



ÉTUDES ET DOCUMENTS
BALKANIQUES ET MÉDITERRANÉENS

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Vieilles maisons de Plovdiv (Bulgarie)
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**sous la rédaction de
PAUL H. STAHL**

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LES JUIFS SEPHARADES DE BULGARIE

Contribution

Dimitar Božilov

Les premières années après le changement politique du 9 septembre 1944, la Bulgarie se trouve dans une déstabilisation politique et dans une isolation internationale. Après une période de dix ans apparaissent les conditions d'une vie politique normale, mais cette possibilité est empêchée par l'imposition du modèle social de Union Soviétique où le rôle principal appartient au parti communiste. Cette situation a influencé directement la vie de la communauté des Juifs de Bulgarie, au point de vue de sa stabilité et de son comportement social. Les déplacements dans l'espace politique se répercutent dans le milieu juif. Les Juifs membres du parti communiste poussent vers la création d'un Front de la Patrie juif, qui graduellement occupe des positions clés dans les organisations juives. Durant les deux premières années s'est développé dans les institutions un conflit entre les Juifs communistes et les Juifs sionistes.

Dans mon étude sont présentés les caractères de la vie des Juifs bulgares, afin de savoir si leurs traditions et leur mode de leur vie se sont rétablis après la Seconde Guerre Mondiale. Lors des changements politiques de 1944¹ la structure sociale des Juifs bulgares est bien formée. Les conditions historiques dans lesquelles cette structure a été formée sont celles de la société bulgare urbaine et bourgeoise. En même temps la législation discriminative du pouvoir des années quarante a influencé l'activité professionnelle et leur stratification sociale.

Les recherches des sociologues ont prouvé que les Juifs ne représentaient pas un groupe privilégié économiquement. La plupart, avant la guerre, travaillent dans l'industrie et le commerce. A côté des travailleurs il y a un groupe important de producteurs et de commerçants qui ne se distinguent pas par rapport des habitants les plus pauvres habitants du pays. La bourgeoisie juive, jusqu'à 1942, lorsque elle perd ses positions économiques, n'était pas proportionnellement plus nombreuse que pour le reste de la Bulgarie.

Le changement politique déroulé en Bulgarie à la fin de la guerre inaugure une étape nouvelle de l'histoire des Juifs. Ainsi, l'émigration en Israël (pendant la période 1948-1952) et les changements économiques et sociaux de la Bulgarie ont influencé la structure des Juifs.

Les témoignages des personnes de religion mosaïque que nous avons interrogées, ne peuvent pas offrir une image complète sur la vie de cette période. Chaque personne interrogée avait d'une multitude de possibilités de répondre; la question qui se pose est si les interviewés avaient la volonté, le désir, l'intention de présenter plus que ce qui est écrit dans les livres d'histoire, s'ils pouvaient offrir des réponses vraies. Et, si ils se contentaient de reproduire les événements passés selon les thèses officielles, adoptaient-ils cette attitude par crainte, ou parce qu'ils étaient eux-mêmes partisans convaincus des thèses communistes?

Nous essayons de répondre à ces questions à l'aide des témoignages d'une vingtaine de personnes. Les entretiens essayent de savoir s'ils avaient la liberté d'observer leurs traditions, s'ils pouvaient parler librement leur langue natale, s'ils étaient surveillés, s'ils

¹ Le 9.09.1944 – Le coup d'Etat en Bulgarie, les communistes prennent le pouvoir

supportaient des pénalités dans le cas d'une présentation trop différente par rapport à l'éthos communiste. Nous n'affirmons pas que leurs réponses représentent la vérité concernant le statut d'une minorité, mais elles offrent des points de vue, des motivations, des justifications, des remarques qui, dans leur ensemble, nous permettent de visualiser et de comprendre le champ social.²

Le thème de ma recherche porte sur les spécificités sociales, économiques et politiques de la vie des Juifs de Bulgarie après la Seconde Guerre Mondiale et concerne le temps de pouvoir du parti communiste. Elle est qualifiée dans la nouvelle histoire de la Bulgarie comme totalitaire et autoritaire. Ce thème a été qualifié par un chercheur du Centre d'études juives de l'Université de Sofia comme ambitieux et difficile, dans le sens de l'absence totale de sources scientifiques concernant les Juifs pendant le régime communiste. Ce qui m'a encouragé à continuer malgré les difficultés, c'est mon désir de connaître l'héritage historique et culturel des Juifs bulgares pendant le XX-ème siècle.

Ma méthode de travail est l'approche biographique, méthode ancienne, utilisée par un grand nombre des chercheurs. L'objectif de cette méthode est "d'accéder par l'intérieur à une réalité qui dépasse le narrateur et le façonne. Il s'agit de saisir le vécu social, le sujet dans ses pratiques, dans la manière dont il négocie les conditions sociales qui lui sont particulières."³

BINA YOSIF DEKALO

Date of interview: April 2003 - Sofia

Bina Dekalo is a pleasant elderly lady, who is always ready to tell stories about her big family. She lives in the Mousagenitsa living estate [consisting mostly of concrete panel blocks of flats and located in the southeast part of Sofia], where she has also accommodated a young family who looks after her. They are friends of her granddaughter, who lives in Israel. She has a big room of her own, with a desk on which she has placed a typewriter, carefully covered with a piece of embroidery. With great sadness she explains that she cannot use it anymore, because she has a serious problem with her sight. She also has a wardrobe, a bed, a big table with dark red velvet cover with embroidery, which she keeps as a souvenir from her mother. Her favorite pastime is literature. She knows Ivrit very well and teaches it to students coming to her home several times a week. She is visited by guests very often and does not go out much now, because she is still recovering from a heavy fall. She is always elegantly dressed, with a nice hairdo. She is very kind and always willing to help with what she can.

My paternal and maternal ancestors came from Spain after the persecutions against Jews there some centuries ago [1]. My paternal grandfather Avram Aroyo used to gather us and tell us about the beautiful Spain. We passed these stories from generation to generation. His father used to tell him about the famous Aroyo family, who was named after a river in Spain, near which they lived. Our grandfather told us that his great great-grandfathers lived in Toledo, had big dairy farms and were very rich. Their produce of yellow cheese, cheese and milk was on high demand by all citizens of Toledo. Their company was famous and much respected. We were all sitting listening, fascinated by his words. He was very excited while telling us about the banishment of the Jews from Spain. In order to save themselves, his great great-grandfather, his family and relatives paid a lot of money to board a trade

² Pierre Bourdieu, *Rations pratiques. Une théorie de l'action*, Editions Meridiane, Bucuresti, 1999, pp.65.

³ F. Ferrarotti, 1983. *Histoire et histoires de vie. La méthode biographique dans les sciences sociales*

ship with some other Jewish refugees. They traveled for months around the Mediterranean Sea until they reached the shores of Turkey at that time, where they were welcomed very well. My grandfather was born in Yambol [a town in Southeast Bulgaria].

My **paternal grandfather** Avram Aroyo was the most respected of all in our house in Yambol. He was a handsome man with a short white beard, brown eyes, lean and agile, always wearing a kippah. He loved his grandchildren very much and never forgot their birthdays. I remember that he always whispered some prayer. He was present at the brit milah of each of the boys. These were grand ceremonies. On holidays such as Purim, Tu bi-Shevat he brought presents accompanied by something made of yellow cheese from his dairy farm. My grandfather had a big dairy farm near the town. A Bulgarian, Bai Yordan, was his partner. They were very good friends and we always invited him and his wife to lunch during our Jewish holidays. On the Christian holiday Easter my parents and my grandfather were invited to their place to eat kozunak [Easter cake] and eggs.

My grandfather was very hard working. He got up early every morning and went to the dairy farm. It was located in the outskirts of the town. I searched for some traces of that dairy farm later on, but I could not find any. They produced dairy products there and every day my grandfather brought home yellow cheese and butter. The sales and production were done mostly by Bai Yordan, whom my grandfather trusted a lot. My grandfather supervised the production process and paid much attention to quality and hygiene. Three or four workers worked in the dairy farm. It was a building consisting of a number of sheds. One of the sheds housed wooden dishes for the separation of the butter, and the other one – big troughs, in which they made yogurt. Everything was very clean and produced in a primitive way; I do not remember seeing any machines there. Grandpa Avram was very proud of this dairy farm. Everything they produced was much sought on the market. They made good money and my grandfather helped his three sons financially. But he loved my father most and they were always together. Grandpa Avram lived with us in the big house. When he returned from work in the evening, he washed himself, put on a house coat, ate something and left fresh cheese and butter from the dairy farm in the kitchen.

My grandfather insisted that his children and grandchildren observe the Jewish laws, study Tannakh and the history of the Jewish people. Every Saturday he took us to the synagogue and taught us to be proud of our origin. He himself went to the synagogue very often, even twice a day and gave money for its maintenance. On every holiday he told us the story of the Jews from the time of King David and King Solomon – ‘Shlomo ha Melech’. He told us about the Jews’ exodus from Egypt and how the waters of the sea parted to let them walk across the sea bed, while the Egyptian soldiers following them drowned.

My grandfather had small books with prayers in ancient Jewish, most of which he knew by heart. We had one room on the first floor in our big house in Yambol, where my grandfather went every morning to say his prayers.

My grandfather got along very well with my mother. They often sat together, drinking coffee and talking. My mother used to tell him about her family in Odrin and my grandfather about Spain. Once it was very hot and he told my mother that he was not feeling well. My mother advised him not to go to the dairy farm. Soon after that he died. He was a much respected man and many people came to attend his funeral. The hall was large and was full of people standing. Some Jewish women also came to sing Jewish mourning songs, praising God in Ladino. The rabbi of the synagogue came to my grandfather’s funeral and said the funeral prayer. We missed our grandfather very much and mentioned him very often.

My **paternal grandmother** Sunhula Aroyo was a humble woman devoted to household work. She was very hard working, always busy cooking, cleaning and looking after the children. Every day I saw her in the kitchen with a big apron and a kerchief on the head. I was impressed by the fact that all Jewish women in Yambol wore kerchiefs. My father had two brothers – Jules Aroyo and Lia Aroyo. Lia was a craftsman in Aytos, and Jules, my father’s younger brother, married in Rousse, where he had a haberdashery.

My **father** was a prosperous merchant and he could afford to support our big family. After he built the big house, he settled in it while it was still damp and that was the reason for the illness of his

first wife Bina, which died very young. My grandmother Sunhula took up looking after the children – Albert, Mois, Aron, Sami, Jacques, Carolina and Herzl. They also hired a woman who helped them.

My father had a very big shop for textile at the square in Yambol. His shop was always full of quality textile and that's why it had many clients. Besides, my father was a much respected and liked man, and many people entered the shop just to meet him.

My **maternal grandfather** Mordohay Behmoaras was very conservative. He forbade his daughters to walk freely beside a man and married them to the man who chose them. I saw my maternal grandparents a number of times. They lived in Odrin, which is in Turkey. Grandfather Mordohay was a chazzan in Odrin, he had a beard and wore a special hat, which was part of his special costume as a chazzan in the synagogue and a black cloak with stripes. His hat was small and round, black in color with seams in the middle, which were sewn with golden thread. This was his uniform, which he always wore. I went to visit my grandfather in Odrin and I have seen the synagogue there. My first impression from that synagogue was that it was richer than the one in Yambol and there were a lot of candlesticks with gas lamps in them. The Odrin synagogue had marble walls, which I found many beautiful. The synagogue in Yambol was from bricks, which were whitewashed and painted. I remember that the Jews in Odrin were different from the other people. All men had a small well-formed beard and behaved differently. They were reserved and polite and always greeted in Ivrit.

My **mother** Victoria was named Viducha in Odrin. When she was young, she did not want to go to school. Her father sent her to a religious school, where they studied Tannakh in Ivrit. She had strong memory and memorized a passage by heart as early as the first lesson. When she went home, she recited it to her father. But instead of being happy with his daughter's abilities, he got angry, because he thought that a woman should not study much, but should look after her children and her husband. That's why he forbade her to go to school. So, my mother did not go to school and she remained illiterate. When she issued her documents in Bulgaria, they wrote her name down as Victoria.

When she was 19 years old, my mother was married to a banker in Odrin, who was thirty years older than her. In the first year of their marriage she gave birth to a girl – Bella. After the birth she fell down with a mysterious illness, similar to the sleeping sickness and her husband returned her to grandfather Mordohay. He decided to take her to Jerusalem, to the places sacred for the Jews in order to heal her. In Istanbul where they were about to board a ship, they met a physician from Vienna, who asked my grandfather some questions and advised him to cancel his journey and visit his hospital in Istanbul. He started treating my mother by drawing blood from her arm and she started to recover very quickly. After a month she was completely well. My grandfather paid the physician generously. They were very happy and went on a holiday in some resorts in Turkey. After they returned in Odrin, the first thing my mother did was to go and see her husband and daughter, whom she had not seen since the delivery. It turned out that the banker had found another woman and had even bribed the authorities to marry them legally. Yet, my mother sued him for divorce. The banker paid a big compensation and so, at 21, my mother remained divorced, without any rights over her daughter, but with a big sum in the bank. After my mother divorced, she returned to live with her father.

My father often traveled to Odrin and Tzarigrad on business trips. Once when he was in Odrin he saw a tall, beautiful and elegantly dressed woman crossing the street. That was my mother. He immediately asked around about her and found out that she was from a highly religious Jewish family. My father offered her marriage and she agreed. They married in Odrin around 1906-1907. My father, however, did not tell her that he had seven children from his first wife in Odrin. They left for Yambol and all my father's children lined up and kissed her hand. After the seventh child my mother could not stand it any longer and fainted. After she regained consciousness she cried bitterly. All my father's relatives started to console her, his former wife's relatives also came and promised her that she would not look after all the children alone. My parents loved each other and my mother decided to stay and accepted the seven children. Everybody in Yambol talked about my mother's sacrifice. After she married in Bulgaria my mother received the name Victoria. Three children were born out of the big love between my parents – Marco, Lazar and I, Bina. My name was written as Bienvenida Aroyo in my birth certificate. My father, however, thought that the name sounded very strange for the Bulgarians and shortened my name to Bina. That's how my name was written in my first documents.

So, from my father's **first marriage** I have seven brothers and sisters – Albert, Mois, Aron, Sami, Jacques, Carolina and Herzl. From my parent's marriage I have two brothers – Marco and Lazar. We were all born in Yambol. From my mother's first marriage I have a sister Bella. She was born in Odrin. Of all my brothers only Marco followed my father's will and graduated from college. All the others had primary education in the Jewish school in Yambol. We had special teachers in Ivrit from Poland in our school. For the holidays each class had to prepare a programme. I remember that I had to talk about Pesach in Ivrit. We had to speak in Ivrit about all the holidays and explain what we were celebrating. Our holidays are related to the history of the Jews and that is how we learned our history.

My **sister** from my mother's first marriage – Bela Benaroya married a well-off merchant in Istanbul and lived there for a long time. She has two sons and one daughter. Her first child died of an illness when it was 12-13 years old. Her other children – Raphael and Sarah settled in the USA and in the 1990s she moved to live with them in Chicago where she died.

My **oldest brother** Albert Aroyo was a representative of a French perfume company. They liked him and invited him to work in Paris. I remember that before he left, he lived in Sofia. He married a Jew born in Rouse and called Rashel. So, he left for France with his family in 1936. His two daughters were ballet dancers and were immediately accepted in the general ballet group of the opera. When the Germans invaded France, they were interned to Lyon. All Jews there received an order for deportation. My father's friends from the company, however, did not let him go and hid him, his wife Rashel and his two daughters in a basement in an inner yard. They did not go outside for six months. But the elder daughter of Albert, Jana, could not stand it any longer and said that she would go to the ballet again. So, together with some children, friends of my brother, Jana went to the ballet. Every night her worried family waited eagerly for her. One night Jana was late more than usual and my brother Albert went out to look for her. But he had hardly crossed the first street when a German patrol stopped him. They saw that he was a Jew and surrounded him. At the same time Jana also appeared and when she saw what was happening, she ran to her father. So, they were both detained and deported together with the other Jews to the Auschwitz concentration camp. My brother was killed there and Jana survived by a miracle, but at a very high price. She was a very attractive girl with a slender figure. They violated her sexually and made her clean the toilets. All that, however, left its mark on her psyche. After the end of the war Rashel, the wife of my brother, was still in the hiding place and knew nothing about the fate of her husband and daughter. Jana was released from the camp and went to see her mother in Paris. Jana was unrecognizable and Rashel went into a shock at the sight of her daughter. Jana was also not well mentally, so they both spent some months in a hospital to survive the shock. After that, they received a rented flat and some money to live on. I learned all that from Jana's letters, which she sent me throughout the years. My niece Jana is still alive and lives in a senior home in a Paris suburb. My other niece Sofka has run the ballet of the London television. She lives in London.

My **next brother**, Mois Aroyo, married a Jew from a very rich family in Rouse. They had a factory producing gunpowder - 'Buko Eshkenazi and Co'. They produced gunpowder and weapons. My brother was director of that factory and was well off. His wife was Matilda. They had a daughter Jana, who graduated the French College in Rouse. During World War II they were not deported, because they paid much money. In 1948 they moved to Israel, in Haifa. There Jana's children, Herman and Mois, run together a factory producing passementerie.

My **brother Aron** was very adventurous. Even when we lived in Yambol, he had such inclinations. He loved trading with gold and valuable items and even when he was young he started secretly from my father with money from the turnover of the shop to buy gold and valuables from the villagers living near Yambol. Meanwhile my father could not sleep during the night worrying why the business was not going well. One night my brother Aron decided to gather the whole family and told us that he had prepared a surprise. He made us enter the hall where the lights were out. After we all gathered, he lit the lamps and drew the cover from a heap on the table. It was all gold and valuables. My father gasped, my mother scolded him very seriously for what he had done. My brother lived in Paris for twelve years before World War II. I guess he earned his living by selling that gold. He married in Pleven Mazal Behar, who was born there and they lived in Pleven all their life.

My next brother Sami married while we lived in Yambol. He married a Jew from Drama, Greece, named Sophie. During the wedding the bride was dressed in white and had a hat and a veil on her head. The veil was embroidered in such a way as if it was sprinkled with gold. The hat of the bride was decorated with artificial flowers. My brother Sami was dressed in a tail-coat, white shirt and black tie. There was an orchestra playing music. Special songs in Ladino were also sung during the wedding, mostly by my mother. One of them said: 'Bless them and let them live in peace and love'. There was also a song about the evil mother-in-law and the great love between the bride and the groom. Then followed blessings: 'May God give them health', 'May God give them wisdom', 'May God give them material prosperity'.

The ritual for the wedding started in the morning. At that time three or four young girls came, who helped the bride put on the wedding clothes. In accordance with the Jewish rituals the bride had to dress away from other people's sight. The music started playing early in the morning and it was very merry. The whole neighborhood gathered to watch, to listen and see the bride. It is typical for our Sephardic wedding rituals that an engagement should be made before the wedding, at which 'ashogar' [dowry] was made – the bride shows what she will bring into her new home – clothes, blankets, covers. They had to be luxurious and if possible with embroidery.

After the bride is ready, the groom comes to take her with a carriage. Then they go to the synagogue. The best man and maid of honor take the newly-weds by the hand and go to the pulpit where the rabbi is. Before the people enter the synagogue, they stay besides the entrance and the bride and the groom walk in first. The rabbi starts reading prayers for the wedding, which have very beautiful ancient Jewish melodies. Then they take a sip of the wine and the groom breaks the glass. Then the rabbi declares them husband and wife and blesses them. After that the guests approach them and greet them.

Sami's wife was very beautiful but suffered from strong headache, for which she took very strong drugs and opiates. Consequently, she became dependant on these medicines and they ruined her health. My brother Sami was the only one in the family who remained living in Yambol. He was a retailer. He has two children, with whom he left for Israel in 1948 – Pepo (Yosif), who was a clerk in Tel Aviv and Mois, who worked as a shop assistant in Tel Aviv.

My next brother is Jacques. He came with us in Rousse and even worked for a short while there as a director of the factory producing springs, which my father built. Both Jacques and my father did not understand much this business and they went bankrupt. When we left Rousse, Jacques went to live in Sofia where he had a shoe shop and got married. His wife is a Jew born in Sofia, called Julia. In 1948 they all left for Israel and settled in Tel Aviv.

My sister Carolina had an unfortunate fate. She married a Turkish Jew in Sofia named Buko Agranati and lived with him. I remember that she went to live in Sofia at the place of our brothers Albert and Jacques, who found her that man. But my parents did not like him much. He worked as a shop assistant. They had three girls. Buko Agranati had no Bulgarian documents and when the Law for the Protection of the Nation [2] was passed, he had to leave Bulgaria. So, he decided to join the group of refugees intending to go to Palestine on a sailing boat through Black Sea and Turkey. My brothers advised Carolina to stay and promised her they would support her. But she decided to leave with her husband and somewhere around the first kilometer from the shore the boat named Salvador crashed and my sister and her three children drowned. Her husband was among the few people who survived. He got married once again in Israel and had three children. The trip with the boat was organized by a Zionist, named Komforti who had taken much money for it.

My grandfather Avram said about my brother Herzl that he was the amulet of the family. When he was very young, he went down with meningitis and that affected his mental development. On holidays my grandfather would always give him the best present and always told us to look after him, because he won't live forever. Herzl went to live with our brothers Albert and Jacques in Sofia and found work there as a salesman at a stall. They found him a wife, named Ernesta. In 1948 he moved with his wife to Israel and found himself some small job in trade in Tel Aviv.

My brother Marco graduated the French College in Rousse. From an early age he started supporting my parents and me. After my father went bankrupt in Rousse, we were left with no money

and we went to our brother in Lom, where he worked as a correspondent in French in the newly-opened branch of the General Bank. Without his help, I would not have been able to finish my high-school education. He insisted that I should study, while I wanted to work and help my parents.

Every year my brother Marco went on an excursion to a European country. One year he visited Palestine. Then he decided that he should move to live there to help in the establishment of agricultural farms in the country, where the people struggled with the marshes and the desert storms. In May, 1936 he left us a big sum in the bank and left for Palestine joining a group of Jews from Bulgaria, who were sent to the northern part of the country – in Tiberias. There they founded that agricultural village Kfar Hitim with much hard work and deprivation. Before that German and Turkish Jews had tried to cultivate the land there. But they could not cope with the hard climate. The Bulgarian Jews worked very hard to solve the problems and brought water from Lake Kinneret following the project of my brother Marco. Together with the other settlers from Bulgaria they planted green belts against the warm winds which destroyed the harvest. Today Kfar Hitim is a picturesque village at a high peak and there are many trees and flowers in it. My brother still lives in the village. Although he is quite old, he does some office work half-time for the village and welcomes guests and tourists from around the world. He is one of the most respected people in the whole region.

When my other brother, Lazar Aroyo reached 13 and seeing that my father cannot support the family and cannot send him to study, he decided to go to Pazardjik, where there was a school funded by the Zionist organization teaching agriculture and various crafts. After he studied two years in that school, around 1927 he left for Israel. He traveled two months until he reached the country. Together with other youths from Bulgaria, Poland and Russia they found the Ma'abarot kibbutz struggling with the Arabs, the marshes and poverty. Today the Ma'abarot kibbutz is quite advanced in all respects. My brother was in charge of repairs and maintenance of the cars and farming machines. He had learned that craft in Bulgaria in the school in Pazardjik, which was called 'haTikva' [Hope]. My brother Lazar married a Bulgarian Jew in the kibbutz. Her name was Rosa and she was a teacher in Ivrit in Yambol. They had two children – Gidon and Oro. They live in the kibbutz.

Yambol was a small, but lively trade town. The Tundzha River passes through it and its waters were used to irrigate the gardens growing mainly vegetables. The horse tram transporting the people to the railway station was remarkable. The station itself was outside the town. My brothers and I used to go to watch the two pairs of horses, which pulled two carriages each, always full of people on their way to the station [3].

Another remarkable thing about my hometown were the '**market-gardens**' near the Tundzha River. In the evenings many families went near the gardens to buy special lettuces, which they called 'fat hens', from the gardeners. This is a special kind of enormous and very juicy lettuces, which were grown only near Yambol. The villagers were friends with the Jews and every evening waited for them to come again. One of my brothers, Mois, who married in Rousse, always said that such lettuces grew nowhere else in the world and he missed the Yambol ones very much.

I remember the **Turkish bath** as a low building made of solid stones. In the middle of the bath there was a large area of stone plates, which had been heated and on which people sat in order to sweat. After that people rubbed themselves with special kinds of bags and washed at the faucets. I remember that there were no showers. The bath had separate rooms and entrances for men and women. Usually we went to the bath on Thursday or Friday. There was an entrance hall where we ate. My mother used to prepare a bag with cheese, bread, eggs and butter; we sat on some chairs and ate. It took quite some time until we entered the bathing rooms, because of our breakfast. After a while we went to the entrance hall to eat again. The children had great fun playing at the bath. All evening we would tell each other stories about what we did there. My grandfather Avram Aroyo said in Ladino 'Se fue Djoha al banio tuvo ke kontar mil i un anyo', that is, 'Went Djoha to the bath and had stories to tell for one thousand and one years.'

