient temple's vaults.<sup>21</sup> Today, the Church of St. Nicholas in Kilia is the only underground church in southern Ukraine. It is a cultural site listed in a special UNESCO register as a cultural monument of worldwide significance.

On the territory of Southern Bessarabia, there is also the world-famous Akkerman (Belgorod-Dnistrovsky) fortress, one of the main historical symbols of the region.

#### IV

#### REFLECTION OF THE REGION'S COLONISATION PROCESSES IN CITY STREETS AND TEMPLES

In the second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the core of the population of the steppes situated between the lower reaches of the Danube and the Dniester was formed by the Budjak Tatars. They comprised several waves of nomadic Turkic tribes, the main of which was the Nogays. The Moldavian researcher Nikolai Russev, having analysed in detail the information about the quantitative composition of the population, the peculiarities of settlement and the fate of this people, came to a conclusion that "The victim of the initial

---

<sup>20</sup> Аполлон Скальковский, 'Измаильское градоначальство в 1847 г.', *Журнал Министерства внутренних дел*, xv (1849), 344–422.

<sup>21</sup> Николаевская церковь. Килия, [https://ua.igotoworld.com/ru/poi\\_object/70289\\_nikolaevskaya-cerkov-kiliya.htm](https://ua.igotoworld.com/ru/poi_object/70289_nikolaevskaya-cerkov-kiliya.htm) [Accessed: 7 Dec. 2022].

period of the Russian and Ottoman war was not yet fully developed formation, called Budjak Tatars. This Tatar-Muslim community was never able to consolidate into a single people. It simply disappeared”.<sup>22</sup>

In this context, a quote from the notes of Count Louis de Langeron is remarkable: “... in Bessarabia, the Tatar villages were abandoned by their inhabitants in 1807, and their houses were destroyed so quickly that after six months one could hardly find even the location of these villages”.<sup>23</sup> The empty lands were waiting for new inhabitants – fugitive peasants, Cossacks, Old Believers-Lipovans, all sorts of adventurers seeking profit, and foreign colonists.

Zinoviy Kogut noted that Muscoviya has practised incorporating newly annexed frontier lands into the Russian administrative system for an extended period, but it was forced to adapt to the realities of the existence of such separate privileged territories as Ukraine, the Baltic States, the Kingdom of Poland, the Grand Duchy of Finland and Bessarabia.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, for the first time in the early nineteenth century, the Russian Empire incorporated a territory with a Christian population that had previously been dependent on the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the vicinity of Bessarabia to bourgeois Europe, where a national liberation struggle was taking place at that time, required the tsarist government to establish a specific and relatively liberal administration regime for these lands.<sup>25</sup>

This fact obliged St Petersburg to grant special status to the province, which was to become the European ‘showcase’ of the empire. “This province”, wrote Count Ioannis Kapodistria, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “at the request of the Tsar, should be considered a haven of rest and well-being in the eyes of the inhabitants of neighbouring countries”.<sup>26</sup>

The tsarist government, pursuing its active colonisation policy, sought to increase the local population through colonisation –

---

<sup>22</sup> Николай Руссев, “‘Татары как-то совсем исчезли...’ (последние месяцы истории Буджакской орды)”, *Русин*, 1 (2012), 151.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Записки графа Ланжерона. Война с Турцией 1806-1812 гг.’, *Русская старина*, сxxxі, 9 (Санкт-Петербург, 1907), 577.

<sup>24</sup> Зіновій Когут, *Російський централізм і українська автономія. Ліквідація Гетьманщини, 1760–1830* (Київ, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> Циганенко, *Дворянство Південної України*, 116.

<sup>26</sup> Александр Вельтман, ‘Воспоминания о Бессарабии’, *Русский вестник*, 12 (1893), 16–44.

Bulgarian, Greek, German, Italian, Polish, and Swiss settlers. In only four years (from 1812 to 1816), the number of people in Bessarabia increased from 240 to 492 thousand.<sup>27</sup>

Despite specific difficulties in the process of colonisation (epidemics, the escape of a part of the population across the Prut), taking into account the active resettlement of the Russian and Ukrainian peasants to the free lands of Southern Bessarabia, the imperial government managed to achieve its goal of increasing the population of the region. However, this led to changes in the ethnic structure of the population, the evolution of legal relations, and caused difficulties in identifying the local 'historical heritage'.

Without dwelling on the issues of colonisation of the region, it can be noted that the migration processes could be clearly traced by the names of the streets of the cities, local temples, monuments, administrative and residential buildings.

