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Sea Adventure Fiction Making in the Romanian Setting

Abstract: This paper explores sea-adventure fiction in Romania through oceanic and mobility studies. It examines the genre's reception alongside Romanian maritime history and commerce. Originating in the United States, the genre spread across Europe before reaching Romanian audiences. The study considers the first authors read in Romania and their cultural impact. Despite being peripheral, Radu Tudoran's *Toate pânzele sus!* (1954) became a beloved work for teenagers and wider audiences, later inspiring a popular 1976 TV adaptation. The paper highlights how transnational circulation and maritime imaginaries shaped Romanian sea-adventure fiction.

Keywords: Romanian Sea Adventure Fiction; Radu Tudoran; Panait Istrati; Jean Bart; Mobility Studies; Oceanic Studies.

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Introduction

Sea adventure fiction emerged as a major nineteenth-century genre, initially flourishing in the United States. James Fenimore Cooper pioneered American nautical fiction with *The Pilot* (1824) and *The Red Rover* (1827), exploring national identity through maritime narratives. The genre later spread to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, where Frederick Marryat developed it further in works such as *Frank Mildmay* (1829) and *Mr. Midshipman Easy* (1836). Beyond its literary influence, Marryat's practical contributions to seafaring, including the creation of Marryat's Code for maritime flag signaling, highlight the ways in which nautical fiction intersects with material practices of navigation, communication, and mobility at sea.¹ This interplay between narrative and practical systems underscores the relevance of mobility studies to the analysis of maritime literature.

Building on the transnational circulation of sea-adventure fiction, this study examines the Romanian reception and adaptation of the genre in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Drawing on the concept of a "translationscape", following Jordan A. Y. Smith – the cultural and

literary landscape shaped by translation –, I trace the circulation, visibility, and accessibility of American, British, and French nautical novels in Romania, mapping how texts, ideas, and literary conventions moved across linguistic and cultural borders.² In the Romanian context, this involves examining when and where translations appeared, who produced them, and how they were received by readers. Analyzing this translationscape sheds light on patterns of literary mobility, revealing both the works that gained prominence and the cultural frameworks transmitted through translation.

This paper investigates Romanian sea-adventure fiction through the combined lenses of mobility studies and oceanic studies. Mobility studies provide tools for examining movement as both practice and representation, considering sailing, trade, migration, and the infrastructures – ports, rail connections, and naval bases – that shape such mobility. Oceanic studies, in turn, treat the sea as a cultural and historical space, a medium of contact, exchange, and power, where maritime imaginaries, imperial resonances, and transnational connections take shape. By linking textual motifs such as storms, voyages, and navigation to archival evidence of ports, naval reforms, and trade networks, this study situates literary reception in concrete infrastructures of movement.

The paper is structured around five chapters. The first addresses how sea-adventure fiction was received and circulated in Romanian territories from the 1820s onward. The second examines the influence of translation and transnational circulation on Romanian production and reception of the genre. The third explores the role of Romanian maritime military institutions

and commercial shipping in shaping local tastes, thematic emphases, and publishing practices, while paying attention to who was able to move – sailors, merchants, naval officers, readers – and who was represented as immobile in the narratives, revealing social and political hierarchies. The fourth chapter engages concepts from mobility studies and oceanic studies – such as circulation, maritime networks, and littoral spaces – to analyze how Romanian literature interprets the sea, maritime movement, and cultural memory.

Finally, the paper concludes by synthesizing these findings and reflecting on the broader significance of sea-adventure fiction in shaping Romanian maritime identities.

Methodologically, this study adopts an interdisciplinary interpretive approach that combines hermeneutic textual analysis with historical and archival research. It brings together reception analysis of print culture, archival and historical investigation into maritime military and commercial infrastructures, and close reading of literary works. By integrating these materials through frameworks from mobility and oceanic studies, the paper situates sea adventure fiction within both transnational literary circulations and local material realities. In doing so, it demonstrates how maritime narratives engage with the concrete practices and infrastructures of movement, trade, and navigation.

The Romanian Translationscape of the Sea Adventure Fiction in the 19th and 20th Century

The Romanian translationscape was initially dominated by French novels,

which mediated access to other literatures and helped form a modern literary consciousness among Romanian readers. Early translation practices often reflected elite debates over cultural authority, with figures like Mihail Kogălniceanu criticizing translations as potentially hindering the development of Romanian literature, while Ion Heliade-Rădulescu saw them as catalysts for literary growth.³ Until the mid-nineteenth century, novel translations were overwhelmingly canonical, focusing on authors such as Voltaire, Defoe, and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, while noncanonical works, including adventure and sentimental novels, began to appear only in the 1840s with authors like Alexandre Dumas-Père, *Le corricolo* (1843) and George Sand, *Indiana* (1832).⁴

