

Parapara

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Note: Information within [brackets] are comments by the translator.

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[Translation Begins]

In Memory of PARAPARA— the Southernmost German Village of Bessarabia

by Edwin Müller

Since the former Bessarabian German community of Parapara was founded in 1916 and would have turned 70 this year, if the Resettlement, the Second World War, and everything that followed had not taken place, this article aims to honor our former hometown and its founding generation by providing some information about the geographical location, the history, and the founding of this village, as well as my personal experiences in post-war Parapara.

1. On the History and the Place Name of Parapara

During the centuries-long Turkish rule over the Budjak steppe, there was a Turkish settlement in the area of the later German village of Parapara at the edge of the Danube Delta. The slope of the northern bank of the Danube Delta is still four to five meters [13 to 16 feet] high there, the houses were set into the ground on the shore, and a layer of beams formed the roof above. The inhabitants of this settlement were primarily civil servants of the Ottoman Empire. Their task was to protect the land against intruders and to collect taxes and duties from the local residents. These Turks were very rich because they knew how to pocket a lot of money. For this reason, and because they were notorious and feared as tax collectors, they were mockingly called “Para, para,” which means, (give me) “Money, money!” The word Parapara comes from the Turkish language and means “Money, money!” in the sense of very very much. The Romanian word “*parale*” (money) also comes from the Turkish language. So it is understandable and evident that the German settlement founded in this area in 1916 received the name Parapara.

2. On the Geographical Location of the Former German Village of Parapara

Parapara was the southernmost German community in Bessarabia and was already located in the inlet area of the Danube. In the south of our district lies the Danube Delta. East of Parapara is the Russian village of Halaleshti and the Lipovan [ethnic Russian Old Believers living in Romania, Ukraine, Moldova and Bulgaria] community of Karatschka.



Parapara 1940. Old School with Bell Tower

To the north and west, our village bordered the district of the Ukrainian village of Karamachmet. The Danube port city of Kilia is 10 km [6.2 miles], the port itself 12 km [7.5 miles] southwest, and the district town of Ismail about 60 km [37.3 miles] west of Parapara. Our village was situated on a ridge that was crossed on the eastern and western sides by valleys that flowed into the Danube Delta, so that Parapara faced no danger of being flooded by the Danube Delta. In the district, there are three burial mounds: one to the west and two to the east of the village. On the burial mound in the east stood a 30-meter-high [98 feet] wooden surveying tower. In our time, Parapara had a lot of pasture land, and it was very favorable for keeping livestock. During dry periods, it was possible to drive the livestock to the Danube Delta. The closeness to the Danube port of Kilia was a great advantage because a person could sell his own products, especially grain, at a very favorable price there.

3. On the Founding and Further Development of the Village of Parapara

In 1912, colonist August Schulz acquired 1,550 hectares [3,830 acres] of land from Countess Tolstoi. In 1913, the first settlement applicants negotiated with him over the purchase of estates, and in 1914, land purchases took place. As early as the spring of 1915, the first land was plowed and cultivated. Until then, it had only been used by the farmers from Karamachmet as pasture for cattle and sheep. Since the Danube Delta was nearby, there were no irrigation problems. By 1916, the new German community of Parapara was already registered in the records of the Ismail Tribunal, so the year 1916 is considered the founding year of our village. Parapara belonged to the municipality (*Kommune*) of Karamachmet.

