

## GENERAL OPINIONS AND BELIEFS ABOUT THE ROMANIAN ROMA PEOPLE'S RELIGIOUS CONFESSIONS DURING THE 1920S AND 1930S\*

Daniela Popescu\*\*

*Keywords:* Roma, perceptions, religion, interwar, nomad, myths

*Cuvinte cheie:* Romi, percepții, religie, interbelic, nomad, mituri

The Roma, a complex ethnic group dispersed across Europe and beyond, have long captivated scholars, historians, and anthropologists with their unique cultural heritage. Beyond their distinctive language, customs, and history, the Roma possess a multifaceted religious tradition that was a subject to uncounted misconceptions. The contemporary Romanian historiography dedicated a generous attention to Romanian Roma history, culture, interaction with public institutions, social policies, perceptions, and misperceptions. Among the rigorous research in this field, we mention the contributions of Viorel Achim<sup>1</sup>, Petre Matei<sup>2</sup>, Manuela Marin<sup>3</sup>, Marian Zăloagă<sup>4</sup>, Lucian Nastasă<sup>5</sup>, Petre

---

\* The research has received funding from the NO Grants 2014–2021 under Project contract UEFISCDI no. 38/2021.

\*\* Faculty of History, University of Bucharest, Bdv. Regina Elisabeta, no. 4, and University of „Lucian Blaga”, Sibiu, e-mail: daniela.popescu@istorie.unibuc.ro

<sup>1</sup> Viorel Achim, ed., *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. I (București: Ed. Enciclopedică, 2004) and *The Roma in Romanian History* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Petre Matei, “Romii în perioada interbelică. Percepții naționaliste,” Stefănia Toma, László Foszto, eds., *Spectrum. Cercetări sociale despre romi* (Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Institutului pentru Studiarea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, Ed. Kriterion, 2011) and his latest book *Mișcarea romă din România în presa interbelică: 1933–1941* (Cluj-Napoca: ISPMN&INSHR-EW, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Manuela Marin, ed., *Romii și regimul comunist din România. Marginalizare, integrare și opoziție* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Marian Zăloagă, “The Religious Affiliations of the Romanies from Post-Socialist Romania. Considerations Concerning the In-Group Academic Productions,” *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 14/3 (2022): 431–461.

<sup>5</sup> István Horváth and Lucian Nastasă, eds., *Rom sau țigan. Dilemele unui etnonim în spațiul românesc* (Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Institutului Pentru Studiarea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, 2012).

Petcu<sup>6</sup>, Adrian-Nicolae Furtună<sup>7</sup>, Julieta Rotaru<sup>8</sup> and several other scholars that focused on the modern and contemporary aspects of Roma history. Nevertheless, numerous facets pertaining to the religious dimensions within diverse Roma communities in Romania remain to be studied. In the realms of Romanian folklore, literature, press, and archival records, a profusion of misconceptions, stereotypes, and ambiguities regarding their beliefs prevails, particularly notable during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Their Indian roots created for the general Romanian public the image of an exotic culture, or an image associated with witchcraft. The long period of their nomad life generated the perception of instability, paganism, and mystery. In reality, either if they travelled or if they settled, the general tendency was to adopt the religion and customs of the community, village, or town on the outskirts of which they established themselves.

After the Romanian unitary state was created in 1918, the Roma (Gypsies) of the three provinces have become citizens of Romania, but their distribution around the country was disbalanced. According to Viorel Achim, 84.5 per cent of them lived in villages, while 15.5 per cent lived in cities. In terms of their distribution between various parts of Romania, 2.3 per cent lived in Transylvania<sup>9</sup>, 1.8 per cent in Muntenia, 1.5 per cent in Oltenia, 1.3 per cent in Moldavia, 1.4 per cent in Dobruja and 0.3 per cent in Bessarabia.<sup>10</sup> Although they lived mostly at the periphery and in concentrated groups, the general tendency was to gradually give up at the previous way of living and to adopt Romanian language or the dominant languages and customs in the area they settled. Yet, what was still common was “their marginal social status and their isolation as Gypsies by the population among whom they lived”.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, for the predominant populace within each community, the identity, culture, traditions, or religious convictions of the Romani population remained enigmatic. On the other hand, for the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals who were preoccupied by the study of history, linguistic or anthropology, Gypsies’ origins has drawn their attention.

