

WORKING RELATIONS ON SEGARCEA CROWN DOMAIN: THE USE OF THE MANPOWER FOR THE AGRICULTURAL WORKS (1884-1948)

MITU Narcisa Maria *

Abstract. *The situation of the agrarian workers from Segarcea Domain, people who assured the manpower on the estate, was always under the attention of the central administration. Between 1899-1948, the exploitation of the agricultural lands that belong to Segarcea Crown Domain, was done both through the administration and also through leasing, the labour being made first of all by the dwellers from the villages of the Administration and also by those from the neighbouring villages or even from other administrations. During the leasing period, they concluded agreement contracts. The land the peasants committed to cultivate had to be laboured according to the indications of the agricultural engineers and to the conditions imposed by the leadership of the Administration. The grazing field, in accordance with the agreements, was paid in money and sometimes in products. With human workforce, a constant preoccupation was represented by the endowing of Segarcea administration with agricultural implements, tools and machinery that had a determinant role in growing the productivity and the quality of produces, along with cattle.*

Keywords: *the Segarcea Crown Domain, the exploitation of the agricultural lands, agricultural bargain contracts, Ion Kalinderu, 1884-1948*

The proposal from 1884 that Segarcea estate to be part of the Crown Domain, brought much discontent, both among the political personalities and the population, motivating that there were many requests coming from the peasants who wished to buy it. Despite these protests, in June 1884, Segarcea estate constituted, along with other 11 estates, the Royal Crown Domain.

If previously to the moment of working for the administration, on Segarcea estate, the agricultural works were made without considering the most elementary rules for tiling the ground, starting with 1899, the Crown Domain administration imposed new rules of organization, and also conditions for performing the agricultural works. Segarcea domain was divided on several sections. In 1904, there were 7 agricultural sections: *Segarcea* (2.386.33 ha), *Dâlga* (1.204.70 ha), *Panaghia* (1.072.55 ha), *Lipovu* (2.732.54 ha), *Gârnicioara* (1.812.05 ha) and *Valea Rea* (1.701.26 ha), *Șestu* (947.28 ha), one viticultural - *Viilor* (512.46 ha) and another with forest. There were also founded a park, in which there was the main quarter of the Domain, and a fruit trees nursery of about 19.80 ha.

In the same time, a constant preoccupation was represented by the endowing of Segarcea administration with agricultural implements, tools and machinery that had a determinant role in growing the productivity and the quality of produces, along with cattle. As a consequence, during 1899-1906, the most performing and modern agricultural machinery produced either in the country or abroad, at the end of the 19th century, constituted the agricultural park of Segarcea Domain. In 1906, there were inventoried: two Fowler steam ploughs, 34 sowing machines, 10 threshing machines

*3rd deg. Scientific Researcher "C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor" Institute for Studies in Social Sciences and Humanities, Craiova, Romanian Academy, minarcisa@yahoo.com.

(2 of corn), 10 harvesting machines, 9 mowing machines, 7 machines for cutting beetroot, 3 machines for cutting hay, 10 winnowing machines. Each sector used between 10 to 12 ploughs, 10-16 fixed and mobile iron harrows, with 2 and 3 sections, beataxes, 4 to 5 clod crushers, 2 mechanic rakes for hay, and the vineyard sector owned 9 small-ploughs¹. It was not neglected either the animal working power. In 1906, the number of oxen reached 290, of Moldavian breed, recognized for their qualities and working power and 8 buffalos used for heavy works – ploughing, land clearing – for transportation and traction, 14 mares and 2 Mura horses, used for the vineyard works.

Although the machines and the animals made the most difficult and intense works, the manpower was indispensable. Unlike other estates, where the peasant was seen only as manpower, without anybody being interested in his living standard, the Crown Domain administration had as a main purpose the betterment of the dwellers' situation in the villages on the estate, both from the cultural and material point of view. For this purpose, the villagers were encouraged to participate to conferences, meetings where they had the possibility to receive advice and information. A special role in their education had, especially, the primary school teacher and the priest. Nonetheless, the intellectual development of the villagers from the Crown Domain was recognised by G.D. Creangă, who said that "on the Crown Domain ... the villagers are superior from the cultural point of view"².