Early Romanian literary translations show a gradual incorporation of maritime themes, even before the genre of sea adventure fiction took recognizable shape. Among the earliest examples is *Les Aventures de Télémaque, fils d'Ulysse* (1699) by François de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon, a novel that contains numerous references to sea travel and employs the sea both as a narrative setting and as a moral and symbolic space. The Romanian translation history of this work illustrates an early cultural encounter with nautical imagination: a manuscript translation from 1773, commissioned by Iordache Darie Dărmănescu after a Neo-Greek edition, is considered the first known version; this was followed by Petru Maior's adaptation from an Italian intermediary, Budapest, 1818; and later by Grigore Pleșoianu's four-volume translation published in Craiova in 1831.⁵

Although *Télémaque* cannot be classified as sea adventure fiction in the modern

sense, its circulation in Romanian translation marks an early instance where the sea functions as a formative setting for moral trial and political allegory, thus anticipating later Romanian works that would develop the maritime theme in original narrative contexts.

Within this Francophone mediation, early translations of American sea and adventure fiction reached Romanian readers only indirectly and selectively. Throughout the early 20th century, these early translations – mediated through French and shaped by didactic and ideological purposes – gave way to a more direct interest in English-language fiction. The gradual decline of French dominance after the interwar years culminated in the 1940s, when English and American novels became the central source for translation, followed briefly by a surge of Soviet and Russian prose in the 1950s, before a renewed Western orientation in the 1960s reopened Romanian literary culture to canonical American authors such as Mark Twain, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry James, with *Huckleberry Finn* and *Moby-Dick* both entering Romanian translation only in 1943.⁶ The Romanian translationscape of maritime and sea adventure fiction thus evolved from 19th-century moral didacticism and ideological importation through French channels to a postwar engagement with Anglophone adventure and seafaring narratives as part of Romania's complex cultural reorientation toward the West.

In such a translationscape the American novel emerged as a newcomer in Romanian territories, embraced for its novelty and perceived structural and political affinity, despite conservative currents

such as *sămănătorism* and *poporanism*. The quantitative data reveal that translated novels were often more numerous than local production, particularly due to serialized publication, underscoring the centrality of translation in shaping literary consumption and the early contours of a Romanian translationscape for foreign fiction.⁷ James Fenimore Cooper's works entered the Romanian literary sphere toward the end of the nineteenth century, signaling one of the earliest moments of Romanian engagement with American fiction. The first encounter occurred through an abridged, illustrated "translation" of *The Leather-Stocking Tales – The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840), and *The Deerslayer* (1841) – issued as a single volume in the *Biblioteca albastră ilustrată* ("The Blue Illustrated Library," 1889). This edition contained only condensed plot summaries accompanied by engravings, more an adaptation for popular reading than a full literary translation.⁸ The gesture nevertheless reflects how Romanian readers first encountered Cooper's adventure world at the intersection of visual storytelling, moral instruction, and serialized popular culture – forms that often mediated the early arrival of foreign maritime or frontier narratives.

More complete translations followed in the next decades. *The Deerslayer* (*Vânătorul de cerbi*) was later reissued in 1906 in the form of serialized excerpts under the title *Omorătorul de căprioare* in a periodical. The first full literary translation appeared in 1947 as *Vânătorul*, translated by Eugen Godeanu, followed by abridged editions in 1964. Subsequent decades brought *The Red Rover* (*Corsarul Roșu*), translated by

Alexandru Iacobescu in 1937, and *The Pathfinder* (*Călăuza*), first translated in 1969.⁹ While Cooper's frontier novels belong primarily to the wilderness tradition, *The Red Rover* and *The Pathfinder* extend the adventure motif to the maritime world. Together, these Romanian versions trace a long and uneven trajectory of reception – one that moves from popular adaptations to increasingly faithful translations – and reveal how the sea and the frontier alike shaped the early Romanian imagination of American adventure.

The American novel was gradually embraced by local intellectuals, its adoption was motivated both by structural empathy – the perceived similarity between the developmental trajectories of the United States and Romanian territories – and by political considerations, as translators and editors sought to engage with themes of freedom, national identity, and social reform.¹⁰ The first American novel rendered into Romanian was *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), it constitutes a complete translation of the original. It was published in 1856 as *Coliba lui moșu Toma sau viața negrilor în sudul Statelor Unite din America*, with a preface by Mihail Kogălniceanu linking the narrative to contemporary social issues, including the liberation of Roma people.¹¹ Within this context, James Fenimore Cooper's novels represent a continuation of the American presence in Romanian letters, exemplifying both the novelty of U.S. literature and its perceived political and moral relevance. Works such as *The Red Rover* and *The Pathfinder* were particularly valued for introducing maritime and frontier narratives that expanded the horizon of Romanian readers, aligning with the concept that the American