The streets of a city are a determining feature of any settlement. Street names reflect the culture and everyday life of a population.<sup>28</sup> The history of city streets (their names, stages of development, characteristic features) forms a micro-history of the people who lived in these lands; its roots go back many centuries. Based on the analysis of various plans and maps, we shall illustrate the peculiarities of migration in the region, using the history of the streets of the city of Izmail (formerly known as Tuchkov) as an example.

In the process of selecting names for the city streets of Izmail one can identify several important principles. The following are fundamental ones: geographical (Budjak, Danube), confessional (Catholic, Old Believer), anthropological (Mariinskaya, Tuchkov), and object-oriented (Portovaya, Uchilishchnaya).<sup>29</sup> However, as the first names of the streets were fixed on the map of Izmail in 1832, the ethnic principle appears to be the most important. These are the streets

---

<sup>27</sup> Лев А. Кассо, *Россия на Дунае и образование Бессарабской области* (Москва, 1913), 110.

<sup>28</sup> Лілія Циганенко, 'Назви вулиць Ізмаїла як відображення міграційних процесів у регіоні', in *Одеські етнографічні читання* (Одеса, 2017), 392.

<sup>29</sup> Mariinskaya – in honour of Queen Maria (Maria of Romania, Maria of Edinburgh) – the wife of the Romanian King Ferdinand; named after Sergei Tuchkov – the founder of the town, and its first mayor; Portovaya, the street which led to a harbour; Uchilishchnaya, the street which led to a school.

with names – translated verbatim – as Armenian, Greek, Polish, Old Believers and others.<sup>30</sup>

In 1809 near the eastern walls of Izmail fortress, at the initiative of the commandant, Major-General Sergei Tuchkov, a settlement was established. Within a short period, over 1,500 different constructions were built there. In 1812, under the Tsar's decree, the settlement was granted the town status and the name of Tuchkov. As it was stated in the document, the town was inhabited by "...Armenians, Greeks, Bulgarians, Jews and immigrants from other countries, and their resettlement did not cost the state anything".<sup>31</sup> In other words, Izmail (Tuchkov) developed as a multi-ethnic place from the first years of its existence.

The first plan of the city, bearing street names dated 1832, was found by the researcher Viktor Drozdov in the National Archive of the Republic of Moldova.<sup>32</sup> At that time, the street names referred mostly to the names of nearby settlements (Akkerman, Odesa, Iași, Bender), but there were also names which clearly demonstrated the ethnic affiliation of its residents, such as Greek, Ukrainian, Moldovian, Russian, Lower and Upper Armenian streets.<sup>33</sup> In this case, the latter names are a historical confirmation of the colonisation success in the region in that period.

The documents, preserved in the Izmail archives, allow us to observe that among those who moved to Southern Bessarabia in the first half of the nineteenth century, a certain part was composed of the Slavs of the Balkan Peninsula – Bulgarians, Serbs, etc. However, at this stage, the ethnic identification of the representatives of the named peoples was not reflected in the map of the city. As a rule, the colonists in this category received lands in the countryside, and their percentage among the citizens was insignificant. In the late 1840s, the situation changed. In Skalkovsky's work, we can find a brief description of Izmail

---

<sup>30</sup> Лилия Цыганенко and Виктор Дроздов, *Улицы Измаила: история и современность* (Харьков, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> 'О именовании выстроенного перед Измаилом предместья городом Тучковым', Указ Правительствующего Сената № 25 248 от 14 (26) октября 1812 г., *Полное собрание законов Российской империи*, хххiv, 1 (1649–1825).

<sup>32</sup> План города Тучкова лежащего при реке Дунай и крепости Измаил. Национальный архив Республики Молдова, fond 11, op. 1, delo 203.

<sup>33</sup> Цыганенко and Дроздов, *Улицы Измаила*.

streets, among which a ‘Bulgarian street’ is mentioned.<sup>34</sup> Most likely, the number of immigrants from the Balkans had significantly increased by this period, contributing to the naming of this street on the city map.

At the end of the 1850s, due to the defeat of the Russian Empire in the Crimean (Eastern) War, the southern regions of Bessarabia became part of the United Principality of Wallachia and Moldova, and later they became part of the Romanian Kingdom. The change of political power was also reflected in the street names of Izmail. In the 1858–77 period, the town still had dense areas with an Armenian population [Armenesca de Jos and Armenesca de Sus], Russian Old Believers [Lipovana de Jos and Lipovana de Sus]; the Great Russian street also retained its ethnic character and was renamed into Russian street [Rusească]. The new street names appeared on the city plan: Jewish [Evreiască], German [Nemțească], Serbian [Sârbăscă], and Turkish [Turcăscă].<sup>35</sup>

Izmail also became a concentration place of the representatives of the Polish ethnic group. Based on the analysis of the Izmail archive documents, it can be affirmed that the first Polish colonisation in Southern Bessarabia dates back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, that is, when the Poles from Podolia province started to arrive in the city.<sup>36</sup>

The history of the Polish ethnic group in Izmail would be incomplete without considering the issue of the religious component of the local Polish life. According to published sources, in 1825, the city’s Catholic community petitioned the Russian emperor Alexander I for permission to build a stone Roman Catholic church in the city. After receiving the permit, they began collecting funds to build the church, but they could only afford to build a small prayer house. On the general plan of the fortress of Izmail (1849), the Catholic house of prayer is marked in the place of the present Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Fig. 2).