The purpose of this article is to highlight the main concerns and information

<sup>6</sup> Petre Petcu, *Rromii. Sclavie si libertate. Constituirea și emanciparea unei categorii etnice și sociale la nord de Dunăre 1370–1914* (București: Centrul Național de Cultură a Romilor, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Adrian-Nicolae Furtună, “Social Representation of the Roma Deportations to Transnistria,” *Holocaust. Studii și cercetări*, IV (2012): 115–139.

<sup>8</sup> Julieta Rotaru, “Barbu Constantinescu, the first Romanian scholar of Romani studies,” *Romani Studies* 28, 1 (2018): 41–78.

<sup>9</sup> See Dan-Victor Trușă, “Roma (Gypsies) looking for a Religion. Study of the Hunedoara District 1918–1989,” *Journal of Romanian Literary Studies* 19 (2019): 680–689.

<sup>10</sup> Achim, *The Roma*, 145.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

that circulated in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century regarding the religious beliefs of the Roma in Romania. The focus will be particularly on the sources published during 1920s and 1930s as the articles about the Roma communities were mostly dedicated to their culture, religion, and origins. The 1940s represent a particular case as the eugenic messages or radical articles took the first cover in the veiled attempt to inform or to support the deportations to Transnistria.<sup>12</sup>

The other aim is to identify the primary pieces of information disseminated to the public about the Roma's religion and to explore the most common beliefs, narratives and perceptions held by the majority population regarding the faith, customs, and beliefs of the Roma. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were already several studies approaching the origins of the Gypsies in Europe and some of their cultural traits. Similar studies, but more detailed, were published during the 1920s and 1930s. For instance, Barbu Constantinescu<sup>13</sup>, Mihail Kogălniceanu<sup>14</sup>, Ion Chelcea,<sup>15</sup> Sabin Manuilă<sup>16</sup>, C. Diaconovich<sup>17</sup> published academic papers or lectured on their origins, language, or occupations. Several academic journals even dedicated detailed articles on study cases analysing various Roma groups or villages all around Romania. Such cases were *Revista Sociologie Românească* (*The Romanian Sociology Review*) which was founded in 1936 by the Romanian sociologist Dimitrie Gusti, or *Ardealul Medical*, a medical journal based in Sibiu.

For instance, in a 1938 article dedicated to an anthropological study about the Roma from the Transylvanian village Șanț-Năsăud, the journal *Revista Sociologie Românească* was describing in great details the transformations this Roma community suffered in the past decades:

“The Roma, living in contact with the Romanians, sought to integrate into their community... We can observe from the research on this map<sup>18</sup> that in 1903, the

<sup>12</sup> Viorel Achim, ed., *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol I (București: Ed. Enciclopedică, 2004) and *The Roma in Romanian History* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2004) and Viorel Achim, Constantin Iordachi eds., *România și Transnistria: problema Holocaustului* (București: Ed. Curtea Veche, 2004). Also, see Radu Ioanid, Michelle Keloso, Luminița Cioabă, *Tragedia romilor deportați în Transnistria 1942–1945* (Iași: Polirom, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> *Probe de limba și literatura Țiganilor din România* (București: Tipografia Societății Academice Române, 1878).

<sup>14</sup> *Schiță despre țigani* (Iași: Tipografia “Dacia”, P. Iliescu & D. Grossu, 1900).

<sup>15</sup> *Țiganii din România. Monografie etnografică* (București: Editura Institutului Central de Statistică, 1944).