novel was appreciated for its innovation and structural resonance.¹²

In the early stages of the genre, Romanian prose was heavily influenced by foreign models, particularly French literature, which provided templates for both historical novels, as exemplified by Alexandre Dumas, and sensationalist or mystery-oriented narratives, as developed by Eugène Sue.¹³ This influence arrived through multiple channels, including administrative and cultural contacts under Russian oversight, and dominated literary production throughout the nineteenth century. Some counter currents, however, emerged through the Junimea circle, which imported German models to balance the pervasive French presence.¹⁴ Quantitatively, three-quarters of the nineteenth-century Romanian novels were published in Bucharest, a Francophile and francophone cultural hub. Even outside the capital, in Transylvania or the Austro-Hungarian Empire, French models remained dominant. Yet, despite these borrowings, Romanian writers pursued a clear strategy of autochthonization. Most novels were set in the Romanian territories – approximately 72% of narratives took place in Wallachia, Moldova, or Transylvania – while foreign locations functioned primarily as references or narrative embellishments.¹⁵ This dual strategy – importing narrative structures while grounding stories in local geography – produced a literature that was highly autochthonous yet cosmopolitan in imagination, setting the stage for later developments in maritime fiction.¹⁶

The development of English studies in Romania further facilitated the reception of Anglophone literature and adventure fiction. The first department of English

was established at the University of Cluj in 1919, under the guidance of Petre Grimm (1881-1944), who systematically studied the ways in which English literature became known in Romania through translations. It was followed by the creation of the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Iași in 1925. Later, in 1936, the University of Bucharest founded its own English department, partly to counteract the influence of German culture within the country. These academic initiatives laid the groundwork for the systematic introduction of Anglophone texts, including adventure fiction, into Romanian literary consciousness, enabling translations of authors such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Thomas Mayne Reid, and Francis Bret Harte to circulate widely.¹⁷ Alongside French and German models, the institutionalization of English studies in Romania further shaped the reception of foreign literature.

The Romanian Novel and the Emergence of Sea Adventure Fiction

The Romanian production of sea adventure fiction emerges within a literary landscape shaped by the early development of the national novel. The first Romanian novel, published in 1844, marked the beginning of a modern literary conscience – an emergence identified by Ștefan Baghiu in his quantitative study of novel translation in nineteenth-century Romanian culture – one that sought to articulate a national language, a public sphere, and social types appropriate to a nascent nation-state. After 1829, the end of Phanariot rule (1821), the return of native princes, and the weakening of

Ottoman domination following the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–1829 opened the way for national and cultural development and signalled the beginning of the modern age. The rise of national consciousness that led to the 1848 revolutions and the Union of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859 can be seen as an increasingly successful affirmation of the Romanians, one that culminated in the Union of 1918.¹⁸

In this context, the urgent need to affirm a national literature – to be recognized as such among other European literatures – was part of a broader process of forging and giving voice to a collective identity.¹⁹ The effort to consolidate a national literary corpus required a more vigorous and flexible Romanian language, one weakened until then by the dominance of Slavonic and Greek in Moldavia and Wallachia, and by the political and social marginalization of Romanians in Transylvania. The creation of a national novel thus became not merely a literary ambition, but a symbolic act of linguistic renewal and political self-definition, reflecting the broader aspirations of modernization and autonomy that defined mid-nineteenth-century Romanian society.

The delayed reception of English culture in Romanian territories also had significant implications for the emergence of Romanian maritime and sea-themed fiction. Among the major European literatures, English literature – so closely associated with naval power, maritime exploration, and adventure – was one of the last to become known to Romanian readers. This cultural gap was largely the result of geographical distance and the absence of direct intellectual or diplomatic exchanges between the two nations throughout most of the nineteenth century. While French

and German influences dominated Romanian education and literary formation, England remained a distant and somewhat abstract presence. Romanian intellectuals and students traditionally pursued their studies in Paris, not London, and few crossed the English Channel, hindered by both linguistic unfamiliarity and the symbolic remoteness of British maritime culture. As late as 1837, official correspondence between Bucharest and London still required translation into French, for no one in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs could read English.²⁰

It was only toward the end of the nineteenth century that English language and culture began to acquire visibility in Romania, coinciding with the arrival of Princess Marie of Edinburgh to marry Ferdinand I of Romania in 1893, her British origins stimulated cultural curiosity toward the Anglophone world. Her presence served as a symbolic bridge between Romania and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, fostering new channels of cultural mediation that extended beyond diplomacy into literature and imagination. From this period onward, maritime imagery and the idea of the sea as a space of encounter, risk, and identity – central to English literary traditions – gradually entered Romanian writing. The early translations of Byron's *Manfred* (1843) by C. A. Rosetti and later of Shakespeare by P. Carp and the Ghica brothers, even when mediated through French or German versions, opened an indirect path for the reception of Western models. Through such filtered transmissions, English maritime and adventure motifs would later find resonance in Romanian sea fiction, contributing to the formation of a local literary scene.²¹

