

NEW RESEARCH ON SEVERAL ELEMENTS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE BULGARIANS FROM TULCEA COUNTY (ROMANIA)

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Abstract: During 2022, we carried out a series of field research in the villages of Tulcea County from where Bulgarians left *en masse* in 1940. We had in mind the recording of the existence or non-existence of some elements of traditional heritage, at the level of the 21st century, in the practices of mixed families with a member of Bulgarian ethnicity in order to have the possibility to relate these observations with the phenomenon that has been manifested in the last two decades in several rural communities (localities Vișina and Lunca) of recrystallization and reconfiguration of the identity of Dobrujan Bulgarians, following the establishment of artistic groups/ ensembles, which promote folk costumes, music, dance, gastronomy and traditional customs practised by Bulgarians at the beginning of the 20th century, and campaign for the recovery of some elements of material and immaterial heritage with the aim of presenting them to tourists. Perhaps not by chance, the nostalgia of these traditions manifests itself with the development of agrotourism and the need for the existence of specific local cultural products. Such an initiative is manifested in the village of Vișina, where a small community of Bulgarians lives. The *Sfîtilina* folk ensemble reconstituted and promoted through the persuasion of Mrs. Bianca Folescu (Romanian from Constanța, owner of the *Souvenir from Dobruja* Guesthouse), offers to the tourists artistic moments with local specificity.

Keywords: Romania, Dobruja, Tulcea County, Bulgarians, identity, material heritage, immaterial heritage.

The information about the beginning of the Bulgarian communities, their settlements and development in the northern Dobruja is uncertain, we could even say confusing for those who consult both the Romanian and the Bulgarian bibliography. They are clearly marked by the claim of this territory by the Romanian and Bulgarian authorities from past centuries, each bringing historical, demographic, ethnographic arguments and counter-arguments in their favour.¹ That is why in the field research carried out during 2022, in the villages from where the Bulgarians were displaced in 1940, we looked at this issue detached from the ideological disputes of directly interested (Romanian, Bulgarian) or co-interested (e.g. Russian, Turkish) historiographies and recorded the existence or the non-existence of elements of traditional heritage, at the level of the 21st century, in the practices of mixed families with a member of Bulgarian ethnicity to have the possibility to relate these observations with the recent phenomenon (after 2000) of recrystallization and reconfiguration of the identity of Dobrujan Bulgarians, following the establishment of various entities, mostly NGOs and vocal groups, which promote folk costumes, music, dance, gastronomy and traditional customs, campaigning for the recovery of some elements of material and immaterial heritage.

To decode all these traditional legacies, it is necessary to take into account the course of the Bulgarian ethnic group at least from the beginning of the 19th century (when some settlements were formed) and also to take into account the specific phenomena of inter-ethnic living, identifying similarities, differences, influences, interferences, acculturation, which could occur as a result of repeated migrations, contact and coexistence with Romanians, Muslims and other Christian populations since the Ottoman period. The turbulent history of this area was traversed by all the inhabitants of those times.

Numerous migrations have challenged Bulgarians to manage contacts with other ethnic groups. Among these, we mention: the period of the Russian-Turkish War from 1806-1812² when the Bulgarians from

¹ Chiselev 2019, 32-33.

² Arbore 1929, 11.

