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**The landownership in the former
counties Botoșani and Dorohoi
(1864-1914)**

- PhD thesis -

- Abstract -

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- 2012-

Our research topic is the agrarian problem; we chose this because we considered that the economic domain is very important in the overall evolution of the human society. And because the analysis of the agricultural problem in genera and of the landownership is too broad, but also because each of these issues have made the object of research of several historical and law works and papers, we chose a more limited sector, that of *The land ownership in the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi (1864-1914)*.

The question of the landownership represents a very complex topic regarding the content and the problematic approached, being slightly controversial subject and less studied in the Romanian historiography.

This theme has not been yet analyzed in the specialized literature in the light of interdisciplinary, historical and juridical all together. And when we refer to the juridical perspective we have in mind an extensive analysis from the constitutional law point of view and, in the same time, of the real rights – the ownership.

The main goal of our work is to present the evolution of the structure of the landownership from the agrarian reform from 1864 until the outburst of the First World War.

As our research went on, we realized more clearly that a proper understanding of the phenomena cannot be reached without a thorough knowledge of the historical roots of the agrarian reform of 1864. Thus, the analysis of the structure of the landownership in the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century became a necessity. It was followed, of course, by the desire to know and understand the phenomena concerning the agricultural activity and also of the changes in the landownership.

The analysis of the structure of the landownership and of the agrarian relations that we undertook reveals the features of their evolution in the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi.

The document funds studied is diverse, containing historical and juridical works, treaties, courses, monographs, regulations and articles. Thus we gained a comprehensive overview of the agrarian problem by studying a great number of works and papers, whose titles can be found in the selective bibliography at the end of our paper.

In general, the works regarding the agrarian problem, which in a way or another refer to the agrarian reform of 1864 that concern our study, have a certain rhythm of development and apparition. Soon after the reform, this rhythm is more sustained followed by a period of respite

between (1872-1888), when it was considered that the peasant problem was solved by the rural law of 1864 (including the appropriation of newlyweds, in 1878), then, after the great uprising, the rhythm of appearance of the books and articles about this subject is more intensified, reaching a peak in the first decade of the twentieth century. Despite this, the theme of our study was not approached by the specialists. There are several articles in „Studii și Articole de Istorie” which approach in general terms aspects of the agrarian life, enclosed in a very large context of the economic development of the former Botoșani county without any mention of the former county of Dorohoi, for the period that we approached. However, these articles do not present anything but a general approach of the agrarian problem in the beginning of the twentieth century with very few references to the agrarian reform on 1864.

A representative role in the knowledge of the structure of land ownership, of its evolution and changes, was that of the historian and agronomist Ion Ionescu de la Brad in the work *Agricultura română în județul Dorohoiu*.

A very consistent and with a broad understanding is the work of N. Adăniloiaie and Dan Berindei, *Reforma agrară din 1864*, in which are analyzed the most important aspects of the necessity of the reform and of the elaboration of the rural law of 1864. This work also presents the way in which the land was distributed, the causes of the unjust implementation of the rural law and the meaning of this legal measure in economic development of Romania.

Indispensable aspects regarding the agricultural life we find in the work of Vasile M. Kogălniceanu, *Legislația agrară și măsurile luate în favoarea agriculturii și Chestia țărănească*, in which he underlines the great importance of the agrarian reform of 1864, showing that, from the social and economic point of view, it was the most important law until that moment.

Also an important work is that of the economist G. D. Creangă, *Proprietate rurală în România; Proprietatea rurală și cestiunea țărănească*, dedicated to the statistical analysis of rural property in Romania.

Very useful turn out to be the work of the agronomist George Maior, titled *Politica agrară la români*. Even though the book approaches a more general subject, regarding the development of the agrarian problem in all the provinces, the author dedicates a part of his study to the rural reform of 1864.

As important and useful were the works of the historian Radu Rosetti, *Pentru ce s-au răsculat țărani* and *Pământul, sătenii și stăpânii în Moldova*, considered to be one of the best specialist on the evolution of the agrarian relations in Romania. After he presents the history of the agrarian relations, the author analyses the premises and the elaboration of the rural law of 1864, making a harsh critique to the agrarian regime of the peasants, considering that the reform of 1864 was completely necessary.