As for the material development, Ion Kalinderu, asked, starting with 1901, that when concluding the working contracts, the workers should be assured conditions for a decent living standard. Thus, with the help of the memorandum from the 12th of October 1901, the workers obliged themselves to make certain works in their own households: to fence in their garden and the yard surrounding the house, to make vegetable gardens, to plant fruit trees in their gardens, to use organic fertilizers in the garden and on the cultivated fields, to sharecrop on 10 surfaces with hemp and flax, to use for reproduction only noble-race bulls. There were excluded from the agreement, the recalcitrant dwellers and those with an immoral way of living. Being aware that the works are executed much better and with more devotion if the people were better fed, starting with 1907, in the contracts, the Crown Domain administrator, Ion Kalinderu, insisted on offering daily portions with consistent food. According to him, food had to be not only sufficient, but also equilibrated³. Bread, that was introduced since 1903, starting with 1907, was given daily, at least at one meal.

Another aspect that must be mentioned is that, for the accomplishment of some quality works, the peasants were taught to execute correctly and scientifically, the works for the preparation

¹, Fl. Davidescu, *The Monography of Segarcea Domain from Doljiu County* Bucharest, 1906, p. 42-45.

²*Proprietatea rurală și chestiunea țărănească*, Bucharest, 1905, p. 36.

³Narcisa Maria Mitu, *Domeniile Coroanei Regale (1884-1948)*, Craiova, Publishing House Aius, 2011, p. 62.

of the land and for the maintenance of the cultures. The agreements contained clear rules that the worker had to apply.

Starting with 1901, the surfaces contracted by dwellers were: between 1 to 3 ha for wheat, 1 to 4 ha for corn, while for forage, the surface was unlimited, according to the power of working and to necessities.

Unlike the anterior years, the conditions of the contracts were modified, the dwellers receiving cultivating lots on the estate, without paying the rent in cereals – wheat and oat, having the obligation to work a surface equal with that received. As regarding the forage cultures, on the surfaces for which they paid rent, the workers were obliged to cultivate cereals on a surface equal to the one received, to pay half of the rent from that culture. For corn, the rent was paid in produces, a part in two. If the works were not executed, the contractors were penalized to pay in money the afferent work of the contracted cultures: 24 lei the value of a ploughed and sowed hectare, 28 lei a reaped hectare and transported, 24 lei/the hoed hectare, 8 lei a beataxed hectare, 5 lei the working day with oxen, 24 lei a hectare of corn for gathering, transporting, cutting and carrying the stalks and 0.15 lei for the transportation of a hectolitre of corn. The dwellers who had not cattle for transportation, worked as the other ones, the difference being the fact that they had to effectuate, without paying, four days of labour.

According to the statistic data from 1906, the number of the workers from an estate was of 1.1887, most of them having: 2 oxen, 2 horses and a plough⁴. Even more, annually, in order to deal the need of labour force, in the summer, the Administration hired people from the neighbouring area, almost 300-400 workers. The contracts were usually concluded in advanced, for the next year. According to the archive documents, on 22nd of November 1915, there were hired with a contract 9 agricultural workers for different jobs: wheat reaping, shaft carrying etc., who received 343 lei and in December, the same year, 30 workers from Galicea Mare Commune received, according to the payrolls, 2.557 lei. All these contracts had to take place during the 1916 summer. According to the contract, Segarcea Domain administration provided the workers the transportation, 50 bani a day for each person for food or aliments as following: 1.200 kg of corn flour or bread, 250 ml brandy, meat, cheese, vegetables and twice a week fastening food: beans, potatoes, fish and vegetables⁵.