Dobruja headed towards Bessarabia;³ other dislocations took place in 1809 when hundreds of Bulgarian refugees from Tulcea, Babadag and Isaccea, but also from Varna or Pazargik left the left bank of the Danube;⁴ the migratory current towards Bessarabia, by sea or land (NW Bulgaria – Dobruja – Bessarabia) generated by the war operations in the Balkans from 1828-1829, and in this transit process, a part of the ethnic Bulgarians settled in localities in the micro-zone of Razelm Lake, so that in 1850 they are found in Caramanchioi (Sălchioara), Caugagia, Hamangia (Baia), Ceamurlia de Jos or Casapchioi (Sinoe).⁵ Most families settled in the Babadag *kaşa*. After 1833 there was an emigration of Bulgarians from the south of Bessarabia to the areas of origin in Bulgaria. Part of them remained in the abandoned villages following the Russian-Turkish wars of the second half of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. At the beginning of the 19th century, Bulgarians formed compact settlements in Başchioi (Nicolae Bălcescu), Beidaud, Canli-Bugeac (Lunca), Casimcea, Congaz (Rândunica), Ceamurlia de Sus (from the villages of Crivna, Ravna), Ceamurlia de Jos (from Dragoievo), Potur (Panduru),⁶ Congaz/ Rândunica (Bulgarians from Ghebege near Varna or from the village of Cercovca, near Provadia), Cerna (from Dragoievo, Smiadovo and Riş), Paşa-Cişla/Vişina (from Dragoievo, Smiadovo and Riş) and Sarighiol.⁷ In 1850 Caramanchioi, Camena, Cerna and Eschibaba had a Bulgarian majority and a few Turks. In Canli Bugeac (Lunca) the Bulgarians replaced the Tatar population after 1855. In Zebil the Bulgarians came after the Crimean War and emigrated before the 1877 war.⁸ The settlement of the Bulgarians in the city of Tulcea was conditioned by their displacement following the Russian-Turkish wars, followed by a temporary settlement in Bessarabia.⁹ They formed the "Bulgarian *mahala*/ neighbourhood" in the city, in the eastern part of the former river estuary, bounded by Basarabi (today Păcii), Mahmudiei, Potcovarilor and Dragoş Vodă streets.¹⁰ Many of them were born in Bolgrad, Filipopol, Tîrnova, Nicopole, Adrianopole, Şumla, Carlova or Prislav.¹¹ After 1940, following the Treaty of Craiova, there is a massive departure of Bulgarians from the region. According to Kemilev's statistics from 1941, the number of Bulgarians from Tulcea county, registered for emigration at the mixed subcommittees exceeded 30.000: 2.185 from Babadag, 4.237 from Zebil, 3.530 from Jurilovca commune, Lunca and Vişina villages, 4.081 from Mihail Kogălnicenu, 1.257 from Tulcea, 131 from Sulina, 214 from Măcin, 3.893 from Ceamurlia de Jos, 3.689 from Cerna, 825 from Peceneaga, 4.188 from Casimcea commune, 2.600 from Nicolae Bălcescu, 1.135 from Beştepe.¹² Bulgarians were colonized in the Quadrilateral. For example, families from Tulcea, Congaz, Constanţa and Techirghiol arrived in the village of Akkadiller/Dulovo,¹³ and Bulgarians from Enichioi (Mihail Kogălniceanu) settled in the village of Belgun. Bulgarians who formed mixed families were not included in this historical displacement process. Testimonies about this phenomenon were gathered from the descendants of those who remained: "We stayed because my mother was from Traianu and my father worked at the mayoralty as an agricultural agent, they bribed somebody, I don't know what they did, they remained, but then they were very sorry, because they were left alone."¹⁴ The other interlocutors from Cerna and Beştepe also spoke to us about the departure of relatives and the need for re-adaptation in the communities.

The drastic reduction in number of Bulgarians from Dobruja is also reflected in the table below. The increase of 11 people recorded in the most recent census may be due to local ethnic revitalization initiatives.

³ According to the diary of Count A.F. Langeron about the Bulgarians of Dobruja, mentioned in Duminićă 2017, 35.

⁴ According to the diary of Count A.F. Langeron about the Bulgarians of Dobruja, mentioned in Duminićă 2017, 52.

⁵ Ionescu 1904, 327; Ionescu 1922, 151-154.

⁶ Arbore 1929, 24.

⁷ Miletic 1922, 205.

⁸ Ionescu 1904.

⁹ Popoiu 2001, 95.

¹⁰ Postelnicu 2005.

¹¹ County Directorate of the National Archives (CDNA), Collection of Civil Status Registers Fond, Dossiers 1-37/1879-1882.

¹² Penerliev 2015 *apud*. Chiselev 2019.