I remember that everyone at home paid much attention to **hygiene**. There was a room with a tub which was covered with tiles. We filled it with warm water and bathed every day.

Many Jewish families lived in Yambol. They were mainly merchants and craftsmen. All spoke to each other in **Ladino**, they were very united and were free to celebrate all Jewish religious holidays. The people united around Zionist organizations such as General Zionists [4], Poaley Zion [5], Maccabi [6] and others in the town. Both young and old were members of Maccabi such organization. On Yom Ashekel [7] the Maccabi members made a manifestation wearing sports clothes, passing along the main street of the town and all people would go out to watch them. The whole town danced with them. During that time all Jews were very inspired by the ideas of Theodor Herzl [8] for the foundation of the Jewish state and Yom Ashekel was a day when they raised money to **buy lands in Palestine**.

In order to solve the financial problems related to the municipality, the synagogue and the school, every Friday, before Sabbath, the richer Jews gathered in the municipality and decided what to do.

Yambol was a town celebrating freely and unitedly the Jewish holidays. All Jewish families dressed in their most official clothes and went to the synagogue. The synagogue was always crowded and many times people were left outside. The women always had to wear kerchiefs and there was a separate room for them – at the balcony. I remember that once I went to the synagogue without a kerchief and they did not let me in. When I was very little, they did not bring me to the synagogue. After some time I had to wear a kerchief in order to enter the synagogue. Once the balconies where the women prayed were being repaired. We had a rabbi then, who did not allow the men and women to mix, and so that the women would not be left outside, he ordered that a cloth be put as a screen between the men and the women. Everyone was much surprised what that cotton print was doing in the synagogue.

The whole trade street in Yambol was owned by Jews. It started from our house, which was in the center, then followed the house of Mois Kohen, who is brother of my father's first wife – he had a big textile store. There were a lot of shops after his house – all Jewish ones, there were goldsmiths, grocer's stores, selling lettuces, potatoes, onion, garlic, fruit and vegetables, and a shop from which we always bought on Rosh Hashanah, because they sold oranges. There were also some shops on this street which sold kosher food.

My father Yosif Aroyo with the help of my grandfather and the dowry he received from his first wife's brother managed to build our **big house** in Yambol. The house was always full of people, even my father's younger brother had settled to live with us together with his wife from Pazardjik. My father's house was built near the center village square, the 'megdan' as the large empty area in the center of Yambol was called. The meetings and festivals in the town were organized there. The Friday market was also there. The General Zionists held meetings on Yom Ashekel and on other occasions.

Our house had two floors and a yard, where when we were children we played with the others, some of whom were Bulgarians and others not. There were eight rooms on the first floor, a long hall and a big kitchen with a balcony. In the summers we went out to eat on that balcony. Gas lamps, very modern for the times, hung from both sides of the walls in the hall, which we called the salon. Banquets of the leaderships of the Zionist organizations took place there. Speeches were held, awards were given to people who had excelled in the social work, the hymn of the Jews and many other songs in Ladino and Hebrew were sung. Alongside the hall we placed a long table covered with white blankets, which encompassed the whole room. We put on it beautiful silver spoons and forks. We, the children, were not allowed to stay at the banquets and peeped through a half-open door during the ceremonies. Our whole family loved the big house and was very proud with it. The rooms were well furnished with different furniture for the children of my father's two marriages – eight sons and two daughters. I will always remember that house. When my family moved to Rousse we always regretted selling the house, leaving the town and the good life we had in Yambol. I cannot forget the big kitchen we had in that house. It was as big as the other rooms and had a large window looking at a yard with a covered well. People told various incredible stories about the well to frighten the children. There was an extraordinary cooker in the kitchen made of fireproof bricks and taking up almost the whole wall. My mother used it in the mornings and in the afternoons. The cooker was not lit on Saturdays only. My grandfather Avram forbid us to light a fire then, and my mother was 'chasida', that is, pious. Bags with

vermicelli and couscous made by my grandmother Sunhula for the winter hung from the white walls of the kitchen. In the autumn we made bottled fruit, liutenitsa and jams. It was typical for that time to hang turkey rounds from the ceiling to dry up.

One of the remarkable things I will never forget is the big 'mangal' [a kind of coal-burning stove] with tall cast-iron legs. Every Friday gypsies came to sell us charcoal. My grandmother kindled the fire with the charcoal and put the stove on the balcony and a horseshoe among the charcoal to protect us from the carbon dioxide and when everything turned to embers, she brought it into the large hall. We warmed all the rooms in this way during the winter. In Yambol the winter was not that cold as in other towns of Eastern and Northern Bulgaria. The stoves were enough to warm the rooms. The 'mangal' had another function too – when the fire subsided, my grandmother put crushed onion with cheese in the embers and this was a wonderful breakfast.

Our relations with the Bulgarians and the Armenians were very warm. And since my mother was born in Turkey and knew Turkish, our family was friends with some Turks, too.

We strictly observed the Jewish rituals and traditions in my father's house. My mother Victoria was very religious. When my grandmother Sunhula and she cooked, my mother said that the meat should be salted an hour before it was cooked, because that was what the Jewish laws said. She also said other things, which unfortunately I do not remember. On Sabbath she followed the tradition: not to work, not to light a fire, to go to the synagogue, to prepare in advance special dishes for this day. These dishes were put in the big cooker, where they remained warm without a fire being lit up. On Sabbath my father Yosif Aroyo closed the shop, put on his new clothes and went to the synagogue with a prayer book in hand. He knew all prayers by heart. My grandfather Avram had taught him the prayers when he was a child and in the Jewish school it was obligatory to repeat the prayers many times, not only on 'Erev Sabbath', but also on the other high holidays. When my father would return from the synagogue on Saturday, the big table in the hall would already be laid on for breakfast. It would be full of cheese pastries, cheese crackers, boiled eggs, cooled brandy and fruit. All children would stand up until the prayer was said, after that we would all say 'Amen' and sit down to eat.

We used special dishes for Pesach. We had a nice big wicker basket, nice cooking pots, special plates, glasses and everything necessary. On Pesach the house was cleaned thoroughly and in the evening before the holiday my grandfather would go around the house with a candle to check if no bread crumb, 'chametz', had been left out. It was forbidden to bring bread in the house on Pesach. We took out the new dishes and arranged them on a long table. My father's two brothers with their families always came for the holidays. The wife of one of my father's brothers was a very good cook and prepared some chickens in the cooker.

On Pesach we prepared special loaves of bread without salt and soda resembling matzah. They are called 'boyos'. These loaves were very hard and we had to dip them in water to eat them. We arranged the table for the holiday very carefully. The 'boyos' loaves were put in water in the evening and the next day we would drain the water and prepare a mixture with eggs, which we fried in the form of small balls. We also sprinkled them with sugar or sugar syrup. We do this today too. On Pesach we ate the best dishes – roasted hens, leeks balls, potato balls, lots of nice paste products such as cheese crackers, spinach pastry, meat pastry and sweet things such as quince jam or cherry and morello jam.

On Pesach, my grandfather or my father read the Haggadah in Hebrew. In Bulgarian the prayer was told in the following way: 'What happened this night, as different from all the other nights, is that every other night we are different, but on this night we are all gathered together at one table'. Then God is praised: 'You are the king, you are the master, you are everything.' After the praise for heaven, the story of Moses is told.

On Yom Kippur when we fasted during the whole day, we all went to the synagogue in the evening. The children who had reached 10 years also fasted. We were allowed to eat by seven o'clock the previous day and nothing was eaten on Yom Kippur. There was a small fountain in the yard of the synagogue in Yambol, in which the shochet slaughtered a hen for us, when we brought him one.

On **Sukkot**, the holiday marking the gathering of the harvest, we made tents in the synagogue. We sang very beautiful songs then. On Sukkot we blessed fertility and everything, which grows and feeds us. There is a very poetic psalm of David for this holiday. It is a thanksgiving prayer in ancient Hebrew, which is said in the synagogue.

Purim is a holiday related to the salvation of the Jews. On Purim we made very nice masquerades with masks. People also made ring-shaped buns decorated with red paint and various figures with flowers. There were some sweets typical for Purim, which were called 'roskas de alhashuv' in Ladino. 'Alhashuv' in Ladino means a mixture of sugar and walnuts. These were tasty ring-shaped buns, sprinkled with sesame and filled inside with this mixture of sugar and walnuts. Among all the thanksgiving prayers said in the synagogue there was one during which one knocks with a hand on something, symbolizing the killing of Haman, who had prepared the conspiracy against the Persian king according to the story about Purim. Masks are put on at home in the evenings. I had a very beautiful mask, which one of my brothers had made for me. It was a smiling black girl. I would put on a pleated dress without sleeves and I loved dancing. On Purim the town musicians came to the Jewish school and people had a great time there. Even Bulgarians celebrated with us. Our relations with the Bulgarians were very warm and I remember that they congratulated us when we had holidays. Various neighbors, friends of my mother and clients of my father came to greet us.

Even today I still light candles on **Chanukkah**. It was not a practice to exchange presents on Chanukkah. On that occasion we would light one candle each day for seven days and an eighth candle was always burning for the 'shammash'. The 'shammash' was the servant in the synagogue who kept watch on the candle all the time.

We also had a holiday called **Slichot**. Then we did not sleep all night and we went to the synagogue precisely at 12 o'clock at midnight. I remember people going to the synagogue during the night and the whole street leading to it turning black with them. We had a very good time. We loved slichot and my mother held us by the hand while going to the synagogue. 'Slichot' means evening prayers to God before a holiday. [Editor's note: the interviewee mixes some information because Slichot is special order of service consisting of non-statutory additional prayers which are recited on all fast days, on occasions of special intercession and during the Penitential season which begins before Rosh Ha-Shanah and concludes with the Day of Atonement.] We went to evening prayers before Rosh Hashanah. I think on the occasion of slichot we went for a number of consecutive nights. At that time no Jew was sleeping and we all gathered in the synagogue.

My father was selected chairman of the General **Zionists** in Yambol. He was a gifted speaker and held speeches at the meetings which took place in front of our house. He told the people about Theodor Herzl [8] and his book 'The Jewish State' and about the buying of lands from the Arabs in Palestine. For his successful social activities he was awarded a medal from the leadership of the General Zionists. I remember that we were very proud of this medal. My mother hid it in the wardrobe wrapped in a golden cloth and on Yom Ashekel she brought it out and my father put it on his lapel.

Life in Yambol was very nice. We all lived very happily. But in the end of the 1920s the country fell into a grave economic crisis [9]. As a result, my father's business declined and he went bankrupt. He had to support his big family by himself and that was not easy. So in 1929 my father had to sell the house and our whole family moved to live in Rousse [a town on the Danube coast in Northern Bulgaria]. My father decided to build a factory producing bed-springs with the money he had left. He took for a partner an Ashkenazi Jew named Berkovich. I remember that he came to our house, which we had rented and we were impressed by the fact that he ate lots of sausages and threw their peelings on the floor. My mother would ask him politely not to do that. My father, however, understood nothing of this business and went bankrupt very quickly. This was a hard blow for him and he went down with a very serious sclerosis. After the bankruptcy our brothers supported us and we sold some more valuable things. My mother had a very nice gold necklace and a watch, which she sold. In the meantime, my brothers from my father's first marriage married and found work.

We lived in **Rousse** for around two years. I studied in the high school there in my first and second grade (after the four elementary grades in the Jewish school in Yambol). And since there was

no one to support us my brother Marco called us to live with him in the town of Lom [a small town in northern Bulgaria also on the Danube coast], where he had settled. I continued to study there in the local Bulgarian high school. There I had a music teacher, Motsev, who had formed a choir, in which I took part. He liked my singing and advised me to apply in the conservatory and study singing.

Around 1935 my parents and I moved to live in Sofia. My brother Marco who supported us decided to leave for Israel and we decided to move out from Lom. In Sofia we rented a house at the corner of Hristo Botev blvd and St. St. Cyril and Methodius street. [The west part of the center close to the Jewish neighborhood of the town.] It was a two-storey house with a ground floor. We had to climb some stairs with iron railings. The house was old, but beautiful. There was one more Jewish family on the upper floor. My father died in 1936 in this house and was buried in the Jewish cemetery.

In Sofia I worked as a shop assistant and tried to help with what I could, because the money was never enough. I enrolled to study singing in the conservatory. I was admitted to study dramatic soprano. The director of the conservatory advised me to take additional singing lessons and his wife Ruth Tsankova, who was German, became my tutor. I did not graduate from the conservatory, because the Law for the Protection of the Nation was passed and I was expelled, because I was a Jew.

In 1938 I married my first husband Israel Vasser, who was a secretary of the spiritual council in the central synagogue. Our love was great, especially his. We married in the synagogue, where a chazzan read the wedding prayers and the rabbi was present as an honorary guest. Both my husband and his father were very devoted to our religion. They did not eat food other than kosher. The ritual required that the dowry be presented first – usually this is money the bride's family gives to the groom's family. We did not have a civic marriage.

In 1941 we had a son, Rami. We lived in our house with my mother who looked after the child. At that time I worked in a socks production factory. However, I did not know that he was a member of an illegal communist group. In 1942 he disappeared with a group of Jews and until 1950 I knew nothing about him. Then I found out from my brothers in Israel that he had abandoned us and I was very hurt. I learned that he regretted leaving his family very much and that he did not stay in Bulgaria where the Jews were saved. While running to Palestine, he passed through a lot of places where he saw horrible massacres of Jews. I heard that he had met a family and started seeing another woman. I do not know what happened to him after that.

In the meantime after the Law for the Protection of the Nation was passed in 1939 we were given badges and a signboard with a **yellow star** was put on the door of our house. The situation of the Jews grew worse. At first we were registered in the municipality. There **the clerks treated us very badly**. They created a commissariat for the Jewish issue and a plan for our deportation to Poland. When we heard that, my Jewish friends and I went to the Turkish mosque, because we planned to accept the Islam religion and save ourselves. This was a stupid decision and of course the imam dissuaded us. The authorities had issued an order that Jews should not go out after 9 pm, but the Bulgarians helped us and we could walk more freely. The commissariat decided to send the men to labor camps. There was also one group who were sent to a prisoner's camp in Kaylaka near Pleven. The building of this camp was set on fire and some people burned to death, while others managed to save themselves.

In the spring of 1944 my mother and I **were interned** to the town of Haskovo [a town in Southeast Bulgaria]. My brother Sami was with us, too. At first we were accommodated in the school, and then an order came that we could rent a flat in a specific living estate. So, I managed to find a small room where we settled. It was great poverty. We did not have a bath and we had to go to the town's bath. And to reach it, we had to violate the ban to enter other living estates. We had no right to go out and walk around.

In Haskovo the Jewish women were allowed to arrange fruits at the train station and the men dug hiding places for the army near the town's hills. There was a synagogue in Haskovo and a very rich Jewish family lived near it. They gave us delicious food – buns and chocolate. When I was in the school, a Turkish family brought us food for the child. A boy also brought us some food from home. I had sold everything I had at the black market – clothes, shoes, cloths. But the money was spent very quickly. There were some good people, and if it were not for them I do not know how I could have

coped. My brother Jacques and his wife had some money saved which helped them. In the school yard there was a cauldron, in which beans were cooked every evening.

There was an illegal **communist organization** in Haskovo. I was in touch with this organization. I started meeting members of this organization, because I sympathized with the communist ideas. There were many Jews in the illegal communist organizations at that time. I remember that one member of our organization was caught by the police and after they beat him up, he told them the names of most members. He omitted only my name. There was a trial and sentences. There was one Jew from Plovdiv, who was killed without a trial and sentence. Others were sentenced to life imprisonment. But they were released the same year, because 9th September 1944 came [10]. Others saved themselves by escaping to the partisan squads. On 9th September 1944 they came down from the mountain and were welcomed with flowers.

I remember that once a Soviet plane had made an emergency landing in Haskovo. The pilot was very surprised that people welcomed him with flowers. He was hidden away by the communist organization. After some time 9th September 1944 came, which was a joyous day for all. On 9th September 1944 we were told that we were free and we took the badges off. Everybody was very happy and we walked freely outside. After the internment to Haskovo, I went to live on Veslets Str in Sofia.

Shortly after 9th September 1944 a Jewish cultural and educational organization was established in Sofia. I started working there. This organization solved various problems – accommodating people, who had been interned and returned to Sofia, distributing clothes and food received from the Joint organization [11]. I was very eager to continue my education in the conservatory, but everything I had experienced during the Holocaust, the hunger and deprivations had affected my vocal capabilities and I could no longer sing in the high pitch range.

After 9th September 1944 Eli Ashkenazi [12], who was a lawyer, but was very interested in scholarly issues, founded the Balkan Studies Institute in Sofia. There was a project in the institute to teach all Balkan languages and Ivrit. I was appointed there to teach Ivrit.

The first years after 9th September 1944 were, on the whole, poor. We did not have much money then. The situation in Bulgaria was such that we all received rations for bread. The Joint organization helped much the Jews then. An American representative of the organization arrived in Sofia and brought us many new and second-hand clothes, powder milk, canned food. Then gradually the country stabilized. After the Central Committee of the Communist Party [13] was founded and established itself as leader of the nation, the Joint organization was banished from the country, because they thought that their representative was a foreign agent. All property of the organization was given away to senior homes and other places. Joint had brought to Sofia knitting and sewing machines to give the Jews employment.

Before 9th September 1944 the supporters of **communist ideas** were divided into two groups. One we called 'the real communists'. They distributed leaflets, made sabotages and attacks. I was a member of the sympathizing groups, which were not given very hard and responsible tasks. I started to support these ideas when I was 13 years old. At that time we lived in Lom. There was a lawyer there whose name was Asher Levi. He had a remarkable appearance. He walked around with a black 'rubashka' [a coat without lapels with buttons from top to bottom] and a golden necklace with two tassels. He had wild hair which he combed backwards. He was the 'flag' of the communists in Lom. He was a Jew and he organized meetings in the Jewish school in Lom. There he managed to form a group of sympathizers to the communists, which I also joined. When the Law for the Protection of the Nation was passed the whole country was flooded with leaflets against this law. This was done by the communists.

In 1948 I married Mois Dekalo. We met in Sofia in the Lenin regional committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party. We had a civic marriage. He regarded the Jewish rituals as old-fashioned. He was a wise man, but he was not religious. On the issue of the establishment of a Jewish state, he thought that the Jewish people must have their own state. Only I was interested in Judaic issues. My second husband was born in Bourgas. He joined the Union of Young Workers [14] at an early age. His whole family was very poor and they were all communists. My husband was in prison because of his

anti-fascist activities in the 1940s. After 9th September 1944 he was released. Afterwards he returned for a short time in Bourgas and then came to Sofia. We met in Sofia and we married. We rented a small flat on Ekzarh Yosif Str in the center of the town.

My husband was not very pleased with his work, because he preferred social sciences and art to trade. The leadership of the communist party, however, thought that since he was a Jew, he understood more about trade and did not make him head of a department. My husband was a great idealist, for example, he did not want us to buy a flat, because he thought that he did not fight for that. But I saw what life really was and what the others were doing and I bought the flat in the Mousagenitsa living estate [a living estate in the Southern part of Sofia] in which I live today.

In 1950 I started working in the Lenin District Committee of the communist party, firstly in the business department, later in the department for campaigns and propaganda. But I was overloaded with work there and my husband and I decided that I should quit that job, because I could not bear the stress. We went for a long holiday at the seaside. After I recovered, I started work as a clerk in a workshop producing metals named Vaptsarov. Then I went to the Zemlyane construction plant. I was appointed party secretary there. I worked there with a colonel, who was about to be retired and all the time passed most of the work to me. I found all that very hard, because I had household work to do, too.

After 9th September 1944 I was very happy. Firstly, the Law for the Protection of the Nation was abolished. We became citizens with equal rights of the so-called 'people's' republic of Bulgaria. Party groups and district organizations were formed. I joined the party organization in my living estate – at that time I lived at Veslets Str, which is in the center of Sofia. I was wholly devoted to my work in the Lenin district committee of the Communist Party. The main task of the district committees of the communist party was to strengthen the new model of government, which was expressed in the dominance of the Communist Party. My work was a social one. We organized lectures in Marxism and Leninism; we introduced people to the statute of the Bolshevik Party in Russia. They liked me and wanted to transfer me to the city committee of the party. But there was not enough staff in my district committee so I stayed there. During the communist rule I visited the best holiday resorts. Together with my husband and my son we loved spending our holidays at the seaside, mostly in August. There were a lot of organized excursions by the district committee of the party. We visited historic and natural sights throughout the whole country – monasteries, resorts, towns.

I am very grateful to my husband Mois Dekalo for helping me with the household work. He did the shopping and sometimes cooked. When I was not at home, he took care of everything. We found enough free time for some cultural activities. We did not miss a new performance by the Ivan Vasov state theatre and by the youth theatre. I liked very much the repertoire of the youth theatre, because it was more modern. At that time theatre tickets were very cheap, much cheaper than now. I went to the cinema very rarely.

During the communist rule we observed the Jewish traditions to a lesser extent. I always observed Rosh Hashanah, Pesach and some of the other holidays. When I wanted to celebrate some of our holidays at home, I let my management know and they even gave me a day off. On the whole, **when I lived with my parents we observed the Jewish rituals and traditions. When my husband and I went to live on our own, we were not much able to do that,** because I was devoted to my work in the district committee of the Communist Party.

I worked in Zemlyane until 1972. After that I taught private lessons in Ivrit to children and students from Bulgarian and Jewish origin and wrote for the Evreiski Vesti newspaper. [A monthly newspaper, published by the Jewish community in Bulgaria 'Shalom'.] The editors there liked my style very much. They published some of my short stories and feature articles.

My son Rami studied in a Bulgarian school in Sofia. After that he graduated from the Chemical and Technological Institute. He had to do some training and was appointed in a tire producing factory, which was a Jewish one and was called Bakish. He was an ordinary worker there. He married a Jew from Sofia, while he was a university student. Her name is Matilda. She was studying dentistry. Their wedding was **not religious** and we did not go to the synagogue. She became a dentist in First City Hospital. However, he divorced his wife, who soon after that went down with

some disease and died. My son has a daughter from this marriage, Sabina. She graduated the music academy and now lives in Israel.

After that my son started working in a laboratory testing nuclear energy. There he was assigned the task to develop a plan for utilization of prescribed doses of nuclear energy in some machine. Many teams had tried before that, but unsuccessfully. My son, however, managed to do it. Everybody congratulated him and he was told that he would receive an award of 800 leva, which was not a small sum at that time. But the board of directors decided to spend the money on a banquet. My son was very hurt, because he devoted a lot of months to this project. So, he decided to leave the job and moved to Israel.

My son moved to Israel in 1990. He studied the language in the town of Akko for six months. Then he started work in the village of my brother Lazar near Akko. He started work in a chemical laboratory in Beer Sheva. He had an accident there. One night he went to check something in the lab. Just at that moment something started hissing and there was an explosion. In order to save himself, Rami jumped out of the fourth floor and injured his foot badly. There are Jews all over the world living in that town. My son, however, did not manage to become close with them, because they had a different lifestyle. He has a girlfriend, a Bulgarian Jew born in Sliven who has been living in Israel for a long time.

I have been to Israel four times. Since I was a member of the Communist Party, it was not a problem for me to go there. But always before I left, some people from the intelligence service came and asked me where I was going. I only told them that I did not know Israel and went only to see my brothers. My first impression from Israel was that the country was making progress. Everything was in the process of construction. I went there for the first time in 1952 together with my husband. I was visiting my brothers, who welcomed me warmly. We, however, decided not to remain in Israel, because we were felt distant from the mentality of the people living there and we were very poor.

I was in my brother Lazar's kibbutz – the Ma'abarot kibbutz. He had a service station for machines. There were cars, harvesters, tractors, agricultural machines in the garage, which were given by the state and had to be maintained. There were some people who were in charge of that there. My brother was building his house at that time. They lived in some kinds of sheds - big wooden houses, made of some material, which was very good. My brother had a bedroom, a corridor and a dining-room. Everything was very modern. The kitchens were small, but comfortable, they had everything – a refrigerator, freezers, dishwashers. I was also impressed by the organization and life in the kibbutz. Everyone worked what he or she could do best.

During the events in the Czechoslovakia in 1968 and in Hungary in 1954 [Ed. note: In fact, the events in Hungary took place in 1956.] the information about them reached us through a bulletin issued by the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party. The official position was against these coup attempts. But there was much false information in them.