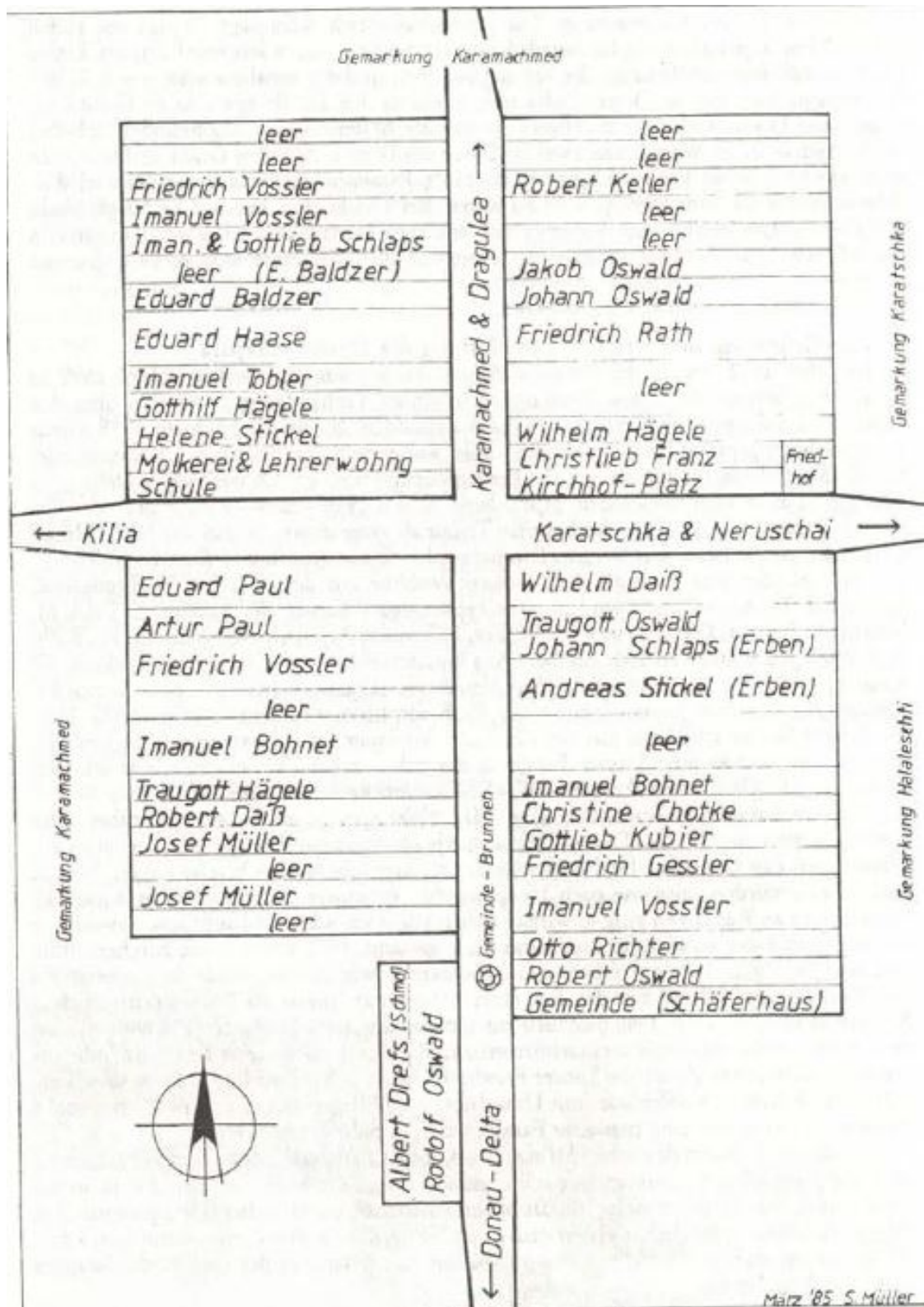
The founders of Parapara were sons of colonists from the villages of Hoffnungsfeld, Gnadental, Neu-Arzis, and Neu-Elft. From **Hoffnungstal** came W. Baldzer, E. Paul, M. Voßler, A. Bohnet, Chr. Hasse, Chr. Voßler, F. Voßler, A. Sackmann, J. Keller, Fr. Rath, A. Stickel, J. Denning, and M. Klaiber. From **Gnadental** came F. Deiß, Chr. Hägele, G. Kienzle, Jakob and Johann Oswald. From **Neu-Arzis** came J. Schlaps, G. Schlaps, and Fr. Schlaps. From **Neu-Elft** came J. Broneske, G. Kraft, Imm. Tobler, F. Adolf, and G. Jans. The young settlers worked with great diligence and perseverance to build up their farms and fields and to expand their village of Parapara, which over time developed into a very beautiful German settlement and, by 1940, counted 36 attractive farms.

The revolution in the Russian Empire in 1917 did not pass Parapara without leaving a trace. The vegetable gardener on the banks of the Danube Delta was attacked and robbed, and there was also an assault on the village itself. Men had to keep watch at night. Women and children were temporarily evacuated to Hoffnungsfeld. But after the annexation of Bessarabia to Romania, economic progress moved quickly back and forth, both for the individual farms and for the community as a whole: in 1932, a church school and a spacious teacher's residence, a dairy, as well as stables for breeding bulls and stallions were built. For the construction of a church, the building materials were already stored in the church square when in 1940 the Resettlement suddenly happened. In 1938, a new state school and a municipal office were built. At our church school, teachers Friedrich Gäßler as well as Mr. Blum and Mr. Wernick worked at different times. Friedrich Voßler was (with interruptions) the mayor of our community. Only one Russian family lived in Parapara: that of the shepherd Mitea.

