

BRAILA MOSQUES OF THE OTTOMAN PERIOD* OSMANLI DÖNEMİ İBRAİL CAMİLERİ

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Sorumlu Yazar

Abstract

After the military expedition against Petru Rareş (1527-1538) in Moldavia, Braila was annexed to the Ottoman Empire and, according to contemporary sources, a fortress was built there. From that moment on, the city and its surroundings underwent a process of deep changes regarding the landscape and its population. Already in 1570, in the city there were 116 Muslim households and four mosques. Over time the city became more and more a “Turkish” settlement and the number of Muslim places of worship increased. The existence of the different mosques and masjids both in the citadel as in the city can be followed through the repair reports, in the studies concerning the Braila’s military history and through the examination of different archive document especially from the *Archives of Pious Foundation* and *Romanian National Archives*. When referring to the praying places in Braila some sources offer more technical data without mentioning the names and other mentions only the names without any information regarding the location. Because of that most of the mosques found in the city cannot be located with precision and the dates regarding their building years are not clear but even so can be periods of their functionality can be predicted. From 16th until the beginning of the 19th century, there were identified 38 different mosques in Braila, but only a few were functional at the same time and many were destroyed by the war or just got ruined. In 1829 the city entered under Russian and Wallachian rule, and the mosques that survived the war from 1828-1829 and were not demolished were used for other purposes like prison or arrest, ammunition depot and even converted into a Christian church like it was the case of the Church of the Holy Archangel Michael from the center of the city.

Key Words: Mosque, Masjid, Holy Archangels Michael Church, Braila, Ottoman city.

Öz

Boğdan’da Petru Rareş’e (1527-1538) karşı düzenlenen askeri seferden sonra İbrail Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’na bağlanmış ve çağdaş kaynaklara göre burada bir kale inşa edilmiştir. O andan itibaren şehir ve çevresi, manzara ve nüfus açısından kapsamlı bir değişim sürecine girmiştir ve artık 1570 yılında şehirde 116 Müslüman hane ve dört cami bulunmaktadır. Zamanla şehir giderek daha fazla “Türk” yerleşimi haline gelmiş ve Müslüman ibadethanelerinin sayısı artmıştır. Kale içinde ve şehirdeki farklı cami ve mescitlerin varlığı, onarım raporları, İbrail’in askeri tarihine ilişkin çalışmalar ve özellikle Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Arşivi ve Romanya

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Milli Arşivi'ndeki çeşitli belgelerin incelenmesi yoluyla takip edilmiştir. İbrail'deki ibadet mekânlarına atıfta bulunurken bazı kaynaklar isim belirtmeden daha teknik veriler sunmakta, bazıları ise konuyla ilgili herhangi bir bilgi vermeden sadece isimlerden bahsetmektedir. Bu nedenle şehirde bulunan camilerin çoğunun yeri kesin olarak tespit edilememektedir ve inşa yıllarına ilişkin tarihler net değildir, ancak yine de işlevsellik dönemleri tahmin edilebilir. 16. yüzyıldan 19. yüzyılın başına kadar İbrail'de 38 farklı cami olduğu tespit edilmiştir, ancak aynı dönemde sadece birkaçı işlevseldir ve birçoğu savaş nedeniyle yıkılmış ya da harap olmuştur. 1829 yılında şehir Rus ve Eflak hakimiyetine girmiş ve 1828-1829 yılları arasındaki savaşta ayakta kalan ve yıkılmayan camiler hapisane veya tutuklama, mühimmat deposu gibi başka amaçlar için kullanılmış ve hatta şehrin merkezindeki Kutsal Başmelek Mikail Kilisesi örneğinde olduğu gibi bir Hristiyan kilisesine dönüştürülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Cami, Mescid, Baş Melekler Mikail Kilisesi, İbrail, Osmanlı şehri.

Introduction

Braila (İbrail) is an old Romania settlement situated on the left bank of the Danube. Due to its elevated position on a plateau that afforded it control and observation of the Danube, Braila was safe against the river's destructive forces and represented an ideal location for settlement. The strategic location, situated in proximity to a ford on a river that served as a significant trade route throughout history, allowed passage to Dobrudja and made it an ideal location for a trading center.

Before the 14th century, on the site of today's town, there was only a small fishing village. (Popescu, 1994, 183). The economic and strategic importance of the area was understood by the members of the ruling dynasty of Wallachia (Eflak) and the village was incorporated into the newly created Wallachian state. Later, when the state's territory was organized and administratively divided into counties, the county of Braila was created in this area and received the name of the town that served as its administrative center. (Panaitescu & Mioc, 1966, 330).

The earliest confirmed reference to Braila comes from a document which resembled a commercial treaty dated in 1368 signed by Vladislav I the ruler of Wallachia. Wishing to increase the commercial importance of the city the Wallachia ruler granted commercial privileges to the merchants from the city of Brasov which were to do their trade at the Danube harbor. According to the document's stipulations the merchants were to pay the custom fees only one time and only at the departure from the city (Pascu & Cihodaru, 1977, 86). As another evidence for the participation of Braila in the international trade is the fact that the city was to be found on the various portolans of the Catalan-Genovese style under the name of Drinago but during the 15th to 16th centuries, the town was known by various names including Brigala (in Italian), Brailova, Ibrail (in Turkish), and Proilavon (in Greek) (Giurescu, 1968, 37-44; Rădvan, 2003, 75-85; Rădvan, 2004, 249; Maxim, 2000, 364). If in the middle of the 14th century, Braila was already a Christian settlement considered to have a pre-urban status at the beginning of the 15th century, Braila is considered to have the status of a town and started to be recognized as an important location in trade in the area. (Câdea, 1993, 26-29; Câdea, 1995, 73-102; Câdea, 2012, 127-128; Holban, 1968, 30; Popescu, 1994, 184; Popescu, 1997/98, 217).

Due to its strategic and economic importance it became one of the first targets that the enemies of Wallachian rulers would attack in case of a military conflict and as an example in 1462, Mehmed II led a fleet of 25 triremes and 150 other ships up the Danube and destroyed Braila. In 1470 the town was again a victim of a military conflict but this time the city was devastated by the Moldavian ruler Stephen the Great

who's actions apparently were motivated not only by politics but also by economic interests, as Braila was a competitor for Moldavian commercial center Kilia (Bogdan, 1959, 16, 19). The conflicts subsided after 1482-1484, when Kilia fell to the Ottomans. However, in 1512, the town was again attacked by Bogdan III, successor of Ștefan, triggered by a challenger to the Moldavian throne from Wallachia. Braila recovered and remained the main gateway to the East for both the Wallachian goods and those brought from Brasov or Sibiu. (Giurescu, 1968, 67).