There were also cases when “working conflicts” appeared and that was the moment when the head of Segarcea Administration had to resort to the military police to determine different villagers to carry on their obligations assumed when signing the contracts. On the 19th of July 1920, the military

⁴ Florian Davidescu, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁵ The National Archives Service of Dolj County, resources Segarcea Crown Domain, file no. 2/1915, f. 56-60 (is quoted next as: S.J.A.N. Dolj).

police department from Calopăr was announced that four dwellers from that commune, who had been contracted to reap 2.50 ha of wheat on the Domain, did not come to work, according to their agreement, and during this period the wheat spread on the ground. Few days later, on 23rd of July, the chief of the military police department gave an announcement that noticed the dwellers in case to come to work⁶. With a similar situation Segarcea Crown Domain was confronted in the next years.

The expropriation of the agricultural lands, according to the decree from the 14th of December 1918, reduced the surface of Segarcea Crown Domain to 4.829.73 ha. Even so, the crops continued to have wide surfaces, in a proportion approximately equal to the fodder plants. And, in the same time, the sector of vineyards gained a special importance, constituting the most important source of income from the period between the two World Wars, and the wine became the landmark of this Administration.

The works continued to be done with the dwellers, being paid both in rent and money. Considering the fact that through the agrarian reform from 1921, most of the people without lots or with a small surface were put in the possession of land, the manpower became much more reduced and Segarcea Crown Domain was obliged to resort to workers from the neighbouring counties (Vâlcea, Gorj, Argeş), but also from Ardeal and Basarabia. Thus, groups of 50-60 people were hired with a contract for at least 75 full days of work. According to the contracts, the agricultural workers received a residence, payment for food and wood and they had the transportation assured. The food was prepared by cooks, one for 20 workers. For a more efficient work, the workers were arranged in groups made of minimum 10 people, led by a bailiff. In 1922, in the contracts concluded for works as: sowing, weeding, mowing, gathering forage, reaping, gathering and carrying the sheaves to the threshing machine, trashing, and carrying different things with the carts, the working day to be paid with 7 lei a person. The bailiffs were paid with sums between 12 and 15 lei a day, according to the number of the workers they brought to work. Depending on the contract, the work began at dawn and ended at dusk. The food was: 1 kg of corn flour, half of bread and 250 g of vegetables. Three times a week, the food contained meat⁷. In 1928, the daily payment reached the sum of 45 lei for men, 40 lei for women and 100 lei for the bailiff⁸ and in 1945 – 18.000 lei for men, 15.000 lei for women and 25.000 lei for the bailiffs⁹. On average, the number of the season workers was between 450 and 550 a year. For instance, in 1936, there were 487 workers (377 gypsies, 60 villagers and 50 dwellers from Ardeal) and in 1937, 531 people.

⁶ *Ibidem*, file no. 34/1919, f. 82.

⁷ *Ibidem*, file no. 10/1922, f. 10-14.

⁸ *Ibidem*, file no. 13/1930, unnumbered.

⁹ *Ibidem*, inventory files no. 21/1945, unnumbered.

As regarding the works on each hectare, in 1926, the prices were calculated as following: 300 lei the spring ploughing, 400 lei the August ploughing, 400 lei the first hoe and 500 lei the second hoe for corn, 500 and 600 lei for the first and the second hoe of the beetroot, 1.000 lei for cereal reaping and 500 lei for mowing the hay¹⁰. The cost of the agricultural works raised continuously in the next years, reaching the sums of, in 1930: 800 lei for reaping, 80 lei for harrowing, 510 lei for threshing, 175 lei for sowing, 320 lei for ploughing with oxen, 1.200 lei for mowing and 150 for cart transportation¹¹.

The deepening on the economic crisis imposed a gradual reducing of the expenditures, in all the sectors. In the budget project for 1932, it was mentioned the reducing to the bare necessities for the working days, the performing of the ploughing only with animal traction, in order to reduce the expenditure from 700 to 200 lei/ha. The steam plough had to be used only for clearing the lands that would be cultivated with lucerne and in the vineyards. In the agricultural campaign, the number of the workers was reduced to almost 188 dwellers from the near villages and almost 350-390 daily workers, who were paid with sums that fluctuated between 12 and 20 lei a day, according to their gender and the working power, plus the daily food. Most of the workers were gypsies, who received twigs and 6 stere of wood for each household¹².