Besides these studies, a series of works and articles appeared, analyzing the overall aspects of the rural reform or approaching only certain details, contributed to the clarification on this controversial issue.

A special chapter in the historiography of the problem is represented by the social and economic relations in the rural world. These relations are nothing else but the consequences of the agrarian legislation, more and more favorable to the landowners, and were materialized in different forms of discontent, resistance and struggle against the system. In this context, we have to mention the substantial contribution of certain authors or researchers which have presented these problems in Romania or in several regions, with examples for the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi.

Varied as importance are the documentary sources publicated in the collection D. C. Sturdza-Scheeanu and Radu Rosetti, which along with other juridical works have constituted the support for our conclusions.

We also have to mention the fact that our analysis is based, almost entirely, on archive documents. Along with the works published, the base of our documentation is found in the County Division of The National Archives Botoșani, where the archive of the former Dorohoi county is located. At the County Division of The National Archives Botoșani, there are files which contain the minutes of the appropriation committee, for each administrative unit, for some of those, as is the case of Coșula and Prutul de Sus, there are two files. The files in these funds contain important information concerning the agricultural agreements made by the inhabitants with the landowners, and also numerous appeals and complaints regarding the way in which the rural law of 1864 was applied. Although these files contain centralized minutes, there is no centralized data regarding the appropriation for the administrative units of the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi.

Using the information offered by this archival funds we made tables illustrating the number of estates and their types: private, own by the state and by certain public institutions from the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi.

From the selective use of the documents, from the analysis and comparison of different information gathered from all the sources mentioned above, resulted this study of the evolution of the structure of the landownership and of the agrarian relations in the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi, from the adoption of the rural law in 1864 until the outburst of the First World War.

Our work, *Land ownership in the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi (1864-1914)*, has four chapters, and we would like to emphasize the merit of the scientific coordinator, conceived in such a way that they contain entirely all the aspects of the agrarian problem: I. The evolution of the administrative-territorial structures of the former counties Botoșani and Dorohoi (1864-1914); II. The implementation of the rural law from August 14/26 1864 in the former counties Botoșani and Dorohoi; III. The appropriation of the newlyweds on the State's estates and the selling of the State's estates, in lots, to the peasants in 1889 in the former Botoșani and Dorohoi counties; IV. The agrarian relations at the beginning of the twentieth century

In the first chapter we considered necessary to analyze the evolution of the administrative-territorial structures of the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi, in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. In this part of our study we focused on the most important normative laws on which the administrative-territorial units were constituted and functioned, as was the case of the Communal law (No. 394), The law for the establishment of county commissions (No. 396), the changes made to the Communal law (1872, 1884, 1896, 1904, 1908, 1911-1913) and to The law for the establishment of county commissions (1872 and 1894), and also a series of decisions of the local authorities.

We also emphasized, using the information gathered from archives, as much as we could, the importance knowing the exact number of villages and other administrative-territorial units and families throughout the numerous administrative-territorial changes.

In the second chapter we approached the implementation of the rural law August 14/26 1864 in the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi as well as its immediate consequences. From the beginning we have to underline that this chapter represents the fundamental part of our

work due to the importance that this reform had in organizing the landownership by the Romanian legislation and also the situation that it generated.

Thus, it was absolutely necessary that the crucial moments in the elaboration and promulgation of the rural law to be known and also the echo that this law had in the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi. Relying on the documents from the County Division of The National Archives Botoșani, the fund The Prefecture of Botoșani county and the fund The Prefecture of Dorohoi county, comparing the data from the reports of the prefects with the data from the administrative-territorial units, eliminating the errors and the miscalculations, especially for Botoșani county, we analyzed the situation of those who did corvee in the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi before the adaptation of the rural law of August 14 1864.

With the implementation of the rural law, the landowners and the tenants resorted to several means to determine those who did corvee to renounce the appropriation. Thereby, many landowners tried to prevent the implementation of the law by several means: they spread the idea that the appropriation was not mandatory; in certain commissions, in the administrative-territorial units and ad-hoc, there were landowners that managed to impose tenants, subprefects or other landowners as delegates of those who did corvee.