The Jewish organization decreased its activity after the Aliyah [15] in 1948-49. During the totalitarian regime the Jewish organization was most of all a cultural organization. Yet, there were some religious Jews left and the synagogue was kept in good state. In the other towns, however, most synagogues were turned into warehouses and small halls. I remember that even the central synagogue in Sofia was about to be turned into an opera. This however sparked the disapproval of the Jewish organizations throughout the world and the decision was cancelled.

After 9th September 1944 the general policy of the party was against any religions. Jews were forbidden by the Communist Party to celebrate holidays together. Although it was officially forbidden, we found our ways to celebrate them. I went to the synagogue too, although the communist organizations did not approve it. Ever since I was a child, I have been listening to the prayers of grandfather Avram and my father, I understand them and I like them very much. I remember that I had asked a woman working in the Central Committee of the BCP [Bulgarian Communist Party], Velicha Kostova, why Jews were not allowed to celebrate their holidays and the Armenians and Turks were allowed to. She could not answer me. I was always afraid when I went to the synagogue. There were some informers, watching what the people were doing and speaking and then reporting to the secret services. A Bulgarian friend of mine, who was an active member of the Communist Party, told a joke

about Todor Zhivkov [16] during one meeting. Some informer reported that to the authorities and he was imprisoned for 12 years. So, one joke could destroy one's whole life at that time.

I went to Israel in the 1970s too. But at that time I was very cautious. I had a friend in Haifa, whose husband worked as a customs official. Their family had a friend in the Israel intelligence service. When he found out that I was from Bulgaria, he wanted to visit them, to meet me. He was a Polish Jew and tried to question me about some specific sites in Bulgaria, which I knew nothing about. I kept in touch with my relatives in Israel mainly by letters. I loved writing letters. My brothers Sami and Jacques wrote to me the most. I could correspond freely with my brothers in Israel.

During the totalitarian regime my financial situation was quite good compared to the times around World War II and the times after 1989. I think that we live in some 'sick' capitalism, that this is not a democracy. Besides, the money that most people receive is not enough. This capitalism in which we live today is like a prematurely born child.

When the changes in Bulgaria and in Eastern Europe started in 1989, I was against them. Of course, I was not against democracy and freedom of speech and the press. I think that a large part of the advantages of democracy related to the free professional fulfillment of the individual did not take place.

Most of my friends throughout the years have been Bulgarians. There are also some Jewish families who visit me. I keep in touch with them by phone, because I am recovering from a heavy fall. We have a good organization of clubs in the Jewish home. We have a club 'Health', club of Ladino speakers and club of Ivrit speakers. Cultural programs, discussions and lectures are being organized for the Jews there.

Glossary

1. In the 15th century after the Jews were banished from Spain, a big part of those who lived there settled on the Balkan Peninsula. Some of the Jews in Spain were killed by the Inquisition, others adopted Christianity and most of them left Spain.
2. Law for the Protection of the Nation: Law adopted by the National Assembly in December 1940 and promulgated on 23rd January 1941, according to which Jews did not have the right to own shops and factories. Jews living in the center of Sofia were forced to move to the outskirts of the town. The internment of Jews in certain designated towns was legalized, in preparation for their deportation to concentration camps.
3. During the 1920s in Yambol there was a horse tram, which consisted of four horses, harnessed in teams of two one after the other, which tugged two carriages on railways.
4. General Zionists: A social political formation of followers of the ideas of Theodor Herzl for the foundation of a Jewish state. In Bulgaria the members of this formation were among the more well-off Jews and paid a member's fee.
5. Poaley Zion: left Zionist organization
6. Maccabi: Jewish sports organization
7. Yom Ashekel: Day devoted to the collection of money to be used to buy land in Palestine for the foundation of a Jewish state
8. Herzl, Theodor (1860-1904): Jewish journalist and writer, the founder of modern political Zionism.
9. Crises of the 1930s: The world economic crisis that began in 1929 devastated the Bulgarian economy. The social tensions of the 1920s were exacerbated when 200,000 workers lost their jobs, prices fell by 50 percent, dozens of companies went bankrupt, and per capita income among peasants was halved between 1929 and 1933.
10. 9th September 1944: The day the communists officially took power in Bulgaria.
11. Joint: American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Late in 1944, JDC entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief effort. By the end of 1947, some 700,000 Jews received aid from JDC. More than 250,000 of them lived in Displaced Persons (DP) camps operated by JDC. JDC's retraining programs helped people in DP camps learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life.
12. Eli Ashkenazi: Lawyer, founder of the Institute of Balkan Studies in Sofia
13. Central Committee of the Communist Party: The supreme leading body of the Bulgarian Communist Party
14. UYW: The Union of Young Workers. A communist youth organization, which was legally established in 1928 as a sub-organization of the Bulgarian Communist Youth Union. After the coup d'état in 1934, when the parties in Bulgaria were banned, it went underground and became the strongest wing of the BCYU. Some 70% of the

partisans in Bulgaria were members of it. In 1947 it was renamed Dimitrov's Communist Youth Union, after Georgi Dimitrov, the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party at the time.

15. Aliya(h) / pl. Aliyot: lit. 'to go up' or ascension. 1) Term used when a Jew is called to the Torah to make a blessing over it, before and after the Torah is read. Occurs during Torah reading on Saturday, Monday, and Thursday because they were market days. 2) in light of the literal translation immigrating to the State of Israel is seen as a Spiritual ascension.

16. Zhivkov, Todor (1911-1998): Todor Zhivkov was First secretary of the ruling Bulgarian Communist Party's Central Committee (1954-89) and country leader of Bulgaria (1971-89). His 35 years as Bulgaria's ruler made him the longest-serving leader in any of the Soviet-block nations of Eastern Europe. When communist governments across Eastern Europe began to collapse in 1989, the aged Zhivkov resigned all his posts in November of that year. He was placed under arrest in January 1990. Zhivkov was convicted of embezzlement in 1992 and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. He was allowed to serve his sentence under house arrest.

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HAIM MEVORAH MOLHOV

Interview - Sofia

My **ancestors** came from Spain more than five hundred years ago. When the Jews were persecuted in Spain, some were executed by the Inquisition; others adopted Christianity, but most left and settled on the Balkan Peninsula. My ancestors originate from the Sephardi Jews. The family name of my paternal grandparents is Molho, but my name is Molhov in accordance with the Bulgarian standards for family name endings.

My **father**, Mevorah Molho's kin is from the town of Pazardjik. (Editor's note: Pazardjik is a small town in Southern Bulgaria, important trading center in the 19th c.) His father, Haim Molho, was born there (in 1815). I have seen him only on a portrait with a long white beard, standing in front of the house, together with my grandmother Vizanka Molho, who was his third wife. My father told me that as fate had willed, my grandfather's first wife died, then he married again, but his second wife also died and he married for the third time. My father was born to my grandfather's third wife. But his third wife also died and he married again. I remember only his fourth wife when she was quite old. When my grandfather died, she moved to live in Plovdiv (in Southern Bulgaria) with her two children, uncle Mois and aunt Bucha. My family kept closely in touch with my grandmother and treated her like a real relative. I kept in touch with uncle Mois and aunt Bucha, who were very close with my father. My grandfather lived up to the age of ninety-eight. According to my father, one day my grandfather was sitting in a café in Pazardjik. There was one Jew in the town, who was crazy. This Jew decided to play a practical joke on my grandfather and told him that his son, Mevorah, my father, was killed at the front, where he was fighting in the Bulgarian army during the Balkan War in 1912-13. My grandfather got so frightened that he had a stroke and died.

Since my **paternal grandfather** married four times, his wives brought their own children to live with them. I have seen only a few of my father's siblings from the other marriages. The eldest brother of my father from my grandfather's first marriage was Josif Molho. He was a teacher and later the director of an insurance company. He was comparatively well off, he had a two-floor house in Plovdiv. His wife Sarah was born in Vidin. They had two sons, Viktor and Shlomo. I also know one sister of my father from my grandfather's second marriage – aunt Oro, who was married to a Jew from Chepino (present-day Velingrad). She had two sons – Sami, who was a distinguished tobacco expert and chief expert of a big tobacco company, and Jojo. Uncle Mois was a smart and good man working as a traveling salesman. Uncle Mois is my father's brother-in-law from the last, fourth marriage of my grandfather. He married Sophie Meshulan from Northern Bulgaria in Plovdiv. They had two sons and a daughter – Viktor, Misho and Sarah. Viktor and Sarah settled in Israel in 1948 and Misho left for America. Viktor was advisor to Sharon, when he was Minister of Agriculture.

My **maternal grandfather** was Israel Geron and my grandmother – Reyna Geron. My

maternal grandfather died young of infection. About him I know only that he was a big man, but I don't know what he worked. My grandmother became a widow and her children started to look after themselves. My grandmother Reyna Geron was a very good housewife. She lived in her old house until she passed away and she was supported by her sons, who were accountants. In fact, I was born in her house. Six of us lived there – my grandmother Reyna, my parents, my brother, my sister and I. My grandmother was a religious woman and strictly observed Pesach and the other Jewish holidays. Most of the household chores were done by my mother and my grandmother helped her.

From my mother's family I managed to see my **grandmother** and the siblings of my mother – Bohora, Albert, Nissim, Vitali and Roza. My mother had one more brother, David, who died in the Balkan War in 1913, and whose loss the family often mentioned. I also got to know well aunt Bohora and uncle Nissim, who lived in Sofia, while uncle Albert, uncle Vitali and aunt Roza lived in Plovdiv. Uncle Albert was an accountant; he had learned the profession from his brothers Vitali and Nissim. They hadn't gone to special accountant schools, but had learned by themselves. They also knew French very well. Uncle Albert was well off and had built a three-floor house for his family in Plovdiv. Aunt Roza lived in a separate two-floor house and there was a haberdashery on the first floor.

My **father**, Mevorah Haim Molhov, was born in Pazardjik in 1882, and my mother Rebecca Molho, nee Israel Geron, was born in Plovdiv in 1887. My father moved to Plovdiv in the beginning of the 1910s. He fought in the Balkan War in 1912. My parents met in Plovdiv, when my father moved to live there. I think that my parents had a religious wedding in 1913. In the first years of their marriage, my family rented the house of my maternal grandmother.

My father worked as a cobbler after his military service. He did not make shoes, only mended them. My father worked in a small shed near our house. As far as I remember its owner was a Bulgarian, from whom my father had rented it almost for free.

My **mother** was a very kind woman, always eager to give. I think I inherited this from her. I remember that every time we went for a walk in Plovdiv, she bought me a sweet or a pretzel. Although we did not have much money, she always did her best to make me happy.

I was born in 1915, my **brother** Shelomo – in 1920, and my **sister** Vizanka – in 1922. When the war was finally over, I was already born and when my father came back home, he found my mother holding a child with long blond curls. In his opinion I resembled a girl too much, so he told my mother to cut the curls. We were born in the house of my maternal grandmother Reyna. The house was a one-floor building, consisting of two rooms and a large corridor. My grandmother and my parents lived in one of the rooms and the children – in the other. There were two more rooms in the house, which my father let out. At that time rents were very low and were not regarded as serious income. We were not well-off and in the summers when I was a student I went to work as an apprentice at the hardware store of uncle Vitali Bucha, married to Bucha, who was my father's sister-in-law and sister to Mois Molho. There was no electricity in our house and we used gas lamps. I did all my studies in the elementary school and the commercial school under a gas lamp. It was not until I graduated from the commercial school and started work that I was able to buy a wardrobe with my first salary and electrical cables and equipment with the second. So, we finally had electricity. There was a big basement in the house where we kept our food and the drinking water in the summer, since summers in Plovdiv are very hot. In the smaller room my mother had a loom on which she made blankets and rugs.

During my childhood we could not afford to go resorts. During our vacations my brother, sister and I went to work. Usually my maternal relatives went to excursions, camps and resorts. When I was a student, my grandmother, who loved me a lot, gave me two levs every day. I remember that once she went on holiday to Chepino (present-day Velingrad) for two days. When she returned, I asked her to give me six levs – for the days when she was away and although she did not have much money, she gave it to me. My father also gave me money, but only one lev. He was not making much money, but he did his best to earn us a good living. My brother, who is younger than me, was more intemperate and sometimes my father had to borrow one lev from the shop assistant in the hardware store to give it to my brother. I was more diplomatic and did not pester my father to give me money, if he didn't have any at that moment.

When I was 13 years old, my family organized for me the greatest Jewish holiday **Bar**

Mitzvah, marking the occasion when a boy reaches the age of religious majority and responsibility. This was a very big celebration with many guests present. I had to learn by heart and deliver in front of the guests a speech, which was written by the rabbi Shemuel Behar, who later also lead my wedding ceremony. I still remember the first lines of that speech, which I delivered in Ladino, "Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, brothers and sisters! Today is the day of my holiday, which is also a holiday for the whole family." Every day before the ceremony I rehearsed the speech a number of times at home. My grandmother would listen to me every time and get very excited and I would joke that I wanted my presents in advance. Moved to tears, she would promise to buy me the best presents. The ceremony took place in the synagogue. The rabbi was there and I made my speech, which was quite long – around eight pages. My grandmother Reyna bought me a suit and uncle Albert – a watch. During the ceremony we ate almond jam, also called "masapan".

Before **September 9, 1944** there was a big Jewish community in Plovdiv that had its own traditions. After the establishment of the Jewish state most Jews left for Israel and very few of us remained in Bulgaria. The small number of Jews, who stayed here and their dispersion throughout the country led to their **assimilation**. That is why we are not so religious as our parents, who strictly observed all the traditions. My father was a **religious man**, he observed Shabbat, ate kosher food, went to the synagogue. My mother organized the festivities for all religious holidays. She did all the household chores and prepared the kosher food for Pesach. The kosher dishes were arranged over a white tablecloth, and my father read the Haggadah. We also observed the other Jewish holidays – Purim, Lag Baomer, Succoth.

I graduated the **Jewish school** in Plovdiv – primary and junior high school, that is, until the fourth grade. In the Jewish school we studied all general subjects, such as geography, history, and also Hebrew and the Talmud, and in this way we were raised Jewish. They taught us Hebrew very well. Thanks to it now I have some basic knowledge in Hebrew, which helps me very much today. I speak in Hebrew with my sister's husband, who is an Austrian Jew. There I became a member of the youth organization Hashomer Hazair. **Hashomer Hazair** is the Jewish scout organization. In the Jewish school we also had a sport organization Maccabi. In the Hashomer Hazair organization we went to summer camps, where we slept in tents and were taught how to be scouts. We learned how to give first aid in case of injuries. When we were 17 years old, we had to decide whether we wanted to go to Palestine or not. At that age we became senior scouts – "boger". Some Jews went to the agricultural school in Sadovo (a small town near Plovdiv) for six months, where they were taught farming. My brother Shelomo went to this school before he left for Israel. I did not want to leave, because I did not want to leave my parents, who were not in good health and did not have much money. I wanted to stay and help them.

There was a big Jewish municipality in Plovdiv, comprising around 8 000 people. There were many merchants, craftsmen, clerks, workers and many poor people among them. Politically the Jews in Plovdiv were divided into three groups. They were all united by the idea of the establishment of a Jewish state, but differed in the way in which they wanted it to happen. There was a left Zionist movement, a center, and right Zionists. The youth organization of the **left Zionists** was Hashomer Hatzair, and that of the **right Zionists** was Betar. The general Zionists, the center, supported the sport organization Maccabi. The main idea of the left Zionists was working in a kibbutz, for which we were being prepared. The right Zionists advocated the establishment of a militarized Jewish state.

There was a small group of sheds against the **Jewish school**, which we called the "yard" – "cortijo" in Ladino. This word has a slightly derogatory meaning, close to the meaning "ghetto". They were inhabited by Jews, who had moved from Odrin (town on the southern part of the Balkan peninsula, now in Turkey) due to economic reasons and had settled in Plovdiv. They lived in very miserable conditions. The children of those Jews went to our school. They were very poor students, because they knew neither Bulgarian, nor Hebrew well. That gave rise to some very funny situations. The director of the Jewish school wanted us to know Hebrew very well so he appointed a teacher in Hebrew from Poland. This Polish Jew, whose name was Zimbalist, did not know Bulgarian at all. He had come with his family and the director had arranged for him a house and a salary so that he would teach us Hebrew.

The Hebrew grammar was very difficult and we could not understand anything, because he did not explain it in understandable language. In junior high school we knew very little Hebrew and the refugees from Odrin didn't know any. One day I was the student on duty. One child, Binyo, from the Odrin Jews, was a few minutes late. The teacher asked me to tell to him in Ladino that he must not be late again. I also translated to the others his request to open our notebooks with the homework. He summoned Binyo and asked for his notebook. I had to translate from Ladino once again. Binyo didn't have homework and excused himself saying that his notebook had fallen into a puddle and he had had to tear out the pages with the homework. And he also swore at him in the end. I found it very funny and I couldn't help laughing while I was interpreting. The teacher did not understand Ladino, so he did not understand the swearing. However, the teacher had the habit of slapping the boys in the face. When he heard the story that Binyo had made up about his homework in Hebrew, he slapped my classmate and me on the ears. Later I found out that my eardrum was punctured, and even to this day I don't hear well with that ear. This was the reason why the teacher in Hebrew was sent back to Poland later.

Another classmate of mine, Albert, also one of the Odrin Jews, had a father who was a saddle-maker. Once he was expelled from class, because he could not understand the language. During the recess interval after the third class, Albertico returned to the school with his father. Beside our Jewish school there was another one, which was new then. It was located three houses from ours. I think that students from the higher grades studied there. I had noticed that the teacher in Hebrew, Zimbalist had gone to that school during the recess. I showed Albertico and his father where the teacher was. We found him, he tried to hide, but Albertico's father had it out with him, while, we, the children, jumped with joy. But after that the teacher's council expelled Albertico from school and I had my mark for conduct lowered. Yet, after that incident it became known that the teacher was beating the kids and a new teacher in Hebrew was appointed.

When I graduated from the Jewish school, I needed money to continue with my education. My father wanted me to study in the commercial high school, but he had no money to support me. Uncle Mois Molho, one of my father's brothers, had noticed that I did very well at school. He found out that I had graduated from the Jewish school with excellent marks and that I had received an award for that. He suggested that each of my father's brothers give 500 levs so that we could pay the fee for the high school. Thus, all my father's brothers managed to raise the fee and I signed up in the commercial high school. My education lasted three years and each year a fee had to be paid.

This practical commercial high school was not recognized officially as a complete secondary high school education. Its graduates could work as accountants, economists or bank clerks, but could not apply to study at a university. We studied economics in the school and its subjects were not very different from those in the secondary business school. I think that we studied the same things, and the only difference was that we covered the material for three years, instead of five. Most of the students in the school were Bulgarians. There was no negative attitude towards the Jewish students in the school. My father did not want me to remain poor like him and he did all he could so that I could be an accountant like my uncles. I graduated the school with excellent marks (in 1931) and I really started to work as an accountant in a Jewish credit co-operative, "Malka Kassa", which gave loans mostly to craftsmen. I worked there for two years. Then, by competition, since there was much unemployment and an economic crisis in the 1930s, I got a job as a bank clerk in the Jewish bank "Atikva". It gave loans to Jewish merchants.

I remember a very interesting episode from the time when I was a bank clerk in the Hatikva bank in 1938-39. At that time I loved theatre very much (and I still do). I had two friends – Mair Bivas, whom I had known since the Jewish school and Jacques Behar, whom we met later. He had come with his family to Plovdiv from Yambol (Southern Bulgaria). We were friends for 56 years. In 1938 we decided to apply for the positions of amateur actors in the Plovdiv Municipal Theatre. There was a hierarchy in the Plovdiv theatre as regards the statute of the actors and the payment. The highest in the hierarchy were the directors, then came the actors, the trainees, the drama actors and lastly, the amateurs.

In 1938 the Plovdiv Municipal Theatre invited for a director the famous actor Georgi Stamatov. He decided to select a team to work with. He announced a competition for actors, who were

paid 820 leva, trainees, who received 710 leva, drama actors, who were paid 450 leva and amateurs. No matter that we were all working, we decided to apply for amateur actors, who usually took part in the crowd scenes and received 20 leva a performance. Jacques Behar worked as a sales assistant in a Jewish textile store, and Mair – in another store. The requirement for the competition was to recite a poem by heart and each of us had prepared one poem.

The exam lasted two days. My friends went in before me and recited their poems. Finally, it was my turn. Georgi Stamatov looked me up and down and, to my surprise, asked me to act a sketch before reciting. But I had no idea what that meant. He asked me to imagine that I entered an official banquet, invited the most beautiful lady to waltz and danced with her. This is a sketch, which is given as a minimum requirement to the drama actors. However, I answered that I could act it out, but I was against dancing. At that time the “Hashomer Hatzair” organization taught us to be against dancing, wearing ties, smoking and drinking. I was an ardent follower of these ideas. Although I worked as a bank employee, I did not wear a tie, neither smoked, nor drank. The organization advocated that dances could divert us from our mission – to prepare for work as a “halutz” – as workers in the village commune (in Palestine), and to build the Jewish state. I explained that to Georgi Stamatov, who was sitting with his wife, also a famous actress, in the second row in the theatre. He accepted my explanation and asked me to act it out until the moment of dancing and to imagine that I had no tie. The stage was well lit and I acted out entering the ballroom and heading towards the beautiful lady. When I finished, Georgi Stamatov told me I was free to go and I left without reciting my poem. I felt a bit sad, because I thought that he didn’t like my performance. The results had to come out in two days on the bulletin board of the Plovdiv theatre.

When the results were out, I saw that my friends were admitted, but my name was not among the amateurs. However, my friend Mair saw my name among those of the trainees. That was a big surprise for me, because it could be my opportunity for an actor’s career. My joy was great. I had to go straight away to rehearsals for the new premiere. I had to play truant from the bank so that I could go to the theatre. I found myself numerous excuses to go out during my working hours, because the theatre attracted me more. One day the director of the bank, Menahem Fardo, called me in his office and I had to confess about my new hobby. The director scolded me and I had to give up the theatre. At that time the country was in a deep crisis, there were many unemployed men and I could not afford to risk losing my job. My father also talked to me about that.

I married on September 1, 1939 in Plovdiv on the day when Nazis invaded Poland. My wife is, in fact, my first cousin, because she is the daughter of my mother’s brother Nissim Geron. At that time such marriages were allowed. In fact, I didn’t know my wife well before we married. I remember that she first came to Plovdiv in 1934 to see her relatives. She was supposed to live in the two-floor house of aunt Roza Asher Birma, who, however, had gone on a holiday in Chepino (present-day Velingrad). That is why my aunt had asked me to meet my cousin Nina at the station and I had agreed. I remember that she was a beautiful girl and she impressed me a lot. That’s how our love started. Nina stayed in Plovdiv for about a month and then left for Sofia. We wrote each other letters from 1934 until 1939, when we got married. We had a religious wedding. The rabbi Shemuel Behar, who was a very dignified and clever man, married us. The rabbi prepared for us a special marriage certificate – “ketuba”, which is written in ancient Hebrew. I remember the rabbi telling my wife to take good care of the marriage certificate. At the wedding ceremony in the Plovdiv synagogue I had to do the ritual of breaking a glass with my foot. A glass covered with a white napkin was put in front of my wife and me. I stepped on it heavily and smashed it. This is done in order to have luck in the marriage. Some people joke that in this way the groom “frightens” the bride into submission. The celebrations after the wedding took place in the house of aunt Roza, my mother’s sister.

After we married, my wife and I decided to go on a honeymoon in Belgrade. Although it was announced that on September 3, 1939 England declared war to Germany, we decided to go anyway. We had a very good time there and we even found it funny that while we were in Belgrade, there was a food crisis in Bulgaria and a ration system was being introduced, according to which meat would be given only two days a week. At that time we were still not aware of the hardships we would experience in Bulgaria.

My wife Regina Molhova graduated from the Third Girls' High School in Sofia with excellent marks. She was a member of the *Workers' Youth Union* and took part in protests against the high school fees. She was arrested by the police because of that. Her father, Nissim Geron, who was my uncle, was relatively well-off. He had the ambition to build a factory for glucose production. Unfortunately, he had two Bulgarian partners who cheated him and he went bankrupt. The construction of the factory had already begun and even nowadays a protruding chimney can be seen in the Kniajevo living estate (Editor's note: suburban estate in the south-west of Sofia at the foot of the Vitosha Mountain). My uncle only managed to keep his flat, which he had very wisely registered as property of his wife. I live in this flat now. It has three rooms and is situated in the center of Sofia right next to the "St. Aleksander Nevsky" Cathedral.

I lived in Plovdiv until 1939. In 1940 I moved to Sofia where my wife lived. My uncle, the father of my wife Nina, found me a job in a wine company where I worked until 1942. Nissim Geron was chief accountant of that company and I started work as his assistant. My son Benedict Molhov was born in 1941. My family loved music. While I lived in Plovdiv, I sang in the Jewish choir. In Sofia I signed up in the "Georgi Kirkov" choir. My wife also had a beautiful voice and I brought her to the choir where she sang for 26 years. My wife's parents also sang very well. Thus, our son, Benedict Molhov, grew up to become a famous composer, conductor and singer.