In 1933, the price of works for a hectare reduced even more: 200 lei for oxen ploughing, 97 lei for sowing, 30 lei for harrowing, 260 lei for threshing, 360 lei for reaping, binding and carrying the sheaves to the threshing machine, 440 lei for mowing and 100 lei the cart transportation¹³. In 1940, for the 563 workers hired for different jobs and paid with sums that varied between 22-26 lei a day was given 683.000 lei. This amount was divided as following: 200.000 lei for the gypsies hired on the estate, 334.000 lei for the gypsies and the villagers who worked in the vineyards, 20.000 lei for the Hungarians hired in the vineyards and 129.000 lei for the villagers¹⁴.

The work in the vineyard was made mechanically, with small ploughs and as manpower, there were used the gypsies. They were preferred especially for the small sums for which they could be hired. The jobs that they had to do daily, according to the contract, were: unearthing, cutting, binding, hoeing, aspersing, planting, ploughing and also any other works in the press house and on the field, according to the requests of the viticulture section personal¹⁵. Yet, the collaboration with the gypsies was not without incidents. The lack of seriousness they proved during the works obliged the leadership of the Administration to resort sometimes to the help of police and military police

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, file no. 4/1927, f. 191.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, file no. 1/1933, f. 137.

¹² *Ibidem*, file no. 1/1932, f. 576-577.

¹³ *Ibidem*, file no. 1/1933, f. 137.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, file no. 12/1929, f. 38.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, file no. 15/1939, unnumbered.

from the communes where they lived. In 1930, at the Vineyard sector, were hired 288 workers, among which: 240 were paid with sums between 20-45 lei a day plus the food ration and 48 were Hungarians and were paid with 40-45 lei a day. The daily food for the Hungarian workers was around 27 lei, while that for the autochthonous workers of 21.40 lei¹⁶. The difference was in the fact that the foreigners received food on Sundays and on holidays too.

On the 22nd of May, the general administrator proposed the building of special shelters for gypsies, “to assure for them human living conditions, to make them feel as the other people and to evolve on the biological scale”¹⁷. These houses had to give shelter to 10 families of gypsies. Two years later, when it was decided the deportation of the gypsies in Transnistria, the Minister of Internal Affairs decided that those on the Domain to remain there, insisting, in the same time, for building houses for them because, starting with the 1st of April they were no longer allowed to live in huts. A special attention was given to the workers’ body care. For this purpose, the head of the Segarcea Administration, Toma Busuioc imposed, starting with May 1942, that each Sunday to be the day of bathing. To make sure that the decision was applied, the head of the Administration made a commitment to give them wood for heating the water.

During the Second World War, among the vineyard workers, we could also find the Soviet prisoners. For the performed jobs, they were paid with 90 lei a day, from which 60 lei were due to the Camp and 30 lei to the prisoner. The daily food cost 50 lei, consisted of products and was given by the Administration.

In conclusion, we can assert that the situation of the agrarian workers from Segarcea Domain, people who assured the manpower on the estate, was always under the attention of the central administration. The measures taken by the administrator Kalinderu represented the basis for the future intellectual and material development of the peasant, determining him to evolve faster and through his own strength, above the dwellers of the other estates. In consequence, the purpose was reached, the working peasant from the Crown Domain succeeded in becoming a model for the Romanian rural world.

Bibliography

Davidescu, Florin, *Monografia Domeniului Șegarcea din județul Dolj*, Bucharest, 1906.

Proprietatea rurală și cheștiunea țărănească Bucharest, 1905.

Mitu, Narcisa Maria, *Domeniile Coroanei Regale (1884-1948)*, Craiova, Publishing House Aius, 2011.

The National Archives Service of Dolj County, resources Segarcea Crown Domain, file no. 2/1915, 34/1919, 10/1922, 4/1927, 12/1929, 3/1930, 1/1932, 1/1933, 21/1945.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, file no. 2/1928, f. 246-250.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, file no. 9/1941, f. 42-43, 45.