As we mentioned before, due to the numerous injustices and to the abuses of the landowners and tenants, the peasants made appeals and complaints for the infringements of the law to all the institutions of the state, from the Permanent Committee to the State Council. Even though their appeals were often justified, the peasants rarely got the justice they searched.

In this chapter we insisted on the way in which the implementation of the rural law of August 1864 was carried out in the two counties (Botoșani and Dorohoi) that today form Botoșani county. Also, in order to reveal the number of those who were appropriated, we made two tables for each administrative-territorial units of the two counties. These tables contain all the villages from those administrative-territorial units, in alphabetical order, from the municipalities established by the Communal law of March 31 1864. In the first set of tables, next to the name of the village is recorded the name of the owner and of all of those who did corvee on the estate before the adaptation of the rural law. The second set of tables contains the name of those who did corvee and were appropriated, mentioning the piece of land received, in the field or in the village, and the sum that they owed for the ransom of the corvee, according to each category of those who did corvee. No the least, using the information from these tables, we

centralized the data showing the number of estates and their three types: private, own by the state and by certain public institutions from the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi. Then we recorded of those who did corvee placing them in their social strata, from the three types of estates.

In the third chapter, we followed the chronological order of the stages of the appropriation of those who did corvee by the rural law of 1864, presenting *The appropriation of the newlyweds on the State's estates and the selling of the State's estates, in lots, to the peasants in 1889 in the former Botoșani and Dorohoi counties*. We grouped these two issues in a single chapter because the appropriation of the newlyweds, in a way, the selling of certain parts of the State's estates, and also because of the fact that both questions represented a late implementation of certain articles of the rural law.

As in the previous chapter, we tried to accomplish a theoretical and statistical presentation of the appropriation process of the newlyweds, of the peasants with special agreements, of the peasants who could not receive their land and also of those without or with very little land, after the criteria established by the law of August 10 1876 and of the laws regarding the alienation of State propriety .

Thus, with the appropriation of newlyweds, under articles 5 and 6 of the rural law, a new series of villages appeared. Considering useful the knowledge of the realities of that period, we made tables containing data regarding the name of the estate, the number of lots, the date of the appropriation, the surface of the new villages founded in the two counties, Botoșani and Dorohoi. Therefore, we consider that the tables we made can be used by the local authorities for the documentary attestation of these localities.

In the last chapter of our thesis we analyzed and presented the agrarian relations from the beginning of the twentieth century, in the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi. Thus, for a better understanding of the agrarian relations we studied and presented the agrarian legislation and its implementation, especially regarding the agrarian agreements. For the research of the evolution of the agrarian relations, the most important documentary source was the analysis of the *statistical and social inquiries* made by the State's institutions or by researchers. We also used certain information from the reports of local authorities, materials of the Superior Council of Agriculture, found in archives and only rarely published (as was the case of the annual reports of the county prefects or of the records of the Superior Council of Agriculture).

That is why, fundamental for the problem of the agrarian relations remains the structure of the landownership. Regarding this structure, the official statistics from the period we analyzed do not offer systematic or complete data. Therefore we did not have the possibility to present the dynamics of the structure of landownership in the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi, instead we were grounded to the analysis of the data regarding certain domains, in certain moments.

In this chapter we also presented the way in which the tenancy functioned, the period in which it was regulated, and also its connection with the great latifundia in the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Also, our study has a great number of annexes that contain information that complete and sustain our scientific approach.

Through our study he emphasized that, at least in the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi, the land and the landownership always represented a sensitive point, never completely solved, never completely regulated. Thereby, often the peasants were the ones that suffered from the lack of regulations.

The most important part of our study is represented by the revealing of the role of the elaboration and the implementation of the rural law adopted during the reign of Alexandru I. Cuza, in the historical frame of the two counties and its immediate consequences. By the implementation of the rural law, the landowners and the tenants resorted to several means and abuses in order to determine the peasants to renounce their most important propriety, the land. Although the State intervened in the rural problem through numerous laws conceived in the interest of the peasants, its efforts remained without success.

Reaching the end of the work, we observed that, during the research, many details regarding our theme have gathered. The temptation was to use all the information in order to better highlight certain opinions. In the same time it became clear to us that there are more to be said regarding the subject of landownership.

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