Following the military campaign in Moldavia against Petru Rares in 1538 conducted by the sultan Suleiman I, Braila came under direct Ottoman authority. During this episode, Moldavia lost in favor of the Ottoman Empire the Southeast of Besarabya where the powerful fortress of Bender was raised and consolidate the Ottoman control in the area (Mircea, 1941, 464-475). It is unclear under what circumstances Radu Paisie, the voivode of Wallachia, agreed to submit Braila, but it is accepted by the historians that the settlement was incorporated into the Ottoman defense system, from the north of the Danube, after 1540. (Holban et al, 1972, 504; Iorga, 1996, 289; Giurescu, 2000, 119). As part of this defense system, following their occupation of Braila, the Ottomans began constructing a stone citadel guarded by a garrison which increased with time. As an outpost of the Ottoman Empire, Braila had a role in a more effectively control of Wallachian and Moldavian voivodes' politics but the traffic on the Danube as well. Braila and its surrounding areas, were organized similar to other former Wallachian territories that entered under directly Ottoman occupation (Maxim, 1983, 806-814). Besides the military and strategical importance, because it was a harbor on the Danube, Braila increased its economic importance as well being called in 1569 an important harbor not only for Wallachia but for Moldavia as well (Giurescu, 1968, 73-75, 115-119, 157-158; Popescu 1992, 335; Popescu, 1997/98, 222-223). The capture of Braila marked the Ottoman control of the north of the Danube and allowed for surveillance over the river, which was a critical transportation route for troops and goods as the Empire continued to expand into central Europe along the Danube (Maxim, 1983, 806-814).

After the occupation the settlement of Braila suffered changes that reflected the new situation and the politics of the new rulers. Beside and maybe contemporary with the migration and settlement of a new population were brought elements of Ottoman urbanization as in the other Ottoman settlements along the Danube line that became territories of Islam. Praying places, military structures, and various types of social architectural works such as bazaars, mosques, public baths, and religious foundations were constructed in Braila (Engin, 2013, 50). Despite the existing literature on Brăila, there is a significant gap in the research on mosques in Braila, therefore, the purpose of this study is to shed light on the situation of mosques in Braila and what had happened to them after the Adrianople Treaty from 1829.

1. The praying place from Braila

The city of Braila has been a predominantly Christian community for hundreds of years, long before the Ottoman Empire came to the Danube. This is evidenced by the existence of early Christian necropolises on both the higher plateau of the city and near the bank of the Danube (Cândea, 1995, 34-104). As the most significant port in Wallachia due to its advantageous geographical position and the revenue generated from trade taxation, Braila became a focal point of interest for neighboring states and following almost two centuries of Wallachian control in year 1538 the city became

part of the Ottoman Empire (Mircea, 1941, 464; Maxim, 1994, 974; Maxim, 2010, 175)¹.

From the moment Braila entered under direct Ottoman control, with brief periods of interruption, for almost 290 years, the fortress and the harbor continued to be significant economic, strategic, and military assets in the region (Popescu, 1997/98, 222-223). There are previous studies that have contributed to the economic and military history of Braila, however, the information concerning the city itself is scarce. Foreign travelers and soldiers in the Russian armies that came to Braila and left descriptions of the city noted its resemblance to the Ottoman city in the region. Resembling a typical Ottoman city, in Braila as well, in addition to the traditional houses, public baths, squares, and markets, there should have been a multitude of mosques and masjids used by the Muslim population which represented the majority in the city.

Upon examination of the sources consulted regarding the Muslim praying houses, it became evident that while some merely mention the names of the various praying places found within the city during the time being concerned more with their personnel or administrative problems regarding their activities, other sources, like the repair reports, concentrate more on information regarding the repair and upkeep of the buildings. Because of the destruction suffered during different wars in which the city was involved many praying places were completely destroyed and others were only partial affected and had to be repaired. In addition to the damage caused by the war, another factor that contributed to the degradation and ultimate ruin of numerous buildings in the city was the use of low-quality construction materials, such as unburnt bricks. Furthermore, the construction methods employed also played a role in the deterioration of the city's infrastructure. (Stănescu, 1956, 316).

Although the primary focus of research was generally on the citadel or the Ottoman fortifications of Braila, the studies conducted by Hakan Engin, Ionel Căndea, H. Stănescu, Mariana Şlapac, Laurenţiu Rădvan and Mihai Anatolii Ciobotaru provided some insight into the circumstances surrounding Muslim prayer in Braila, particularly in the context of the Russian-Ottoman wars of 1710-1711, 1735-1739, 1768-1774, 1787-1792, 1806-1812, and 1828-1829. In addition to the aforementioned scholars' studies, the material comprising Russian military maps, when combined with other newly discovered archival materials, will contribute to the development of a more comprehensive understanding of the topic of Muslim prayer spaces in the city during the Ottoman era.

1.1. The praying place from the citadel

A review of the existing literature on Braila reveals that the most frequently mentioned Muslim prayer space in Braila was located within the castle. Although the mosque is known only by the name of *Hunchiar*, given in Romanian documents and the date of its construction is uncertain, it is regarded by historians as the oldest mosque in the city (ANDJB, 99/1832, 5-9; Popescu, 1938, 23). It is believed that the structure was built solely for the use of the Ottoman garrison and was constructed contemporaneously with the citadel. Given the importance attached to the fortification and reinforcement of the citadel and the castle, this place of worship as well, was

¹ The exact date of this episode in Walachia's history is still debated among Romanian historians, but everything happened after the Ottoman military campaign against Petru Rareş, the ruler of Moldavia. The military campaign began in 1538, and two years later, in October 1540, the Ottomans began construction of a citadel at Braila, which was not finished in 1546.

subjected to a series of renovations and modifications over time. As example before and after the Russian Ottoman wars from, 1768–1774, 1787–1792, 1806–1812 and 1828–1829 the citadel underwent extensive renovations as did the mosque found on its grounds (Engin, 2022, 111).

This praying place, which is classified by H. Stănescu as a masjid was first mentioned on a plan made in 1790 by the Austrian Johan von Vermatti and published for the first time in 1929 by Gheorhe T. Marinescu (Stănescu, 1956, 316; Marinescu, 1929, XXIII). Based on the above-mentioned plan, in his research on the history of Braila and its fortifications, Ionel Căndeia associates the oldest known mosque in Braila with the one marked on Vermatti's plan, which is located in the southeast corner of the citadel. Although the building was likely of modest size and lacked a significant military importance, it received enough attention from the cartographer; as evidenced by its clear and precise indication on the plan. The place was marked in the interior of the citadel with the symbol of a crescent and a small sketch of a mosque (Marinescu, 1929, XXIII; Căndeia, 2004, 9, 15). When it came to the location of the Constantin C. Giurescu cites the location of the masjid from the citadel as being in the third enclosure of the citadel. This differs from the locations given by Stănescu and Căndeia, who both mention its location in the first enclosure of the citadel (Giurescu, 1968, 75; Stănescu, 1956, 306; Căndeia, 2004, 9, 15). On a plan of Braila, dated from 1828, Ionel Căndeia locates the masjid in the southwest corner of the citadel and concludes that after 1810, when the citadel was deeply affected by the explosion of the gunpowder magazine, it must have been rebuilt in another place (Căndeia, 2005, 196).

