



## A description of Romania and Bulgaria from the travelogue of Haji Pirzada Naeini

### Review scientific article

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This work provides an analysis of the "Safarnameh" written by the Persian traveler Haji Pirzada Naeini in 1887. The focus of this paper was specifically on those segments which detail his passage through Romania and Bulgaria, through the cities of Bucharest, Giurgiu, Ruse and Varna. In his travelogue he provides interesting descriptions of these settlements, as well as giving information on presence of Persian citizens in these areas during the second half of the 19th century.

### Key words:

Haji Pirzada Naeini, travelogue, 1887, Kingdom of Romania, Principality of Bulgaria, Persia

## Opis Rumunije i Bugarske iz putopisa Hadži Pirzada Naeinija

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Ovaj rad daje analizu „Safarnameh“ koju je napisao persijski putnik Hadži Pirzada Naeini 1887. Fokus ovog rada bio je posebno na onim segmentima koji detaljno opisuju njegov prolazak kroz Rumuniju i Bugarsku, kroz gradove Bukurešt, Đurđu, Ruse i Varna. U svom putopisu on daje zanimljive opise ovih naselja, kao i podatke o prisustvu persijskih građana na ovim prostorima tokom druge polovine 19. veka.

### Ključne reči:

Hadži Pirzada Naeini, putopis, 1887, Kraljevina Rumunija, Kneževina Bugarska, Persija

Mohammad Ali Naeini Haji Pirzada was born in the Persian town of Naein between 1835 and 1840, in a Sufi family (Chittick, 2007, p. 38).<sup>1</sup> He moved to Tehran and then went on his first journey outside of Persia, to Istanbul, in 1857. He was a student of the Sufi mystic Haji Mirza Saffeh, while he also maintained friendly

<sup>1</sup> Nain is located in central Iran, not far from Isfahan. Sufism (*erfan va tasavof* in Persian) is one of the teachings in Islam.

relations with the Persian ambassador in Istanbul. Afterwards, he traveled to Mecca, Syria, Egypt, and had twice spent time in Europe. He conducted his first journey to Europe in the early 1860s. (Vanzan, 2012, pp. 552–553). The second one happened during the 1886–1888 period. He went to Europe via Bombay and Cairo, where he made the acquaintance of some of the most important personages of the age, such as William Gladstone and Lord Salisbury. He was also able to establish cordial relations with the renowned British Iranologist, Edward Granville Browne, who had just then begun his scholarly career (Wickens et al., 1989, pp. 483–488). Naeini traveled to and spent time in many European cities - London, Paris, Berlin, and Vienna. Haji Pirzada Naeini worked and wrote during a period in time when the Qajar dynasty ruled over Persia. This was a time when foreign influences were felt in Iran, mostly that of the United Kingdom and of the Russian Empire. At the same time, there was great interest in Iran itself for trips abroad, including to Europe and Russia, which was why travelogues were widely popular among the Persian populace, even being written by Persian shahs.<sup>2</sup> (Pirnia & Ashtiani, 2006 [1385], pp. 951–956). Haji Pirzada left a travelogue of his second trip to Europe, under the title “Safarnameh,” in which he gave a detailed description of the places which he had visited. Unfortunately, the original of this work is not available to the public and is most probably in the possession of the author’s family. Nevertheless, it has been published based on a transcription which is readily available in the Majlis Library in Tehran. (Haji Pirzada, 1963, p. 8). The travelogue was written in Persian and, as such, was compiled and published with commentaries in two volumes by Dr. Hafiz Farmanfarmaiyan in 1963. (Haji Pirzada, 1963; 1965). It was written in a simple style, without many literary embellishments, and contains detailed descriptions of all of the places that he had visited during his travels. The first part of the travelogue begins in 1886, wherein he details his journey through the cities of Iran (Tehran, Shiraz, and Isfahan), and then he shifts his focus to his trips abroad - starting with India. He travels to Egypt via Bombay, continuing afterwards on to Italy, London, and Paris, spending much of 1887 in Europe. From Paris, he traveled to Vienna and Istanbul, doing much of it by train. This points to the fact that he used the so - called *Orient Express* which was established at the end of the 19th century with the goal of connecting the cities of Western Europe with the Ottoman Empire and the newly - established Balkan states. (*Orient Express*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022). From Istanbul, he traveled by sea to Egypt, returning to Persia via Beirut in 1888. The most probable reason that Haji Pirzade went on this trip is that he accompanied the Persian minister, Moeid al-Molk, who was going through therapy in some of the cities of Europe. (Haji Pirzada, 1963, p. 8). Nevertheless, his own activities indicate that he used this opportunity for research purposes. Apart from leaving detailed descriptions in his travelogue, he also initiated correspondence