In addition to European models, the Romanian novel of the nineteenth century displayed a marked interest in North America, both as a setting and as a point of cultural reference. While there were few direct cultural or translational exchanges between Romania and the United States, one notable exception was the 1853 translation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Although the American setting rarely dominated literary criticism or public debates, it emerged in fiction both through these translations and through political projections of American ideas by politicians and men of letters such as Zamfir Arbore. This engagement demonstrates that, alongside the French and German models, the Romanian novel remained attuned to transatlantic literary currents, integrating moral, political, and adventure-oriented motifs into the national narrative.²²

A secondary, but theoretically fertile orientation in the geography of the nineteenth-century Romanian novel is the use of port cities as narrative centres. Cities such as Saint Petersburg, Odessa, Cork, Nicolaev, Naples, and Istanbul function as topographical nodes that attract and organize the plots of novelists like N. D. Popescu, Zamfir Arbore, Ilie Ighel, or Constantin de Stamati-Ciurea. There are two types of cosmopolitanism in the internal geography of the Romanian novel: a metropolitan one, previously associated with major urban centres such as Bucharest or Iași, and a coastal one, which gathers narrative energy around maritime cities of the world.²³

Within the "archipelago model," Romanian fiction tends to cluster its plots not only in capitals but also along hydrological routes, especially around port cities and

settlements located near major rivers such as the Danube, the Siret, or the Olt. In Baghiu et al.'s analysis of nineteenth-century Romanian novels, these spaces account for approximately 18 percent of the identified narrative settings, a proportion made even more significant by the fact that roughly 21 percent of the novels do not specify a precise geographical location. Consequently, when the Romanian novel does not stabilize itself in canonical urban centres such as the capital or the royal residence, it often unfolds its narrative in these dispersed maritime or fluvial "topographical nodes", forming archipelagos of narrative dispersion and attraction.²⁴

This tendency toward hydrological and coastal spaces provided the geographical and imaginative foundation for the later development of Romanian sea adventure fiction. By concentrating narrative energy around ports and waterways, these novels not only reflected a growing fascination with mobility and exploration but also anticipated the symbolic importance of the sea as a frontier of modern experience.²⁵

Within this context, maritime and nautical themes gradually entered the national literature, initially in minor works and sketches, and later in full-length narratives. Romanian authors approached the sea both through lived experience and imaginative narration, producing texts that often blurred the boundaries between reality and fiction.²⁶

Building upon this narrative geography centered around port cities and waterways, Romanian sea adventure fiction emerged as a continuation of this coastal and hydrological imagination. The earlier fascination with maritime cosmopolitanism extended into fully developed sea

narratives. These novels shifted the attention from rivers and ports to the open sea, transforming geographical nodes into routes of adventure, mobility, and exploration. The maritime settings thus became spaces of both escapism and national reflection, allowing authors to explore Romanian identity in relation to global modernity. In this sense, the sea adventure novel inherited the structural features of Baghiu's "archipelago" geography: dispersion, movement, and the attraction of distant spaces. Through this continuity, Romanian fiction bridged the local and the global, reshaping the inherited coastal cosmopolitanism into a dynamic narrative of travel and discovery.²⁷

Early contributors such as Eugeniu P. Botez (1874-1933) writing under the pseudonym Jean Bart, innovated by employing logbooks and marine sketches as literary forms, establishing the nautical novel as a recognized genre with works like *Jurnal de bord* (1901), *Peste ocean-Note dintr-o calatorie in America de Nord* (1926), *Pe drumuri de apă* (1931), and *Europolis* (1933). Panait Istrati (1884-1935), drawing from his personal experience as a stoker on Mediterranean ships, also contributed to the development of marine literature, notably through characters like Adrian Zografi.²⁸ Radu Tudoran's *Toate pânzele sus!* (All Sails Up!), published in 1954, became one of the most beloved books of its era in Romania, especially among teenagers. Its success allowed it to extend beyond its original medium, print, eventually being adapted into an award-winning television series in 1976.