¹³ Георгиева 2012, 63.

¹⁴ Oral source: Tudorache Ioana.

Year	1930	1956	1966	1977	1992	2002	2011	2021
Number	21865	388	220	123	127	61	23	34

Source: National Institute of Statistics (for 2021 the data are provisional)

In terms of traditional occupations, Bulgarians were mostly agriculturists (cereal and vegetable growing) and animal breeders (especially sheep, cattle, horses, and poultry). These practices have left behind a series of household tools from the first half of the 20th century that they still use or just preserve without having exclusivity (from the simple ones – hoe, shovel, rake, to the more elaborate – plough, harrow, hand mill). Romanians from Zebil, Sabangia, Beștepe speak admiringly and nostalgically about the skill of Bulgarian gardeners and greengrocers, who cultivated a variety of vegetables and legumes: early potatoes, cabbage, tomatoes, peppers, celery, beans, eggplants, leeks. Moreover, their sales market was extended throughout the region.

The organization of the Deliu family's household from Beștepe¹⁵ mirrors these occupations: an area intended for living – the house; one for animals and one for gardens. In general, the traditional household included, in addition to the dwelling, a series of constructions with an economic character such as: *dam*/ stable; *samalâc* for preserving fodder; *curnic*/ poultry house, the oven for bread, the pigsty, the shed for tools and harness, the barn, the warehouse for corn. In the yard of the house there was usually a fountain with a wave. With the collectivization of agriculture, the peasant household entered into disaggregation, most of the component buildings, no longer being used, were transformed for other uses, others were demolished. New construction techniques and materials appeared.

The planimetry and elevation of the house, and the materials used in construction are closely related to the natural resources of the time and the typology of the houses in the area. Clay, straw, reeds, rush, wood, rods, stone were found in a smaller or larger proportion in rural constructions, regardless of ethnicity. Thus, zonal peculiarities were created in interdependence with the relief forms. For example, in the neighbouring villages of the Danube Delta and Razelm Lake, the reeds used for covering predominated, and in the hilly and plateau areas, clay tiles.

Home textile making in Bulgarian communities was developed. Many textiles – towels, rugs – made in Iazurile, Beștepe were ordered and bought by Romanian, Ukrainian or Russian Lipovan women from neighboring villages.¹⁶ Bulgarian women, just like Romanian women, knew various weaving and sewing techniques – in two loops, in three loops, in four loops (called *macaturi*), over threads, between threads, drawing – obtaining various products: towels (*peșchire*) with anthropomorphic, phytomorphic or geometric patterns, striped rugs, simple or striped fabric for dresses and skirts. Currently, the name that the Bulgarians give to these pieces woven in the household is the Romanian one. In Vasile Deliu's household, several pieces of Vasilica Deliu's tools are kept: the weaving loom, the manual carding comb, the distaff and the spindle, but they are no longer used.

The traditional costume is described in detail in several works from the end of the 20th century - the beginning of the 21st century.¹⁷ The Romanian authors note the similarities between some elements of the Dobrujan Romanian costume and the Bulgarian one (e.g. the straight shirt, *pestelca*/ apron, *gear*/ kerchief) depending on the evolutionary period, in relation to the type of used material, the meaning of some pieces of clothing or the ethno-cultural influence of the area (Romanian, Ottoman, urban, etc.). The descriptions recorded by the Bulgarian authors confirm the structure of the Bulgarian costume described by the Romanian ones.¹⁸

In general, the same ways of holding the hair in braids were used (one, two or four). If they had short hair, they bought tails, white ribbons (*imăcele*), worn especially in the summer. The hair braided in this way was covered with *cealma*/ *celma* (the Bulgarian name given to the piece called by the other populations *modă*,

¹⁵ Deliu family generated oral sources for several generations of museographers from Tulcea: Vasilica Deliu (b. 1927, Beștepe) was the interlocutor of Steluța Pârâu in 1976, Beștepe; her sons, Vasile (b. 1952, Beștepe) and Ion (b. 1944, Beștepe), had a dialogue with the undersigned and Al. Chiselev in 2022.