The existence of a praying place in the citadel is briefly mentioned by Hakan Engin as well. Engin notes that it was renovated during the construction activities carried out between 1755 and 1757 (Engin, 2022, 162). The name of the prayer space is not mentioned, but for the year 1755 its dimensions and the approximate location have been identified. The construction was relatively modest in scale, measuring a mere 12 meters in length and 11 meters in width, with the minaret measuring approximately 18.5 by 4.5 meters and it was situated in close proximity to the gate, the supply and ammunition depot, and the archers' tower (Engin, 2022, 106). The repairs from 1755 included strengthening the pillars and replacing the floor (Engin, 2022, 108, 192). In 1787 the praying place had once again the floor replaced and judging by the dimensions of repaired ceiling, which were 22.5 m. in length and 13.5 m. in width, the building apparently was enlarged as well (Engin, 2022, 108, 131–132, 192; Engin, 2012, 67). Even if the building was enlarged or even rebuilt, the dimensions indicates that the construction was not particularly large, although it was larger than the Sultan Osman Mosque, which was to be found situated in the center of the city (Ayverdi, 2000, 33).

Mariana Şlapac's research on the stronghold of Braila, based on two Russian plans of the city from 1770 and 1775, made by Ivan Sobolev² and Mark Severincik³, also placed the mosque near the citadel gate as well. As an argument can be advanced based the plan's own description in which is very clear and stipulates that the mosque,

2 Şlapac, 2019, 180, "Plan Brailowskoi kreposti v kakom sostoianii ... po vziatii rossiiskim voiskom ot turok nahodiŭta ... ot 1770go godu" (The plan of the fortress of Braila in what condition ... is after the conquest of Russian army from the Turks...year 1770), The State Military-Historical Archives of Russia from Moskow (AMIR), F. 846, inv. 16, d. 2058.

3 Şlapac, 2019, 183, "Plan Brailowskoi kreposti s pokazaniem okolo onago forštata I situaiii 1775go godu fevralea dnea" (Plan of the fortress of Braila and the situation of Vorstadt next to it February 1775), AMIR, F. 846, inv. 16, d. 2127, s. 2.

which is marked with the letter “E”, had beneath it the citadel’s gate. Consequently, the mosque must be situated on the floor above the gate (Şlapac, 2019, 185, 189, 195-196). The location of the minaret, the walls and the gate, and the fact that the mosque was at the second level of the stone tower that was guarding the entrance in the citadel can be better understood when studying both the image of the citadel of Braila that was found in Russian archives by Victor Țvirçun and the military plans discovered in the Russian State Military-Historical Archive (RGVIA) by Laurențiu Rădvan and Mihai Anatolii Ciobotaru (Rădvan & Ciobotaru, 2019, 367, 370-371, 377-382).

As the first enclosure of the citadel disappeared before 1819, the layout of the citadel is changed. If in other older plans of the citadel there always was mentioned or marked a praying place, in the plan made by Seyyid Ömer there are no reference of it (Engin, 2012, 112; Căndea, 2015, 113; Yıldıztaş, 2016, 99). But it is possible to have been omitted because of the lack of importance from military point of view. Even if it was not mentioned or marked in the citadel, apparently a mosque it did exist and for the year 1828, Ionel Căndea locate it near the southwest corner of the citadel (Căndea, 2005, 196). The existence of a former masjid is revealed in an official correspondence between the Magistrate of the city and the Internal Affairs Office of Wallachia, in which was discussed the reorganization of the perimeter of the former citadel. This building, in contrast to the fate of all the city’s fortifications, was not destroyed but repaired, modified, and in 1831 was given a new role as the headquarters of the city police as well as a place of incarceration. Moreover, the building became the center of the Magistrate Square in a new neighborhood that was created where the citadel has stood before. Apparently, it was a practical decision to reuse for a period of time the buildings that fitted the new purpose. Even if it was made of stone, only after one year it was already stated that the building was again in a bad shape so in March 1832 Magister asked for the necessary approval for its repair. Soon after the purpose of the building was changed again because in 1833, the Magister asked from the government the permission to create a national school and planned to use the building of the former mosque, since at the time, apparently was not suitable anymore as an incarceration facility (ANDJB, 99/1832, 5, 9; Stănescu, 1956, 316, Filitti, 1930, 20; Popescu, 38, 23).

1.2. The praying place within the city

A review of the current urban landscape reveals that, despite the presence of a small Turkish community, there is an absence of a mosque in the city. The situation was distinct between the sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the Muslim population constituted the majority in the city. For the Ottoman period, Hakan Engin acknowledges the existence of various mosques and masjids in the city, although he expresses caution and does not provide a precise number. (Engin, 2022, 106, 401). Nevertheless, other scholars have proposed slightly different number for the praying places in Braila. For the year 1770, not including the site within the citadel, Laurențiu Rădvan and Mihai Anatolii Ciobotaru cite a minimum of six locations where prayer was conducted, (Rădvan & Ciobotaru, 2019, 375). Mariana Şlapac references five edifices that were subsequently converted into churches (Şlapac, 2019, 183). However, it is evident that the actual number is likely to be higher, as Petrov’s account does not include any mention of the mosques that were still standing at the time but indicates the burning of thirteen mosques made of stone when the Russian army set fire to the city on January 21, 1770 (Petrov, 1866, 58). Subsequently, in the first quarter of the 19th century from H. Stănescu documented the existence of six mosques in Braila in

1826 (Stănescu, 1956, 316).

Excluding the mosque from the inner castle, that it is considered to have been built in the same time with the citadel, in addition to their names there is further information available about a number of mosques. Two of these mosques are Sultan Osman Mosque, which was constructed during the reign of Sultan Osman Khan (1618-1622), and Sultan Suleiman Mosque. Although the precise locations remain uncertain they were located in the center of Braila there were mentions about being in service simultaneously in 1708 and 1711. (Engin, 2013, 51). This information is consistent, in a degree, with the Russian military charts dated from 1770 and 1775, which depict both the citadel and the city's mosques. As there are mentioned on the descriptions, the praying places from the center before converted to Christian churches soon after the Russian take over were previously (Rădvan & Ciobotaru, 2019, 363-383; Şlapac, 2019, 179-194).