The name "Mevorah" means blessed by God. In Ladino – "bendicho". That is why I named my only son Benedict. When our son was born, my wife Nina Molhova asked the rabbi in Sofia what the contemporary equivalent of the name Mevorah was. He told her that that was the name Benedict. At that time (1941) I was mobilized in the labor camps as a soldier and I was temporarily released for the circumcision of my son. They informed me that they will name him Benedict and I agreed. Now my son is a famous composer and performer and his name can often be seen on posters. I think that the name Benedict Molhov is quite fitting for a composer.

In 1940 the *Defence of the Nation Act* (1) was passed in Bulgaria. In 1941 we started receiving calling orders for mobilization to labor camps, which were set up after the adoption of the *Defence of the Nation Act*. So, my son was born while I was in such a camp.

One day in 1942 a priest came to our house in downtown Sofia with an accommodation order for our home. We realized that we had to move out from the house. That priest was appointed to teach theology to the son of Boris III – Simeon II. We moved out from our house and did not return to it until 1945. During that period I was mobilized three times to labor camps – in 1941 I spent five months in a Jewish labor group building the railway line Kulata-Blagoyevgrad, in 1943 I spent nine months in the same camp and in 1944 – in Belovo. My wife, my son and her parents were interned. After my first mobilization I returned to work in the wine company, because I was useful to them there and they kept my place for me. After that I lost my job. Our life then was very hard, but we helped each other as much as we could.

In January 1943 I received a calling order for the labor camp in Marikostino. That village was located along the river valley of Struma. During that year all Jews were mobilized, even those who had the so-called "paragraph". According to military laws "paragraph" means that because of some illness, one can be exempt from the labor camp. But new commissions were formed then, who sent even the seriously sick Jews to work. I had the misfortune also to be mobilized in 1943. In 1942 I didn't go to a labor camp, thanks to my employers in the wine company. They needed me and procured for me a document that I was ill and in accordance with the "paragraph" I was not sent to a camp.

I took part in the construction of a railway road and the Pirin railway station in Gorna Djumaya (present-day Blagoyevgrad) to Kulata. By that time there was a narrow-gauge line along the Struma River. We were around 2 500 Jews working there. We were divided into groups of 300-400 people. We had our supervisor, sergeant major, responsible for us. The biggest malarial epidemic broke out in our camp.

I spent nine and a half months in the camp – from January to October. This was a malarial area and many of us went down with malaria. Within a year and a couple of months I was ill with malaria three times. The doctor was also a Jew and his name was Dr. Jacques Behar. He explained to me that they did not have the medicine usually given to patients with malaria – quinine. At that time all

the quinine was sent to the German army and only its substitute called Atabrine, which tinted the skin yellow, could be found in Bulgaria. They gave us this substitute and our skin turned yellow.

One of my most vivid memories from the labor camp is the passage of the **deported Jews** from Aegean Thrace and Macedonia through Bulgaria. Those territories were occupied by the Germans and annexed to Bulgaria during World War II. 11 382 Jews were deported irrespective of their age. Loaded into narrow wagons, they passed by us. We worked near the old narrow-gauge line and constructed the new railway line, which is used nowadays. We saw the tragedy of those people. They were transported to Gorna Djumaya, then transferred to wide wagons and deported to Poland, into the gas chambers. All that happened after the signature of King Boris III, which is his heavy sin.

While I was in the camp, my family – my wife, her parents and my child, **were interned** to Chirpan (a small town near Plovdiv). There were around 48 000 Jews in Bulgaria and the plan was to send half of them to towns in North Bulgaria, and the other half – in South Bulgaria. This was done in order to prepare the Bulgarian Jews for deportation to Poland or Germany. At first the order had been to send my wife's parents to Chirpan and my wife to Razgrad in North Bulgaria. With the help of the commissariat in Plovdiv, where we knew an employee, Nina's accommodation order for Razgrad was torn and a new one was written for Chirpan where her parents were. So, my wife received help from her parents. My family was accommodated in a school and lived very miserably. At that time my wife developed a very serious form of diabetes. In October 1943 I was released from the camp and I went straight to Chirpan. I saw that my wife's condition had deteriorated. Her whole organism was burning from the illness and her breath smelled of acetone. I rushed to the municipality and asked to be transferred to Plovdiv where my parents lived. There were also good Jewish physicians in Plovdiv. They allowed us to move to Plovdiv and we took my wife to a medical consultation. Three distinguished Plovdiv Jewish physicians decided that my wife should take insulin three times a day. My wife and I settled in an old house and my wife's parents went to live with some relatives.

My release from the labor camp was temporary, because I was once again mobilized in April 1944. I once again took part in the construction of roads in Belovo and Sestrino in central Bulgaria. There was a rumor that King Boris III had reached an agreement with Hitler to leave 22 000 Jews in Bulgaria to work as I did and deport the remaining women, elder people and children, who were more than 22 000. That would have been a great tragedy... In Plovdiv I saw how the Jews were saved by metropolitan Kiril, who later became a bishop. He was a friend with the distinguished Jews in the city and after the authorities in Plovdiv began gathering the Jews in the school to deport them, he arrived in Sofia to meet with the regents, since Boris III had already died, and declared that he would lie on the railway lines in front of the train, but would not allow the Jews to be deported. That was how we were saved. Meanwhile, the Soviet army was already winning the war and in July-August I was released from the labor camp.

After **September 9, 1944** (2) I was appointed director of the criminal department of the police in Plovdiv. I was not a member of the *Workers' Youth Union* (3), but I was a member of the **Bulgarian Communist Party**. In 1945 I decided to come to Sofia to check what had happened to our house. I made the priest move out and my family once again moved to live in Sofia. We lived in this house together with my wife's parents. Now I still live here. In Sofia I was appointed director of the economic department of the police. My job was very stressful and soon my health deteriorated sharply. In order to preserve my health I decided to change my life and after I completed my secondary education, I changed my highly paid, but very stressful job with the low-paid, but quiet job in the "Chimmetalurgproyekt" Institute.

I worked for 26 years in the "Chimmetalurgproyekt" institute until I retired. While I worked there, I decided to apply to the university. The three years in the commercial school were not recognized as secondary education, so first I had to complete high school. I signed up in the technical school in industry chemistry. I enrolled in a correspondence course and went in for exams. While I was studying in the high school I headed the personnel department of the institute. After I graduated from the high school, I went to work in the technical department. Together with two friends of mine, one of whom was a political prisoner before 1944, and the other, Todor Milenkov, had a death sentence in the same period for antifascist activities, we decided to apply for a university degree in the Chemistry and

Technology Institute. However, at that time I was 40 years and two months old and Todor Milenkov – 40 years and eight months old. It turned out that we could not be admitted to the university, because the upper age limit was 40 years. Then we decided to go to the Education Minister, but we were received by Deputy Minister Ganchev instead. We explained to him our intentions and that our documents were not accepted because we were a couple of months above the allowed age. At first, he refused to help us, but Todor Milenkov said that we would go to the Prime Minister Anton Yugov, whom we knew personally. Then he agreed and took our applications. After one week I received a letter that the ministry allowed me to study in the institute. I graduated in 1963. In the same year and the same month my son Benedict graduated from the Music Conservatory. The newspaper “Jewish News” wrote about that saying that there were two university graduates in our home now.

I continued working in this institute and I became head of the international relations department. I was in charge of the department responsible for the free-of-charge exchange with designers’ organizations from the countries in the former socialist camp – Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. We established relations with all designers’ institutes. I established contacts with the designers’ organizations in these countries and each year our institute sent there Bulgarian specialists in the area of chemistry and metallurgy. In this way the seven countries cooperated technically. When guests came from abroad, I was in charge of their accommodation, stay, program and the signing of contracts. I have visited many European nations due to my job.

My specialty was black metallurgy and when the institute divided into “Chimproyekt” and “Metalurgproyekt”, I chose to work in “Metalurgproyekt” although the director of “Chimproyekt” was a Jew. I retired at the age of sixty-three (in 1978), but I still felt strong and I returned back to work for two more years. At that time I headed the external relations of the institute with other similar institutions. After 1989 I was also a member of the Union of Engineers. Now the decay in Bulgaria is huge. The institute where I worked still exists but very little is left of it.

In 1980, two years after my retirement, I felt strong and eager to work again. So, I decided to go back to the “Chimproyekt” Institute. First, I went to the director of the technical personnel department and asked him if I could return to my previous position – to be in charge of the international exchange. He told me that I came just in time, because the man they had appointed to this job, couldn’t cope with it and was absent very often. Then I went to the director of the institute, who turned out to be a new one and to my surprise he knew everything about me, although we had never met. After all, I had spent 26 years in this institute and I myself had appointed hundreds of people to different positions here.

The director was happy to grant my request and appointed me as director of the free exchange of technical experts between the countries members of the Council for Economic Cooperation. I started working immediately and got in touch with my colleagues in Czechoslovakia, Poland, the German Democratic Republic and Yugoslavia. They all knew me and they were happy that I was back. I prepared the program of the institute for the next five years.

I liked my work in the institute and really put my heart into it. Although the institute did not have much money, I came up with ideas how to make the foreign guests have a good time during their visits. I organized for them excursions to the Vitosha Mountain, visits to the opera and the theatre. They always liked their stay and often they themselves organized farewell dinners in gratitude for the attitude towards them.

During the totalitarian period my family and I did not experience direct anti-Semitism. We experienced such an attitude for the first time in 1972 when my son Benedict, having graduated from the State Conservatory, was assigned to work for three years as assistant conductor in the “Svetoslav Obretenov” cappella choir. But he was given only a temporary job, because he was in the place of another colleague on leave. During that time my son received a job offer from the Plovdiv Opera, but the salary they offered was low and he declined. At that time, in the middle of the 1970s my son joined the choir of Prof. Ruskov, with whom he made tours abroad. Besides being a composer, my son is also a very good baritone.

I raised my son in the spirit of leftist ideas. My wife and I were left oriented and supported the communist party. I continue to be left oriented today. My daughter-in-law is a Jew from Plovdiv. This

was important for our family. Our son is familiar with all the Jewish traditions and rites.

My brother and sister left for Israel not with the mass aliyah in 1948–49, but earlier. My brother Shelomo graduated from the agriculture school in Sadovo and was ready to be a halutz – a worker in a kibbutz – and left for Palestine in 1942. He got issued a passport and with my help, almost illegally, since he hadn't done his military service, left for Palestine. There he settled in a camp and later took part in the "Hagana" resistance movement against the English rule, which existed until the establishment of the Jewish state. My sister Vizanka also left before the establishment of the Jewish state – in 1946. She graduated from the special school for sewing crafts and consumers' goods in Sofia and was also prepared to live in a kibbutz. In Israel, after 1948, she became a tailor in the "Ein Hahoresh" kibbutz. There everyone does what he or she can and receives what all the others receive. Vizanka married an Austrian Jew, Michael Gila Zur in Israel and adopted the name Gila Zur. My brother also married in Israel. My parents left for Israel in 1949. They settled in Haifa and died there in the middle of the 1950s.

I went in Israel for the first time in 1954 to see my sister and my brother. My stay in Israel was planned for one month, but the ship with which I arrived and which was supposed to bring me back to Bulgaria, was three months late and I stayed longer. Meanwhile, I applied for non-paid leave to have my position kept in the Institute. I didn't have any problems with the authorities for staying three months in Israel. I respect Georgi Dimitrov (the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party) a lot, since he, in contrast to Stalin, allowed the Bulgarian Jews to leave for Israel. At the moment there are very few Jews in Bulgaria and mixed marriages between Bulgarians and Jews happen a lot more often. They are the reason for the strange combinations of Bulgarian and Jewish names.

During the rule of the communist party I have always supported the people's power and the official position of the party. As an employee of the People's Militia during the 1950s I was the "fist" of the people's power. Now, looking back at those times, I regard the rule of the communist party as totalitarian. The power was focused in the people around Zhivkov (Secretary General of the Bulgarian Communist Party) and the idea of the people's power was corrupted. Many of the party's activities were unknown to most people, for example the camps for political prisoners. These things became known only after the fall of the communist regime in 1989. I am pleased with the period of rule of the BCP (Bulgarian Communist Party). During that time I managed to acquire a university education free-of-charge, I had a good job. My son, Benedict Molhov, and his wife also graduated from the state conservatory without paying any fees.

I think that the opening of the East European countries to the West is a positive one. However, I also think that the end of the rule of the communist parties in these countries was a result of the long-term work of the American intelligence, which led to the political changes. I was a BCP member and I am still a member of its successor – the socialist party.

At the moment, according to my son's statistics there are no more than 6,000 Jews left in Bulgaria. Nevertheless, the editor of the newspaper "Jewish News", Mihaylina Pavlova, has found on the Internet a list of Jews whom the unknown author claims to be racists. Many of my acquaintances are on this list; only my name isn't there. Some of the political parties advocate unofficially anti-Semitic ideas.

Nowadays life in the Jewish community is very good. Various cultural events are organized for us.. Every day during the week I go to the Jewish cultural home to have lunch and meet with my friends. Thanks to the world Jewish organization "Joint" we receive aid and we can eat relatively cheaply. My son is the conductor of the Jewish choir and has taken up all the administrative work; that is why he has a cabinet in the Jewish Cultural Home.

Translator: Ivelina Karcheva

Glossary:

1. *Defence of the Nation Act*: According to the Defence of the Nation Act, passed by the National

Assembly in December 1940 and promulgated on January 23, 1941, Jews did not have the right to own shops and factories; Jews living in the center of Sofia were forced to move to the outskirts of the town; and the internment of Jews to certain designated towns was legalized, in preparation for their deportation to concentration camps.

2. *September 9, 1944*: The day the communists officially assumed power in Bulgaria.

3. *Workers' Youth Union*: Workers' Youth Union, an underground communist youth organization, was established in 1928 as a legal sub-organization of the Bulgarian Communist Youth Union. After the coup d'état in 1934, when the parties in Bulgaria were banned, it went underground and became the strongest wing of the BCYU. Some 70% of the partisans in Bulgaria were its members. In 1947 it was renamed Dimitrov's Communist Youth Union, after Georgi Dimitrov, the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party at the time.

PSYCHOSOCIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE MYTH-LEGEND ON NEGRU VODĂ

Ion Chelcea
Septimiu Chelcea

This paper analyses the myth-legend about the foundation of Wallachia by Negru Vodă, a character whose real existence has been contested by historians. In Romanian collective conscience, Negru Vodă personifies the virtues of Romanian people: their endeavour for liberty, their spirituality, their vocation for culture and civilisation.

În acest studiu este analizată legenda-mit despre fondarea Țării Românești de către Negru Vodă, personaj a cărui existență reală este contestată de către istorici. În mentalul colectiv românesc, Negru Vodă întruchipează virtuțile poporului român: dorința de libertate, spiritualitatea, vocația pentru cultură și civilizație.

The historians regarded the tradition on Negru-Vodă almost exclusively from the viewpoint of the authenticity of his existence. This perspective was limited from the beginning as scientific approach, on the one hand, due to the lack of documents attesting the rule of Negru-Vodă and, on the other hand, due to the existence of contradictory opinions. The literature has long debated the identity of the legendary character: hence a certain confusion in terminology, which mentioned both a "literary tradition" and a "bookish creation"¹.

The literary tradition was to emerge quite late, in the 17th century only, when the "Chronicle of Wallachia" presented Radu Vodă – nicknamed Negru – contrary to the historic reality not as the son and second successor to Alexandru Basarab, but rather as the founder of Wallachia and of the Princely Church from Curtea de Argeș.

The situation was interpreted in different manners. Dimitrie Onciul presented it as follows: the tradition also ascribed to Radu, who finished the construction of the Princely Church from Curtea de Argeș, the quality of founder of the church, the more so as his tomb is in this church. From the situation of founder of the "most significant old church of the country" there was only one more step to that of founder of the state, the more so as Basarab the 1st was the founder of Wallachia².

According to Dimitrie Onciul, the legendary character Negru Vodă, was none else than Basarab, the founder of Wallachia. Ștefan Ștefănescu had a similar opinion: "Negru Vodă was the legendary embodiment of Basarab the 1st"³. Other historians substituted, however, Negru Vodă to other rulers from the Basarab family: to Radu or even to Neagoe Basarab. Nicolae Iorga stated that there would be no connection between Negru Vodă and Radu Vodă and that we should consider Neagoe Basarab instead who also was a great

¹ P. Chihaia, De la Negru Vodă la Neagoe Basarab. Interferențe literar-artistice în cultura românească a evului de mijloc (From Negru Vodă to Neagoe Basarab. Literary-artistic interferences in the Romanian culture during the Middle Ages), Academia Press, Bucharest, 1976, p. 15.

² D. Onciul, *Anul morții lui Basarab Voievod (The year when Basarab Voievod died)*, în "Buletinul Monumentelor Istorice" (Bulletin of the Historical Monuments), 1923, p. 104.

³ Ștefan Ștefănescu, Negru Vodă, "intemeietorul" Țării Românești (Negru Vodă, "founder" of Wallachia), în "Magazin istoric" (Historical Magazine), I, 6, 1967, p. 4.

founder of places of prayer⁴. Petre Constantinescu-Iași believed that "beneath the name of Negru Vodă, the memory of several important characters from the history of the 13th-14th centuries is preserved"⁵.

We consider that to understand the myth-legend so much rooted in the conscience of the Romanian people we have to change the approach of the written historical tradition⁶ and follow the path of the oral history, of the popular tradition. Our study used therefore this ethnopsychological approach. Instead of considering the information included in the documents from Tismana and Câmpulung monasteries, in the papers granting privileges to the freeholders from Câmpulung area, etc., we will consider the oral popular creations collected on site during the two World Wars by C. Rădulescu-Codin particularly, the tireless folklorist from Muscel. These "naive productions" originated in the mentality of the Romanian people and they express the national ideals, even if they drift away from the content of the written historical documents.

To sum up, we have two different perspectives on Negru Vodă: one originating in the written history, the other one in the oral history. B.P. Hașdeu mentioned for the first time the distinction between the legend on Negru Vodă and the tradition of the chroniclers⁷. Large interferences exist, obviously, between the two perspectives. The oral tradition highlights, in the ethnopsychological approach, the spirituality of the people represented by the legendary hero. The distinction between the two perspectives mentioned earlier was not always – in our opinion – correctly understood. Here is just one example: in an older paper, *Negru Vodă și epoca lui* (*Negru Vodă and his time*), A.M. Marienescu⁸ pitied "poor" Negru Vodă because the historians took him out of the circulation, placing him into legend forgetting that we owe him the Monastery from Curtea de Argeș, as well as the "foundation". A.M. Marienescu compared Negru Vodă to Aeneas, the Trojan hero who reached the western coast of Italy in Latinum after 7 years of wandering on the sea, becoming king: one of his successors, Romulus, later founded Rome. Speaking of Negru Vodă, A.M. Marienescu said: the people who created the legend do not lie⁹.

Negru Vodă: myth-legend

Lucian Blaga said once that "what history does not forget becomes legend and what history forgets becomes historiography". What are the relations among the legend and the myth? We will not attempt to add a new definition to myth besides the existing ones. In a previous paper we have analysed the myth from the ethnopsychological perspective¹⁰. We will limit now to the definition of Victor Kernbach: the "myth is a traditional narration

⁴ Nicolae Iorga, *Histoire des Roumains et de la romanité orientale*, vol. III, in "Monitorul Oficial" (Official Monitor), Bucharest, 1937, p. 188.

⁵ P. Constantinescu-Iași, *Negru Vodă, de o parte și de alta a Carpaților* (*Negru Vodă on either side of the Carpathians*), in "Magazin istoric" (Historical Magazine), V,1, 1971, p. 32.

⁶ Gh. Brătianu, *Tradiția istorică despre întemeierea statelor românești* (*Historical tradition on the establishment of the Romanian states*), Eminescu Press, Bucharest, 1980.

⁷ P. Constantinescu-Iași, op. cit., p.32.

⁸ M. Marienescu, *Negru Vodă și epoca lui* (*Negru Vodă and his time*), in "Analele Academiei Române" (Annals of the Romanian Academy), series II, XXXI, Bucharest, 1909. .

⁹ Idem, p. 21.

¹⁰ Septimiu Chelcea, *Mit (Myth)*, in *Dicționar de psihologie socială* (*Dictionary of social psychology*), Scientific and Encyclopaedic Press, Bucharest, 1981, p. 144.

originating from a primitive society which imagines the concrete explanation of the temporal or spatial enigmatic phenomena and events that occurred during the psychophysical existence of humans, in the visible or invisible environment and universe in connection to the destiny of the cosmic and human condition, to whom the humans ascribe supernatural origin during the primordial creation and which they consider sacred and revealed to their archetypal ancestors and to humanity by supernatural beings during the moments of grace of the beginnings"¹¹.

In our opinion, the most important difference between the legend and the myth is given by the fact that the myth implies much more religious elements in its structure than the legend. The oral tradition on Negru Vodă contains a large but not overwhelming proportion of supernatural, religious elements, which justifies us to consider it a myth-legend. On the other hand, the *myth* as system of ancient representations requires one to believe in it, which does not happen to the legends. The myths have a more coherent structure and the themes succeed in unchangeable order forming a united entity¹². The legend is the passage from myth to history.

Obviously, there are other distinctions, too: the myth places you in an undetermined period with no beginning, while the legend places you in closer times. This is why the legends have from case to case their grain of truth, as Gh. Brătianu noted. After all, the legends are an "unwritten chronicle" created for certain purposes to explain the people, the events and the past.

According to the people's mentality, both the myth and the legend represent the history but each of them in different ways. Both have joint psychological roots, particularly affective ones. They start from the feelings and wishes of the communities more than the rational judgement does. They account for the collective aspirations and representations.

Geographical location of the events from the myth-legend on Negru Vodă

The events from legends can be located more easily than the mythological ones; they are closer in time to their creators. Negru Vodă had a sure origin: he belonged, or better said he came from the Romanians living beyond the Carpathians. The sources state that Negru Vodă lived on the other side of the mountains during the time when on this side of the mountains the Romanian were oppressed by the Tartars. The Romanians sent a "paper" (letter) to Negru Vodă asking him to help them get rid of the oppressors. They gave him a password, too, so as not to be mistaken for the tartars during the night: he had to say "lion charcoal" and the reply had to be "millet grain". We should mention that the password was also used in the Hebrew Gnosticism: in order to pass the "guards" standing on either sides of the entrance to the heavenly hall: the soul needed a password"¹³.

The myth-legend showed that Negru Vodă had a humble social position in Transylvania: he was farm hand. A miraculous artifice came up: one of the foals he took care

11 Victor Kernbach, *Miturile esențiale (The essential myths)*, Scientific and Encyclopaedic Press, Bucharest, 1978; p. 5.

12 R. Bastide, *La mythologie*, in *Ethnologie generale*, Jean Poirier (ed.), Paris, 1968, p. 1065.

13 Mircea Eliade, *Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase (History of the religious creeds and ideas)*, vol. III, Scientific and Encyclopaedic Press, Bucharest, 1988, p. 173.

of proved to be uncanny, it was able to fly¹⁴. Negru Vodă chose it as payment. He mounted the foal and flew it to the “glory of the sky”. This is how the first supernatural element appeared in the story on Negru Vodă. Living among the Romanians beyond the mountains, Negru Vodă passed a “stage” of “initiation” we might say: it was there that he got his supernatural powers. It is interesting that the powers invested in him did not originate from supernatural beings, but from fabulous circumstances. His story kept the pattern met in many other myth-legend: the seemingly insignificant and weak one was the winner.

Endowed with a supernatural nimbus Negru Vodă crossed the Carpathians.

The legend showed his itinerary: he started from outside Făgăraș, where there is a fortress ascribed to him¹⁵ and stopped first at Dragoslavele after crossing the mountains¹⁶. There are some contiguous believes about his itinerary: the villagers of commune Florești (Dolj County) believe that Negru Vodă and his people from Rome rather than from the other side of the mountains¹⁷.

The myth-legend mentions some localities tied to the name of Negru Vodă. The small fortress from Stoenеști (Argeș County) is mentioned the most times. He lived here in a wealthy palace fitted with bathroom; the Divan of the country was here. However, according to the popular belief Negru Vodă lived at Câmpulung-Muscel¹⁸ (Argeș County).

The legend on Negru Vodă seems to have two faces, just like a medal: there is a popular-oral one and a scholarly-written one. We mentioned earlier the popular creation. Let us examine now the other face of the medal. From the scholar perspective, the focus is on the town of Câmpulung, then on Curtea de Argeș. Further on, the domination of the hero spread rather diffuse, expanding up to the Danube. The chronicle of Luccari (1605) from Ragussa mentioned that Negru Vodă consolidated even Bucharest where he: “raised a few brick reinforcements”¹⁹. Târgoviște, Tg. de Floci and Giurgiu are other towns supposedly reinforced by Negru Vodă.