<sup>34</sup> Скальковский, ‘Измаильское градоначальство’, 360.

<sup>35</sup> Liliia Tsyganenko, ‘Istoria străzilor Ismail: de la Imperiul Rus până la România Mare’, in *Spațiul cultural românesc din Bugeac. Monografie* (Oradea, 2021), 7–41.

<sup>36</sup> A detailed description of the Polish ethnic group in Izmail in the early nineteenth century can be found in the articles by one of the authors: Лілія Цыганенко, ‘Етнічний склад населення фортеці Ізмаїл на початку ХІХ ст.’, *Етнічна історія народів Європи*, 41 (2017), 20–4; Лилия Цыганенко, ‘Польская этническая группа в Измаиле в начале ХІХ века’, *Analele universităţii “Dunărea de Jos” din Galaţi*, xvi (2017), 35–43.



Fig. 2. The Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Izmail, Ukraine; photo by Tripadvisor



The second attempt to raise money to build a church in the city was made in the second half of the 1840s. According to estimates, up to 1,500 Poles were living in Izmail at that time. However, the second attempt also proved unsuccessful, despite the official construction permission obtained in 1845. According to some local historians, the construction of the Roman Catholic church in the city started in 1849, but this fact is still difficult to prove.

The Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary was most likely built in the second half of the nineteenth century. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the Catholic church had 2,215 parishioners. In 1915 the church was rebuilt after a fire and continued its service until the summer of 1940. Then followed the years of neglect. In 1949, by a decision of the city executive committee, the church building and the adjoining constructions were officially listed as ownerless. In the following years, this Catholic temple was turned into a sports gym for children from the neighbouring schools. Only in 1996 the church got back its original status.

In the documents of the Commission for the Restoration of the Rights of the Rehabilitated People, an interesting case has been found. The first document is a statement dated January 1998, with the request of the Roman Catholic church community to return “all religious buildings which are on the territory of the church, where at present

private premises and a fuel warehouse office are situated, which before 1940 had belonged to the church community”.<sup>37</sup> The statement also points out that the last administrator “was the Roman Catholic priest Ioan Hondru. In 1940, he became a victim of repressions and was exiled to Siberia, where he died”.<sup>38</sup>

The Poles were not the only representatives of European culture who took part in the processes of colonisation of the Southern Bessarabia lands. The Germans, Austrians, and Swiss also acted as founders of colonies in the vicinity of local towns. Most of these settlements appeared near Akkerman and Izmail. The founder of Sarata was Ignaz Lindl, a Catholic priest. In 1822, about 40 families from Bavaria and Württemberg moved here.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, most of German heritage in the region (houses, churches, cemeteries) have survived in a deplorable condition. The ruins of the German churches and the churches of Southern Bessarabia are an example of a careless attitude towards historical memory.

## V

### CONCLUSIONS

The existence of a city’s cultural heritage, i.e. the result of its historical and cultural development that acquires its own special forms of culture, is impossible without the preservation, transmission and reproduction of cultural experience. The researcher Natalya Voronina has a very good point, stating that “the spirituality and unity of the people are encoded in the texts of culture”.<sup>40</sup> An important feature of the functioning and

---

<sup>37</sup> “Hondra Ioan Fedorovich, born in 1877, a native of Stolnicheni village, Chisinau district, Bessarabian province, before his arrest he was a priest of a Catholic Church, arrested on 10 July 1940, by the Izmail district department of the NKVD of the Ukrainian SSR. By Resolution of the Special Board under the USSR NKVD of 3 June 1941, he was sentenced to eight years’ imprisonment under Article 54–13 of the Criminal Code of the USSR. Was rehabilitated on 7 July 1989” – from the certificate of the Security Service of Ukraine in the Odesa region of 13 Feb. 1998.

<sup>38</sup> Archive of the Commission for the Restoration of the Rights of the Rehabilitated, Izmail, fond 242-T, op. 3-Л, delo 156.

<sup>39</sup> Галина Олейнікова, ‘Лексико-семантичні аспекти топоніміки Буджацького регіона’, in *Буджацький фронтір у дзеркалі сучасної гуманітаристики* (Ізмаїл, 2021), 62.