The three southernmost German villages of Bessarabia—Parapara, Pomasan, and Friedrichdorf—which were geographically arranged in a triangle, represented three German ethnic islands among many Moldavian, Russian, Ukrainian, and Lipovan villages. This allowed many German settlers to buy land from people of other ethnicities, so that by the time of the Resettlement in 1940, the land area of the municipality of Parapara amounted to around 2,000 hectares [4,942 acres].

4. The Resettlement

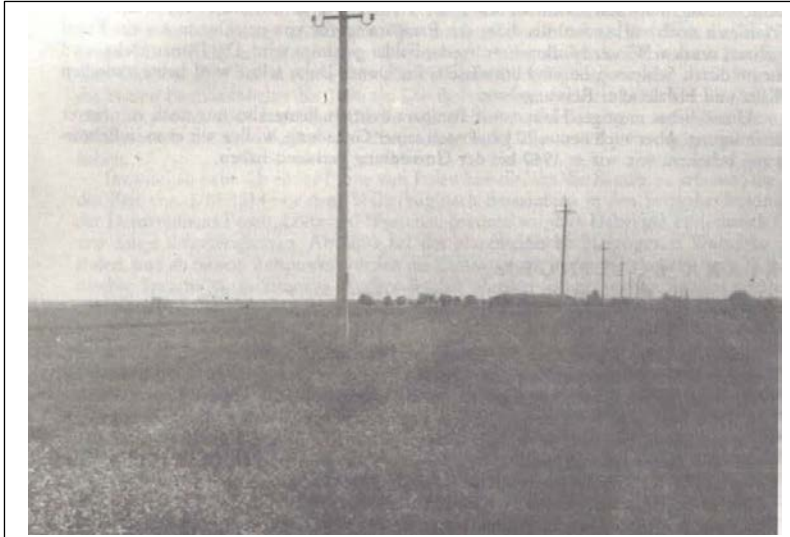
On the day of the Resettlement, 11 October, 1940, all the Treck-vehicles from the German communities of Plotzk, Hoffnungsfeld, Friedrichsdorf, Pomasan, and Parapara gathered in our village before sunrise. The vehicles were all lined up in a long row. Many people from the Ukrainian community of Karamachmet and other villages had come, going from wagon to wagon with tears in their eyes, saying goodbye to us German settlers; our shepherd Mitea and his wife were also there. As the vehicles started moving, many mostly younger people ran alongside them for half of the distance to Kilia and then turned back with tears in their eyes. We continued to the port of Kilia, where we were put on the ship. So we said farewell to our homeland. During this farewell, I noticed for the first time that even my father was crying.



Parapara Village Plat Map

5. How I saw Parapara and the Surroundings again from 1945 to 1947

After I had fled from Siberia to Bessarabia due to the hasty events of the last months of the war, on 12 May, 1945, as a sixteen-year-old, I sat at the garden ditch of the former farm of my parents in Parapara. I had arrived there thirsty, hungry, thin, wrapped in rags, and without parents; I was afraid and cried bitterly. My birthplace Parapara, where I had spent happy, carefree childhood years, had become foreign to me, and now strangers lived there. None of them knew that I had arrived in Parapara and did not know where to go next. I had to make myself known. But how would the current residents of the village receive me, and what would happen to me next? As the sun set in the west, I ventured to enter the farm of my parents. A dog greeted me with loud barking. A woman appeared and looked at me with astonishment and searching examination. At my request for water, she brought me a jug of water, which I drank all of it. I thanked her, left the farm, and walked towards the house of the shepherd, where I



Parapara 1940. Old School with Bell Tower

suddenly stood before the wife of Mitae, who recognized me immediately, hugged me, and led me into her house, where Mitae also warmly welcomed me, immediately butchered a lamb, and treated me to good food. After I had thoroughly washed myself, I was assigned a good place to sleep. The next day, the wife of Mitae took me to our former farm, where the woman who had given me water the day before lived. The woman cried and said: “When I saw you last night, I immediately knew that you have experienced much suffering and hardship.” With the shepherd’s wife, I then went directly to the community chairman in Karamachmet (5 km [3 miles]). With the approval of the chairman, a friend of my father’s picked me up later on the same day. He and his family were Baptists. This family cared for me as if I were their own child, and I lived in their house for almost two years. Out of gratitude, I worked on the farm and gladly helped with yard and field work. They also had their own farm. At a time when people were generally dismissive of Germans, all the residents of Karamachmet showed me humanity and love. I also often went to Parapara, whether it was for fieldwork, tending sheep, or cutting reeds in the Danube Delta. I often watered the horses on our farm.