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<sup>2</sup> A good example of this are the two Qajar shahs, Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (1848-1896) and Mozaffar ad-Din Shah Qajar (1896-1906). They traveled abroad multiple times and have left travelogs which have been published.

with the British Orientalist Edward Browne, which he maintained even later in life, exchanging valuable knowledge about Oriental studies, and especially about Iranology and Sufism. Pirzada left descriptions both of major cities and smaller towns in his travelogue, dedicating the same amount of attention to both, without prioritizing any one city or country over another. His descriptions of Iranian, Indian and Egyptian cities are equally exhaustive as are those of Paris or London. (Dabashi, 2020, pp. 240–259). He spent most of his time in the company of an Alexandrian interpreter, Mirza Abdullah who, besides Persian, also spoke Arabic, French and Turkish. (Haji Pirzada, 1963, p. 171).

In this paper we have analyzed those parts of his travelogue in which he writes about his trip through the Kingdom of Romania and the Principality of Bulgaria in November 1887, on the road to Constantinople from Vienna. Apart from describing the contemporary circumstances in those two countries, he also gives a comparison with the state of affairs twenty years prior, during his first trip through those lands. (Haji Pirzada, 1965, p. 71). His records give us a unique insight into the changes which happened in these areas during this period, through the lens of a Persian traveler. Romania underwent significant changes during the second half of the 19th century. The two principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia were united under the rule of one prince, Alexandru Ioan Cuza in 1859. The name of this unified principality was changed in 1862, when it became the Principality of Romania. Bucharest was chosen as the new capital of this entity and, during his seven - year reign, Cuza was able to institute significant reforms. The principality received a new ruler from the House of Hohenzollern, Charles I, in 1866. The state experienced great progress during his long reign, with the reconstruction of Romanian cities in a more modern style and the expansion of the railroad network throughout all corners of his domain. With the conclusion of the Russo - Turkish war in 1878, Romania became *de jure* independent of the Ottoman Empire. Charles I was coronated as king in 1881 and Romania was officially raised to the status of a kingdom. (Djuvara, 2004, pp. 200–206).

In contrast, Bulgaria had been an integral part of the Ottoman Empire until 1878. A movement for the national emancipation of Bulgarians, known as “vzrazhdane” (възраждане), was active throughout the 1860’s in the Bulgarian lands. The Congress of Berlin formally granted autonomy to the Principality of Bulgaria in 1878, with Eastern Rumelia remaining a part of the Ottoman Empire until 1885, when it was annexed to Bulgaria through a personal union. The principality was ruled by Alexander I Battenberg (1879–1886), (until he was replaced by Ferdinand I of Saxe - Coburg (1887–1918). (Pantev et al., 2008, pp. 249; 256).

When Haji Pirzada first passed through these regions during early 1860s, Romania was still a unified principality, while the lands inhabited by the Bulgarians were under the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire. There are no records available of this first trip, but he does frequently mention some details in his “Safarnameh” from 1887, twenty years later. The changes which he witnessed the second time

that he traveled through these lands were much more substantial. Romania had, in the meanwhile, become an independent kingdom, while Bulgaria had become an autonomous principality and - from 1885 - was in a personal union with Eastern Rumelia. (Pantev et al., 2008, p. 250). Haji Pirzada spent only a few days in these lands during his sojourn through the Balkans. He left detailed descriptions of four of the cities which he traveled through: Bucharest, Giurgiu, Ruse and Varna. Apart from describing these cities and their surrounding villages, Pirzada also left some records of the Persians who resided in these lands with whom he had established contact. He was also well - informed of the political situation in this area. He mostly used the Persian variants for the toponyms which he recorded, some of them originating from Arabic, while others were derived from Ottoman Turkish. For instance, the Danube was referred to as the “Tuna”, Wallachia and Moldavia were “Aflak” and “Bogdan”, while Austria - which he mentioned multiple times in his travelogue - was sometimes referred to as “Ātrish”, or as “Namsa” - a loanword from Arabic. He called the Bulgarian city of Ruse “Aras - chiq”, from the then - current Ottoman name for it: Rusçuk. (Haji Pirzada, 1965, p. 71). All of the dates are quoted in the lunar Hijri calendar which was current in Persia during the Qajar dynasty, which we have - for the purposes of clarity - translated into their Gregorian equivalents. (Leong, 2001, p. 10).