<sup>40</sup> Наталья И. Воронина, *Теоретическая культурология*, i-ii (Саранск, 2006), 238.

existence of urban memory on the city's territory is its fragmentation and decentralisation.

Under the conditions of modern globalisation, the development of mass communications and their universal accessibility, a memorable object of a city may often be doomed to complete oblivion. It usually falls out of the field of self-identity of urban society and does not find support 'from above' – in the form of state or local trusteeship. In other words, it is necessary to reveal the importance of socio-historical memory structures of the local community to maintain the social functioning of the material objects of a historic city. In order to keep the memory alive – places of memory have to be preserved in time. These are the symbols that evoke the values considered elements of identity, without which there is neither history nor culture.<sup>41</sup>

The way out is seen as either including memorable urban objects in the registers of state-protected monuments or making them part of tourist routes. Issues of tourism development as a separate branch of the region's economy deserve more attention, and the historical and cultural potential of Southern Bessarabia objectively contributes to it.

Thus, the cultural memory of the city is its most important symbolic resource, which can and should be used in urban branding, through the creation of a favourable socio-cultural environment of the city, in the image strategies of the city, in the formation of urban identity, which demonstrates strengthening symbolic ties between the city and a citizen. The material presented in the article contains the layer of historical and artistic memory of the cities of Southern Bessarabia, which has to be preserved and transmitted to the next generations.

*proofreading Krzysztof Heymer*

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Gajda Kinga Anna and Monika Eriksen (eds), *Positive Places of European Memory* (Kraków, 2015).
- Oleinikova Galina, 'A Synergetic Approach of the Multicultural Space of the World', *Danubius supliment*, xxxv (2017), 151–9.
- Tsyganenko Liliia, 'Istoria străzilor Ismail: de la Imperiul Rus până la România Mare', in *Spațiul cultural românesc din Bugeac. Monografie* (Oradea, 2021), 7–41.

---

<sup>41</sup> Kinga Anna Gajda and Monika Eriksen (eds), *Positive Places of European Memory* (Kraków, 2015).

Tütüncü Mehmed and Andrew Krasnozhon, *Місто Ізмаїл та його фортифікація/ The Ismail City and Its Fortification (in the sources of 16th–19th centuries)* (Odesa, 2020).

Записки графа Ланжерона. Война с Турцией 1806–1812 гг., *Русская старина*, xxxi, 9 (Санкт-Петербург, 1907).

Кассо Лев А., *Россия на Дунае и образование Бессарабской области* (Москва, 1913).

Мысливец Николай Л., 'Память о прошлом в пространстве современного города', *Социологический альманах*, 11 (2018), 107–13.

'О именовании выстроенного перед Измаилом предместья городом Тучковым', *Указ Правительствующего Сената № 25 248 от 14 (26) октября 1812 г. Полное собрание законов Российской империи*, xxxiv, 1 (1649–1825).

Олейнікова Галина, 'Лексико-семантичні аспекти топоніміки Буджацького регіона', in *Буджацький фронтір у дзеркалі сучасної гуманітаристики* (Ізмаїл, 2021), 61–7.

Райнов Борис, *История Килии*, i (Измаил, 2008).

Руссев Николай, "'Татары как-то совсем исчезли...'" (последние месяцы истории Буджакской орды), *Русин*, 1 (2012).

Сайко Эди В., *Город как особый организм и фактор социокультурного развития. Город как социокультурное явление исторического процесса* (Москва, 1995), 11–44.

Сапожников Игорь, 'Здание мечети пророка Муххамеда в Измаиле: новые факты и интерпретации', in *Материалы по археологии Северного Причерноморья*, 9 (Одесса, 2009), 243–68.

Скальковский Аполлон, 'Измаильское градоначальство в 1847 г.', *Журнал Министерства внутренних дел*, 25 (1849), 344–422.

Циганенко Лілія, 'Назви вулиць Ізмаїла як відображення міграційних процесів у регіоні', in *Одеські етнографічні читання* (Одеса, 2017), 392–397.

Циганенко Лілія, *Дворянство Південної України (друга половина 18 ст. – 1917 р.): монографія* (Ізмаїл, 2009).

Цыганенко Лилия and Дроздов Виктор, *Улицы Измаила: история и современность* (Харьков, 2017).

**Liliia Tsyganenko** – urban history; nobility of South Ukraine (second half of the 18th and early 20th centuries); professor at the Izmail State University of Humanities, Ukraine; e-mail: liliatsyganenko@gmail.com

**Galina Oleinikova** – toponymy, multicultural space; doctor of philology, Izmail State University of Humanities, Ukraine; e-mail: oleinikova1211@gmail.com