

World of Stamps: **Dobruja—** **A little known stamp country**

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Sc. 2N1

Wars and other conflicts frequently influence the issuance of postage stamps and postal activities generally. World War I resulted in a large number of new stamp countries. In many cases they were areas which had been occupied by enemy forces or



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regions where plebiscites were held to determine the area's future affiliation.



In this story we will take a look at Dobruja (known as Dobrogea in Romanian and as Dobrudzha in Bulgarian). It is basically the region occupying the Romanian coastal area east of the Danube River and going down into Bulgaria. Shown here: Northern Dobrogea highlighted in orange and Bulgaria with Southern Dobruja highlighted in yellow, from

<http://www.knowledgerush.com/kr/encyclopedia/Dobruja/>

During the centuries Dobruja has been home to Greeks, Romans and Turks. The major city is Constanta along with the Mamaia tourist resort. Before World War II the Romanian part of Dobruja had a considerable Bulgarian minority.

Dobruja is a country of endless steppes which are used for large scale farming. During a bus journey from Tulcea in the North to Constanta in the South we passed through huge fields of wheat, sunflower and corn. Just south of



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Tulcea there were also many vineyards. Along the Black Sea coast fishing is an important activity. Off the Danube Delta sturgeons are harvested and the caviar is sold at high prices to elegant restaurants.



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When World War I broke out in 1914 Romania was a lot smaller than what is the case today. Many Romanians lived in Transylvania, which was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. On August 27, 1916, Romania entered the war in an effort to take over Transylvania. The Romanian army had some 500,000 soldiers but they were rather poorly trained and the leadership was equally poor.

On September 1, 1916 Bulgarian and Turkish forces entered Dobruja from the south. With most of the soldiers being employed in the west of the country the Romanian defences were unable to offer any resistance. The Romanians had to move a number of army units from the Transylvanian front to the defence of Dobruja where they were aided by Russian troops.

The Bulgarians occupied Constanta on October 22, 1916. They then went on to take control of the city of Cernavoda on the Danube. The Romanians had been unable to repel the Bulgarian invasion and by the end of the year all of Dobruja was firmly in Bulgarian control.

On December 6, 1916 the Bulgarian army aided by the Germans reached Bucharest, the Romanian capital. The Romanian government had to seek refuge in the mountains of Moldavia. A cease fire was proclaimed on December 9, 1917.

On November 10, 1918 Romania once again entered the war which was now coming to its inevitable end. Despite its early losses Romania gained all of Transylvania and Bucovina in the ensuing peace negotiations. The major part of Dobruja was returned to Romania.

The Romanian part of Dobruja was occupied by Bul-

garia from 1916 until 1918. The Bulgarians issued a set of four Bulgarian stamps overprinted “Post in Romania” in Cyrillic letters and “1916-1917”. The denominations are 1, 5, 10 and 25 stotinki. The basic stamps were part of the 1915 Bulgarian definitives. Three of the stamps show Tsar Ferdinand and the 1-stotinki low-value depicts a ruined castle.

Some stamp catalogues have decided to list these stamps under the heading of “Bulgarian Occupation of Romania”. Scott lists them as Romania 2N1-2N4 (as indicated in our captions) “Issued under Bulgarian Occupation—Dobruja District”. The stamps were mainly intended to be used in Dobruja but there was also a Bulgarian post office in Bucharest. Shown here are three Dobruja stamps on a piece post-marked in Bucharest.



The German military administration released stamps for the occupied parts of Romania during the 1917-1918 period. The major exception was the Dobruja District.

Collecting a basic set of Dobruja stamps is inexpensive as they are valued at a few cents each. The only exception is the 5 stotinki value of which only 300,000 copies were printed. It is of course much more difficult to locate cards or covers franked with these stamps.

If the basic set of four stamps can be located easily, getting hold of the many varieties such as inverted overprints or overprints in the wrong colours is a lot more difficult. However, the existence of these error stamps is a good reason to study all Dobruja stamps carefully.

Today Dobrogea is a region with a mainly ethnic Romanian population. But there are also minorities of Tatars, Russians, Ukrainians, Turks, Greeks and especially Roma (often referred to as Gipsies). During World War II the Bulgarian minority left the northern part of Dobruja and the only traces of that group of people can be found in Tulcea’s Ethnographical Museum.