According to the chronics the legendary hero extended his influence to areas remote from the locations mentioned in the oral-popular productions. Negru Vodă is mentioned in a document kept in Tismana Monastery, dated January 8, 1569. His name is also mentioned in connection to the localities of Cătălui and Bălteni (former Ilfov County) and to the hermitages from Poenari (Argeș County) and Cetățuia, near Râmnicu Vâlcea²⁰. The scholarly locations do not contradict the popular-oral ones but complete them. We think that the popular-oral approach must be considered first in discussing the geographical area where the myth-legend on Negru Vodă developed. The other perspective must not be disregarded, either.

¹⁴ Lazăr Șăineanu, *Basmеle române în comparație cu legendele antice clasice și în legătură cu basmele popoarelor învecinate și ale tuturor popoarelor romanice*, Studiu comparativ, (Romanian fairy tales as compared to the classical antiquity legends and in connection to the fairy tales of the neighboring states and of all the Roman peoples; a comparative study) Bucharest, 1895, p. 224.

¹⁵ I. Ghițescu, *Negru Vodă - Seneslau?*, in “Magazin istoric” (Historical Magazine), X, 10, 1976, p. 6.

¹⁶ C. Rădulescu-Codin, *Din trecutul nostru. Legende, tradiții și amintiri istorice* (From our history. Legends, memories and historical recollections), Cartea Românească Press, Bucharest, (no year), p. 69.

¹⁷ Răspuns la Chestionarul lui N. Densușianu (Reply to the Questionnaire of N. Densușianu), Mss. Academia Română (Manuscripts of the Romanian Academy) p. 40.

¹⁸ C. Rădulescu-Codin, op. cit., p. 74.

¹⁹ C. Giurescu, *Probleme controversate în istoriografia română* (Contrversial problems of the Romanian historiography), Albatros Press, Bucharest, 1977, p. 81

²⁰ B.P. Hasdeu, *Etymologicum Magnum Romaniae*, vol. III, Minerva Press, Bucharest, 1976, p. 314.

Many localities from the former Muscel County are among the geographical sites mentioned by the popular-oral tradition: Jidava (Grădiște), Vales and Vieroși Monastery. Many forms of the relief are also tied to the name of Negru Vodă: the three mounds near Schitu Golești, Cula lu' Negru Vodă, etc.

The multitude of places and localities reminding Negru Vodă show that the myth-legend developed in the area of Stoenesti-Câmpulung crossed Râul Doamnei and Dâmbovița River included Argeș, Dolj and Prahova Counties and stretched up to the Danube.

At the beginnings of the Wallachian history: Negru Vodă

Some specialists consider that the myths would be unhistorical, that the events depicted there are outside the history. However, both the popular-oral and the scholarly tradition placed Negru Vodă at the beginnings of the Wallachian history. The *Chronicle on Radu from Afumați* (1525) states that Negru Vodă “came down on Dâmbovița River and established a new country”. From this point of view Negru Vodă is in line with all the legendary heroes: history begins with them!

The Romanian people tied the legendary personality of Negru Vodă to the establishment of Câmpulung and Curtea de Argeș towns. According both to the chronicle and to the popular tradition the town of Câmpulung-Muscel was the first town of the “foundation”. When Matei Basarab reconfirmed much later the privileges of the local freeholders he referred to “my ancestor... Me, Radu Negru”²¹.

Negru Vodă is not considered just the founder of the country but also the founder of fortresses. According to the popular tradition he was the possible founder of the early form of a fortress built on the peak of Cetățuia mountain close to the commune that was later named Cetățeni (Argeș County). He had a palace here with many rooms defended by trenches whose vestiges “can still be seen nowadays”. Not far from the palace there was the Princely bathroom, where the water was brought in leather bags hoisted by cranes. According to the local topography, the Princely Divan was close by. Even at the beginning of this century the local people could state exactly the place where Vodă stood, the table where he ate was in front: “a block of rock with a broad stone on top”²².

It is noteworthy that Iacob Bongars, too mentioned the fortress from Stoenesti when he travelled to these places in 1584: “The castle of Negru Vodă”... which the Turks destroyed later. C.D. Aricescu in his “wanderings through the mountains” also stopped at the “famous fortress of Negru Vodă built by him or by another one”²³.

Besides the fortress from Stoenesti the popular tradition also mentions the “Small fortress” near Schitul Golești railway station (Argeș County), made of three rocks, about which they say: “here was the small fortress built by Negru Vodă”²⁴. Other fortresses built by Negru Vodă are those from Breaza (Țara Oltului) and Tătărești (Teleorman County)²⁵. The tradition placed a town named Târgu-Frumos at Dărmănești (Prahova County), on the right

²¹ *Câmpulung-Muscel*, Sport-Turism Press, Bucharest, 1974, p. 45.

²² C. Rădulescu-Codin, op. cit., p. 64.

²³ C.D. Aricescu, *O preîmbinare pe munți sau lumea reală, și lumea ideală (Wandering through the mountains, or the real world and the imaginary one)*, C. N. Rădulescu Press, Bucharest, 1872, p. 14.

²⁴ C. Rădulescu-Codin, op. cit., p. 32.

²⁵ *Idem*, p. 51.

bank of Provița River, which Negru Vodă had supposedly wasted²⁶. The stone road from Ghirdoveni (Prahova County) was also supposedly build on order from Negru Vodă

Negru Vodă – founder of villages and church settlements

Negru Vodă, himself or the people very close to him, are also considered to be the founders of some villages. The establishment of villages follows that of towns and fortresses. The popular tradition says that Dragoslavele village was founded by Dragoș one of the chieftains of the group which crossed the mountains with him from the land of Făgăraș. The legends changed the "certain historical fact, the possession in Făgăraș of Radu Vodă, the father of Mircea cel Bătrân"²⁷. After stopping at Pravăț, south east of the present commune of Dragoslavele, Dragoș founded the village. Other chieftains from the group of Negru Vodă did the same. Badea established the village of Bădeni, and Stoian established the village of Stoenеști. As reward for his bravery, Negru Vodă hands over in ownership to Dragoș the territory between Pravăț and the ridge of the mountains lying at north²⁸. The establishment of Cneaza village from the former Muscel County is also tied, according to the tradition, to the name of the legendary hero²⁹. Berevoești village (Argeș County) has Bera as eponym hero, settled there by Negru Vodă³⁰. The establishment of Gemenea village is connected to the circumstances when the water from Stoenеști basin was released and "the wall made of buffalo skins broke up" and the water drowned the Tartars washing them down in screams to the village whose name remained Gemenea since then. The popular etymology is obvious. The village of Slobozia took its name from the "release" of the water from the "wall made of buffalo skins"... At Stoenеști the water "stood still", while at Cotenești it "turned". The popular explanation to some denominations shows the phenomenon of polyvalence mentioned by the specialists in the study of myths and legends³¹.

The series of villages owing their existence and name to the same hero continues: he gave to Bota the village of Botești, to Dobre the village of Dobrești and to Țigănilă the village of Țigănești. The same happened with the villages of Negrești, Sgripcești, Turcești, Priboeni³².

The people tied therefore the name of Negru Vodă to the establishment of many villages, besides fortresses and towns. This shows how much the protective personality of the hero expanded and how much did the peasants participate in the development of the myth-legend on Negru Vodă. Many geographical names, forms of relief, etc., are associated to him, too: the legend says the following on "Colțul Doamnei" (Lady's Cliff) a cliff near the source

²⁶ Răspuns la Chestionarul lui N. Densușianu (Reply to the Questionnaire of N. Densușianu), Mss Academia Română (Manuscripts of the Romanian Academy), p. 365.

²⁷ Aurel Sacerdoțeanu, Dimitrie Onciul (1856-1923), in "Magazin istoric" (Historical Magazine), I, nr. 4, 1967, p. 86.

²⁸ C.C. Giurescu, Principatele române la începutul secolului, of XIX-lea (Main Romanian principalities at the beginning of the 19th century), Scientific Press, Bucharest, 1957, p. 171.

²⁹ I. Catrinescu, Geografia comunei Dragoslavele (Geography of Dragoslavele commune), in "Voința Muscelului" (The will of Muscel), 1903.

³⁰ C. Rădulescu-Codin, op. cit., p. 81.

³¹ V.V. Caramela, I. Trancu, Negru Vodă și căpitanul Bera în cartea legendelor „și miturilor orașului Câmpulung și satului Berevoești (Negru Vodă and Bera Chieftain in the book of legends and myths of Câmpulung town and Berevoești village), in "Studii și cercetări de antropologie" (Studies and research into anthropology), 12, 1975, p. 85.

³² C. Rădulescu-Codin. op. cit., p. 80.

of Dâmbovița River: "when his Lady saw that Negru Vodă was losing the battle with the Turks she let herself fall into the precipice not to be taken into slavery and shattered into dirt and pieces"³³. The legends also mentioned "Cula lui Negru Vodă" (The Vault of Negru Vodă), cliffs and grottoes where treasures were supposedly hidden and where one can only get to with "the grass of beasts"³⁴. "Malul Doamnei" (Lady's Bank), on Dâmbovița River, in the commune of Cetățeni (Dâmbovița County), keeps the memory of the houses that Negru Vodă built for his Lady, Ana³⁵. C. Rădulescu Codin stated: "this is a highly strategic gorge"³⁶, which would help the legendary hero. The same can be said on "Colțul Foișoarelor" (Watchtower Cliff) used by Negru Vodă to observe the tartars. This surveillance site was also named "Foișorul lui Negru Vodă" (the Watchtower of Negru Vodă). The place where the hero and his counsellors were eating was named "Colțul cu tava" (the Tray Cliff)³⁷. Because the Lady of Negru Vodă intervened to appease the "quarrel" between the monks from Curtea de Argeș and those from Câmpulung, one of the mountain peaks was named "Piscul Doamnei" (Lady's Peak)³⁸. There also is "Piscul lui Negru Vodă" (the Peak of Negru Vodă) close to the commune of Berevoești³⁹.

"Râul Doamnei" (Lady's River) has its legend: after Negru Vodă chased the Tartars out of the country he decided to move his residence⁴⁰ from Câmpulung to Curtea de Argeș. On the way there they camped on the banks of a river. The Lady of Negru Vodă nearly drowned when she bathed there; the river was hence named "Râul Doamnei", while the village (later commune) established there was named Domnești. Other variants are more dramatic: being chased by the Tartars, the Lady of Negru Vodă almost drowned in the river which ...⁴¹.

"Doamnele" mountain, Sânt-Ilie, mountain, some cliffs and grottoes are tied in the collective memory to the name of the hero or of his Lady. One may say that not just historic but also geographic realities mingle in the threads of the legend. Elements of religious belief also appear in the myth-legend on Negru Vodă. The myth-legend on Negru Vodă is not yet focused, however, on the religious belief. According to the old mentality upon enthroning the Prince of the country was promising to build churches and monasteries. Negru Vodă made no exception to the "code of the time": as soon as he crossed the mountains he raised a church at Dragoslavele⁴². The chronicle states: "he remained for a while at Câmpul Lungul where he built a large and nice monastery. He went thereafter to Argeș and built his throne there, building princely houses and (a) church which still exists"⁴³. The popular tradition also included the Catholic monastery from Câmpulung among the foundations of Negru Vodă,

³³ Ibidem, p. 56.

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 80.

³⁵ Ion C. Nițescu, Gh. Pârnuță, *Nume de locuri din zona Muscel (Names of places in the area of Muscel)*, in "Studii și comunicări" (Studies and Communications), V, Câmpulung Muscel Museum, 1989, p. 255.

³⁶ C. Rădulescu-Codin, op. cit., p. 79.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 56.

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 58.

³⁹ V.V. Caramelia, I. Trancu, op. cit., p. 86.

⁴⁰ Radu-Ștefan Ciobanu, *Curtea de Argeș și Câmpulung-Muscel: reședințe domnești în raport de anterioritate sau contemporaneitate? (Curtea de Argeș and Câmpulung-Muscel princely residences in a relation of anteriority or contemporaneity?)*, in "Studii și cercetări" (Studies and Researches), V, Câmpulung Muscel Museum, 1989, p. 3.

⁴¹ C. Rădulescu-Codin, op. cit., p. 54.

⁴² I. Catrinescu, op. cit., p. 7.

⁴³ Radu Popescu, *Istoriile domnilor Țării Românești. Cronicari munteni (History of the Wallachian Princes)*, 2, 2nd ed., apud Radu-Ștefan Ciobanu, Bucharest, op. cit., p.4.

which he raised upon advice from his Lady Marghita⁴⁴. Nicolae Domnesc church from Curtea de Argeş and Tismana Monastery are also regarded as foundations of Negru Vodă.

Petraşcu Voievod, the son of Radu Paisie, had Negru Vodă painted (a copy of the painting from Nicolae Domnesc church) in the mortuary chamber of Neagoe Basarab family (1554-1556). The specialists in Romanian art history consider that the portrait of Negru Vodă painted in the church of Curtea de Argeş Monastery signifies the passage from the ecumenical spirit to the national one.

According to the popular tradition, Negru Vodă also built a church with two partitions near the palace from Cetăţeni. His Lady was buried in Domneşti village owned by Curtea de Argeş Monastery. According to other sources of the popular tradition Lady Marghita would be buried in Vieroşi village in the church which Negru Vodă raised initially in Gemenea at Enculeşti. Because the land there did not look too good he thereafter moved the church to Vieroşi "passing the bricks from hand to hand down to this valley"⁴⁵. Vieroşi Monastery (1573) was founded by the High Steward Ivaşcu and by the High Lord Steward Albu from Goleşti.

Negru Vodă's fight against the Tartars

The defence of Wallachia against the invading Tartars is the core of the myth-legend on Negru Vodă. Due to the legendary hero the Romanians were always winning. The heroes from the Slavic legends fought the Turks. These legends are much more recent. The legend on Marko Kralievici illustrates our statements. The Russian tales speak of the fights with the Tartars and with the Mongolians as well. The fact that the myth-legend focuses on the fight against the Tartars shows that it developed before the foundation of Wallachia, while the scholar tradition on Negru Vodă appeared much later, "when Wallachia had become fully autonomous"⁴⁶. The myth-legend shows the opposition to the invaders, it expresses the will of the people to escape destruction. It is essential to our culture: we might say that it is the first historic legend of the Romanians living on either side of the Carpathians.

The elements of the nature are in close relation to the local people in their struggle against the invaders as shown by both the popular poetry and by the educated creation. When Negru Vodă arrived the Tartars were already in the country. "Hei, hei, dear, the Tartars were extremely fierce and grim... They were as many as the leaves and the grass"⁴⁷. The popular vision assimilated them to the giants from the early days of mankind: "They lived during the time when our Saviour was on Earth. They are fierce, quick-tempered and bad, very bad; they had only one eye in their forefront, they did not care about the home, about the food, about scythe and the plough. They only lived from plundering... they were killing, burning"⁴⁸. They were pouncing from the hills – some carry their names – and either killed or yoked the Romanians they were catching. "Negru Vodă fought the Tartars for a long time hoping he would eventually get them out of this land of ours"⁴⁹. The invading Tartars were pagans. They were invading the villages on days of religious feasts, even on Easter Day, when the men and women were in church and the young ones were doing the ring dance, catching them

⁴⁴ C. Rădulescu-Codin, op. cit., p. 54.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 66.

⁴⁶ Aurel Sacerdoţeanu, op. cit., p. 86.

⁴⁷ C. Rădulescu-Codin, op. cit., p. 34.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 53.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 59.

thus by surprise. The villages remained deserted. This accounts for the common pastures former village areas.

The popular tradition sometimes depicted the Tartars farming. At that time a lot of millet was grown in Wallachia. The legend says that the land was stretched and good and the Tartars were farming it with ploughs dragged by the Romanians. They were gathering the stubble like some furnaces and setting them on fire and then spread (the ashes) all over the ploughed land. Then they seeded millet. The legend preserved the truth that “before, the land was clear” and cultivated with millet. The same popular tradition reminds the localities invaded by the Tartars: for instance Tătărani village. Negru Vodă defeated and chased them over the Danube. When the Tartars returned the Romanians “hit them again” and fought them “chest to chest”⁵⁰. The Romanians used legendary stratagems to defend their country. Most often, the invaders were drowned: “Negru Vodă dammed the Dâmbovița river with a strong wall and a dam gate and one night when the Tartars were sleeping after partying the Romanians opened the gate to the dam and unleashed the waters drowning all the Tartars and there was nothing left of them”⁵¹. The Romanians also used the advantage of the land, such as “Săritoarea lui Negru Vodă” (The jumping place of Negru Vodă), for instance, which the people also called “Săritoarea lui Mihai Viteazu”, by contagiousness. The Tartars once “almost got” Negru Vodă but he managed to escape due to the “end of a glen which he jumped with his people”. Under other circumstances a “tract of forest” saved him.

In his struggle against the Tartars Negru Vodă used several passwords. When he took the fortress of Jidava for instance, the password was “millet stubble field” and the reply was “linden cudgel”⁵².

Another stratagem was to mount the horseshoes “the other way around”, with the teethtes of the shoe towards the front⁵³. According to the popular mentality other legendary heroes did the same: Vlad Țepeș⁵⁴ or Avram Iancu⁵⁵. When the Tartars tried to catch Negru Vodă he escaped due to his supernatural horse, which could fly – flying horse met in the popular ballads in fairy tales and in mythology⁵⁶.

Negru Vodă – civilising hero

The myth-legend also ascribed Negru Vodă the quality of “civilising hero”. After the Tartars were chased away he became concerned with the organisation of the social life. His soldiers abducted girls from Moldova and married them to start a family⁵⁷. Another variant stated that his soldiers married young girls who came from Rome. The resemblance to the “Abduction of the Sabine girls” is obvious, which shows the influence of the scholar tradition on the popular one.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 65.

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 55.

⁵² Ibidem, p. 69.

⁵³ Ibidem, p. 66.

⁵⁴ S. Săveanu, *Aventuri prin tunelul timpului (Adventures through the tunnel of time)*, Sport-Turism Press, Bucharest, 1977, p. 89.

⁵⁵ Ion Chelcea, *Literatură populară română contra dominațiunii maghiare în Ardeal (Romanian popular literature against the Magyar domination in Transylvania)*, Cluj, 1935, p. 20.

⁵⁶ Ion Mușlea, *Le cheval merveilleux dans l'épopée populaire, în Melanges de l'école roumaine en France*, 1924; p. 67.

⁵⁷ C. Rădulescu-Codin, op. cit., p. 63.

Another aspect of his activity as civilising hero is the introduction of the corn in the Wallachian agriculture. Indeed, the myth-legend is in agreement as timing with the historical truth⁵⁸. The legend says that the people of Negru Vodă bought turkeys from the Hungarian Country and stuffed them with corn because corn was prohibited for sales abroad. When they arrived in Wallachia the soldiers took the corn grains out of the turkey crop and seeded them⁵⁹. The wheat crops also survived due to Negru Vodă. The Tartars were burning the wheat crops. A dog swallowed a wheat straw full of grains and run to the forest where the Romanians had withdrawn worrying how would they get wheat seeds. From the saved wheat grains they restored the wheat crops. Ever since then, however, the wheat has grains only towards the tip of the straw, unlike before when it had grains all over the straw⁶⁰.

The myth-legend on Negru Vodă reflects the process of crystallization of the Romanian people's self-conscience, which started in the early village communities of the 13th century when Câmpulung was a mere consolidated rural settlement with periodic market. The area where the myth-legend developed had a higher economic and social-cultural life as compared to closer or more remote areas of the country. The conflict around which the myth-legend developed expresses the contradiction between two stages of evolution in culture and civilisation. The foundation of Wallachia by Basarab the 1st was due to the higher stage of development in the social life. Previous to the fight from Posada (1330) the Romanian people had already surpassed the "ethnographic vegetative" stage – as Vasile Pârvan said – and had already developed the self-conscience with a clear cut delimitation from the invaders who disturbed the order of the social, material and spiritual life. This is why the invaders were depicted in gloomy colours, as belonging to the "early times", to the early stages of civilisation. The entire country stood against them. Even nature fraternized with the Romanian people. Negru Vodă embodied the principle of good, the spirit of independence and liberty defining the Romanian people. Through the Tartars the myth-legend suggests any other invading enemies. In complete unity, by firmness, bravery and ingenuity the Romanians defeated the enemy. In this respect, the myth-legend "created behaviours", moral and civic behaviour codes, similar to the *Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son Teodosie*.

Negru Vodă, the myth-legend acted to consolidate in time the awareness of the Latin origin of our language and culture, the unity of conscience and feelings of the Romanians living between the Carpathians and the Danube. Although polyvalent, the functions of the myth-legend on Negru Vodă focus on the patriotic feelings. The patriotic feelings, which extended from a limited area to engulf the whole country, caused the myth-legend on Negru Vodă to become an essential part of the Romanian culture. In our opinion its specificity does not lie in the narration on the foundation of Wallachia, of towns or fortresses and churches, but in supporting the endeavour of Romanians towards freedom and independence. Hence its permanent up-to-dateness. The myth-legend on Negru Vodă differs in structure from the myth-legend on prince Dragoș, the "founder" of Moldavia.

In our opinion, Negru Vodă is neither the legendary embodiment of Basarab the 1st, nor of other rulers from the 13th and 14th centuries, but the name that the Romanians ascribed to their endeavour for liberty, to their vocation for culture and civilisation, to their spirituality.

⁵⁸ C.C. Giurescu, *Probleme controversate în istoriografia română (Controversial problems in the Romanian historiography)*, Albatros Press, Bucharest, 1977, p. 125.

⁵⁹ C. Rădulescu-Codin, op. cit., p. 67.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, p. 49.

CONCERNING THE FRESCO TECHNIQUE USED BY THE ROMANIAN MEDIEVAL PAINTERS

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Abstract. The term fresco typically describes the *buon fresco* process in which painting is done upon a wet lime-plaster wall with pigments ground either in water or a water-based solution only. When the wall dries, the painting becomes an integral part of the surface. This makes fresco more durable than superimposed decorations (*secco*). The means to paint frescoes are and have been through history as many as there are schools of art. This paper tries to fill a big gap existing in the knowledge about the techniques and materials used in mural painting on the territory of today's Romania during the Middle Ages. Besides presenting the materials, utensils and techniques used in fresco during that period, influences of foreign schools on the way the Romanian iconographers painted will be also discussed as well as their knowledge of the natural resources available to them and their craftsmanship.

The term fresco typically describes the *buon fresco* process in which painting is done upon a wet lime-plaster wall with pigments ground either in water or a water-based solution only. When the wall dries, the painting becomes an integral part of the surface which makes it more durable than superimposed decorations. It also has a matte (dead flat) finish which allows it to be viewed from all angles without undue glare or reflections. The means to paint frescoes are and have been through history as many as there are schools of art.

1. This paper tries to fill a big gap existing in the knowledge about the techniques and materials used in mural painting on the territory of today's Romania during the Middle Ages. Besides presenting the materials, utensils and techniques used in fresco during that period, influences of foreign schools on the way the Romanian iconographers painted will be also discussed as well as their craftsmanship and their knowledge of the natural resources available to them.

During the 19th century researchers like Duchesne¹ and Bayet² wrote that it was impossible to find well conserved exterior medieval fresco. In the Romanian area there are still such works, older than 400 years which stood admirably the test of time. Research done by us over a period of more than twenty years, together with recommendations from existing manuscripts, with fragmentary data from some researchers interested almost exclusively in iconography, and with communications from old painters, holders of workshop "secrets" transmitted over centuries from one generation to another, gave us insights into the materials and techniques used to make these frescoes.

In general the fresco technique is, as Michelangelo said, "the most difficult and daring painting technique, the ultimate test for a painter". Many painters, renowned for their paintings done in oil and tempera, cannot produce great frescoes. This technique requires from the painter self-discipline, courage, craftsmanship, and ability to make fast decisions.³ Experience is also necessary as is a good understanding of this technique since the colors used look differently when they are wet than they are dry.