In addition to the aforementioned information, there are several other details regarding the Sultan Osman Mosque. It has been documented that the building has sustained damage on multiple occasions during periods in which the population of the city and the city itself was a victim of the 1710-1711 and 1768–1774 Russian-Ottoman wars. For the first time the mosque required repairs and renovation following the attack and occupation of Braila from 1711 (Maxim, 2011, 80-81)⁴ and at the request of the local population in the aftermath of the Russian army's retreat in September 1711, the mosque and the city's damaged suburbs were repaired (Engin, 2022, 101, 519)⁵. In another Russian attack over the city of Braila, this time during the Russian-Ottoman war from 1768–1774, the Sultan Osman Mosque was deteriorated again or even completely destroyed but was rebuilt in 1777 in the same place (Engin, 2013, 51). According to the list of materials required for the construction, the edifice was built with a stone foundation. Among the materials required for its reconstruction there are mentioned stone, bricks, pillars, and various iron and lead pieces. The minaret of the mosque was constructed from stone and covered with lead (Engin, 2012, 60-61; Engin, 2012, 133-134).

Over time, due to damage caused by wars, because of age, poor craftsmanship or poor construction materials, other mosques that got in a poor condition and were found records of their maintenance work or repairs. For example, in year 1757 in the city repairs were made to a mosque and an open air praying place (namazgâh). The renovation of the mosque was quite vast because it included the ceiling, the walls, floors and windows of which the frames had to be completely renovated. The resistance of the building was reinforced by applying a significant amount of white plaster on both the interior and the exterior of the walls (Engin, 2022, 108-109). Construction activities continued after the Russian-Ottoman war from 1768–1774, and for the year 1777 there are mentions of another mosque, that was in need of repairs. The name is not known but it was supposed to have been built by Sultan Suleiman and was located between the first and the second entrance of the fortress. Its location indicated that was situated closer to the west wall rather than to the center of the city and must not be confused with the above-mentioned Sultan Suleiman Mosque. Since the evaluation made for the repair of the damaged parts of the fortress was not

4 Accordingly to Mihai Maxim, the damages brought to the city and the people was estimated at 5.803 guruş. This amount is approximately double the price of the palace in Ortaköy on the Bosphorus, confiscated from Prince Dimitrie Cantemir, former ruler of Moldavia.

5 The above-mentioned information it is to be found not in the main text of the research but in the 336 and 1736 footnotes.

approved the necessary repairs were not made (Engin, 2022, 127). Ten years later in 1787, during the extensive construction works that were registered in the citadel, some renovation works were carried out on buildings in the city as well. An open-air praying place and mosque, that required maintenance on the roof and the surrounding walls, were reported to be in a state of disrepair and in need of repairs. In this case too, the name and the location of these praying places were not revealed (Engin, 2012, 67). Another mosque, which underwent repairs and modifications in the year 1789 was located on the eastern side of the city, in close proximity to the external wall. The presence of a mosque in this place is unusual because the distance between the citadel and the external wall of the fortress was not big enough to allow the existence of a neighborhood and furthermore, this exact part was more exposed to an enemy military attack (Engin, 2013, 117).

In another part of the city, very close to the center at only 160 meters from the Holy Archangels Church, on Rubinilor Street at number 16, according to Stăneacu, some traces of circular masonry with a radius of about 1.25 m. represent the foundation of a minaret made of brick and adobe (Stăneacu, 1956, 315). If the statement of Stănescu is true and a mosque was built on this place, it must be newer than 1770-1775 because it does not resemble any mosque from the Russian military plans of Braila and must have been destroyed before the Russian occupation from 1829 because there is no mention of this mosque at the time when Braila came under Russian occupation.

From other official documents and this time from two censuses made in 1570 and 1597-1598 it is known that in Braila there were three masjids and one mosque. Their names were Hacı Mehmed Bursalı Masjid, Hacı Mehmed Masjid, Cemşid Masjid and Ahmed Ağa Mosque. Since the total Muslim population was composed from 116 families and a small garrison, even if at that moment were recorded only 3 imams it seems that the number of praying places was quite high (BOA, TTd. No. 483, 178-179, BOA, TTd. No. 0688, 122-123; Maxim, 2013 263, Maxim & Gheorge, 2018, 37-52)⁶.

In first part of the 18th century six more names of praying places are recorded to as being located in the city center. Beşlüyan Ağa Mosque, was mentioned to be active in 1728, and for the year there are mentions regarding Çarşı (Suk), Kale, Fârisan, Fârisan-ı Evvel and Hüdavendigar (Engin, 2022, 106, 290, 306). The first of the mosques mentioned was built at an unknown date by Fârisân-ı Evvel Ağa Mustafa and considering the fact that a pious foundation Beşlüyan Ağa Cami-i Şerifi Vakfı was functioning in 1742, the mosque must have been active as well, and even in 1813 since the name of Beşlü Ağa Mosque is encountered in a document in which is stipulated a fee paid for the services of the imam and the scribe (Engin, 2013, 52; Engin, 2022, 507). Since the founder of Beşlüyan Ağa Mosque is Fârisân-ı Evvel Ağa Mustafa and Engin Hakan in his Ph.D. thesis mentions Beşlüyan Ağa, Fârisan and Fârisan-ı Evvel Mosques in the center of the city and they seem to be active at the same time, it is not clear if there are three different mosques or one mosque called in three different ways.

Making use of the records of pious foundations and judging by the fact of the existence of a pious foundation named Kapudanoğlu Cami-i Şerifi Vakfı can be concluded that in 1757 there was active a mosque with the name of Kapudanoğlu as well (Engin, 2013, 52). Unfortunately, there are no other information regarding the location or the construction date.

6 It was brought to my attention that the same information about Braila was included in other registers at TKGMA, KK. 83 and BOA, TT. 701. Until now I had not been able to receive and study them.

Apparently, the buildings of the mosques and maşjids were not used only for religious purposes. In need, some mosques were used to store provisions when the storage places were not enough. A few mosques' names are known because in 1819 their buildings were used for this exact purpose. These are the Beşlü Mosque, Yalı Mosque, Hangar Mosque, Hacı Ali Mosque, Sim Mosque, Çarşı Mosque and Küçük Osman Mosque (Engin, 2022, 401-402). Beside their names there are almost no other information regarding their place or the date of construction.

After the Russian occupation of the city, the minarets of the Muslim praying places were demolished and the buildings used for other purposes. The above-mentioned mosque from the citadel was firstly used as a jail and after two years the intention was to be used as a school. But it was not the only one and in a document from April, 6 1831 for safety reasons an order is made for the to move of the ammunition stored in the maşjid near the Danube. After the evacuation, the building was scheduled to get demolished (ANDJB, 36/1831).