¹⁶ Titov, Chiselev 2015, 5-20.

¹⁷ Pârâu, 2007, 102-103; Titov, 2015, 129-130; Chiselev 2019, 92-93.

¹⁸ Тодоров et al. 1974, 239-248; Кирилова 2015; Кирилова 2022.

moadă, modiță, tulpan, testemel, casinca, bariș, ciumber, etc. and which denoted a triangular headscarf), starting from the back, under the tails. For holidays or important events, the headdress was much more elaborate with a fez made of red or blue cloth, many ornaments with coins made of precious materials, and flowers attached to the forehead or neck. Married women wore *gear/* headscarf with tassels. In winter, the woollen *berta* was also used. The straight shirt was made of cloth with vertical wefts, in frames or curls. Ornamentation was done with *arnici/* dyed cotton thread, especially at the neck, at the ends of the sleeves and at the hem.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Dobrujan Bulgarians wore at least two types of costumes: with *fîsta* (skirt) or with *ciucman* (dress). The skirt was made of wool or calico, sometimes decorated with narrow lace at the hem. At the waist they wore *iviță* (belt) or *covăneț* (metal cord) and *paftale* (buckles).¹⁹

The central element of the traditional costume is the "pristelka" (in Romanian *pistelca/ pestelca*), richly ornamented, made through a combination of weaving, sewing, dyeing or crocheting techniques. The fineness of the home cloth and its colour harmonizes with the dress or skirt. Girls started wearing *pristelka* at the age of 14-15, when they entered in *hora* (round dance). The common ornamental patterns were *cuchiciki* (combs) and *bîierak* (peak).

In the cold season the *polka* was worn, slightly rounded at the front, with a tail at the back and pleated.

The traditional male costume is more difficult to reconstitute. The Bulgarians wore shirts made of homespun cloth. The old type had a straight collar and an opening on one side, fitted with a closing system. It was later replaced by the one with an opening in the front. Over the shirt, during the summer, they wore sweater-vests in four loops, with motifs in frames. In winter they wore *iamurluc* (cloak) and *ciubara* (sheep hat). The wide pants (*șulvari, dulvari* or *șăroche*) made of tweed were tied with a *uciucur* (string) or wide belt made of black or red wool.

In the case of food, we discover the same alimentary patterns created in the socio-cultural evolution of the area. Wheat-based foods (bread, flatbreads) are consumed daily, at all meals. Practicing Orthodoxy involves observing dietary restrictions during fasting periods, and consuming certain animal products on holidays. In the festive moments, dishes rich in meat were consumed, especially from sheep, pork and poultry: *korban* from lamb or wether, lamb with bulgur and mint prepared for St. George and Easter,²⁰ cabbage with meat and bulgur, *babic* (saveloy) with beef mixed with pork or mutton, mutton pastrami, *pacea* (aspic), *sarmi* (cabbage rolls stuffed with meat), *baur* (a kind of liverwurst), *deadușku* (the big meat pudding) and *babușka* (the small meat pudding) cooked for Christmas.²¹

During fasting periods, vegetable stews, *iabniie de boghi* (bean stew) were consumed. Also, the baking is individualized in a diversity of shapes, ways of preparation or types of fillings: round-shaped breads used in various ceremonial contexts, curly pie with milk, pie with *ivără* (pumpkin), *cherdele* (leavened pies stuffed with cheese)²², *ghismane* (pies made of cow's colostrum), doughnuts.

The feast calendar²³ condensed celebrations, rites and ritual gestures within several festive cycles: winter holidays, Easter holidays, St. George's Eve and Day. This community kept the holidays on the old style (Julian) calendar, later switching to the order of the Gregorian calendar. "Priest Rincea officiated the ceremony in Romanian at the church, both on the new and old calendar, but if an old man wanted to serve him at the grave or at an almsgiving in Bulgarian - he knew - and he spoke them as each one wanted".²⁴ "Here (s.n. in Beștepe) there was only one church, we went to church on the new calendar, but at home we also kept the old one: we didn't wash, we didn't work in the garden".²⁵

¹⁹ Oral source: Tudorache Ioana.