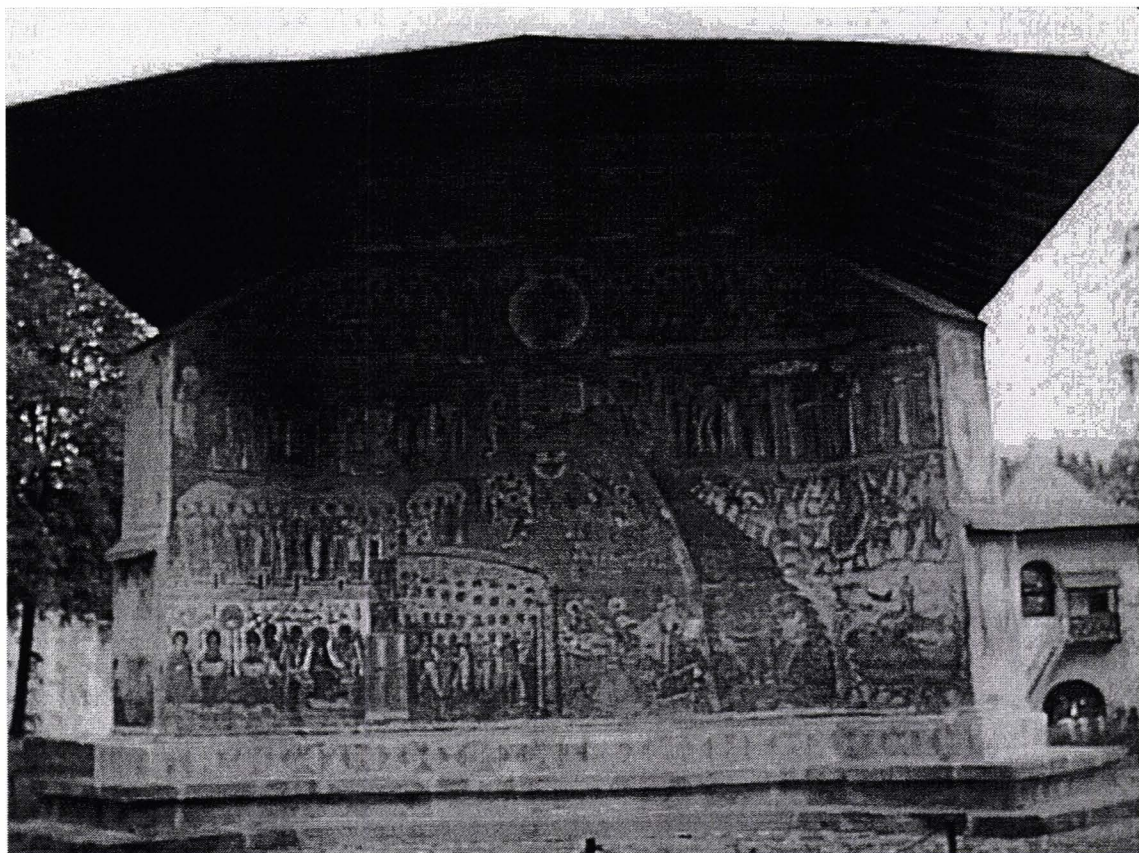


Figure 1. The Last Judgement, the West wall, Voroneț Monastery (1488), Romania.

In general the fresco technique is, as Michelangelo said, “the most difficult and daring painting technique, the ultimate test for a painter”. Many painters, renowned for their paintings done in oil and tempera, cannot produce great frescoes. This technique requires from the painter self-discipline, courage, craftsmanship, and ability to make fast decisions.⁴ Experience is also necessary as is a good understanding of this technique since the colors used look differently when they are wet than they are dry.

The mural painting done by the Romanian medieval iconographers was all done in the *buon fresco* technique⁵ and stood admirably the test of time. Beside the church of the Voroneț monastery which is also known as the Sistine Chapel of the East⁶ (Figure 1), there are several others (Sucevița, Humor, Moldovița, Arbore) located in the eastern part of Romania which were painted in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. They all have interior painting, which is common in Orthodox churches, but are also fully painted on the outside which in the Russian area never appears and seldom appears in the Balkans and Greece area. These exterior murals were admirably conserved in spite of a climate which is harsh, with large variations in temperature from a season to another and abundant precipitations.

2. Before actually painting a fresco on a wall (which could be stone, brick or a mixture thereof) some technical steps had to be completed:

- the bricks with low or zero porosity were eliminated (based on the color of the vitrification spots appearing when calcination was conducted at too high temperatures);

- elimination of the inorganic salt deposited on bricks;

- exposure of the wall to the air for longer periods of time, starting with the second half of the 15th century. Prior to that period deficiencies had been recorded, due to settling, even though wooden beams were often used as inner reinforcement.

Beginning with the first decade of the 16th century, in order to use a new church while the walls and foundation were still “working”, temporary decorations (summary painting done using only 3-4 colors) were made. It was at least five years later that the actual fresco was painted. The prolonged exposure to the air seems to be beneficial if we note that the majority of the Romanian medieval frescoes do not have fissures in the mortar as do better-known frescoes (e.g. the superb frescoes in the famous Church of the Savior in Chora monastery, in today’s Istanbul, dating from 1315-1321 and which needed extensive restoration work⁷).

3. In Romanian frescoes, as in Byzantine ones, the mortar used in fresco was different from the one used in masonry. Natural calcium carbonate (sometimes even chalk was used) of a convenient purity has always been available and using wood only for burning contributed to maintaining that purity. That is why the *erminies*⁸ and other written documents from that time are very laconic regarding the purity of this raw material and its calcinations.⁹

The hydration of calcium oxide (lime slaking) was done using river water. The entire amount of water was added at the beginning because rapidly slaked lime tends to be colloidal while slowly slaked lime tends to be crystalline. The ratio calcium oxide to water was in accordance with present time information, 1:2.5.¹⁰ The water excess covered easily the stoichiometric requirement and the water lost following evaporation due to the exothermic effect of the reaction¹¹. The heat generated by the slaking of lime is considerable sometimes reaching up to 400°C. The hydration of lime, in contrast with what we know from Palomino¹² regarding the Spanish painters of the 14-15th centuries, was done in small batches in a wooden casket (as described in the *erminies*) with stirring until a “*ciorba*”¹³ consistency was achieved. After separating the waste and the large (unhydrated) pieces through an ordinary but efficient sieve made of twigs, the mixture was put in a storage pit (1.5-3 m deep), with walls covered in planks. On top of the wooden cover (to prevent mechanical contamination) soil was placed during the storage. During the sieving and the mixing preceding it, cooling was achieved which diminished the losses due to evaporation.

There are no indications that in the Romanian area continuous removal of the carbonated lime was performed periodically as was recommended in Russian manuscripts (the periodicity of the process was connected either to numbers with occult significance or to the great religious holidays of the year). Some of the *erminies* recommended removing the thin “skin” of calcium carbonate off the lime surface when the latter was taken out of the storage pit to be used but not periodically during the first six weeks of storage, as was done on the territory of today’s Russia.

Due to the high quality of the lime obtained, the Romanian fresco painters did not resort, as did the Russian painters³, to applying a first mortar layer in which a resinous binder was introduced or to consolidating the mortar layer with big nails as in some Italian frescoes of the 14-15th centuries¹⁴.

In other Romanian manuscripts, as in similar Russian ones, it is recommended for the slaked lime to be “like pot cheese”, like butter, or to have the proper consistency “to be taken by shovel”, or “not to fall off the trowel when stirring it”. In Cennini’s instructions for painters the same type of recommendation appears, to use lime which was “so well slaked that it has the appearance of an ointment”.¹³

Pliny the Elder recommended slaking and curing to last for three years¹⁵, the Russian manuscripts ten to twenty years, and Vitruvius recommended six months while mentioning cases in which the lime was cured for twenty years¹⁶. The Romanian iconographers and their “books” considered that slaked lime is fit for use in fresco (complete hydration and separation of impurities) 1-2 years after its slaking.¹⁷ Some manuscripts indicate that sometimes even lime slaked three decades ago was used. In any case, like other fresco painters, the Romanian painters unanimously agree in their manuscripts that the longer the lime was slaked, the better it worked.

4. In contrast to the recommendations of Cennini or the Russian and Byzantine painters, the wetting of the wall prior to painting was done abundantly, as follows: five-six times for brick walls and only 2-3 times for walls made of stones. Concerning the wetting of the support, we must keep in mind that, due to the large areas frescoes were typically painted on, the resistance of the mortar layers was diminished. This was mainly due to the fact that before applying the last layer of mortar, the previous one had partially dried. The solution to this, especially during the warm season, was to wet with water the surface on which the mortar which will eventually hold the painted layer was applied.

At the time the Romanian fresco painters were using this wetting steps in the process of painting murals, Western Europe was starting to use what we call now the *mezzo fresco* technique.¹⁸ Churches are still painted using this method in present day Romania and a handbook for painters published not long ago in the United States still recommends wetting before the application of each layer of the fresco.¹⁹

5. There are no recommendations in the *erminies* concerning the rugosity of the mortar layer which could mean that the average granulation of the river sand used was probably satisfactory. It is however mentioned how the control of the granulation of sand was done, an element which is absent from ancient manuscripts dealing with this topic^{14,15}.

6. The Romanian “books of painting” do not make any reference to the amount of water introduced in the mortar or about the consistency of the mortar. It was prepared by apprentices under the supervision of an experienced master. This is different from Cennini’s Treatise where recommendations can be found concerning the thickness of the “equalization mortar” layer and the amount of mortar which can be prepared for one time use. In most cases the proportion of lime introduced in the mortar was similar to that indicated by Cennini and Vasari²⁰. We have recently met some cases in which the intermediate layer of mortar, not the one on the brick or the exterior one, was very friable due to the excessive amount of sand.

The amount of water varied from one master to another and, over time, from one epoch to another.

Sometimes the mortar layer contained sand, at other times a reinforcement material (hemp, flax, stems of other plants, straws, leaves, etc)²¹, the same as in Roman, Byzantine or Russian mural painting. Fillers (such as chalk, tile powder, brick, coal) were sometimes used too while there were cases when use of both filling agents and reinforcement materials was recommended.

7. When hemp, flax and stems of other plants were used as filling agents, they were cut into “standardized” lengths. After removing the “wooden” parts and “standard” cutting, they were “conditioned” by soaking in a solution of calcium hydroxide. The alkaline treatment was applied to straws as well.

In documents from another epoch the above mentioned treatment was replaced by the recommendation to use the mortar (to which the reinforcement agents had been added) only three days after preparation (which would have the same effect).

It seems that trends would come and go concerning the materials to be used in frescoes too. For instance, without any apparent reason, a reinforcement agent was being used very frequently (e.g. flax in the Moldavian frescoes of the 15th century) while in other regions of the country, at the same time, that same material was very seldom used.

Numerous examples offer proof of the ability the artisans of those times had in choosing their materials in order to obtain a strong and durable mortar. An example of innovation in this area can be seen at a monastery in Argeş where the exterior mortar layer was reinforced with leaves (low volumetric density) for the case when the lime used had mediocre binding characteristics (Figure 2).

Irrespective of the type, the reinforcement material increased the drying time of the mortar the fresco was painted on. That is why, unlike their Italian contemporaries, the Romanian fresco painters were able to apply the mortar layer on larger surfaces. The leveling was done as the work progressed. This reduced to an acceptable minimum the risk of visible distinction between surfaces painted on different days. Another consequence was the increase in the time allowed for work from ten to fourteen hours. In any case, the local climatic conditions contributed to the increase of that period of time too, compared to Italy for instance. If, during the work, a calcium carbonate “skin” appeared before applying the colors on the mortar, it had to be broken and removed with a trowel.

As filling agents for the mortar layers, those used at Mount Athos (at the school of the legendary Panselinos) were used by the Romanian artisans too together with others with higher porosity and low value of the volumetric density (like coal dust). We found this filling agent – the earliest used – in the remains of an old fresco (13th-14th century) in the Arges district²². Chalk dust was also used as filler by the Romanian medieval painters. This filler was recommended by Vitruvius too.¹⁵

8. The total thickness of the applied mortar strata (8-20 mm) does not seem to be “standardized” and, in most of the cases, was lower than in the Byzantine frescoes. This was the case when the support wall was made of either brick or stone, unlike in Giotto’s School. As everywhere else, in the Romanian area the thickness of the mortar layers varied from one part of the building or wall to another. The adherence between the mortar layers was excellent.

The number of mortar layers in the Romanian medieval frescoes (2-3) resembles the Byzantine (2) or Russian ones and it is inferior to the ancient ones (6-7 in Roman frescoes). As in the Byzantine murals, the appreciable dimensions of the frescoes led to the necessity of simplifying the technique used in building the fresco support.

Besides a variable proportion of lime in the different layers of mortar, the quality and quantity of the filling agents was also variable. In this respect, the Romanian frescoes are similar to the ancient ones and different from the Russian frescoes. Unlike the ancient frescoes, the Romanian artisans did not use chalk or marble dust in the final layer.

9. The chromatic values and vivid hues maintained for centuries prove that the Romanian medieval artists knew how to choose their pigments. They had to resist high radiation exposure and the atmospheric agents (when applied to the exterior walls of churches).



Figure 2. Saint Michael, interior fresco (painted in 1526) in a church in Curtea de Arges, Romania.

The painters' knowledge and ability in using pigments are evident not only when speaking of the resistance to microclimate and the alkalinity of the calcium hydroxide solution but also when considering the very method of application (how, how much, and to what extent each pigment changes its hue after the fresco dried). Concerning the resistance to the basicity of the environment a Romanian manuscript states that "...pigments have to stand the strength of lime, have to be long-lived and pleasant to look at..."²⁰

It is worth mentioning that, unlike the Russian fresco painters (who used a greater number of pigments for exterior walls than for interior ones), the Romanian fresco painters used approximately the same number of pigments in both cases.

Mihail Alpatov, whose opinion was that in the context of a whole work, the colors are “the vehicle of spiritual expression”, looking at the work of medieval Romanian fresco painters more than five decades ago said: “What an astonishing courage! The Romanian masters painted the exterior walls ... without being afraid of the fact that the colorscould fade”.²³

Concerning the exterior murals from northeastern Romania a question remains in this respect: how come all of them have been well preserved (Voronet, Humor, Putna, Moldovita, Sucevita, Arbore) only those at Probota were much poorly conserved? The climate is the same, since they are in the same part of the country, and Humor was painted only 3 years after Probota, 1535 vs. 1532, respectively) and it is in a much better state. A possible explanation for that (mentioned by a well-known art critic⁴) was that technical procedures less durable were tried on the frescoes of this church, the first to be fully painted on the outside.⁴

10. In some of the *erminies* a more or less complete list with pigments recommended for use in fresco appeared and, in fewer cases, even a list with those which should not be used was given.

Sometimes it was indicated which pigments give certain hues when used in certain parts of the fresco or which pigments should be applied on a certain background (e.g. it was obligatory to apply a blue pigment on burned umbra and on black).

As in other “books of painting”, the recommendations in the *erminies* have the character of a “standardization” (e.g. the recommendation of a *verdaccio* resembling Cennini’s). However a chromatic monotony was never noticed in the general presentation of the Romanian medieval frescoes. The monasteries in the northeastern part of Romania are a testimony thereof. In 1983 the late Vasile Dragut was quoting a well-known Austrian art historian who, in 1913, was writing: “...these strange churches of Moldavia which, due to the polychromy of their façades, are on a par with San Marco in Venice or with the Orvieto dome...No other country in the world offers us something as striking as that.”²⁴

11. Some of the pigments used were natural (taken from the surrounding nature or bought), others were prepared in the workshops. The technological indications referring to the latter category of pigments contain an intermingling of precise details and, sometimes, recommendations that we cannot accept or understand today.

Thus, in Manolache Halipiu’s *erminie*²⁵, when preparing a blue pigment some components are recommended which are not indicated for use in *buon fresco*. At the end of the recipe, Halipiu indicates the bibliographic source (“so do the Russian ones”). Immediately after that, in the same manuscript, there is another recommendation regarding the same pigment, a simpler and clearer recipe, adequate for the purpose and used in the painter’s workshop.

In many cases, in the recommendations from the *erminies* the dosage of the reactants, the duration and the thermal regime of the preparative reaction and other details are clearly stated as is the method to control the preparation. Thus in Halepiu’s *erminie*, when presenting the preparation of the synthetic cinnabar (using a mixture of mercury and sulfur), after everything is made clear, the final indication appears that the heating should be made with oak charcoal only.

In Macarie's *erminie*, the variant transcribed by Eleazar (a monk from Căldărușani), referring to the preparation of cinnabar by the same "dry" method, after indicating the necessary reagents and the quality control tests, it is stated that the heating should be made with charcoal obtained from a different wood essence. In both cases the working temperatures are higher than those absolutely necessary and the duration recommended for the reaction (24 hours) seems to be appreciated generously.

Regarding the choice of the fuel and the strict specifications concerning its qualities, we have to be cautious today. For melting sulfur and properly heating mercury it is not necessary to use a certain type of wood.

12. Concerning the actual painting technique the recommendations available display refinement and precision.

Thus, when applying some colors containing iron oxides in their composition it is recommended first to lay on a pigment which mixes better with water. Unlike the Italian fresco painters of the 14-15th centuries, the Romanian ones did not modify the binder by introducing egg, casein or milk. The west European painters also chose to apply some costly and partially soluble pigments (like lapis lazuli, azurite) *a secco*, after the fresco had dried, held together by glue rather than egg yolk.²⁶

Sometimes the indications found in the Romanian "books" are similar to those used by schools of painting from other countries with which the Romanian painters were in contact. An example is the preparation of the background recommended for painting figures (containing black pigment mixed with green, yellow and white) which seems identical with those recommended by Cennini¹³ or Dionysus of Furna²⁷ for the same task. At the same time, unlike Panselinos^{28,29} school, with which the Romanian painters were in contact through Dionysus of Furna, for some backgrounds the Romanian artisans used cinnabar mixed with lime white and ochre.

The preceding examples oblige us to draw other conclusions as well. One is that the *erminies* were compilations. Their authors – like their contemporary colleagues – had acquired data not only from local tradition and from the schools they had come into contact with. They introduced and kept using their own observations and adaptations, the result of centuries-long activity and of a selection process competently performed.

13. The pigments. The black pigment was obtained by controlled partial combustion of numerous wood essences (oak, birch, tree bark), of vine shoots, bones, nut shells, or peach kernels. Not all the details and justification for the uses assigned to each type of black have reached us through either written or oral testimonies. However some of them are known from different sources. In his manuscript Macarie of Căldărușani recommends to use a black obtained from the wood of a resinous tree to paint the pupils. He argues that "if you use the one you work on wood and canvas the color will fade". Other *erminies* mention that a darker purple hue, like the one used to paint gray hair, is achieved by mixing black obtained from oak tree with a very well-specified white, obtained from the carbonated lime from old frescoes' mortar). At the same time a lighter shade of black used for more luminous backgrounds was prepared from vine shoots.³⁰

White pigments were prepared either from lime (slaked long ago or more recently, or from mortar of old frescoes separated from the painted layer and subsequently ground) or from chalk dust. The most used white pigment was made from lime recently slaked. The steps of the preparative process were: drying in the sun, followed by vigorous calcinations and slaking.

Although the compositions of the white pigments were very similar, like the black ones, the uses for each of them were different. It was known at the time that pigments with the same chemical composition could lead to different intensities as the sizes (respectively the granulations) of the particles differ. Each pigment transmits its own characteristics to the color it is used in. Thus, in painting the faces, it was recommended to use a white obtained from a calcium hydroxide prepared long ago. The white obtained (by a technology described in minute detail) from the mortar of an old fresco was recommended for mixtures of pigments used in painting backgrounds, gray hair and human flesh. This white pigment was made through a process during which the filling agents (from the old fresco mortar) had not been removed. There are also instances when the recommendation is to use white pigment, without any other specification (e.g. in painting the folds of clothing).⁹

Sometimes specifications were made regarding the use of the same “standardized” hues or colors for a certain part of the fresco. The white from the mortar of an old fresco was mixed with cinnabar or praseolite³¹, while that obtained from recently slaked lime was mixed only with cinnabar in most cases. The chromatic accords and the great resistance over time also proved the pertinence of the centuries-old observations.

Testimony of the technical level of that epoch, the control of the quality of the raw material used to prepare lime white – hydrated either well in advance or freshly – was done by tasting (“not to be sour”).

The green pigments typically used in fresco were obtained from hydrated silicate of aluminum, magnesium and iron (the popular name found in *erminies* is praseolite), malachite³², or basic copper acetate (prepared from vinegar and metallic copper using a technology described by us elsewhere³³). The appearance of a basic copper chloride in small amounts in the green color is due either to its formation during the preparation of the copper acetate (due to the accidental presence of chloride in the calcium hydroxide solution) or to its later formation, following a double exchange reaction.

When the green pigment had been prepared starting from iron oxide, darkening of the color often occurred. It was believed to be caused by the partial conversion of ferrous oxide into ferric oxide.³⁴

Each of these unique monuments fully painted on the out side have their individuality. Figure 3a shows the church of the Moldovița monastery, in Northeastern Romania, which has a wonderful green color as background for all its well-preserved exterior frescoes while the background at Humor is a dark red hue (Figure 3b).

Yellow pigments were first obtained from a natural “earth”, limonite³⁵. Some of the pigments were from local sources, others were imported (e.g. the Constantinople ochre). Their covering power and their hue were very skillfully used (technically speaking). By calcinations – briefly described in the *erminies* – new hues were obtained from a different type of ochre. Unlike Western Europe, in Southeastern Europe these new hues seldom had special names.

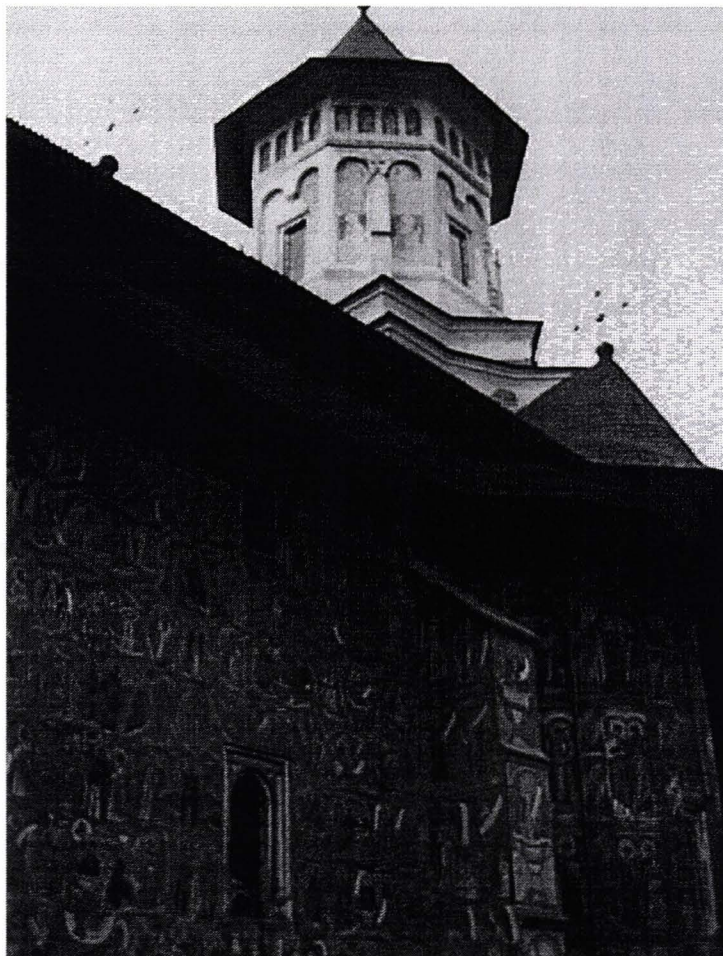
As red pigments, minium and cinnabar (natural or synthesized in the painter’s workshop) were used. The synthesized cinnabar was not purified as was recommended in Theophrastus’ book³⁶. Also as red pigment, some aluminum silicates tinted by iron oxide were used.

It is interesting to note that the Romanian painters, unlike Pliny the Elder, knew that cinnabar and minium were two different compounds and that they behaved differently when exposed to the atmospheric agents. Skillfully, knowing their pigments, the fresco painters recommended in an *erminie* (considered to be a compilation of Panselinos’ teachings and

Theophrastus' book) to use minium only when painting the red of the cheeks. At the same time, for lips, they recommended either a mixture of cinnabar with ochre and black or cinnabar with lime white, or cinnabar with burned umbra and black.²⁰

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(a)



(b)

Figure 3. (a) The church of the monastery Moldovița (painted in 1537); (b) the church of the monastery Humor (painted in 1535)

The brown pigments were made of natural or burned *umbra*³⁸ mixed with black (in a 1:1 ratio), and with some iron oxides either natural or roasted. They were used for the shadows around the eyes, nose and arms, etc.

The most frequently used blue pigments were natural azurite³⁹ and *lapis lazuli*⁴⁰. Concerning the *lapis lazuli*, some *erminies* pointed out that it had to be mixed with some indigo and with calcium carbonate or lime white for better resistance over time. "Voronet Blue", a color obtained from lapis lazuli, has been added to the lexicon of art alongside colors such as the "Titian Red" and "Veronese Green". Its magnificent fresco representing the Last Judgment, placed on the West wall (Figure 1) is known world-wide.

14. In most cases the colors were prepared by controlled grinding with water or a solution of calcium hydroxide. As in Cennini's book, it is often mentioned in the *erminies* that the more thorough the grinding is, the more adequate the pigment would be ("... grind it fine, to butter consistency..."²⁰).