Other information regarding the mosques from Braila are provided by Mehmet Emin Yılmaz, in his book in which he discusses the Turkish mosques that have been transformed into churches. With regard to the mosque in the center of the city, besides the fact that Çarşı Mosque name is used, the same name used by Mariana Şlapac he mentions that in another Russian plan the same edifice it is called Bayraktar Mosque (Yılmaz, 2023, 647-648). Until now the name of Bayraktar Mosque is only found, in this research. Besides that, the image from a Russian plan and proposed plan of the building given by Yılmaz, being a little bit different in dimensions, do not match the plan given by Ionel Cădea, H. Stănescu, Constantin Carp and Lucian Rotaru (Cădea, 2004, 18, Stănescu, 1956, 309, Carp & Rotaru, 1995, 123-124).

Further, Mehmet Emin Yılmaz, in his study gives a list of the former mosques and some of the names were unknown before. To facilitate comparison with other similar information, the mosques are listed in chronological order according to the years mentioned in the sources consulted by the author: Ali Mosque without mentioning the year, Hacı Ahmed Ağa Maşjid - 1699, (Farisan-i Evvel Ağası) Mustafa Ağa Mosque - 1728, Çarşı (Hacı Ali oğlu Hasan Ağa) Mosque - 1747, Kale Mosque - 1755, Sultan Osman Mosque - 1757, Kaptanzâde Hacı Mustafa Mosque - 1757, Câmi-i Cedîd - 1761 and Sultan Abdülhamid Mosque - 1816 (Yılmaz, 2013, 656-657). As for the Sultan Abdülhamid Mosque, it was built by Abdülhamid I and destroyed by an earthquake in 1802-1803. The necessary repairs were made by Ahmed Pasha and was used again on July 11, 1816 (İnce, 1995, 338)⁷.

Beside the mosques mentioned above there are some many more names that came from the study of the Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Arşivi (Archives of Pious Foundation). Unfortunately, there were no information regarding the exact locations of the construction date or what happened with these building over the time, but the just the names and the dates when are mentioned in the documents are of importance for this research's topic because can give an idea regarding the longevity or the importance of the praying places.

Some mosques are mentioned only once (Table 1) like Beşlüyan Ağası - 1742 (VGMA, 1220, 34), Kovanzâde Hacı Mustafa Ağa Mosque - 1757 (VGMA, 1219, 38), Sultan Osman Han Mosque - 1757 (VGMA, 1219, 58), Başıbân Ağası Mosque -1758 (VGMA, 1219, 58), Kapudan oğlu Mustafa Ağa Mosque - 1758 (VGMA, 1219,

⁷ The above-mentioned information it is to be found not in the main text of the research but in the footnote number 122.

58), Alemdar Hacı Hüseyin bin Ahmed - 1759 (VGMA, 1219, 58), Hüseyin Hacı Ömer İmdâr ibn-i Hacı Ahmed Mosque - 1763 (VGMA, 1185, 377), Hacı Mustafa Ağa -1763 (VGMA, 1185, 377), Küçük Hacı Hüseyin bin Molla İsmail Mosque - 1765 (VGMA, 1185, 377), Hacı Hüseyin Alemdar Mosque-1765 (VGMA, 1185, 377), Çörek Ali Oğlu Hüseyin - 1766 (VGMA, 1185, 377), Seyrek Kasabzâde Hacı Mustafa Ağa - 1778 (VGMA, 1185, 378), Şükrüzâde Hacı Ali - 1780 (VGMA, 1185, 379), Küçük Osman Ağa - 1786 (VGMA, 1185, 379), Molla Memiş - 1823 (VGMA, 1185, 383), Koçağ Oğlu Mosque - 1823 (VGMA, 1185, 383).

Other mosques are mentioned two, three or even four times (Table 2). In this category are Sinobî Mustafa Ağa - 1759 (VGMA, 1219, 58), 1761 (VGMA, 1185, 377), 1790 (VGMA, 1185, 380), 1820 (VGMA, 1185, 383), Hüdavendigâr Mosque - 1759 (VGMA, 1219, 58), 1777 (VGMA, 1219, 58), Hacı Mehmed - 1761 (VGMA, 1185, 377), 1775 (VGMA, 1185, 378), Yetim Damadı Hacı Mehmed Ağa Mosque - 1762 (VGMA, 1185, 377), 1778 (VGMA, 1185, 378), 1778 (VGMA, 1185, 378), 1784 (VGMA, 1185, 379), Rüstemzâde Hacı Hasan Ağa bin Mustafa -1789 (VGMA, 1185, 380), 1823 (VGMA, 1185, 383), Şükrüzâde Mustafa Ağa - 1792 (VGMA, 1185, 380), 1822 (VGMA, 1185, 383)

In the second part of his chapter regarding the mosques from Braila, Mehmet Emin Yılmaz analyzing the Russian map no. 10138, which was first brought to the attention of researchers by Laurențiu Rădvan and Mihai Anatolii Ciobotaru (Rădvan & Ciobotaru, 2019, 367, 374, 382), as the first cited authors, Mehmet Emin Yılmaz, mentions the existence of three marked mosques and three churches. The element of novelty is the fact that on the map in question the author mentions the existence of Hakan Ağa Stone Inn. The inn appears to be located very close to the mosque from the center of the city, in a place that is marked on the map with red square. Unfortunately, there is no mention of the source of this information since in the maps description there are no details regarding it (Yılmaz, 2023, 647).

Connected to this subject in Mariana Şlapac research on the map AMIR, F. 846, inv. 16, d. 2058 from 1770, on a similar red square located in the same place is mentioned a former mosque converted into a Russian church („Bîvşaia mececi v koei ime<etsea> rossiiskaia terkov”) and the place is marked with “Y” letter. On the map AMIR, F. 846, inv. 16, d. 2127 f.2 from 1775 the description is almost identical the only difference is that, instead of letter “Y” it used letter “Z”– Old mosques („Bîvşie mececi”) (Şlapac, 2019, 196). The same spot on the Russian map “Plan de la forteresse et de la ville de Brahilow prise par les Russes au moin de Juin 1772” it is marked with letter “N” which accordingly to the map’s own description represented a mosque transformed in a church (Moschée au Eglises). On the other Russian maps analyzed by Laurențiu Rădvan and Mihai Anatolii Ciobotaru (Rădvan & Ciobotaru, 2019, 371, 380), even if the red square is charted it is not mark upon it and no other information is given regarding its purpose. On the Riniev and Borroczyn plans, from 1830 and 1834, even if some years past after the conquest of the city, the same square shape can be seen exactly in the same place but again with no indication regarding its meaning (Castraveţ, 1994, 177-178). There might be a mistake of the cartographer when the map was made, but there is the possibility that it was indeed an inn, as Mehmet Emin Yılmaz mentioned previously, and under the Russia occupation was used, as a Russian church, leaving the other mosques transformed in churches to be used by the local Christian population which had only one church for attending their religious needs.