²⁰ Oral source: Vasile Deliu.

²¹ Lozanova 2015, 116-117.

²² "Every time she baked bread, on Saturdays, grandmother made a tray with *cherdele*. We had enough bread for a week." (Oral source: Vasile Deliu).

²³ Olteanu 2008, 7-196; КОВАЛОВ 2016, 18-150.

²⁴ Oral source: Tudorache Ioana.

²⁵ Oral source: Vasile Deliu.

The Christmas period represented a favourable moment for the performance of magical omen, oracular and propitiatory acts. Carolling is the most meaningful practice for the community. The Bulgarians had songs or announcement formulas and carols with a direct beneficiary (e.g. *Sidi ianoc na visoc ceardac/* The strong man sits on the high balcony - for a lad, *Zbilusăi Cernu More/* The Black Sea struggled - for the priest, *Gudiniță dvori mite/* Fiancée sweeps the yard - for the fiancée). From an organizational point of view, the groups of carollers were led by a young man, recently married, and named *popa*.²⁶ Around Christmas, the youths interpreted carols in Bulgarian, today long forgotten, but inventoried in several collections of folklore made by Romanians or Bulgarians ethnographers.

Other traditional elements either of clothing (the hat decorated with a wreath made of a thin rod braided with multi-coloured wool applied around, over which another wreath of beads was placed), food (baking a pie into which a coin was inserted), magical-ritual gestures (throwing a forkful of boiled wheat at the ceiling, in order to have rich harvests while saying: *Dă porasne jito tu du tavană/* Let the wheat grow to the ceiling)²⁷ are elements common to Bulgarians and other Christian populations. Likewise, performing *Sorcova* (*Survă*). On New Year's morning, Bulgarian children went to every household carrying a budded hazelnut rod. They said a simple verbal formula: *Survă, survă gudină, / Survă, survă gudină / Pu jno, pu sdravă/ Pac dă gudină / Sorcova, sorcova of the year, / Sorcova, sorcova of the year, / May you live, be healthy/* Again the next year. The children received pretzels, nuts, and bread wreaths. An apotropaic practice is related to plucking a few buds from the rods and mixing them in lye, resulting a headache remedy.

In the past, among the Bulgarians, there was the sequence of bathing the newlyweds in the previous year, around the Epiphany, followed by offering of a towel to each participating lad, for the husband's health, saying: *Ză zdravne tu nă .../* In his health of... (the name of man).²⁸ The custom was kept in the village of Izvoarele by the Greek community, which makes us believe that the custom was also practised by other communities.

Another practice is that of blessing and baptizing the horses on Epiphany, followed by a race (names found at Bulgarians, Aromanians, Romanians: *cușie, coșie, încuraț*). There was also a day (January 8) dedicated to the celebration of midwives, named *Babinden* by the Bulgarians. The main moments of the celebration were related to the visit to the midwife, the offering of gifts (e.g. round bread, soap, towel, and food), the kissing of the hand, the common meal at the midwife's house and the subsequent party. The custom is also recorded among Romanians, Aromanians, Meglenoromanians, Ukrainians, Russian Lipovans, and Greeks.

The Eve and Day of St. George constitute a period of the beginning of spring, for populations with an agro-pastoral occupational profile constituting the moment when agreements are made between animal owners and shepherds. In its structure, the existence of ritual practices with an apotropaic or propitiatory role is decoded. The Bulgarians also performed the *kurban / korban*, denoting the sacrificial rite of a lamb or ram, with a propitiatory, apotropaic or oracular role.