<sup>16</sup> *Evoluția demografică a orașelor și minorităților etnice din Transilvania* (București: Cultura Națională, 1938).

<sup>17</sup> *Enciclopedia română* (București: Editura și Tiparul W. Kraft, 1898).

<sup>18</sup> The map was included in the annex of the quoted article, Aurel Boia, “Țiganii din

Roma, for the most part, occupied the centre of the village near the church. Today, on the contrary, their houses are located on the outskirts, with only a few here and there attempting to get closer to the centre”<sup>19</sup>

For that particular research, several interviews were conducted, during which a Roma woman argued that the local authorities believed that their poor socio-economic status, reflected in their small, insalubrious clay houses, negatively affected the image of the area where the church was situated:

“Well, there were houses close to the church, and they thought about moving us because the houses were bad looking.’ (Maria T. Luca, a 27-year-old Romani)”<sup>20</sup>

The same study included a brief part of the research referring to the religious beliefs of Roma inhabitants. Most of the locals in the village of Şanţ-Năsăud were of the Greek Catholic faith, and the study showed that the Roma also adopted the majority’s belief system:

“We also believe in the Cross, in God, in the church, we get married, we baptize, we celebrate Easter and Christmas. (Maria T. Luca, a 27-year-old Romani)”<sup>21</sup>

Based on interviews with the Roma inhabitants, the study concluded that in Şanţ-Năsăud village, there is no significant religious difference between Roma and Romanians, except in terms of church attendance and the frequency of celebrating various customs, which can be attributed to the lack of economic means:

“However, they attend church less frequently, which is due not only to the lack of tradition in this regard but also to economic reasons. Attending church requires decent, festive clothing. Some of the Gypsies do not have such clothing. With what they have, they cannot enter the church:

‘I would go to church all Sundays, but how can I go? I used to go, but now I don’t have anything. We don’t have clothes. I am barefoot. I don’t have, clearly, that’s how it is now, said a Gypsy woman”<sup>22</sup>

These types of studies and research were frequently published in academic journals or literate circles. However, this was a narrowed spectrum as

---

Şanţ-Năsăud,” *Sociologie Românească* 3 (1938): 360.

<sup>19</sup> Boia, “Țigani din Şanţ-Năsăud,” 355.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 358.

a significant proportion of the interwar population was characterized by illiteracy, predominantly resided in rural areas under impoverished conditions, and lacked extensive access to educational opportunities.<sup>23</sup> So, which were other sources of information and dissemination? The main tool was the press. Newspapers such as *Universul*, *Adevărul* or *Dimineața* were among independent newspapers, with the largest circulations and the widest distribution.<sup>24</sup> Yet, these focused more on daily news from Romania or news from abroad and the mentions about Roma were just referring to minor events, crimes, and common news. During the end of 1930s and mid 1940s these newspapers have become carriers of eugenic messages, and numerous articles presented defamatory cases against various Romani communities from different neighbourhoods or villages and argued for their deportation.<sup>25</sup>

Yet, various articles, pieces of folklore tales, jokes or comics portraying Roma were published by humorous newspapers such as *Veselia*<sup>26</sup>, or supplements and magazines of major media conglomerates, such as *Dimineața Copiilor*<sup>27</sup> which was a magazine for children, published under the aegis of *Adevărul* newspaper. Also, informative short articles were published by various local papers such as *Foaia Poporului* from Sibiu county.<sup>28</sup>

Throughout the decades, there have been numerous myths, legends, and some partial research about the religion of the Roma communities in Romania. Such extended topic is not the purpose of this study. However, we emphasize that during the interwar period, the Roma were the subject of religious discussions, capturing the interest of diverse religious missionary endeavours. The general tendency was for Romani groups or communities, typically situated on the outskirts of towns or villages, to adopt the religion and religious rituals of the majority. During the period we focus our attention on, the predominant cult was Orthodox Christianity, while in Transylvania, it was Greek-Catholicism.