When analyzing the Russian maps about Braila, in all of them is marked a praying place located in the city at the intersection of nine small streets. Accordingly, to Mariana Şlapac in that location it is located the center of the city and she names the mosque as Çarşı Mosque, being considerate the most important religious building. She adds that the above-mentioned mosque was latter transformed, after the 1829 into a Russian Church (Şlapac, 2019, 182-183).

Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi also mentions a mosque, which has been converted into a Christian church. He could give the dimensions of the construction, which were 12 meters wide and 15 meters in length, but he couldn't say anything about the construction date (Ayverdi, 2000, 33).

Laurențiu Rădvan calls the former mosque Ceaidî Dgemasi but cannot give other details about it. Ioan Munteanu is not able to name the mosque but considers that the building is 250 years old (Munteanu, 2022, 5, 7). Ionel Cădea considers that the building was constructed at the beginning of the 18th century (Cădea, 2004, 13).

A detailed examination of the architectural features of the building led H. Stănescu to conclude that it was constructed prior to 1750 which put his statement between the previous to historians. Analysis of the materials utilized in the construction of the former maşjid, resulting in the following findings. He assumes that the original construction utilized unburned and superficially burned brick, which exhibited significantly reduced durability compared to the well-burned brick that commenced usage around 1832. Prior to its new use, the windows of the building were small and overlapping. The structure was supported by octagonal oak pilasters. Such elements can be observed in both the external and internal walls of the building. The middle portion of the smoked oak beam roof was dated to the 18th century. The ceiling and center part of the roof are embellished with a remarkable piece of ornamentation, known as „göbek” (Stănescu, 1956, 317).

After both the Ottoman military force and Muslim inhabitants withdraw from Braila and by the conversion of city's main mosque into an Orthodox cathedral the city was transformed from an “Ottoman and Muslim Braila into Vlach and Christian Braila (Filitti, 1930, 4).

2. Religious Conversion: A Mosque's Journey to Orthodox Church

After the signing of the Adrianople Treaty (1829), according to which Braila became part of the Wallachian administration, the Christian church from the city, as an institution, as in previous cases in similar cases, was incorporated into the diocese of Buzau. The archimandrite⁸ sent by the Bishop of Buzau, in Braila began to consecrate the Muslim places of worship in order to transform them into churches. His actions were quickly stopped and there are no further records regarding his actions to transform the mosques into churches (Popescu, 1932, 66, 82).

This practice was not singular. Until 1829, during the Russian occupation of the city, the mosque from the main square of the city was already twice converted by the Russians into a Christian church. The first time happened during the Russo-Turkish war of 1806-1812. After the fortress of Braila was taken by the Russian army and on the date of 4 February 1810, a letter was sent by Metropolitan Gavriil to the secretary Vasile, to the inhabitants of Braila and the members of the church in the county, in which it is made known that, as had happened in the past, when Braila had been

8 A dignitary rank in the Romanian Church hierarchy ranked under the bishop.

previously in similar situations, the entire border was passed under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Buzau “as a right given from ancient times to this diocese”. From that moment inhabitants of Braila were asked to recognize the Bishop of Buzau, Filitis Constandie, as the leader of the Christian church (Virtosu, 1930, 10-12).

The conversion made after the Adrianople Treaty was the final one and it came at the initiative and request of Grand Duke Mihail Pavlovici, the person in command of the army that occupied Braila during the Russian-Ottoman war from 1828. Apparently, the Grand Duke Michael Pavlovici wanted to build a cathedral, but instead of raising a new building from scratch on the foundations of the old masjid, the existing building was converted into a church (Drăghicescu, 1943, 322). His request was approved directly by the Bishop of Buzau, and the decision to convert the former masjid from the center of the city into a church became definitive (Didicescu, 1906, 62).

Following the approval of his request, the duke provided the church with the ecclesiastical requirements needed to ensure that the religious rite was carried out properly although the necessary ritual objects arrived some years later (Buculei, 2008,189-190). It is recorded that Grand Duke Michael sent the church a 24-light polycandle, a row of religious books in Russian and an-gold icon (Didicescu, 1906, 62). For this occasion, by the order 958 dated March 18, 1836 the mayor of the city invited the residents to come out at the city’s gate and receive the precious objects. (Vasilescu, 1929, 20-21).

On March 8, 1831, the church was sanctified in honor of its main benefactor and was given the patronage of Saint Archangel Michael. This occasion became an important event for the city and for the consecration of the church, an archimandrite came from Buzau being delegated for this special purpose directly by the Bishop of Buzau. This important ecclesiastic figure was assisted in the ceremony by the priest Ioan from Braila, the latter being appointed to lead the newly created church (Didicescu, 1906, 62). From that day the church was also popularly known as the *Russian Church* or the *Church of the King*. This name may come from the fact that the service was originally conducted in Russian because the liturgical books were in that language (Didicescu, 1906, 62; Munteanu, 2007, 29; Iordache & Grănescu, 2021, 141)

Prior to this momentous event for the city and the Christian community, the former masjid that was chosen to become the church required renovation and some architectural adjustments to accommodate Orthodox Christian worship. According to Stănescu the conversion of a masjid into a church had a practical meaning, by reusing a good building for the needs of the city but a political one as well. It represented victory over the Ottomans who had ruled the city for the past 290 years. In this way met a need, but it was also a political statement (Didicescu, 1906, 62).

In 1831, following a plan by Russian architects, the west windows were covered and an altar apse was built of burnt brick, which was more resistant than the unburnt or superficially burnt brick the building was constructed in the first place. The original windows from the north and south sides, which were narrow and overlapping, were replaced with wide, rounded windows at the top (Stănescu, 1956, 317; Enache, 2008, 76). The work at the construction of the altar and the completion of the building were financed by Ioan Slătineanu, at that time the county’s ruler, and by his family (Buculei, 2008,189-190). In one of his study regarding Braila, Filitti mentions that during the year 1832 because of Slătineanu’s efforts of the church was adorned and its construction was completed (Filitti, 1930, 18).

In 1858 the church was in a bad situation and finally got closed and was to be demolished. However, due to a lack of funding to establish another place of worship and parishioners' requests for the edifice to be repaired, the church was renovated in 1862 with funds that were collected from the congregation and public aids. In addition to the restorations, the church was extended westward by 7 or 8 meters, depending on the source cited (Didicescu, 1906, 63; Enache, 2008, 75). The new added section featured a window and a side door on both the north and south walls. Inside, it was provided with a balcony for the choir that did not resemble the rest of the old building (Stănescu, 1956, 317).