After staying in England and France, where Haji Pirzada spent the better part of 1887, he arrived the the city of Budapest. He left that city on Tuesday, Nov. 8th and headed for Bucharest<sup>3</sup> by train; he mentions that the journey lasted 19 hours. (Haji Pirzada, 1965, p. 66). Haji Pirzada wrote down his observations of the lands which he saw while traveling by train, putting special emphasis on the state of agricultural crops in Austria-Hungary and Romania. He described the road from Budapest to Bucharest as being “full of mountainous terrain and plains, with many fields under crops, mostly wheat and corn.”<sup>4</sup> He highlights the fact that most of the land is fertile, well used and brimming with crops. What especially piqued his interest was that the crops grew without any additional irrigation thanks to the moist soil and the regular rains, which is why the corn stalks were tall and strong, as he concludes his description.<sup>5</sup> It is not in the least surprising that he points out these details in his records, since he was born in a dry climate, in a settlement not far from Isfahan. Another aspect of agriculture which intrigued him in these parts was how sugar was extracted from the sugar beet,<sup>6</sup> which certainly represented an oddity for him, since the production of sugar in Iran was based on the sugarcane. (Haji Pirzada, 1965, p. 66). During his stay in Bucharest, he lodged

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<sup>3</sup> He cites dates in the Lunar Hijri calendar, therefore his departure from Pest is dated Safar 21st 1304.

<sup>4</sup> He highlights that the kind of corn he saw was called “balal” in Tehran. Nowadays, this term is used in Modern Persian to denote corn which is suitable for cooking and baking.

<sup>5</sup> Considering that he grew up in a dry climate, in a town not far from Isfahan, it is not surprising that he mentions plants growing without the need for further irrigation.

<sup>6</sup> This must have been a curiosity for him, since sugar is made from the sugarcane in Iran.

at the Hotel “Union.” He wrote in his travelogue that the climate in Bucharest is cold, especially during the winter. He also correctly mentions that Bucharest is the capital of Romania, emphasizing that the country used to be called “Aflak and Bogdan”, the Persian and Arabic toponym for Wallachia and Moldavia. (Haji Pirzada, 1965, p. 68). Pirzada also refers to the historical fact that Romania had once been part of the Ottoman Empire, but that it was now an independent country, ruled by a monarch “of the Austrian dynasty.” He was, in fact, writing about Charles I Hohenzollern, without being aware of the details of this dynasty’s origins. With regards to the political situation in Romania, he writes that Ottoman and Russian influence used to frequently alternate here, but that the state was on the road of constant progress. As regards the religion of the land, he states that a majority of the population professed Christianity, without going into the details of whether it is Orthodoxy or Roman Catholicism/Protestantism. Economically, he considered Romania to be a prosperous country and highlights that Bucharest was “a city which had mostly renovated, with many new streets and buildings, as well as a new theater. (Haji Pirzada, 1965, p. 68). He emphasizes the fact that many Europeans had recently moved to Bucharest and had bought homes there, mostly people from London and Paris. These conclusions of his are mostly corroborated by the fact that Bucharest had indeed gone through a period of architectural expansion during the reign of Charles I, and had become a desirable destination for many foreigners from Western Europe. (Djuvara, p. 203). He dedicated a substantial portion of his writings in describing the Romanian military, stating that he saw a lot of soldiers both on the streets and in the wagon of the train that he traveled in. He describes the soldiers as being “young, tall, full of energy and well - educated.” Based on their posture and behavior, he concluded that they had received a good military education and that a majority of them spoke French quite well. They were very well dressed, according to Pirzada, and - in his estimation - their uniforms were “much better than those of the French army and of the same quality as that of the Prussian military.” (Haji Pirzada, 1965, 68). He was likewise astute in noticing how widespread the French language was among the Romanian, a popularity which that language had acquired at the beginning of the 19th century (Haji Pirzada, 1965, p. 68; Djuvara, 2004, p. 172). After spending one day in Bucharest, Haji Pirzada continued his trip by train to the town of Giurgiu.<sup>7</sup> He wasn’t as impressed by Giurgiu as he was with Bucharest, describing it as being “very filthy” and that town streets consisted of “dirt roads and were full of mud.” As for the domestic livestock, he mentions that the populace of Giurgiu mostly held cows, sheep and donkeys. He took a carriage to the riverside, where he embarked on a steamboat and crossed over to Rusçuk.<sup>8</sup> The crossing from Giurgiu to Rusçuk by boat lasted, according to him, around half an hour. (Haji Pirzada, 1965, p. 69). Since at this period in time there was no bridge across the Danube from Romania to Bulgaria,

<sup>7</sup> He calls the town Zherzhava, which is modern-day Giurgiu.