For this reason, there were various articles in the interwar press about Orthodox or Greek-Catholic representants trying to persuade as many individuals as possible who did not belong to any religious denomination to baptize.

<sup>23</sup> Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 19.

<sup>24</sup> See Ion Hangiu, *Dicționarul presei literare românești. 1790–1990* (București: Ed. Fundației Culturale Române, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> See Daniela Popescu, “Perceptions and Misperceptions on Roma People during the First Half of the 20th Century. A Glimpse into the Romanian Press,” *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 14/3 (2022): 388–405.

<sup>26</sup> Published for the first time in 1892.

<sup>27</sup> Published for the first time in 1924.

<sup>28</sup> Published for the first time in 1898.

The Romanian Orthodox Church was the dominant church so, many actions in this respect were initiated by Orthodox priests.<sup>29</sup>

During the 1930s, many theological and public figures argued that, since the Russian Orthodox Church had lost its influence abroad due to the communist uprising, the Romanian Orthodox Church should seize this opportunity to replace the Russian Orthodox missionary efforts and use them as a geopolitical chance to expand its influence outside Romanian borders.<sup>30</sup> There were missionary campaigns and during the important Orthodox celebrations or holidays the main newspapers published generous articles describing how large groups of Roma men and women were baptized during major Orthodox celebrations.<sup>31</sup>

One case that garnered public attention in the 1930s was the initiative of the Orthodox Archimandrite Calinic I. Popp Șerboianu, who aimed to establish *The General Association of Gypsies* in Romania in April 1933.<sup>32</sup> He was a correspondent member of the Gypsy Lore Society, published a paper on the Romani history, language and culture and aimed at organising the Roma in Romania.<sup>33</sup> Yet, his attempt was not very successful. It is worth mentioning here that other associations and Roma movements co-existed at that time (for instance, The General Union of Roma in Romania or The Association of the General Union of Roma in Romania).<sup>34</sup>

One widespread perception was that Roma people have no religion or any religious representation because of their nomad habits, their lack of trust and the absence of their moral values. One frequently used Romanian folkloric saying was referring to “the Gypsies’ church” as non-existent because they “ate their faith”, suggesting that Gypsies betrayed their faith and moral values for food and material goods. This tale was often published in the press in the columns dedicated to culture or literature. For example, in a 1912 article entitled “The Gypsies’ church” in *Foaia Poporului* the story was published as follows:

“We, Romanians, know that Gypsies once had a church, but since it was made of cheese, bacon, and other goodies, they ate it.

<sup>29</sup> See: Mirel Banică, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română, stat și societate în anii '30* (Iași: Polirom, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Banică, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, 124.

<sup>31</sup> “Botezul țiganilor,” *Universul*, no. 7 (January 8, 1936): 6.

<sup>32</sup> Achim, *The Roma in Romanian History*, 154–159.

<sup>33</sup> Chapter 6 dedicated to Romanian case in Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, *Roma Voices in History* (Schöningh: Brill, 2021), 324–326.

<sup>34</sup> For a detailed perspective on this topic see Petre Matei’s research Petre Matei, “Between Nationalism and Pragmatism: The Roma Movement in Interwar Romania,” *Social Inclusion* 8, no. 2 (2020): 305–315 and Petre Matei, “Raporturile dintre organizațiile țigănești interbelice și Biserica Ortodoxă Română,” in Vasile Ciobanu, Sorin Radu, eds., *Partide politice și minorități naționale din România în secolul XX* (Sibiu: Ed. Techno Media, 2010), 160–173.