The renovation and addition of the west façade gave the church a new look. According to Enache, who analyses the construction styles of churches, the church acquires elements of the neoclassical style, but due to repairs and transformations over time the building can no longer be classified as part of an architectural style (Enache, 2008, 76).

On February 9, 1831, the Sovereign Divan of Wallachia, by order no. 813 to the Magistrate of Braila decides to allocate a sum of 7000 old lei annually for the maintenance of the church. This income came from the sale of the fish from the ponds on the Braila's Estate. Beside that the revenue of the church was to be cumulate with the income of a place near the boulevard that had 543 square fathoms. This decision was it was approved on April 2, 1831 by the General Kiseleff. And since the parish priest was not allowed any more to control the church's revenue the magistrate of the city was asked to elect three bishops which had role to administer the church's funds (Romania et al., 1890, 22, 224-225, 583; Didicescu, 1906, 62; Filitti, 1930, 18; Vasilescu, 1929, 20).

Conclusion

Since 1829 when, accordingly to the Treaty of Adrianople, Braila was given back to Wallachia passed 195 years. In this period of time almost every trace of the Ottoman heritage that was left in the city after 290 years of domination was erased. In the search of the new and the modern city and with the wish to cut the ties with the past, only one building remains to be hint of the old times and that is the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel Church.

Starting from the fact that this small church was a mosque until 1831 and today there are no Muslim praying places left in Braila, this research's scope was to reveal what was the situation of the mosques and masjids both during the Ottoman occupation and post the Treaty of Adrianople.

The undertaken research was not an easy task because there is no study that can give a frame work for this subject. The information was gathered from studies that just touch the subject just adjacent and their main focus point was the castle and its fortifications, the military aspects of the campaigns and were not directly interested or focused in the situation of the praying places.

At an interval of 20-30 years the destruction brought upon the city by the repeated war between Russia and Ottoman Empire shaped the surroundings and affected negatively its buildings and people's lives. Even if the rebuilding works took many years, these calamities did not stop the life of the city and its reconstruction. Since always the main focus of the architects was the fortress and the citadel, the process of repair the destroyed or ruined praying places took many long years. One example is the mosque built by Sultan Suleiman which was damaged during the 1768-1774 war

but only in 1777 a repair report was made and in the last instance was not approved and the mosque was not repaired. Another example is Sultan Abdülhamid Mosque that was damaged in 1802-1803 and was again good for service only in 1816.

This study started from the live proof of just a mosque, from the center of the new city, and ended by adding almost 37 names indicating the praying places in the city of Braila. The actual church had more attention from the scholar but even in this situation there is not name that everyone agrees upon. So, there are more data about the building but the name of the former mosque, the benefactor and the date when it was built are still unknown.

For Braila the first record regarding the existence of some Muslim praying places is from the 1570, just 30 years after Braila was occupied, and indicate only four praying places. As in this case most of the sources indicate just the names of the mosque, some other give information regarding the founder without entering in details regarding the dates of construction or the exact location. In the reviewed documents some praying places were mentioned only once and other multiple times. When it came to the mosques or masjids about of which were found only singularly mentions no conclusions regarding their longevity can be drawn. On the other hand, in the cases when there are multiple records it is easier to follow the continuity of the mosque. For example, Sultan Osman Mosque can be traced for almost 150 years and apparently it is the most long-lasting mosque in town, being always repaired after the war ended. Another Mosque that can be traced during passing years, is *Beşlüyan Ağa*. In the records that were analyzed, the mosque is mentioned for the first time in 1728 and the last time in 1819. Anyhow the lack of document records after the last date that was found in the source doesn't mean that the mosque just disappeared or was closed for prayer.

There were mosques that had slightly changed their names during the time and without some extra information regarding the location or the founder it is not easy to understand if it is the same mosque or a new one. Another interesting thing that can be observed is the fact that apparently, some mosques can be grouped according to different periods of time. Not all the mosques are active all the time. Some mosque might have waited year for repair or renovation but during that period other were built from the ground. From period to period there were always new mosque names that could be traced for 20-50 years and after that their names just stopped being mentioned in the records.

Starting from this point of this research it will be interesting to find more exactly the locations of these praying places because the information about their location like "city center" is not very helpful to create a map. Some more information regarding the construction dates will be of help in a better estimation of the year of service. This study left completely outside of the question the Muslim population. The information regarding the praying places corroborated with the evidence of census, with data regarding every neighborhood would help very much in creating a clear image of the praying places in Braila.

Table 1: Mosques mentioned only once in the documents

| Name of the mosque | Year | Archives reference |
|--|------|--------------------|
| Beşlüyan Ađası | 1742 | VGMA, 1220, 34 |
| Kovanzâde Hacı Mustafa Ađa | 1757 | VGMA, 1219, 38 |
| Sultan Osman Han | 1757 | VGMA, 1219, 58 |
| Başıbân Ađası | 1758 | VGMA, 1219, 58 |
| Kapudan ođlu Mustafa Ađa | 1758 | VGMA, 1219, 58 |
| Alemdar Hacı Hüseyin bin Ahmed | 1759 | VGMA, 1219, 58 |
| Hüseyin Hacı Ömer İmdâr ibn-i Hacı Ahmed | 1763 | VGMA, 1185, 377 |
| Hacı Mustafa Ađa | 1763 | VGMA, 1185, 377 |
| Küçük Hacı Hüseyin bin Molla İsmail | 1765 | VGMA, 1185, 377 |
| Hacı Hüseyin Alemdar | 1765 | VGMA, 1185, 377 |
| Çörek Ali Ođlu Hüseyin | 1766 | VGMA, 1185, 377 |
| Seyrek Kasabzâde Hacı Mustafa Ađa | 1778 | VGMA, 1185, 378 |
| Şükrüzâde Hacı Ali | 1780 | VGMA, 1185, 379 |
| Küçük Osman Ađa | 1786 | VGMA, 1185, 379 |
| Molla Memiş | 1823 | VGMA, 1185, 383 |
| Koçađ Ođlu | 1823 | VGMA, 1185, 383 |