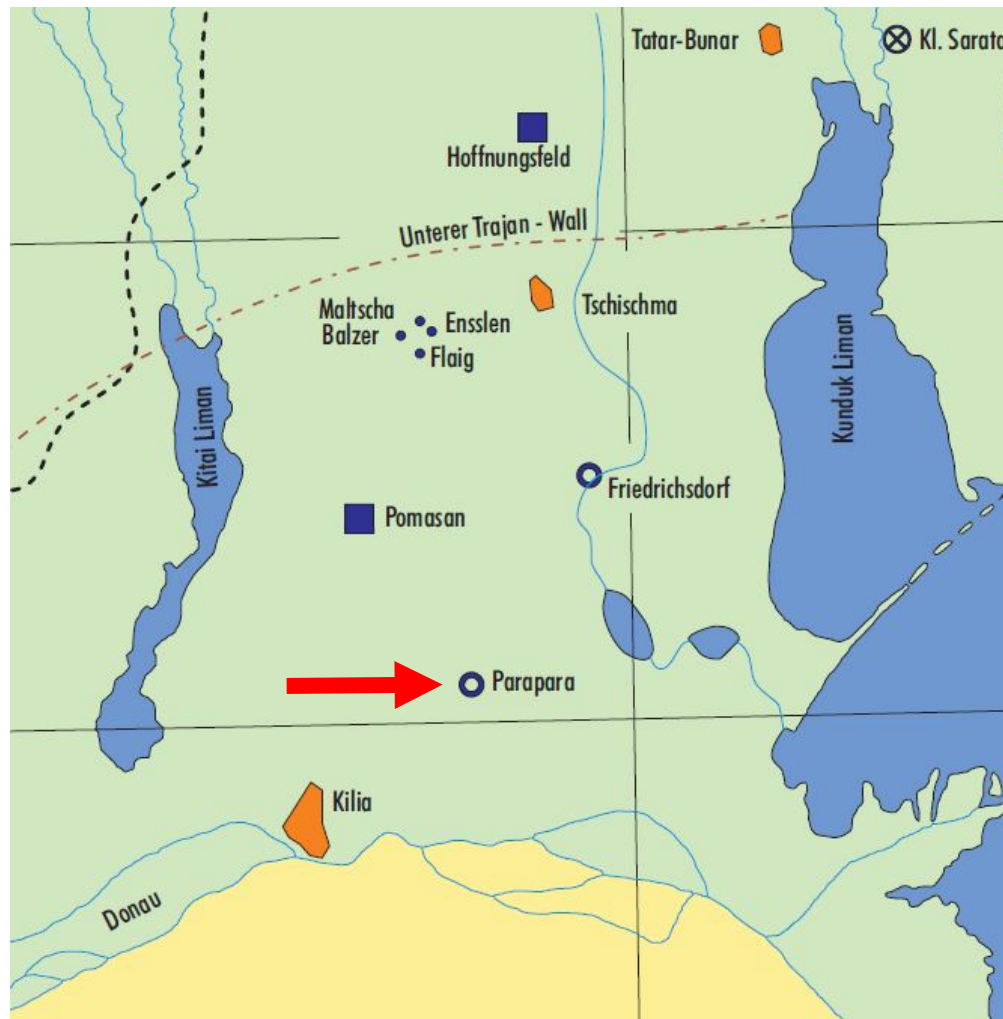
The acacia forest of Parapara, which was already planted before the Resettlement, was already quite large. However, it was heavily plundered. At that time, the houses and stables were still all standing, but nothing was maintained anymore. The fields were no longer cultivated. The new inhabitants of Parapara mostly came from Wilkow, which is located directly at the Danube inlet. On 1 February, I left Bessarabia and arrived in Kazakhstan (Asia).

6. Parapara no longer exists today

In the summer of 1982, I was able to participate with Mr. Kelm in a study trip to Bessarabia. During the days of our stay in Kischinew [Chisinau] and Odessa, no fewer than 28 people from Karamachmet visited me, and the joy of reunion was very great on both sides. All houses and farm buildings in Parapara have been leveled, and not a single house remains. Where once neat German colonist houses adorned the landscape, there are now extensive fields of grain worked by the collective farmers from Karamachmet. Only one well for watering horses is still present. A canal was built from the Danube up close to Parapara, from which water is pumped to irrigate the fields. The Danube Delta is now drained and managed through locks. In the Danube Delta itself, rice is now cultivated between Kilia and Halaletschi.

Our once-beloved home village Parapara now exists only in our memory. But even today, 70 years after its founding, we want to remember it as we left it in 1940 during the Resettlement.

[Translation Ends]



[Stumpp Map of Bessarabia reworked by Rolf Jethon—not in original document]