Eugeniu P. Botez or Jean Bart was the son of General Panait Botez, a fact that might explain his early orientation towards

a military career. He completed his primary studies in Iași, where he had the privilege of being taught by the celebrated storyteller Ion Creangă, an experience that likely influenced his later literary sensibility. In 1889, he entered the School for the Sons of Military Officers, and on July 1, 1894, he was admitted to the School of Artillery, Engineering, and Navy Officers in Bucharest.²⁹ He graduated two years later with the rank of second lieutenant in the navy, continuing his specialization at the Naval Officers' Training School in Galați between 1896 and 1898. Botez then served in the Danube Division and later in the Sea Division, gradually advancing in rank – becoming lieutenant in 1901 and captain in 1906. Between 1905 and 1906, while working at the Port Captaincy of Călărași, he founded the first historical register of the port, a testament to his organizational and documentary spirit. Later, between 1910 and 1912, he acted as a maritime commissioner at Sulina, before resigning from active service and entering the navy reserve on January 1, 1912.³⁰

As George Călinescu notes in the preface to *Europolis*, Jean Bart (Eugeniu P. Botez) brought maritime life into Romanian literature, previously focused on land. His writing captures the rhythms of naval life – the crew at work, the officer on watch, the movements of the ship – while also reflecting the author's artistic sensibility. Călinescu emphasizes that the sea in Bart's work is both a physical and symbolic space, where navigation becomes a form of aesthetic contemplation and the Romanian sea adventure novel connects to a broader, cosmopolitan vision of modernity.³¹

While Jean Bart transformed the seafarer into a contemplative artist who

perceived the sea as a cosmic and aesthetic space, Panait Istrati approached the maritime world from a more human and emotional perspective. In stories such as *Moș Anghel* (1925) or *Căpitan Mavromati* (1927), the sea becomes not a vast metaphysical horizon but a living force that mirrors human struggle, freedom, and longing. Where Bart's officer gazes upon the horizon with disciplined wonder, Istrati's sailors and wanderers inhabit it passionately, as if the sea itself were part of their inner life. Together, these two writers mark the dual foundation of Romanian sea adventure fiction: one grounded in professional maritime experience and disciplined observation, the other in the spirit of adventure and existential yearning.

In *Europolis*, Jean Bart constructs the harbour of Sulina as a microcosm of global circulation, where maritime routes and cultural currents converge into a "super-diverse" world.³² The harbour's multiethnic population – Greeks, Ottomans, Russians, Italians, and Romanians – embodies a form of Levantine cosmopolitanism that mirrors the port's real historical position under the European Commission of the Danube, itself a political and symbolic infrastructure of transnational mobility. Communal life in *Europolis* unfolds through rituals of social cohesion such as the naval ball, where diverse social, ethnic, and linguistic groups mingle uneasily beneath the veneer of festivity.³³ This image of the harbour as a site of both celebration and exclusion resonates with Panait Istrati's representations of festive gatherings – often Easter or local feasts – which similarly enact fragile moments of togetherness amid poverty and displacement. In both authors, celebration becomes a lens to observe the boundaries

between belonging and marginality, local identity and global circulation. The symbolic border between the Romanian flag and that of the Danube Commission condenses this tension: the harbour is simultaneously a national periphery and a node in the international maritime network.³⁴ This layered geography of contact, exchange, and distance prepares the ground for Istrati's later reimagining of ports and harbours as spaces where spiritual, social, and geographic mobilities intertwine.

In *Moș Anghel*, Panait Istrati reclaims his linguistic and cultural belonging by explicitly addressing his Romanian readers in a preface that blurs the line between translation and original creation. He insists that *Moș Anghel* "nu e o traducere, ci o scriere românească," written in "limba mea," despite first composing the story in French.³⁵ This act of self-translation is more than a linguistic gesture – it embodies the transnational condition of Istrati himself, a writer navigating between two literary systems and two publics. The story opens in Brăila, during the Orthodox Easter celebration, where villagers light reeds, fire guns, and greet the resurrection with both faith and community joy.³⁶ Like the naval ball in Jean Bart's *Europolis*, this festive moment enacts social cohesion and moral ambiguity, revealing the tensions between the sacred and the everyday, the local and the global. Yet, while Bart's harbour captures the cosmopolitan spectacle of Sulina under the Danube Commission, Istrati's Brăila radiates a more intimate sense of collective vitality – a symbolic hearth where memory, mobility, and belonging merge through language. In this sense, *Moș Anghel* transforms celebration into an oceanic form of contact: not the crossing of seas, but the

circulation of words, faith, and community across borders and tongues.

If Panait Istrati's maritime imaginary emerged from a life of real mobility – of ports, harbours, and exile – Radu Tudoran's relationship to the sea was born from immobility, from the impossibility of movement within the confines of the communist regime. Born Nicolae Bogza in 1910 in Blejoi, Prahova County, Tudoran inherited from his father, a commercial-navy employee, an early fascination with seafaring that became a lifelong dream of navigation and discovery. Unlike Istrati, who traversed the Mediterranean as a traveller and worker, Tudoran's sea remained largely internalized – a geography of longing. During the late 1940s he was silenced by political censorship and forced to survive through translation, mediating the voices of others while his own creative expression was suppressed. This shift from author to translator mirrors a broader condition of restricted mobility: he could no longer journey outward, only circulate within the language of others.