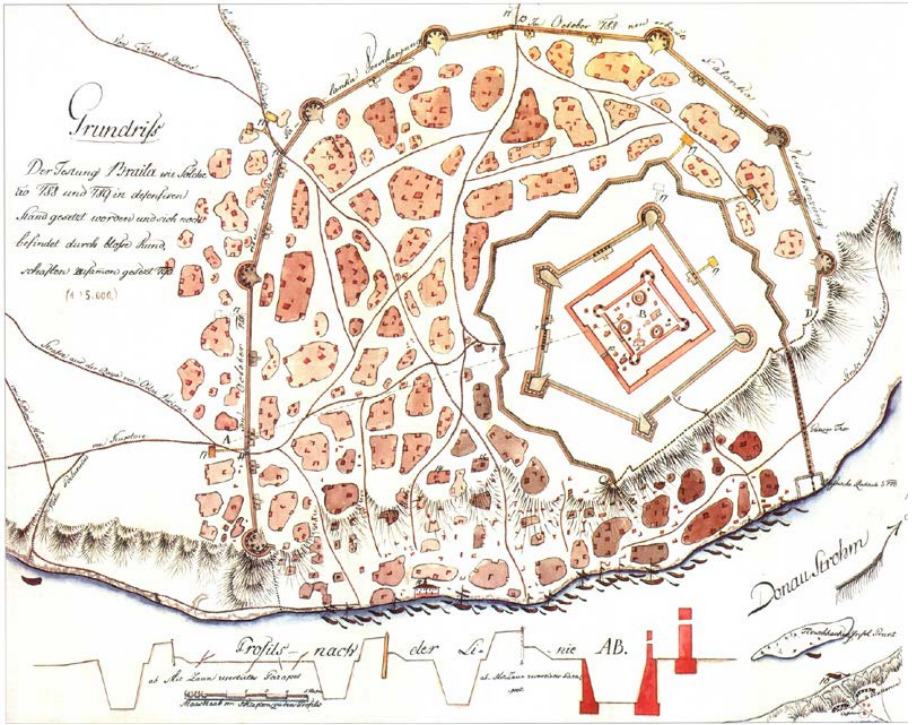
Table 2: Mosques mentioned two, three or even four times in the documents

| Name of the mosque | Year | Archives reference |
|---------------------------------------|------|--------------------|
| Sinobî Mustafa Ađa | 1759 | VGMA, 1219, 58 |
| | 1761 | VGMA, 1185, 377 |
| | 1790 | VGMA, 1185, 380 |
| | 1820 | VGMA, 1185, 383 |
| Hüdavendigâr | 1759 | VGMA, 1219, 58 |
| | 1777 | VGMA, 1219, 58 |
| Hacı Mehmed | 1761 | VGMA, 1185, 377 |
| | 1775 | VGMA, 1185, 378 |
| Yetim Damadı Hacı Mehmed Ađa | 1762 | VGMA, 1185, 377 |
| | 1778 | VGMA, 1185, 378 |
| | 1784 | VGMA, 1185, 379 |
| Rüstemzâde Hacı Hasan Ađa bin Mustafa | 1789 | VGMA, 1185, 380 |
| | 1823 | VGMA, 1185, 383 |
| Şükrüzâde Mustafa Ađa | 1792 | VGMA, 1185, 380 |
| | 1822 | VGMA, 1185, 383 |

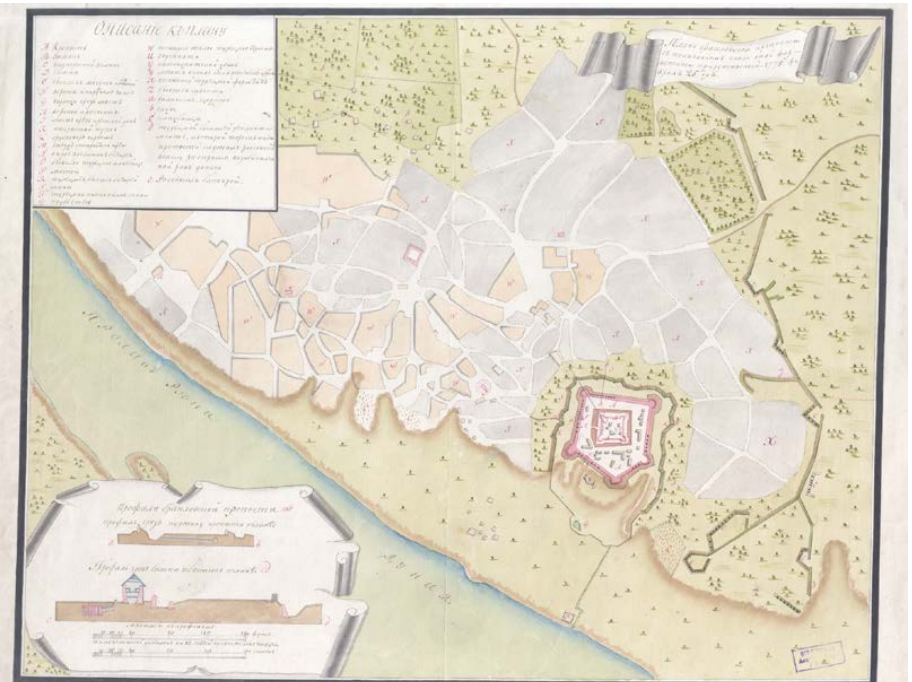
Table 3: Mosques mentioned in Braila from 16th to 19th century

| Name of a mosque |
|--|
| Başiban Ağası Mosque |
| Beşlü Mosque / Beşlüyan Ağa |
| Câmi-Cedîd Mosque |
| Çarşı (Hasan Ağa, son of Hacı Ali) Mosque |
| Çarşı (Suk) |
| Çörek Ali Oğlu Hüseyin |
| Fârisan |
| Fârisan-ı Evvel Ağa Mustafa Ağa Mosque |
| Hacı Ahmed Ağa Masjîd |
| Hacı Ali Mosque / Ali Mosque |
| Hacı Hüseyin Alemdar Mosque |
| Hacı Hüseyin Ömer İmdâr ibn-i el-Hâc Ahmed Mosque |
| Hacı Mehmed Ağa |
| Hacı Mustafa Ağa |
| Hamamcı Osman Ağa bin Süleyman |
| Hangar Mosque |
| Hüdavendigâr |
| Kale Mosque |
| Kaptanzâde Hacı Mustafa Mosque / Seyrek Kasabzâde el-Hâc Mustafa Ağa |
| Koçağ Oğlu Mosque |
| Kovanzâde Hacı Mustafa Ağa Mosque |
| Küçük Hacı Hüseyin bin Molla İsmail Mosque |
| Molla Memiş |
| Rüstemzâde Hacı Hasan Ağa bin Mustafa |
| Seyrek Kasabzâde Hacı Mustafa Ağa |
| Sim Mosque |
| Sinoblu Mustafa Ağa |
| Şükrüzâde Hacı Ali |
| Şükrüzâde Mustafa Ağa |
| Sultan Abdulhamid Mosque |
| Sultan Osman Mosque / Küçük Osman Mosque |
| Sultan Suleiman Mosque |
| Yalı Mosque |
| Yetim Damadı Hacı Mehmed Ağa Mosque |

Plan 1. I. Johann Vermatti



Plan 2. The plan of the fortress of Braila in what condition ... is after the conquest of Russian army from the Turks...year 1770



Plan 3. Plan of the fortress of Braila and the situation of Vorstadt next to it February 1775



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