For a better "acceptance" of the color by the last mortar layer the *erminies* pointed out that if a thin skin of calcium carbonate had been formed on the mortar, openings were made in it with the trowel before applying the colors. This way the water from the wet mortar seeped out becoming part of the pigment vehicle. Following the chemical reaction with the carbon dioxide from the air and formation of calcium carbonate, the painted layer could still be entrapped in its crystalline structure.

The Romanian fresco painters used only pigments with great covering power and nowhere is mentioned a difference between them concerning the granulation control, the breaking up or the normalization of the pigment particles. When a pigment did not resist the action of calcium hydroxide it was mixed with creamed milk and then applied on plaster which was dried less.

The appearance in the *erminies* of some vague indications regarding compositions of some color preparations to which egg or a boiling bran solution had been added led to the controversy (centuries ago) if all the painting considered *buon fresco* in the Romanian Middle Ages was actually true fresco. Tempera, unlike the old Russian fresco where it was used for thin superposed layers, represents in the work of the Romanian painters retouching or later restoration.

A certain waviness in the surface of the fresco mortar seems to be due to a technique by which the improvement of the general aspect of the work was attempted. The surface seems to be intentionally wavy, targeting a more vibrant light effect, achieving both a matte finish as well as the transparency of water color in some instances or oil or pastel reflexions in some other instances. There is neither in the Romanian old painters' manuscripts nor in the memories of the younger ones any specification about the use of technology to obtain a fresco with a very polished, smooth and tough surface. We also did not find even vague recommendations like Cennini's or Battista Alberti's⁴¹ regarding the finishing of the last mortar layer by means of a wet brush or the handle of the trowel.

16. The thin brushes (round, stiff or pointed) used in fresco painting by the Romanian artisans were made of mule mane hairs, mule jaw hair or hair above the hoop of the ox (the round brushes), and also from goat and squirrel straight hairs (the pointed brushes). Badger hairs or hairs from the tail of a cow did not appear to have been used as it was the case with Russian frescoes.

Combed hairs, very well cleaned and of the same length were tied with a thin thread and then inserted into the feather of an eagle or another bird. In case the hairs were not straight, the *erminies* suggest straightening by means of "yellow sticky earth".

The big brushes were made with pig hair. There are no recommendations as in Cennini's treatise to use white hair only. Before being tied to a wooden handle, the hairs were either tied with a thread or glued with melted conifer resin.

All brushes were kept during work in and later cleaned with a dilute calcium hydroxide solution.

Fresco is a form of art requiring a thorough knowledge of materials and high technological skills in order to make an art work which can stand time and weather agents (especially when painted on external walls). The passing of time and poor restorations have worsened the condition of many a mural in different countries. In a country with limited resources restoration of religious monument was very scarce and the elements were the only enemy. The frescoes existing in Romanian churches (some from as early as the 1300s) are a testimony to the talent and skills of the painters from that area during the Middle Ages and their success in producing masterpieces which passed successfully the test of time in a place with a trying continental weather pattern.

The manuscripts containing the recipes the fresco painters used when preparing pigments and painting frescoes show their advanced knowledge of materials and the fact that they raised their technique to heights which few of their peers attained. The same "books of

painting” also help understand the place the Romanian fresco painters held in the Europe of their time and the connections they established with schools of painting from other countries.

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- ¹⁸ In the *mezzo fresco* technique the painting is not done on freshly laid mortar but on one that is partially dried. The result was that the colors penetrate it much less. In the appendix to the second volume of his “*Prospettiva dei pittori e architetti*”, published in 1700, Ignazio Pozzo (a priest) called *mezzo fresco* the true fresco technique (since it was the one in general use during that time in Western Europe). He wrote: “Be sure not to begin painting until the lime has reached a stage where it is hard to make a finger mark in it”.
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- ²⁸ Manuel Panselinos - Athonite painter from the Paleolog's epoch (13th century). He was known as one of the greatest painters of frescoes. Most of these can be found in the Protaton Church, at Mount Athos.
- ²⁹ <http://www.macedonian-heritage.gr/HellenicMacedonia/en/B2.2.2.4.1.html>
- ³⁰ Leonida M.D., Mihalcu M., *Black organic pigments used by medieval painters*, The 34th MiddleAtlantic Regional Meeting, Baltimore, June 2001.
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- ³² Basic copper carbonate. Fine, clear yellowish green, not reliably permanent when used as pigment. Found as major copper ore and, later, synthesized as Bremen blue. Used in jewelry too.

³³ Leonida, M.D., Mihalcu, M., About a green copper-based old pigment, The 32nd Middle Atlantic Regional Meeting, Madison, May 1999.

³⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferric_oxide

³⁵ Mixture of hydrated iron oxides. Found naturally as iron ore.

³⁶ Theophrastus, History of Stones, English version Sir John hill, ed., C. Davis, London 1774. Chemistry - basic copper carbonate. It is found as minor ore of copper and it is used as ornamental stone, pigment, and in jewelry.

³⁷ Theophrastus, History of Stones, English version Sir John hill, ed., C. Davis, London 1774. Chemistry - basic copper carbonate. It is found as minor ore of copper and it is used as ornamental stone, pigment, and in jewelry.

³⁸ Mihalcu, M., Fața nevăzută a formei și culorii, Ed. Tehnică, Bucharest, 1996.

³⁹ Basic copper carbonate. It is found as a minor ore of copper and it is used as ornamental stone, pigment, and in jewelry.

⁴⁰ Sodium calcium aluminum silicate sulfate. For centuries it was the most expensive pigment. It was replaced by synthetic ultramarine.

⁴¹ Alberti, B. De Pictura (1436, dedicated to Brunelleschi), De Re Aedificatoria (1452) and De Statua (1464). Alberti was a theoretician: he gave a scientific basis to works of art and ennobled the figure of the artist, placed painting, sculpture and architecture on the same level as literature and philosophy. In his writings he craftsman became an intellectual.

LA PROPRIETE COMMUNAUTAIRE EN YOUGOSLAVIE CONTEMPORAINE

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I) Données historiques sur l'ancienne propriété communautaire

1) Par propriété communautaire nous entendons le droit des communautés de disposer d'un objet: Les individus ou les groupes domestiques ne sont pas au point de vue juridique les possesseurs d'une partie concrète de la propriété communautaire; le droit de possession englobe la totalité de la propriété communautaire et en réalité signifie le droit d'exploitation et de disposition. Le bénéficiaire du droit de disposition est soit une organisation sociale (*stricto sensu*) soit une organisation territoriale.

2) Le cadre socio-économique général de la propriété collective est la société agro-pastorale, mais aussi la société urbaine dans la zone littorale où fonctionnait le droit statutaire. Une partie de la société agro-pastorale avait un caractère patriarcal, étant structurée en phratries et en tribus; on la trouve ainsi au Monténégro, en Herzégovine, en Serbie et dans la région de Kossovo et Métohia. Il s'agit sur le plan ethnique de Serbes et d'Albanais yougoslaves.

Il faut préciser que l'organisation tribale des Serbes et des Albanais diffère de l'organisation tribale dite primitive; illustrée par exemple par le cas des Iroquois: chez les Serbes et les Albanais il s'agit avant tout d'une organisation sociale dont la tendance patriarcale est très forte. Elle est en fait la résurgence d'une organisation tribale au moment de la conquête ottomane qui; depuis la XV-e siècle entraîne la disparition des Etats médiévaux serbes et de l'autorité centrale autochtone: Cette organisation tribale se maintient dans le cadre de l'Empire ottoman jusqu'au début du XX-e siècle.

3) On peut diviser l'espace géographique concerné en trois zones; panonique, dinarique et littorale; on y trouve dans chacune des survivances héritées de différents systèmes socio-politiques et juridiques.

La propriété foncière collective est, en principe, destinée à une élevage de pacage; mais ce n'est pas la règle. Par exemple, dans la zone panonique, la base de l'élevage n'est pas constituée par les pâturages mais par l'agriculture. Pourtant, la propriété foncière collective y est plus vaste et mieux organisée qu'en Serbie du Nord (Vukosavljević 1953 : 194). Dans ce cas, le rôle des prescriptions de l'Etat a été décisif : au cours des XVIII-e et XIX-e siècles l'Autriche y applique une politique de planification et de colonisation. A part les terres arables, chaque commune villageoise possède des pâturages communautaires.

Au point de vue de la propriété collective, la zone dinarique est la plus importante ; cette forme de propriété y été bien organisée. Dans cette zone existaient certaines conditions socio-économiques, géographiques et historico-juridiques qui ont influencé la formation des diverses sortes de propriété communautaires qu'on trouve à quatre niveaux : celui de la communauté domestique ("*kuća zadružna*"); celui de la phratrie ("*bratstvo*"); celui de la tribu ("*pleme*"); celui de la village ("*selo*"). L'ensemble de ces propriétés collectives n'est pas strictement séparé mais, au contraire, bien souvent les niveaux s'entremêlent. Les

caractéristiques principales de la propriété communautaire que nous aborderons en détail sont les suivantes :

Le groupe domestique de la *kuća zadružna* est composé en principe par plusieurs générations de parents ou, plus rarement, d'individus non-apparentés. Ses biens sont en principe inaliénables; étant transmis aux membres de la communauté. Cependant, il y a quelques exceptions à ce principe en cas de besoin majeur, famine ou rachat de servage. La protection des biens communs et hérités contre leur aliénation se fait par un mécanisme institutionnalisé basé sur droit de préemption; qui empêche leur vente en dehors d'un certain cercle parental. Dans cette communauté domestique, la "*patria potestas*" n'est pas développée. Les biens hérités appartiennent à la communauté, aux générations contemporaines et futures, conséquence de l'idée que la communauté domestique est permanente. La question de la succession des biens et des fonctions dans la *kuća zadružna* ne se pose pas tant qu'elle existe, c'est-à-dire tant qu'il y a des héritiers males. Le décès d'une personne dans la communauté domestique; et même du chef lui-même; ne constitue pas nécessairement un problème pour la succession.

b) Les caractéristiques de la propriété collective au niveau de la phratrie et au niveau tribal sont les mêmes ou semblables et nous les présentons en même temps. La propriété communautaire se compose tout d'abord de pâturages et de forêts, puis d'eau et d'abreuvoirs, de chemins, de moulins à eau et jamais de terres arables. Le nom de la propriété communautaire diffère mais le plus souvent on l'appelle "*komunica*" – communaux, "*planina*" – montagne et "*selina*". Tous ces noms désignent des propriétés communautaires.

La forme principale d'économie de la propriété communautaire est l'élevage semi-sédentaire. Etant donné que les biens fonciers du groupe domestique sont relativement petits, les biens collectifs (pâturages et forêts) ont une grande importance économique.

Les mots de *komunica* et de *planina* désignent en même temps un régime économique et juridique. Ce régime d'exploitation de la montagne se maintient mieux là où survit une organisation communautaire, comme c'est le cas au Monténégro ou en Herzégovine (Ćirić-Bogetić :1966).

Dans la montagne on trouve les "*katunište*" ou "*stanovi*", habitats pastoraux. Un habitat pastoral se compose de la cabane de l'éleveur et d'une ou de plusieurs bergeries. L'ensemble s'appelle "*katun*" ou "*stan*". Les katuns sont groupés par phratries ou par villages. A part son katun chaque groupe domestique peut avoir un potager; ce qui ne signifie pas l'obtention d'un droit de propriété sur cette terre. Selon les besoins, ces parcelles peuvent être transformées en pâturages communs. Pourtant, parfois les katuns et les terrains qui les entourent deviennent la propriété des groupes domestiques.

La transhumance (appelée « *izdig* » ou « *priljanje* ») des troupeaux vers les alpages se déroule de manière traditionnelle. L'estivage dure environ trois mois (juin-août). L'arrivée du bétail en montagne a lieu le même jour pour tous les éleveurs ; en Bosnie s'est le 6 juin, un mois après la fête orthodoxe de la Saint Georges, règle ancienne mais toujours suivie: La garde du bétail à part constitue un ensemble de production. Par contre, l'utilisation et l'entretien des pâturages sont collectifs.

C'est le devoir de chacun et de chaque communauté de défendre les montagnes communautaires des ennemis extérieurs. Et si jamais un étranger achète ou acquiert d'une autre façon un morceau de terre appartenant à un groupe domestique, il n'acquiert pas automatiquement le droit d'exploiter les pâturages et les forêts communautaires.

La propriété communautaire est acquise soit par l'occupation des terres libres, « n'appartenant à personne », soit par succession, achat, guerre (conquête).

Chaque *kuća zadružna* possède en principe les mêmes droits sur la terre communautaire; le nombre de ses membres et l'importance du bétail ne sont pas pris en considération. En fait, les droits ne sont pas les mêmes, car les groupes domestiques possédant un plus grand nombre du bétail profitent plus des communaux. Les droits à l'exploitation des communaux ne peuvent pas être aliénés et ils ne sont pas accessibles aux étrangers à la communauté. L'émigrant perd son droit sur les communaux, mais s'il revient il le retrouve.

Durant le passage progressif de l'élevage à l'agriculture, une partie des forêts communautaires est transformée en pâturages et en terres arables appartenant individuellement aux *kuća zadružna*. Dans ces cas; la terre communautaire est partagée entre les *kuća zadružna* à l'amiable. Celles qui ne participent pas à l'acquisition de pâturages par conquête (à la suite d'une guerre), ne participent non plus à l'exploitation ou aux partages éventuels des superficies gagnées.

La « *selina* » (ou « *utrina* ») comprend les terres communautaires au niveau du village ou de la commune villageoise. La *selina* n'est pas aussi bien organisée que les communaux des tribus ou des phratries; elle comprend aussi des pâturages et des forêts.

On trouve les meilleurs régimes d'exploitation de la *selina* en Croatie et en Voïvodina, comme aussi dans certaines parties du Monténégro, de la Macédoine ou de la Serbie du sud-est. En Croatie, les règles coutumières de fonctionnement de la « communauté foncière » (« *zemljišna zajednica* ») sont sanctionnées par la loi du 25 avril 1894 (Krbek 1948 : 5). Une quote-part dans une communauté foncière s'acquiert par héritage. Un immigré peut devenir membre d'une communauté foncière de plusieurs manières: par achat, par héritage (après un mariage matrilocal) ou par un accueil formel de la part des autres membres. Les quote-part ne sont pas les mêmes pour tous à cause de la divisions des groupes domestiques.

Dans les communes où vivaient des paysans non asservis, le droit d'héritage concerne également les femmes et les hommes; par contre, là où les paysans étaient soumis à un seigneur, les hommes seuls héritaient. L'émigré perd son droit d'exploitation, mais l'acquiert à nouveau à son retour.

La communauté foncière est administré par un conseil. Le droit de vote est égal à tous, ou proportionnel à sa quote-part ; qui ne peut pas aller au-delà d'un tiers de tous les votes (Krbek 1948 : 18 ; Vukosavljevic 1953 : 258-259).

En Slovénie, déjà à la fin du XVIII-e siècle, l'appareil bureaucratique de la monarchie absolue a éliminé presque toutes les institutions traditionnelles autonomes. Après 1848, la communauté villageoise est devenue seulement une partie de la nouvelle commune administrative, ayant une compétence limitée. Pourtant, certaines survivances des anciennes autonomies se sont conservées *praeter legem* dans la pratique jusqu'à la première guerre mondiale et même après. C'est le cas en Slovénie de l'Ouest où la fonction de « *župan* » - maire villageois, existait de facto même après la création de la commune administrative (Vilfan 1974 : 84-85).

1) A part les pâturages et les forêts, les moulins à eau et les moulins à foulon étaient également objet de la propriété communautaire. La construction et le maintien de ces moulins étaient faits en commun. Les bénéficiaires étaient les *kuća zadružna*, chacune à son tour. Par rapport aux autres droits collectifs, qui ne peuvent pas être aliénés, on peut ici vendre

sa quote-part, appelée « *red* » - tour. Les quote-part, égales au début, deviennent inégalitaires par suite de la division des groupes domestiques et du nombre de successeurs de chacun.

La communauté, en tant que propriétaire suprême, peut donner en cadeau ou louer un moulin à eau à une institution publique (école, église) (Tomić 1928 ; 361-362).

Après la moisson, les terres des kuća zadružna redeviennent temporairement un bien communautaire; le droit de vaine pâture fonctionne, et chacun a le droit de paître son bétail ou même de grappiller dans les vignobles.

Le mode d'aliénation des terres communautaires se faisait par usurpation, règlement d'une dette communale, partage au profit des pauvres et des immigrés. On partageait tout d'abord les parties de terres faciles à cultiver et seulement après les forêts. Les critères de partage étaient différents, par groupes domestiques, par tête d'homme, ou par le nombre des membres composant les groupes domestiques (Vukosavljević 1953 : 68-71).

On peut affirmer qu'au cours des XIX-e et XX-e siècles se déroulent parallèlement deux processus socio-économiques. Le premier est constitué par le développement permanent de l'agriculture au détriment de l'élevage extensif; le second est le renforcement de la propriété privée, en même temps que la propriété communautaire diminue graduellement et perd son importance économique. L'économie marchande et monétaire détruit l'économie traditionnelle et détermine le passage de la propriété communautaire à celle privée.

II. Propriété communautaire et propriété socialiste (collectiviste)

La science juridique yougoslave insiste sur le fait que tout droit révolutionnaire, y compris celui socialiste, doit changer radicalement l'état social préexistant. On peut se poser à juste raison la question suivante: est-ce qu'un droit nouveau et révolutionnaire peut, et dans quelle mesure, changer efficacement la réalité sociale elle-même, surtout la réalité villageoise. A l'aide des lois on peut changer une réalité sociale jusqu'à un certain point; au delà, un désaccord advient entre le système juridique officiel et la réalité sociale (R. Lukić, 1971 ; 145-146).

Cette opinion est confirmée pleinement par les recherches ethnologiques. Un dualisme juridique est la conséquence du désaccord qui advient entre le droit coutumier vivant et le droit de l'Etat. Ce dualisme a des conséquences négatives que nous observons surtout dans le domaine du droit de propriété et d'héritage.

Les erreurs politiques et idéologiques concernant le rôle des campagnes et de l'agriculture dans la construction du socialisme ont eu un effet important sur la propriété communautaire (surtout celle de la kuća zadružna) qui l'on voulait faire disparaître. Dans cette conception socialiste, la classe ouvrière constitue le facteur principal et unique de l'industrialisation du pays. Le village et sa culture traditionnelle représentent un élément conservateur appartenant au passé qui freine la construction du socialisme et doit pour cette raison disparaître. Cette attitude sectaire du Parti Communiste et de son gouvernement vis-à-vis des paysans est le résultat du dogmatisme idéologique qui se manifeste après la deuxième guerre mondiale, bien que pour la Yougoslavie il était notoirement connu que ce sont justement les paysans et les villages qui avaient constitué la base de la révolution. Or, dans la période socialiste les paysans sont devenus citoyens de second ordre.

La réforme agraire mise en place après la deuxième guerre mondiale fixe une limite maximale de dix hectares de terres cultivables par groupe domestique. La réforme a touché

d'abord les grands propriétaires, y compris l'Eglise, mais aussi la propriété communautaire des kuća zadružna traditionnelles, sans tenir compte du nombre de leurs membres.

La politique fiscale agraire, elle aussi, ne tient pas compte de la kuća zadružna, c'est-à-dire de la structure de ses groupes domestiques composés de plusieurs générations et du caractère communautaire de la propriété des biens. Une telle politique a contribué à la division de la kuća zadružna, la possession des groupes domestiques étant réduite en petites parcelles, d'une part; et au passage de la propriété communautaire à la propriété privée, de l'autre.

Après la deuxième guerre mondiale, toutes les mesures politiques et socio-économiques devaient être nécessairement légalisées; ceci veut dire qu'elles devaient se faire à travers une forme juridique. Par exemple, telle a été la réforme agraire ou la loi sur la socialisation (collectivisation) de tous les biens communautaires traditionnels (« *opštenarodna imovina* »)¹ (Krbek 1948 : 5, 28; Krstić 1957 : 143).

Les objectifs de la nationalisation étaient les suivants : a) – la rationalisation économique; b) – l'équité sociale au bénéfice des paysans pauvres et moyens et c) – l'avantage politique obtenu par la réalisation de l'idéal de l'égalité sociale dans l'exploitation des richesses nationales. La jurisprudence de cette époque (à commencer par les années quarante) considérait que la nationalisation des « communautés foncières » traditionnelles de la Croatie représente « la transformation d'une forme mauvaise de propriété communautaire en une propriété collectiviste, la plus parfaite, dans le cadre de la propriété socialiste » (Krbek, : 5, 27).

Sur la base de ces nouvelles lois, les forêts; proclamés biens publics, ont été cédées en gestion et en exploitation aux entreprises forestières; les pâturages ont été cédés aux coopératives agricoles (dites « *zemljoradnicke zadruga* »). Ce type de coopérative était considéré comme « le type le plus haut et le plus progressiste de coopérative rurale qui doit exercer un rôle spécial dans la construction socialiste de notre pays » (Krbek: 5, 27). Toutefois, déjà au milieu des années cinquante il s'est avéré qu'il s'agissait d'un échec social, politique et économique, étant donné qu'elles étaient basées sur la contrainte, à l'image des kolkhoses soviétiques.

Après la collectivisation manquée de l'agriculture, le coopérativisme se renouvelle et passe par phases différentes. Aujourd'hui encore, on considère que les coopératives agricoles doivent remplir quelques fonctions comme suit: a) la coopérative rurale est le moyen de base de socialisation de la production agricole; opposée à l'économie privée des paysans; b) la coopérative, appelée zadruga, rassemble les agriculteurs pour qu'ils réalisent leurs droits et leurs obligations dans le domaine d'autogestion économique; c) cette nouvelle situation socio-économique est réglée par la Constitution de 1974 et par la « Loi sur travail associé » de 1976; d) par association avec la coopérative agricole, les agriculteurs restent toujours les propriétaires de leur terre, ils la cultivent avec leurs outils, ils disposent de leurs produits et profitent des nouvelles agro-technologies grâce à la collaboration avec la zadruga (Milošević, 1985 : 135).

Néanmoins, sans tenir compte des buts initiaux proposés, beaucoup de zadrugas sont incorporées dans les grands combinats agro-industriels, et ceci par simple décision politico-administrative. Entre 1960 et 1978 ont été liquidées plus de 3500 coopératives agricoles. Ainsi a été expropriée une forme de propriété qui n'a jamais été privée et qui n'a aucun caractère capitaliste

¹ En Croatie et au Monténégro par exemple. la promulgation des nouvelles lois en 1947; en Bosnie en 1955.

Nous avons dit que la propriété communautaire traditionnelle a été transformée par des lois et des décrets en « propriété populaire générale ». Dans quel état se trouve l'expropriété communautaire ? Y a-t-il encore des éléments traditionnels ? On ne peut pas donner une réponse exacte, car les investigations ethnologiques et sociologiques manquent. Dans les lignes qui suivent sont présentées seulement quelques régions yougoslaves, la Bosnie, le Monténégro, le Banat, le Kosovo et la Métohia.

La Bosnie: le régime d'exploitation de la montagne d'autrefois a été changé et déséquilibré de manière déterminante. En principe, ceux qui payent la taxe de pâturage peuvent faire paître leur bétail et construire une cabane d'éleveurs et une bergerie sur la « montagne » sans égard de leur origine géographique. Les coopératives agricoles tâchent, avec plus ou moins de succès, d'exploiter les pâturages de manière rationnelle. On effectue l'analyse pédologique des pâturages, on sème de nouvelles sortes d'herbes, on construit des nouveaux abreuvoirs et on défriche les broussailles. Tous ces travaux sont payés par l'argent obtenu en taxant les pâturages. La zadruga organise deux sortes de troupeaux chaque année: un pour bétail de la coopérative et l'autre pour bétail privé. Les restes des pâturages sont cédés aux éleveurs individuels. Le jour où le bétail monte sur la montagne est fixé par la zadruga ; après la fonte des neiges. Avant d'aller sur les alpages, le bétail passe par un contrôle vétérinaire. Les sentiers suivis par le bétail sont aussi fixés par la coopérative. – L'administration forestière change aussi l'ancien régime d'exploitation des forêts. A cause de la protection du gibier, des jeunes forêts et des pâturages d'essai, le droit traditionnel d'exploitation des forêts est limité. D'autre part les bénéficiaires traditionnels sont poussés à cueillir les plantes médicinales, les cons des conifères de même que d'autres produits de la forêt. De ces activités tertiaires on gagne presque autant que par la vente du fromage (N.F. Pavković, 1981 ; 95-96, 98-99).