His novel *Toate pânzele sus!* (1954) therefore stands as both recovery and resistance. Written in the ideological climate of socialist realism, the novel breaks away from state-sanctioned aesthetics to imagine a world of maritime openness and collective adventure, where curiosity and moral courage replace ideological conformity. The ship *Speranța* – its name meaning “Hope” – becomes the symbolic vessel of an inward voyage, a rewriting of the journey Tudoran was denied in life. Like Istrati's *Chira Chiralina or Codin*, it transforms the sea into a horizon of moral clarity and imaginative liberty, an open expanse opposing the enclosure of the land.

Tudoran's years as a translator during repression are integral to his sea-writing. Translation, as a form of mediated motion, allowed a limited yet meaningful participation in global literary circulation; it was a substitute form of mobility within a closed system. Through the act of writing *Toate pânzele sus!*, he reclaims authorship as navigation, charting an imaginative route through which freedom could still flow. In this sense, Tudoran's sea fiction literalizes the concepts central to mobility and oceanic studies: the sea as a medium of circulation, translation as constrained movement, and narrative as infrastructure enabling passage between confinement and openness. His work thus forms a natural bridge to the next section, where the sea will be read as a space of flows, contact, and memory within Romanian literary modernity.

The Formation of Romanian Maritime Infrastructure and Its Cultural Impact

During the reign of Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688–1714), documentary evidence demonstrates that organized shipbuilding and repair were already functioning institutions on the Danube. Treasury registers from the period (*Condica de venituri și cheltuieli a visteriei*, 1694–1704) record repeated allocations for the construction and maintenance of vessels at Giurgiu, indicating both the continuity and scale of activity there.³⁷ These recurrent expenditures show that shipyards were not occasional or improvised worksites but sustained operations requiring material provisioning, skilled labour, and administrative oversight. In other words, under Brâncoveanu the princely domain actively

sponsored and managed maritime craft production – a pattern that links early modern princely polity with the practical infrastructures of riverine navigation and local economies.³⁸ This early institutional embedding of ship construction provided a lasting human and technical substrate – carpenters, joiners, smiths, and dockside organization – that later nineteenth-century commercial expansion would capitalize upon.³⁹

A further institutional milestone was the *Hrisovul pentru corăbiile care trebuie să navigheze pe Dunăre*, issued by Prince Alexandru Moruzi on 23 November 1793. The *Hrisov* codified princely authority over ship movements and shipbuilding: it regulated where vessels could be kept in winter (notably the “princely marsh of Cărnogi”), established watch and guild obligations for their protection, and made clear that private construction required princely authorization. By formalizing these rules, the *Hrisov* transformed maritime practice into a governed, visible, and ritualized part of political life; it both constrained and legitimized private initiative, thereby producing a legal-cultural framework in which the very act of launching or licensing a ship was a public, state-sanctioned event. The *Hrisov* thus marks an important intermediate moment between early princely provisioning and later commercial emancipation: it shows how navigation and ship construction had become subject to bureaucratic regulation and public performance.⁴⁰

The recognition, in 1829, of freedom of commerce and navigation on the Danube (Treaty of Adrianople) represents a decisive rupture that converted the existing technical and institutional foundations into a broad commercial and national

project. Freed from Ottoman restrictions, Romanian ports and shipyards experienced a rapid upsurge of ship construction for merchant purposes: contemporary reports record multi-vessel launches at Galați and Brăila, while private boyars and merchants commissioned ships to sail under a Romanian flag. This juridical and diplomatic opening not only multiplied material production – vessels, steamers, barges, repair facilities – but also created occasions for ceremonial and rhetorical appropriation of maritime achievement. Public ceremonies around launches, such as the celebrated launching of the *Marița* at Brăila, and the attendant press and poetic responses turned technical accomplishment into national spectacle. The result was a striking feedback loop: legal-political change stimulated shipbuilding; shipbuilding fed public visibility and ritual; and ritual provided authors – and especially poets and journalists – with symbolic material to frame navigation as an emblem of national progress.⁴¹

These three layers – princely patronage under Brâncoveanu, the regulatory framework of the 1793 *Hrisov*, and the catalytic liberalization of 1829 – explain why maritime imagery so quickly acquired literary resonance in nineteenth-century Romanian culture. Technical sites (shipyards, docks), social figures (shipwrights, captains, owners), and public rituals (launchings, flaggings, poems) together produced a repertoire of images – voyage, horizon, risk, and national flag – that poets and prose writers would later reconfigure.