Lazarus Saturday has in its structure elements related to the cult of the dead, there is the practice of going to the cemetery and offering alms, especially pies with cheese and *kolivo*. Among the Bulgarians, the custom of the *Lăzărel* emphasized, which shows some similarities with the carolling, only that this time the performers of the rite are pubescent girls and not boys. However, the pattern is common: the association of the girls, the hierarchy of the group, going from house to house, the performance of some consecrated songs, the reward of the host. The girls who walked with *Lazarus* wore many necklaces with golden coins around their necks. This prescription must be correlated with the mechanisms of magical thinking, because by similitude it was believed that as gold shines on the necks of maidens, so ears of corn will shine in fields. When the girls left the household, a sieve was thrown after them. If it fell with its bottom up, it was a sign of full barns and vice versa.

Palm Sunday is marked by the consecration of the willow tree. This willow has apotropaic properties, being planted at the gate or placed in the house, at the icon. Among the Bulgarians, on Palm Sunday, the girls who joined together to participate at the *Lazarus* tradition, performed an act similar to the choice of

²⁶ Sassu 1929, 223-225.

²⁷ Sassu 1929.

²⁸ Oral source: Vasilica Deliu.

Paparuda among the Romanians, in order to determine at which of them the Easter meal will be organized. They wove wreaths of willow and threw them on the river; the one, whose crown arrived first in a place determined by mutual agreement, became the godmother of the others. This gesture must be correlated with the act of ritual sister-becoming, frequently practiced by Romanian girls (but not only) on this day.

Easter represents the celebration of the Resurrection of the Saviour and, by extension, the regeneration of nature. The central moment is the participation in the Resurrection service, bringing the light home and extinguishing it in the sign of the cross at the door frame, as well as the consecration of the ritual foods (red egg, Easter cake) but also other types of offerings (steak, cheese). Moreover, the Easter candle was endowed with apotropaic qualities, being good in case of fires, surrounding the house, or it was placed on the right horn of the lamb that was to be sacrificed for the *Korban*. "St. George on the old calendar (s.n. 6 May), fell all the time after Easter".²⁹

Sufinden is the first Monday after Easter when the dead are commemorated: they go to the cemetery; red eggs are distributed, but also Easter cake, sweets and wine.³⁰ The other ethnic groups in the locality do the same, the day being called *Easter of the Dead*.

On the Eve of the Holy Trinity they gathered and spread wormwood and walnut leaves all over the house. Also, now the wife's *unmuffling* / *descotoșmănat* took place: "The young wife sat muffled with a vest (sewn from thin wool, in four loops, with flowers, with aiglet), on her feet with woollen stockings, and on her head with a scarf. And she stayed like that until the Holy Trinity; the godmother would come, undress her and then she was allowed to walk freely".³¹ This custom represented the end of the transition stage from the status of a girl to that of a married woman with full rights in the community of women. Also, through this gesture, the bond of spiritual kinship between the young wife and the godmother was strengthened. Today it is no longer practised.

The rites of passage are similar to those of the other populations with whom the Bulgarians lived in this area, but there are also certain specificities. For example, at the baptism, the midwife baked a cake, which was to be eaten by the women present at the ceremony. After three days another cake was prepared which signified the erasure of ancestral sin. Or, during the wedding ceremony, immediately after coming from the church: the bride and groom were rewarded by the in-laws; the entry of the bride into the groom's house, on a white cloth placed at the entrance; serving godparents and parents-in-law with honey and walnut from a kalabash, accompanied by the verbal formula "Zlatco bulcă" (Sweet bride); the destruction of the kalabash by the bride and groom, on the threshold of the house, so that the sweetness of marriage does not leave the house.³² At important commemorations, generally held on Saturdays, a lamb was sacrificed, the ritual and the resulting dish also being called *kurban*.³³ Today, these gestures have not been identified, with the exception of the *kurban*, the preparation of which is handled by women (even in the family of the Deliu brothers, a lamb roast is prepared, which they call *kurban*, but we have not identified other ritual gestures related to the sacrifice).