<sup>8</sup> Rusçuk or Ruse in Bulgarian he calls “Aras-chiq.”

Pirzada did so by boat. While crossing the Danube from Giurgiu to Rusçuk, he wrote down a few facts about it. He consistently uses the Persian toponym “Tuna” to refer to it, mentioning that “foreigners mainly call the river - Danube.” He also notes that, in the past, the Danube served as the main waterway from this region towards Europe, starting from Rusçuk and then continuing on to Pest, Vienna and other European cities. He had used this route during his previous visit 20 years ago. River traffic had, according to his words, significantly decreased as railroad traffic became more lively. He estimated the width of the river channel at around 1000 measures, likewise noting that “even though the water of the Tuna is sweet, yet it is not used for the irrigation of fields, but only for the transport of goods.” (Haji Pirzada, 1965, pp. 71–73).

He spent one night in Rusçuk in the building known as “Eslāh-khāneh,” of which he says that it was established by Midhat Pasha, but not mentioning any further details about it. Midhat Pasha was ottoman governor of the Tuna Vilayet during this period.<sup>9</sup> (Haydar, 1903, p. 38.) This was, in fact, the first modern hotel to have been established in Ruse, which provided accommodations to European diplomats traveling to this city or passing through it on their journey along the Danube. Therefore, it is not surprising that a Persian traveler who was accompanying a Persian minister had stayed there as well. (Boneva-Blagoeva, 2020).<sup>10</sup> Pirzada here takes the opportunity to reminisce on his previous journey through Ruse: “When I had been here twenty years ago, I visited Midhat Pasha, who had already become well - known for his work in constructing the city and improving the hygiene of its streets. Even now, people can point out which buildings were constructed during his governorship.” (Haji Pirzada, 1965, p. 72). While touring Ruse, he wrote that the city had earlier belonged to the Tuna Vilayet of the Ottoman Empire but that it now “belongs to a small country called Bolgarestān, which only has 60,000 men capable of military service.” The ruler and government of Bulgaria he characterized as being “Christian.” He likewise mentions that Ruse has a population of 20,000 inhabitants. He walked through the streets of that city, visited the bazar, and observed that the city and inhabitants had not changed that much over the intervening 20 years, stating that it was “still quite dirty.” He also left some interesting records of the Muslim population of Ruse, mentioning that there were 27 mosques in the city at the time but that there was a plan to raze 20 of them to build new streets in their place. According to his words, the Muslim community of the town was “weak and without any respect being accorded to it, but they still have not lost their faith” nor have they “abandoned their mosques and their namāz (prayers).” (Haji Pirzada, 1965, pp. 71–73.). Even though he didn’t mention the sources which he used for this information, his description of the state of the Muslims of Ruse mosly agreed with the contemporary situation. According to some statistics, Ruse had a 40%

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<sup>9</sup> Rusçuk was Midhat Pasha’s father place of origin.

<sup>10</sup> It is well known that the famous traveler Felix Kanitz had stayed there while writing about his travels through the Balkans.

Muslim population just before Bulgaria had become autonomous principality. Nevertheless, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 dealt a blow to it, as it began to decline and lose prestige, mainly in the areas which had been most affected by the war. Nevertheless, according to the Census of 1881 which encompassed the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia, Muslims still comprised  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the population of these lands. (Eminov, pp. 209–241).