The development of Romanian maritime infrastructure – ports, canals, and shipyards – served as more than a commercial or civic investment; it laid the groundwork for both military operations

and cultural circulation. By enabling the movement of goods, personnel, and maritime knowledge, these infrastructures created networks of human and technological mobility connecting local communities to regional and international maritime systems. The circulation of engineers, sailors, and traders through these spaces fostered cultural and technical exchange that shaped local reception of naval practices and maritime technologies. This transnational dimension is illustrated by commemorative postal issues, such as the Romfilatelie stamps depicting the European Commission of the Danube and Sir Charles Augustus Hartley (1825-1915), the British engineer whose mapping of the Danube earned him the title "Father of the Danube"; these stamps celebrate the cooperation and expertise that underpinned navigation and port development in Galați and Sulina.⁴² Simultaneously, the physical and organizational foundations of ports and shipyards prepared the Romanian Navy for modernization, enabling the integration of new vessels, innovations in mine warfare, and the operational use of riverine and coastal routes. In this way, infrastructural, cultural, and commemorative practices directly facilitated the subsequent development of national naval forces and their participation in broader transnational maritime networks.

The evolution of the Romanian naval forces since the establishment of the Corps of the Flotilla in 1860 demonstrates the centrality of military infrastructure in structuring both riverine and maritime mobility, which in turn facilitated the development of commercial shipping networks. From the outset, the Navy was conceptualized as a protective and enabling

force for civilian maritime activities, reflecting the principle that a commercial fleet can only thrive under the security provided by military control.⁴³ During the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878, Romanian naval units demonstrated this capacity by controlling the Danube, sinking Ottoman monitors such as *Duba Seifi* and *Podgorița*, and deploying defensive minefields to regulate the movement of both enemy and friendly forces.⁴⁴ These operations illustrate the dual role of naval mobility in combat and territorial regulation, while also shaping local perceptions of military power along critical riverine nodes. The development of indigenous naval technologies, including the Rădulescu and Vislovski mines prior to World War I, further reinforced the Navy's capacity to structure mobility autonomously, enabling coordinated support for land operations during the 1916-1918 campaigns.⁴⁵ Beyond strategic and logistical functions, the *Crucișătorul Elisabeta*, constructed in 1888 at the Armstrong Shipyard in Newcastle, England, exemplifies the transfer of British maritime know-how to Romania, establishing a technological and cultural link between the two countries.⁴⁶ Navigating from the Tyne to Galați via the North Sea, English Channel, and Danube, *Elisabeta* integrated Romania into broader maritime networks while facilitating training voyages, representational missions, and infrastructural inaugurations, such as the Sulina and Kiel canals and the port of Constanța.⁴⁷ The installation of Romania's first radiotelegraph station aboard *Elisabeta* in 1905 extended communicative mobility across the Black Sea, enhancing operational coordination and the projection of state presence.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the

ship's deployment during the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) to protect Romanian nationals in Constantinople illustrates the Navy's capacity to operate across international waters, linking national strategic interests with commercial and diplomatic engagements.⁴⁹ The British origins of Elisabetha ship also underscore a literary-cultural dimension, as England was a pioneer in the development of the sea adventure and nautical novel, creating a conduit for maritime imagination and narrative practices that would influence Romanian sea fiction. Collectively, these developments highlight the interplay between military innovation, infrastructural expansion, and cultural reception, positioning the Romanian Navy as a decisive agent in organizing both physical mobility and socio-economic connectivity across riverine, maritime, and transnational spaces.

Mobility and Oceanic Studies along Romanian Sea Adventure Fiction

Building on the historical maritime institutions and infrastructures outlined in the previous section, Romanian sea-adventure fiction can be read as a literary space in which these material realities are reimagined and narratively transformed. Moreover, Romanian sea-adventure fiction can be approached through the frameworks of mobility studies and oceanic studies. Mobility studies emphasize flow, infrastructure, and movement, examining how characters, goods, and ideas circulate across networks of transport and ports. Oceanic studies, in turn, examines how literary texts construct the sea and maritime spaces as cultural and symbolic environments, highlighting the relationships between land,

water, and human activity. In the Romanian context, literary depictions of the Danube, the Black Sea, and ports such as Sulina reveal how maritime spaces regulate and enable circulation, shaping characters' journeys and the narrative's tempo. Authors like Eugeniu Botez depict these networks not merely as backdrops but as systems facilitating encounters, commerce, and cultural exchange, reflecting a uniquely Romanian maritime sensibility.