Here's how a Gypsy cobbler tells the story:

'Once upon a time, the Gypsies built their church from bricks, but we Romanians took it from them and turned it into a cheese church, for we had many sheep. When the Gypsies saw the cheese church of the Romanians, they traded with them, thinking it was good, and they ate it. That's why they don't have a church of their own. But when they traded with the Romanians, the Romanians still owed them sixty coins, and that's why the Gypsies have the right to go to the Romanian church, always demanding their debt, which is why they beg every time they meet a Romanian'.<sup>35</sup>

Another aspect that intrigued researchers and press at that time was the polytheistic roots that generated the exotic perception upon Roma communities. For example, in a 1926 article, *Dimineața copiilor*, a journal for children, published an article explaining the origins of Gypsies' language and religion as follows:

"When they left India, the Roma were polytheistic, meaning they believed in multiple gods, although they didn't worship them extensively because the Roma have never been a people deeply devoted to religion. Their religion consisted more of superstitions, spells, and incantations. Later on, some of them converted to the Islamic faith (particularly the Roma in Turkey and Bulgaria), while others converted to Christianity".<sup>36</sup>

When it comes to how narratives are formed, often, groups and communities do not express their opinions or messages directly. Instead, these narratives are encoded in various communication forms. These messages can be identified not only in direct communication, but also in the press, tales, or other written literature.<sup>37</sup> On multiple occasions, the religious side of the Gypsies was discussed in press most of the times connected with a person or a group of people, either the figure of a Romanian neighbour, or the figure of an Orthodox priest who acted as beacons on the Orthodox path.

For instance, an article published in January 1925, on Saint John the Baptist celebration day, recounted the story of a Gypsy man who pondered the idea that Romanians had numerous religious celebrations and Gypsies not. Impressed by the fact that the entire Romanian community was enjoying these moments

<sup>35</sup> "Biserica țiganilor," *Foaia Poporului* (June 23, 1912): 6.

<sup>36</sup> "Religia și limba țigănească," *Dimineața copiilor*, no. 137 (1926): 2.

<sup>37</sup> See: H. Porter Abbott, ed., *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative: Cambridge Introductions to Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020) and Donald P. Spence, *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis* (New York: W W Norton & Co, 1982).

together, the man asked the Orthodox local priest to include his family in these communal social activities as well:

“One day a Gypsie man wakes up his wife and tells her:

‘– All the Romanians have a celebration for their souls. We don’t have. Let’s have one for us as well!

‘– Well, good! said his Gypsie wife. Go to the priest and ask him to invent one for us as well.

‘– Father, all the Romanians have a feast day, but I don’t have one. Father, I discussed with my wife and I’m asking you to give me one.’

‘– If that’s the case, I’ll give you one too.’

‘– May God bless you, Father, when will you give it to me?’

‘– What’s your name, Gypsy?’

‘– They call me Budu, but my given name from my godfather is Ion.’

‘– Alright, then, your feast day will be on Saint John’s Day’<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, the cultural motif of celestial and infernal realms, as well as the transitional journey between them, permeates the public sphere. The literature and press abounded in narratives depicting both Gypsies and Romanians engaged in a pursuit to attain heaven or engaging in diverse moral dialogues with the divine realms. Frequently, these images were interspersed with cultural symbols and even stereotypes. To illustrate this idea, the humoristic magazine *Veselia* published a tale entitled “The Gypsy’ dream”. In this tale, a Romanian and a Gypsy man steal a plump pig from a wealthy landowner, and both ate half of it. They agreed to go to sleep and the person with the most beautiful dream will get the remaining portion of the pig. Both went to sleep, and the Gypsy described a dream of ascending to heaven on a path with golden stairs, encountering a heavenly realm with golden streets, gardens, and a grand golden house where God dined. They ate together, and the Gypsy returned to Earth after filling his belly.<sup>39</sup> Anecdotes like these invoking the cultural reference to gold or

<sup>38</sup> “Praznic de Sfântu Ion,”  *Glasul Bucovinei* (January 24, 1925): 2.

<sup>39</sup> “Once upon a time, a Romanian and a Gypsy stole a plump pig from a wealthy landowner. At the dinner table, famished as they were, they ate about half of the pig. What remained would go to the one who had a more beautiful dream. That was the agreement they made. Both went to bed to dream. After not a very long sleep, the Romanian woke up and asked:

– What did you dream, Gypsy? You go first.