In the end, we can say that the multiple changes in the political, administrative, economic, social environment, etc. generated mental changes at the level of each individual who adapted to his present. Living alongside the Other made his identification take place in the context of interculturality. In this case is applied the theory according to which the identity of each inhabitant of Dobruja was formed not as a result of the juxtaposition of given ethnic identities but from the negotiation, within multiple interactions, of some affinities and oppositions, proximities and distances, in order to constitute a new, identity-bearing reality.³⁴ The massive emigration of Bulgarians after 1940, the existence of ethnic mixed families and the adoption of the Romanian language as the basic language, the need to hide under the cover of another ethnicity, for fear of deportation, determined that most of the traditions of this community are no longer active, or rather, they exist fragmentarily dormant in the memory of the few elderly. I have identified with difficulty a few people who have affirmed openly their Bulgarian roots, but who talk about traditional

²⁹ Oral source: Tudorache Ioana.

³⁰ Chiselev 2019, 36.

³¹ Oral source: Vasilica Deliu.

³² Petrică 2010, 136.

³³ Olteanu 2008, 55.

³⁴ Ferréol, Jucquois 2005, 335.

practices in the past. The children in the monitored families are aware of their Bulgarian heritage (they keep in touch with uncles and cousins from Bulgaria and visit each other annually, they know Bulgarian words, they keep household items, fabrics, items of folk costume inherited from their grandparents and invest them as a Bulgarian identity marker, although they represent common elements, used in the area by all the inhabitants), but also the Romanian one (along with the Dobrujan shirt and *pistelka*, the family keeps the folk costume from Muscel, recognized in the interwar period as the national costume and spread in all the ethnographic areas of Romania).

At home I spoke Bulgarian with my parents (...). My mother-in-law did [s.n. at school] 7 years in Bulgarian and she had her books, but when [s.n. relatives] came from Bulgaria: – Come on, give us this book! and she happily gave them! My daughter said: – Mom, why don't you teach me Bulgarian? – Well, I'm teaching you! And she knows a few words, but she didn't teach the children. (...) Priest Rincea carried on the religious service in Romanian at the church, but if an old man wanted to read them at the grave or at an almsgiving in Bulgarian - he knew and served them as each wanted. Now nobody doesn't speak, all in Romanian, I only talk to Sica (s.n. Tudorache Anastasia) when it's just us.³⁵

The data published by the Statistical Directorate after the 2021 census records only 6 Bulgarians whose mother tongue is Bulgarian, while 27 declared Romanian as their mother tongue.

The phenomenon of recrystallization and reconfiguration of the identity of the Dobrujan Bulgarians that has been manifested in the last two decades at the level of the rural communities from Vișina și Lunca villages manifests itself on a social level through the artistic groups/ ensembles that promote folk costumes, music, dance, gastronomy and traditional customs practised by Bulgarians at the beginning of the 20th century, and campaign for the recovery of some elements of material and immaterial heritage with the aim of to present them to tourists. Perhaps not by chance, the nostalgia of these traditions manifests itself with the development of agritourism and the need for the existence of specific local cultural products. Such an initiative is manifested in Vișina village, where a small community of Bulgarians lives. The *Sfitilina* ensemble, reconstituted and promoted through the persuasion of Mrs. Bianca Folescu (Romanian from Constanța, owner of the *Souvenir from Dobruja* Guesthouse), offers tourists artistic moments with local specificity. Mrs. Folescu bought the house from the Stoenică Stoean and Minca who built the house in 1931-1932. Since 2011, restoration and reconstruction began on this domain.³⁶ The porch of the house was elevated and closed with a fence, the outbuildings were transformed into accommodation or visiting places, the gardens were transformed into a paddock for horses, stables, a stage and other dependencies necessary for the operation of the agro-pension. All this reminds of the life of the Dobrujan people, be they Bulgarians, Romanians, Aromanians, Turks, Russian Lipovans, etc. During the tourist season or with the aim of promoting the locality, the ensemble reproduces in the courtyard of the guesthouse elements from the village dance (*hora*), wedding customs, Christmas carols, etc. At the time of the research carried out in 2022, these initiatives did not produce an effect in Cerna and Beștepe.

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³⁵ Oral source: Tudorache Ioana.

³⁶ Oral source: Folescu Bianca.

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