From the perspective of oceanic studies, the sea becomes a space of circulation, contact, and memory. Circulation encompasses the movement of sailors, merchants, and travellers across waterways; contact refers to encounters with foreign lands, peoples, and maritime practices; memory attends to the sea as a repository of historical and personal histories. In Radu Tudoran's *Toate prânzele sus!*, the narrative enacts these dynamics vividly: the young crew navigates both rivers and open seas, encountering different communities while learning to negotiate the practical and social infrastructures of maritime life. The Danube and the Black Sea are rendered as active spaces, shaping identity, fostering cross-cultural contact, and preserving traces of Romanian maritime memory in the form of traditions, local knowledge, and nautical skill.

Together, mobility and oceanic perspectives reveal Romanian sea adventure fiction as a literature of movement, encounter, and memory. Through flows of people and goods, encounters enabled by maritime and riverine infrastructures, and the enduring presence of the sea and rivers as cultural and symbolic spaces, works like *Toate prânzele sus!*, Jean Bart's *Europolis*, and Panait Istrati's *Moș Anghel* articulate

a maritime imagination that is distinctly Romanian. Istrati's bilingual authorship and self-translation bridge French and Romanian literary systems, transforming the Easter celebrations of Brăila into a site of social and linguistic circulation, where community, faith, and memory intersect.⁵⁰ Tudoran, whose creative force was submerged under the communist regime, maintained his literary presence and livelihood by translating works, demonstrating how mobility of texts and language can persist even when political and personal mobility is restricted. Jean Bart, in turn, revolutionized Romanian literary language by integrating authentic maritime terminology, creating a lexicon that registers seafaring practices, ports, and naval infrastructures. Across these works, the interplay of circulation, contact, and memory not only structures narrative adventure but inscribes the sea, rivers, and ports with national, local, and individual significance, producing a literary space in which

mobility, language, and memory converge across both physical and cultural domains.

Conclusion

Romanian sea-adventure fiction reveals the dynamic intersection of literary imagination, historical realities, and maritime infrastructures. Examined through the lenses of mobility studies and oceanic studies, these texts highlight the circulation of people, narratives, and cultural forms across rivers, seas, and linguistic borders. Such approaches shift attention from a predominantly land-centered perspective in Romanian literary history toward the sea as a space of movement, encounter, and cultural exchange. By foregrounding maritime routes, ports, and nautical imaginaries, mobility- and ocean-based perspectives open new directions for future research on Romanian literature and culture, emphasizing circulation, transnational connections, and the cultural meanings of maritime space.

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7. Ștefan Baghiu, “Translation of Novels in the Romanian Culture During the Long Nineteenth Century (1794–1914): A Quantitative Perspective”.
8. Rodica Mihăilă, “The Politics of Translation”, p. 286.
9. Academia Română, Institutul de Lingvistică și Istorie Literară „Sextil Pușcariu”, *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului tradus în România de la origini până la 1989*, p. 287, p. 618.
10. Ștefan Baghiu, “Translation of Novels in the Romanian Culture During the Long Nineteenth Century (1794–1914): A Quantitative Perspective”.
11. Rodica Mihăilă, “The Politics of Translation”, p. 288.
12. *Ibidem*, p. 287. The first major American novel translated into Romanian was Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1853), rendered into Romanian from French just months after its U.S. publication, in two competing editions printed in Iași: *Coliba lui Moș Toma sau Viața negrilor în sudul Statelor Unite*, translated by Teodor Codrescu and prefaced by Mihail Kogălniceanu, appeared at Buciumul Român Press, while *Bordeiul unchiului Tom sau Viața negrilor din America*, translated by Prof. Dimitrie Pop and illustrated with Leon Pilatte’s lithographs from the French version, was published by Institutul Albinei. Both versions illustrate how translation operated as a tool of moral and social mobilization – Stowe’s text being instrumental in the public debates leading to the abolition of gypsy slavery in the Romanian principalities in 1855–1856. Later in the century, Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward (Privire îndărăt, 1891)*, also translated from French and published in the popular Roman collection, contributed to shaping early socialist thought and inspired the founding of the Romanian Social-Democratic Party in 1894, v. *ibidem*, p. 287).
13. Ștefan Baghiu, Radu Vancu, Alex Goldiș, Ovio Olaru, Vlad Pojoga, Teodora Susarenco, and Denisa Frătean, “Geografia internă a romanului românesc în secolul al XIX-lea [The Internal Geography of the Romanian Novel in the 19th Century]”, *Transilvania*, no. 10 (2019), p. 33–36, https://biblioteca-digitala.ro/reviste/Revista-Transilvania/2020_Revista-Transilvania_07_octombrie_2020.pdf.
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- a more transatlantic perspective (v. Ciorogar, *op. cit.*). Petre Grimm's work focused exclusively on poetry and theatre, and his major contribution lies in systematically examining the ways in which these genres of English literature were received and made known in Romania through translations.
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 47. *Ibidem*.
 48. *Ibidem*.
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