– Oh, what a dream! It was a path from the ground to the heavens, up to God, with golden stairs. I climbed those stairs, holding onto the banisters so as not to fall, all the way up to Heaven where God sits. There, golden streets, and golden gardens with golden trees awaited me; golden forests with golden birds; golden fields with golden flowers. In a tall house, entirely made of gold and precious stones, adorned with saints like a church was God. He sat at a golden table, on a golden chair, and with a golden fork, He ate from a golden plate a delicious and expensive dish.



other Roma cultural traits such as clothing or language were frequently used. Complementary to this narrative, there is also the image of a deeper connexion with the divine realm as several stories portrayed Gypsies traveling to hell to save their relatives or praying to God during desperate moments.<sup>40</sup>

For example, one educative tale published in told the story of one Gypsie and two Romanians who were working together and made several wishes that came true. The Gypsie man jokingly wished his wife will give birth to twelve babies. Since he was superstitious, instead of him being the 13th man of his home he wished to have been sent to hell. This wish also came true. After his boys grew up, the youngest one decided to go to heaven and to hell to bring his father back. He tricked Saint Peter and was allowed to heaven, but he was cast out of paradise because he tried to administer justice by punishing a few thefts on his own. He also managed to trick everyone in hell threatening to build a church:

“– What are you doing there, Gypsy?’ asked the demons, feeling a bit uneasy.  
‘– I want to build a church, so that you can’t move from hell until you give me back my father.’  
When they heard about the church, the demons were terribly frightened and brought the old Gypsy”<sup>41</sup>

This long anecdote follows the same structures as other folkloric tales invoking the leitmotifs of heaven and hell, of an initiatory journey, fights again evil. Although this is one of the less frequent tales where the hero is a Gypsy man, some stereotypes were not elided.

Another common theme found in tales and humorous anecdotes portrays Roma, especially men, who were persuaded to go to church by their Romanian neighbours whom they work for. However, this type of narrative described their presence at the church futile as they lacked knowledge, both about the religious meaning and about the customs and practices.<sup>42</sup> Often, while depicted as novice or pagan, this image of the Roma was associated with several stereotypes such

---

God called me to His table, and I also ate from the delicious dish until I nearly burst. After I filled my belly like a sack, I bid farewell and descended back to Earth”, “Visul țiganului,” *Veselia* XXXXVI, no. 24 (June 12, 1930):15.

<sup>40</sup> For instance: “Once, a heavy rainstorm with thunders and lightnings caught a Gypsy man in the field. Since he was completely naked, he ran in all directions, seeking shelter. During this time, upon finding a haystack, he exclaimed:

“Dear God! At least let me put my head under cover and let the lower part of my body get struck by you, God!”

“Din gura poporului,” *Veselia*, XXXXVI, no. 24 (June 12, 1930):15.

<sup>41</sup> “Țiganul în raiu și în iad,” *Dimineața copiilor* no. 174 (LIV, 1927): 15.

<sup>42</sup> *Veselia* (June 13, 1935): 12.

as “the thief”<sup>43</sup> or “the uneducated”, “the ignorant”, “the sinner”, “the alcoholic”, “the diseases carrier” and others.

Their presence inside the church or during various religious ceremonies was a common narrative invoked by the press. The perception of Roma as a novice or pagan was accompanied by the image of the sinner. Many anecdotes are set in the church and involve the act of confession in front of an Orthodox priest and frame the narrative that Gypsies are sinners and seldomly they go to confess their sins and weaknesses:

“During confession in the Lent, a Gypsy once came,  
 Who hadn’t confessed all year, it was quite a shame...  
 ‘– Tell me’, the priest said with due concern,  
 ‘Do you enjoy alcohol, and do you yearn to have a drink from time to time?’  
 ‘– Of course’, the Gypsy said; I don’t decline, I do enjoy it, it’s true, I must concede,  
 Even my children know, indeed,  
 They are a gift from God’, he said.  
 ‘– Well’, the priest replied, with furrowed brow,  
 ‘– That’s not a good thing, I must avow,  
 For even the Almighty, above us all,  
 May get quite angry, I recall.  
 But fear not, dear Gypsy, do not fret,  
 Our Father, the Holy One, you can bet,  
 Is forgiving and kind, it is said,  
 If on this Earth, you mend your tread.’  
 ‘– If He is kind’, the Gypsy grinned wide,  
 ‘– Here’s what I’ll do, no need to hide,  
 I’ll keep on drinking, that’s my plan,  
 For next year, with Him, I’ll make amends”<sup>44</sup>.

There is worth mentioning the fact that these anecdotes and narratives were many times intended as humoristic narratives, but the layers of these messages were in fact pejorative and placed on the register of negative examples that were offered to the public.

The Roma community’s religious identity and its portrayal in narratives were subjects of various tales, anecdotes, myths, and articles present in the 1920s and 1930s public space. While stereotypes or perceptions often depicted

<sup>43</sup> For instance, a short tale described a Roma man going to church during the Easter day at the Resurrection service for seven years in a row and still was not able to understand why Jesus was caught and crucified. His conclusion was that Jesus made the mistake to steal seven years from the same place. *Veselia* (June 26, 1924): 7.

<sup>44</sup> “Țiganul la spovedit,” *Veselia* XXXVI (June 12, 1930): 5.

Roma as lacking in religious representation due to their nomadic lifestyle and perceived moral values, these narratives were challenged by studies and articles proving to public opinion the opposite. Yet, the hidden connotations of these narratives remained depreciatory, structured on inferiority-superiority reports, and revealing the 'us versus them' distinctions.

The narratives surrounding the Roma often intersected with cultural motifs related to celestial and infernal realms, as well as the transitional journeys between them. The press and literature frequently depicted both Roma and Romanians engaging in pursuits to attain heaven or engaging in moral dialogues with the divine. Yet, this pursuit was depicted as a competition or a domination of the Romanian majority. These narratives sometimes utilized cultural symbols and stereotypes. For example, the story of a Gypsy man's dream of ascending to heaven contrasted with the earthlier concerns of acquiring food. Other stories depicted Roma individuals traveling to hell to save their relatives or praying to God during desperate moments, reinforcing the spiritual aspects of Roma religious identity.

To sum up, the Romanian interwar years were marked by a dynamic interplay between religious, cultural, and political influences on the Roma community. During the 1930s, there was a significant discourse among theological and public figures regarding the potential to replace the Russian Orthodox Church's waning influence abroad due to the communist uprising. The Romanian Orthodox Church considered this an opportunity to expand its influence beyond Romanian borders. Consequently, missionary campaigns targeting Roma communities were launched and newspapers regularly reported on the baptism of large groups of Roma during major Orthodox celebrations.

OPINII GENERALE ȘI PERCEPȚII REFERITOARE  
LA CONFESIUNILE RELIGIOASE ALE MINORITĂȚII  
ROME DIN ROMÂNIA ÎNTRE ANII 1920-1930

*Rezumat*

Există o multitudine de mituri, legende, stereotipuri și percepții eronate despre cultura, originea și religia minorității rome din România. Unele publicații și ziare editate în special în anii 1920 și 1930, cum ar fi *Revista de Sociologie Românească*, *Ilustrațiunea Română*, *Ziarul Călătoriilor*, au publicat unele articole încercând să descrie și să analizeze originile și practicile religioase ale romilor. Studiul de față își propune să aducă în atenție diferitele percepții și convingeri despre viața religioasă a comunității rome, identificate cu precădere în presa națională. Plecând de la istoriografia subiectului și sursele primare ale epocii, articolul își propune să exploreze cum practicile și politicile societale au influențat viața și confesiunile religioase ale comunității rome.