After spending a night at the hotel “Eslāh-khāneh,” he took a 15 minute ride by coach to the local train station. He embarked on the train and arrived in Varna “after a nine hour ride,” as he describes it. Obviously, he was using the new railroad from Ruse to Varna which was completed in 1867. (Rey, 2022). The duration of Pirzada’s travel agrees with the then current train schedules of the Orient Express, according to which it took 8 hours 50 minutes to get to Bucharest from Budapest. (Chéret, 1888). Pirzada mentions that the train operator’s assistant was an Italian with whom he spoke during the breaks, which made the trip more interesting. The scenery on the train ride to Varna, according to Pirzada, consisted “...of fruit crops, mostly vineyards, apples, cherries and apricots,” highlighting that the land is “green, forested and fertile.” He also notes that he saw an abundance of game - rabbits, partridges and sparrows. (Haji Pirzada, 1965, p.73). What especially caught his attention was how poorly developed the regions that he was passing through were, and the lack of infrastructure, which for him was inconceivable given the obvious fertility and beauty of the land. He inquired among his fellow passengers about this state of affairs and received two plausible explanations. The first was that these lands had been subjected to the ravages of the Russo - Turkish War, which was why they had not been able to develop yet. The second possibility was that the state had not yet begun to properly invest in the development of this region. He concluded that a majority of the rural population that he saw on his journey from Rusçuk to Varna was Muslim, because he saw a lot of mosques and minarets along the way. (Haji Pirzada, 1965, p.74–75). While in Varna, he stayed at the “Han Ahmad Efendi” Hotel for two nights and recorded that it was “just as nice as a foreign hotel,” and that the “rooms were tidy and the quilts and mattresses were changed on a regular basis.” A tour of Varna sufficiently impressed him that he wrote that it had “advanced considerably” since his last visit and that a hospital, state school, and new military barracks had been built next to the old one. He also noticed “a large stone fountain which had an inscription in Nastaliq, which declares that it had been raised in 1200 AH in honor of the Sultan Mahmud” (Haji Pirzada, 1965, p. 73). Nastaliq is a calligraphic style originating from Iran, but the inscription itself was doubtless in Ottoman Turkish, considering the period and its place of origin. If we were to translate the date into the Gregorian calendar, 1200 AH can either be according to the lunar Hijri calendar, meaning that the monument had been raised in 1785, or in the solar Hijri, in which case we get 1821. Unfortunately, neither of these dates quite agree with the official data accepted in historiography, according to which the fountain was raised in Varna during the reign of Mahmud

II in 1834. (Zlatanov, 2016, p. 195–208). Haji Pirzada stayed two days in Varna, and on November 13th 1887 he embarked on a ship to Istanbul, continuing his journey back home. (Haji Pirzada, 1965, p. 74)

Pirzada frequently kept company with the local Persian communities while traveling through Romania and Bulgaria, devoting special attention to these encounters in his travelogue. He notes that Persians were mostly able to recognize each other at first glance or when they heard Persian spoken, after which they quickly established contact among themselves. Pirzada was able to learn important details about events unfolding in these countries through the local Iranians. While crossing from Giurgiu to Rusçuk by steamboat, Pirzada made the acquaintance of the captain, who was a Persian Armenian named Krikor from Urumie near Tabriz, who had been ferrying people across the Danube. He spoke with Pirzada in fluent Persian (Haji Pirzada, 1965, p. 69). He also met several Iranians in Rusçuk, whom he describes as working as grocers and woodworkers. The majority of them originated from the Iranian cities of Sanandaj, Hamadan, and Isfahan. One Iranian, Sa'id Jalil, invited into his carriage and his home. Pirzada described him as an "Iranian 35 years of age" who had been living "in the region of Rum for the past 20 years." He also mentions that they dined on mutton at Jalil's house, drank tea and spent time together. (Haji Pirzada, 1965, p. 70). He also met a group of Iranians in Varna, mentioning that they were from the cities of Salmas and Sanandaj and the region of Kurdistan. (Haji Pirzada, 1965, p. 74)

Haji Pirzada Naeini embarked on a ship traveling from Varna to Istanbul. He spent some time in Istanbul, having found accommodations at the Iranian Embassy there. He gave a detailed description of Istanbul, while also mentioning some interesting conclusions about his sojourn through the Balkan states of Romania and Bulgaria. Firstly, he states that ever since the Congress of Berlin a large number of refugees (predominantly Muslims) had fled Bulgaria and Romania to Istanbul, where the government had done everything to take care of them, even though some of them were still living in poverty. (Haji Pirzada, 1965, p. 99–100). After his stay in Istanbul, he traveled by ship to Egypt, then through Beirut and Baghdad, returning to his homeland successfully on January 28th 1889 when he entered Tehran. (Haji Pirzada 1963, p. 57)

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