Le Monténégro: La région offre un bon exemple de symbiose entre les prescriptions légales et le droit coutumier dans l'exploitation de la « propriété générale populaire ». Au Monténégro, comme ailleurs, toute la propriété communautaire traditionnelle est proclamée « bien public ». La Loi de 1947 affirme que « chacun » peut profiter de l'expropriété communautaire tribale ou villageoise. Pourtant, en réalité la situation est différente; chacun se rappelle que la « montagne » était jadis partagée par villages, par phratries ou par tribus. On connaît bien même aujourd'hui où et qui a le droit d'y construire une bergerie – « katun ». Un cas à part est celui des « étrangers », c'est-à-dire ceux qui jadis n'avaient aucun droit d'exploiter les communaux - « komunika ». Ceux qui par exemple ont essayé de s'introduire sur la montagne de la tribu des Kući ont été refoulés en leur faisant savoir qu'ils étaient malvenus (Dj. Krstić, 1979 : 234).

Le Banat (selon nos propres recherches de terrain): situé dans la grande plaine du Banat sa situation est différente; au sud de la région les pâturages communaux étaient situés ou bien sur des terrains marécageux (paludéens) ou bien sur des terrains sablonneux. Au commencement de l'année 1956, et sur la base des ordonnances de l'autorité régionale, les pâturages communaux ont été expropriés au profit des coopératives agricoles. Quelques parties de ces terrains inféconds, surtout dans la sablière de Deliblato, sont demeurés pâturages communautaires villageois; leur importance économique est réduite. Sur les

pâturages restés propriété communautaire villageoise, l'élevage traditionnel des moutons continue. Les pâturages expropriés sont transformés en champs cultivables ou en vignobles.

Kosovo et Metohia: dans cette province, où la majorité de la population est d'origine albanaise, il n'y a pas d'étude concernant le sujet présenté dans cet article. Des informations fragmentaires parues dans la presse informent que les « biens publics » (quelques milliers de hectares) sont usurpés par des éleveurs albanais. Ils s'étaient appropriés les pâturages aussi par le passé. Combien parmi les « propriétés sociales » et quelles parties de la propriété sociale ont été ainsi occupées redevenant privées ? Les autorités locales répondent qu'elles ne le savent pas (quotidien Politika du 29 août 1986, p.7, Belgrade). Le régime d'exploitation des pâturages est probablement semblable à celui traditionnel et les bénéficiaires en sont les grands groupes domestiques et les villages.

Conclusions

1) Pour conclure; on peut d'abord se rappeler que la propriété foncière communautaire dans les Balkans (inclusivement dans les pays yougoslaves) est un phénomène archaïque et constitutif de la culture traditionnelle.

2) La propriété foncière communautaire était liée à l'économie d'élevage. La terre cultivable appartient aux groupes domestiques.

3) Le droit coutumier en général et la conception des paysans sur la propriété sont profondément pénétrés par l'esprit communautaire qui se manifeste à quatre niveaux: celui domestique, de la phratrie, du village et de la tribu.

4) Au cours du XX-e siècle et surtout après la deuxième guerre mondiale on a assisté à des transformations radicales. Les changements socio-économiques qui se sont produits dans la Yougoslavie socialiste ont puissamment influé l'ensemble de la culture traditionnelle. La modification du droit de propriété des alpages et des forêts prend une importance particulière; proclamés biens publics; ils ont été cédés en gestion et en exploitation à des entreprises. Le régime économique et juridique ancien d'utilisation des pâturages et des forêts a donc été modifié de manière essentielle.

5) La science juridique de la Yougoslavie a déjà constaté que l'un des traits les plus caractéristiques du système juridique capitaliste est celui situé la propriété paysanne sur une base individuelle. Le capitalisme et son système juridique, essayent de briser toutes les propriétés communautaires, surtout celles qui se manifestent au niveau domestique et villageois. Mais, o surprise ! cet esprit communautaire qui a survécu au capitalisme a été brisé par le droit socialiste, bien que le collectivisme (donc toujours une propriété en commun) est l'une de ses caractéristiques fondamentales.

6) L'idée de certains penseurs socialistes du XIX-e siècle que la propriété communautaire traditionnelle pourrait servir comme base de départ dans la construction du socialisme n'a pas été prouvée par les faits; elle ne s'est pas réalisée.

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LES CRISES "POST-DICTATORIALES" DE CHAOS SOCIAL

Henri H. Stahl et Paul H. Stahl

Note: en 1990, quelques mois seulement après les changements politiques en Roumanie (le 5.VIII.1990), je publiais une étude signée par Henri H. Stahl et portant le titre de cet article (dans les Etudes et Documents Balkaniques et Méditerranéens, nr. 15); son auteur décrivait ce qui arrivera dans la vie rurale roumaine. Ses pensées, vraie étude de futurologie, ont été confirmées par les faits de manière éclatante. Il me semble intéressant de republier l'article en y ajoutant des notes signées par moi-même. - (Une version roumaine a été publiée par la revue Sociologie românească, vol.II, nr.1, Bucarest, 2004). – Paul H. Stahl

L'observateur attentif de la vie sociale actuelle de la Roumanie commence à être inquiet en constatant que l'abolition des C.A.P. (Centres Agricoles de Production) installés par le pouvoir communiste lors de la collectivisation de l'agriculture, est suivie par une situation de chaos social; on arrive même à se poser la question si les "privatisations"¹ sont nécessaires. Il s'agit en fait d'une crise sociale qui aurait pu être prévue, donc évitée, si l'administration de l'Etat n'aurait pas été prise de panique devant une situation de fait qui échappe à son contrôle et qui le pousse à prendre des décisions insuffisamment réfléchies. Ces décisions reflètent le peu de connaissances qu'on a sur la sociologie rurale roumaine et sur l'histoire sociale du pays.²

En fait, de pareilles crises se sont jadis déroulées dans le pays; Si non les avait étudiées, on aurait su que la disparition de tout système de contrainte imposé par la violence – au moment où, pour une raison ou pour une autre cesse d'exister et les foules inorganisées restent sans maître – déclenche une crise anarchique, tel un "amok" frénétique, qui détruit toute trace de planification.³ La foule considère que les actes de pillage, de destruction et de

¹ Re-transformation de la propriété collectiviste en propriété individuelle.

² Le nouveau pouvoir était en fait le même, mais appartenant à la deuxième catégorie de dirigeants communistes; ils avaient fait la révolution en éliminant la première catégorie, révolution qui, pour la population et les observateurs étrangers devait être anti-communiste, mais qu'ils ne pouvaient pas se décider à lui donner ce caractère. Ils se sont donc trouvés dans la situation d'appliquer des réformes anti-communistes (tout en ne les appliquant pas) et surtout, de telle manière que ceux qui avaient acquis des situations sociales privilégiées ne les perdent pas.

A la méconnaissance de la vie sociale, se sont ajoutées les décisions prises dans l'embarras d'un choix qui devait être anti-communiste, mais en fait ne pouvait pas l'être. Tout ce qui a suivi, sur tous les plans, dans les années qui se sont succédées, ont mis en évidence cet embarras de l'ancienne classe dirigeante, de changer la vie tout en refusant de céder de pouvoir, ou de renoncer aux privilèges. Dans les faits, ils appliquaient à la lettre les idées et les désirs exprimés ouvertement par Gorbatchev.

³ La vie sociale internationale fournit en permanence de semblables exemples qui confirment ce qui vient d'être dit pour la Roumanie. Le Portugal élimine la dictature et le pays est pris par le chaos, qui culmine au centre du pays où, sous la poussée du parti

boycottage civils, constituent tout autant de victoires pour la lutte de libération et d'élimination de la tutelle d'une dictature et d'une exploitation auxquelles ils avaient été soumis. C'est le cas par exemple pour les planifications introduites par des armées conquérantes, qui désirent exploiter une population vaincue.

Durant la première guerre mondiale, la Valachie (Oltenia, Muntenia) a été conquise par l'armée allemande, qui l'a administrée entre 1916 et 1918. Pour assurer leur approvisionnement, en exploitant au maximum la production céréalière du pays, les armées allemandes ont procédé à l'organisation "rationnelle" des processus de production. D'un côté on a réduit la nourriture de la population locale obligée à recourir aux rations obtenues sur des bons, ainsi calculées pour que la population ne meure pas de faim. De l'autre, la production agricole elle-même a été planifiée en décidant quels légumes, quels fruits, etc devaient être cultivés, sur quelles superficies, à l'aide de quelles techniques et en suivant quel calendrier. Les paysans, ceux qui étaient encore restés dans leurs villages, ont été obligés à prêter un certain nombre de jours de travail. Ce type de planification, introduit par la "Kommandantur" allemande n'a pas été étudié et il est aujourd'hui encore peu connu. On dispose de quelques notes seulement signées par George Antipa, lui-même impliqué dans cette planification en tant que responsable de la partie roumaine. Mais, dès que les armées allemandes ont été obligées de quitter le territoire roumain, et avant que l'administration roumaine réfugiée en Moldavie soit revenue en Valachie, les paysans, dès qu'ils se sont vus sans maître, se sont mis, dans un assaut impétueux, chaotique, à piller, à détruire, à voler les dépôts restés à la suite de la retraite des armées allemandes, incendiant des constructions et des installations en bon état, que ces dernières avaient laissées sur place (par exemple des sécheries qui produisaient des fruits secs). Cette série de vandalismes fut perçue comme la preuve éclatante de la victoire contre les occupants planificateurs.

Simultanément, en Moldavie aussi, on avait institué une planification de l'agriculture pour répondre aux mêmes besoins, cette fois-ci par l'administration roumaine elle-même. La majorité des paysans était mobilisée sur le front mais la production agricole devait quand même être assurée, car la direction de l'Etat devait assurer la subsistance de la population et de l'armée. On a donc planifié combien et où on doit labourer et semer, une fois la moisson

communiste se sont déroulées une série d'actions illégales. L'Albanie, où fonctionnait encore le dernier le pouvoir dictatorial communiste en Europe, finit aussi dans un état de désordre marqué par l'attaque des dépôts d'armes et leur pillage. L'exemple le plus récent semble être celui de l'Irak, où la fin de la dictature, aggravée par l'occupation du pays par des armées étrangères a créé un chaos généralisé marqué par des violences qu'on ne peut point faire cesser. Au combat, qui prend des aspects économiques, s'ajoutent les aspects liés à la liberté nationale, accompagnés par une absurde guerre de religion.

Revenant à la situation roumaine, dans la mesure où j'ai pu parcourir les villages pour observer les anciennes coopératives agricoles communistes, je me suis rendu compte avec quelle vitesse elles ont été pillées et ruinées après 1990. L'exemple qui m'a impressionné le plus est celui du système d'irrigation de la plaine du Bărăgan; je l'avais visité dans les années 80, moderne, fonctionnant bien. Tout avait été volé, les plaques qui pavaient les canaux se trouvaient dans les cours des villageois. D'autres exemples m'ont été signalés, fermes jadis prospères (productrices de viande, de fromages par exemple) avaient été abandonnées, les animaux volés ou laissés mourir de faim.

récoltée, elle était distribuée par cartes de rationnement, les rations étant fixées toujours par l'Etat. En Moldavie aussi, une fois les troupes allemandes vaincues et celles russes bolcheviques chassées ou parties du pays, les paysans se sont trouvés sans maître et sans planification obligatoire. Une fois encore, les paysans (auxquels s'ajoutaient ceux qui avaient été démobilisés) ont été entraînés par la même psychologie des foules, demandant avec violence l'expropriation de la grande propriété, la distribution des terres aux paysans qui avaient combattu ou qui avaient travaillé sur les domaines des seigneurs, également concernés par la planification agricole de la guerre. En Moldavie aussi la disparition de la planification a créé des situations de chaos social. Les autorités de l'Etat, prises de panique à l'idée qu'une révolte paysanne pourrait se déclencher, ont procédé vite à la proclamation de la réforme agraire (la loi Mihalache d'abord, plus drastique; la loi Garoflid par la suite, moins dure).

Tout aussi grave mais plus complexe a été la crise sociale qui a suivi la fin de la deuxième guerre mondiale lorsque, à nouveau, on a vu se poser avec insistance la question d'une économie de guerre. Le chef de l'Etat, le maréchal Antonescu a recouru lui aussi à une planification comprenant des plans obligatoires, le travail forcé des paysans, la fixation de "normes" et de "rations". Cette planification elle non plus n'est pas connue, la documentation étant pauvre. Elle a été arrêtée par des conditions exceptionnelles, non seulement par la simple fin de la guerre, mais par l'apparition d'une guerre civile sous l'impulsion du parti communiste.

Ce dernier, une fois le pouvoir conquis à l'aide d'un groupe de révolutionnaires "professionnels", a appliqué la formule qui avait été suivie en Russie tsariste.⁴ Elle consistait dans la création d'une armée de "révolutionnaires de profession", un "gang" d'activistes,

⁴ *L'histoire a connu de nombreuses pareilles situations, où un Etat victorieux impose au pays vaincu son système social. Par le passé, c'était la religion de l'Etat victorieux qui était imposée au pays vaincu; ainsi, on sacrifiait à l'empereur dans tout l'empire romain. On a converti de force, en bloc, des populations entières à l'islamisme ou au christianisme, tant en Europe qu'en d'autres continents. C'est ce qui a permis aux anciennes religions de survivre jusqu'à nos jours, car il ne s'agissait pas de vraies conversions. Une vraie christianisation par exemple, ne peut pas être le résultat d'une décision prise par en haut, par la force militaire ou politique, et qui élimine par la force les anciennes croyances. La christianisation ne peut être que le résultat qu'un long processus, qui n'est pas encore fini de nos jours.*

La Russie, appelée pour l'occasion Union Soviétique, était dominée par l'idéologie communiste, vraie religion, car elle concerne l'ensemble des domaines de la vie sociale, tant spirituels que matériels. Le processus qui se déroulait en Roumanie (et pas seulement), et qui avait pris l'apparence d'une lutte de classes, avait deux buts; d'abord, l'installation du régime communiste, ensuite, et c'est le but principal de l'action, l'asservissement de la Roumanie envers le pouvoir central de Moscou. Les activistes qui apparemment militaient pour le communisme, étaient en fait (da manière consciente ou pas, volontaire ou pas), les agents d'un pouvoir étranger décidé à asservir le pays. Le fait que parmi les dirigeants installés au pouvoir dans les années 50 dominaient ceux venus d'Union Soviétique, bon nombre ayant la nationalité soviétique, ou appartenant à l'armée soviétique, confirme ce qui vient d'être dit.

rigoureusement disciplinés et endoctrinés; ⁵ sous couvert d'une "lutte de classes" et d'une dictature du prolétariat, une lutte est déclenchée contre tous les propriétaires, petits et grands, industriels ou agraires. Ainsi, pour assurer sa victoire contre les grands propriétaires, le parti communiste a eu recours à la formule léniniste de l'opposition des paysans pauvres non seulement contre les grands propriétaires, mais aussi contre les paysans aisés. ⁶ Une proclamation décide la distribution générale des terres aux plus pauvres des paysans, qu'on pousse à procéder eux-mêmes au partage des terres agricoles, divisées en petits lots, pris tout de suite en possession. La "lutte de classes" a eu donc au début la forme d'une rébellion, rappelant encore une fois ce que des masses paysannes peuvent faire lors d'une rébellion.

Une fois détruite la grande et la moyenne propriété rurale, le parti communiste est passé à la deuxième phase de l'opération; la prise de possessions de l'ensemble des moyens des production agricoles, en réunissant les parcelles des nouveaux propriétaires, qui les avaient à peine reçues lors de la distribution des terres. Obligés "manu militari" de les céder de "leur propre gré", les "paysans pauvres" cèdent les lots reçus comme aussi le peu qu'ils possédaient auparavant. ⁷ En recourant aux arrestations et à l'expulsion des villages non seulement des plus riches parmi les paysans, mais aussi des récalcitrants, ⁸ les agriculteurs ont

⁵ *L'installation d'activistes politiques dans des postes pour lesquels ils n'avaient aucune compétence a eu un caractère généralisé, et ne touchait pas seulement l'agriculture ou les villages. L'armée, la justice, l'enseignement, la police ont subi le même sort. Une fois la dictature finie, tous ces fonctionnaires improvisés qui avaient été installés dans des fonctions pour lesquelles ils n'avaient aucune compétence, n'ont pas pu être remplacés du jour au lendemain, situation qui pèse encore sur la vie actuelle.*

⁶ *L'idée d'opposer les paysans pauvres aux paysans riches pour reproduire en tout ce qui s'était passé en Union Soviétique a pris des fois des aspects qui, utopiques, étaient également ridicules, car on ne trouvait point partout les paysans riches dont avait besoin la propagande. A l'époque, j'ai traversé des villages où les "riches" avaient moins de 6 hectares.*

⁷ *Selon les informations que j'ai recueilli à l'époque ou plus tard, lors du regroupement des terres des paysans pauvres qui décidaient de constituer une "coopérative", on a usé de l'argument suivant: "nous voulons travailler ensemble et il faut regrouper nos terres pour pratiquer une agriculture moderne". On a ainsi pris les terres les meilleures, chassant leurs propriétaires et les installant sur des terres lointaines et de mauvaise qualité.*

⁸ *Le refus d'abandonner leurs propriétés, comme aussi celui d'entrer dans les "fermes collectivistes" a eu un caractère général. C'est la raison pour laquelle l'effort des autorités pour obliger les agriculteurs à entrer dans les fermes collectives a pris des formes violentes, auxquelles j'ai assisté de manière involontaire lors de mes recherches dans les villages. Ceci était devenu évident surtout vers la fin des années cinquante, lorsque la collectivisation (probablement selon les ordres reçus de Moscou) devait être finie dans l'ensemble des pays occupés par l'Union Soviétique, à part la Pologne. Les différences de situation entre un pays et un autre, une région et une autre, n'ont pas été pris en compte, tout a été terminé à la même époque.*

En parcourant les villages je devais trouver un endroit pour dormir; je me présentais à la mairie et j'étais presque toujours installé dans les maisons des paysans considérés riches. Plus d'une fois j'ai été témoin de l'arrivée pendant la nuit des équipes d'activistes qui sortaient dans la cour "l'ennemi de classe" pour le rouer de coups au milieu des cris de la famille, afin de le convaincre des avantages offerts par les fermes collectives.

été amenés dans la situation de prolétaires agricoles. N'ayant plus ni terres, ni outils, ni animaux (qui leurs avaient aussi été pris), ils furent obligés de vendre leur force de travail dans les conditions dictatoriales fixées par l'Etat, c'est-à-dire par le parti unique devenu propriétaire de l'Etat.

Paradoxalement, on a eu recours à d'anciennes formes d'exploitation néo-esclavagistes, à ce qu'on appelait jadis "la dîme par parcelle" ("dijma la tarla"), moyen odieux d'exploitation, légalement interdit depuis 1907; cette forme d'exploitation consiste dans l'attribution aux paysans d'un lot minuscule payé par une partie des produits obtenus sur lui avec, en plus, l'obligation d'effectuer un certain nombre de jours de travail sur les terres du seigneur. Cette fois-ci, le membre de la nouvelle "coopérative agricole de production" a reçu quelques centaines de mètres carrés, à condition de prêter un certain nombre de jours de travail sur les terres de la "coopérative"; Le principal bénéficiaire de ce système est certainement l'Etat, c'est-à-dire le Parti qui, en exploitant les paysans durant quatre décennies a réussi à réunir les capitaux nécessaires pour fonder une industrie lourde, considérée être la base même de la future société socialiste. L'exploitation des paysans à travers cette forme de planification a profité non seulement aux grands chefs du parti, la "nomenclatura", mais aussi aux plous humbles "nomenclaturistes", envoyés dans les villages en tant qu'activistes, avec pour mission la prise en possession de l'économie rurale. Ils devaient l'organiser, la diriger, effectuer le plan centralisé établi par la bureaucratie du parti. Tous ces petits activistes (maires, présidents des CAP, directeurs des fermes d'Etat, de stations de machines, ingénieurs agronomes, médecins vétérinaires et divers 'politruks' chefs de brigade) étaient investis de pouvoirs dictatoriaux. Chacun a eu, à la suite des services rendus au parti, des récompenses fixées par le pouvoir central, auxquelles ils ont ajouté par eux-mêmes tout ce qu'ils pouvaient ajouter. Ayant dans leur main le pain et le couteau, ils pouvaient voler sur leur propre compte dans la fortune de la coopérative, usant de manière illimitée d'un pouvoir illimité.⁹

Eveillé dans mon lit, je priais le bon Dieu qu'ils ne viennent pas me convaincre aussi. Si on effectuait une recherche basée seulement sur les demandes écrites des paysans pour entrer dans les fermes collectives, on aurait l'impression d'un vaste élan général, enthousiaste et spontané. Ainsi, ils demandaient "l'honneur d'être reçus dans la coopérative", en fait qu'on leur prenne la terre; et la demande finissait par "la reconnaissance adressée au Parti pour l'honneur qu'on leur fait". Avec toutes ces demandes écrites, on pourrait constituer une encyclopédie de l'hypocrisie et du mensonge généralisé, cachant la peur généralisée.

Tous les villages n'ont pas été collectivisés; une présentation comparée entre ceux qui l'ont été et ceux qui ne l'ont pas été serait intéressante; au Maramureș par exemple les villages les plus pauvres, qui n'avaient pas été collectivisés, ont fini par avoir une meilleure situation que les villages jadis riches, mais qui avaient été collectivisés. Ces situations, comme d'ailleurs l'ensemble du processus de la collectivisation, ne sont que peu étudiés.

⁹ *Le chapitre des avantages personnels est particulièrement riche; il permet d'ajouter à la comparaison entre l'exploitation seigneuriale et celle de la dictature le domaine des "petits cadeaux, petits services" ("rusfeturile"). A part la dîme et la corvée, le paysan rendait une série de services au seigneur; il transportait le bois, il balayait la cour, il blanchissait les constructions, il apportait en cadeau des poules. J'ai rencontré le même type de services fonctionnant presque partout, mais cette fois-ci pas pour un seigneur mais pour le représentant du parti, le maire, le chef de la coopérative. Par exemple, envoyer un fonctionnaire de la mairie "acheter" une poule, une dinde, une oie chez un paysan était une*

Ce n'est pas le cas d'analyser ici le mécanisme social et économique. Je retiens seulement le fait que ces activistes politiques, bons techniciens de combat politique, ont été en même temps totalement inaptes pour assurer le fonctionnement des kolkhoses et des sovkhoses et leur efficacité économique. La planification centralisée de l'Etat est ainsi arrivée à une faillite généralisée. L'essai de Gorbatchev n'est que l'essai désespéré de sauver le parti, de ne pas perdre son emprise sur la vie sociale, même en admettant certaines réformes nécessaires, consistant finalement dans le passage du système planifié à celui du marché libre. C'est ce qui arrive en Roumanie aussi en ce moment; le système planifié, en faillite en même temps que devenu odieux, a dû être supprimé ici comme en Russie ou dans les autres Etats est-européens.

Si les techniques communistes se sont avérées efficaces pour construire politiquement le système, elles ne le sont pas pour supprimer le système, entre autres les CAP; il devenait donc inévitable que le passage de l'économie planifiée à l'économie de marché soit suivie par une situation de chaos social. Les masses agricoles, débarrassées de l'exploitation des activistes de parti, sont à nouveau tentées par le vertige des actions de pillage, des rébellions, des luttes internes. Les organes de l'Etat, à peine instituées dans leur nouvelle forme, se trouvent menacées par des rébellions paysannes; pour les éviter, elles ont trouvé comme moyen l'attribution à chaque paysan de 5.000 mètres carrés. La solution est purement démagogique et elle a déjà provoqué une série de conflits locaux qui auraient pu être évités par la connaissance approfondie des réalités sociales et par l'adoption de solutions attentivement réfléchies. Les paysans, restés sans maître, sans autorité dirigeante, devaient normalement être poussés vers des conflits locaux, signes annonciateurs d'un prochain chaos.

On peut déjà déceler toute une série d'oppositions:

1) L'opposition catégorique des propriétaires paysans, plus ou moins grands, auxquels on avait pris abusivement les terres lors de la fondation des kolkhoses, qui revendiquent la restitution des terres collectivisées, en réclamant que "leurs" terres leur reviennent et ne soient pas attribuées à d'autres; Et ceci non seulement dans les limites de la moitié d'un hectare, mais dans leur intégralité, et non seulement en fermage (comme le veut l'actuelle loi) mais en pleine propriété.

2) L'effort des paysans ayant quitté le village pour travailler dans l'industrie dans les villes, d'avoir le droit de garder non seulement la maison du village natal mais recevoir aussi les 5.000 mètres carrés.

3) La lutte dure, visible ou insidieuse, du groupe des "nomenklaturistes" ruraux, qui boycottent la distribution des parcelles, s'opposant à l'abolition de l'ancien système qui, même en faillite, leur convient parfaitement.

situation fréquente. Apparemment, l'opération était honnête car le paysan recevait en échange de l'argent; en fait, il ne pouvait pas refuser de vendre, et devait accepter comme prix le prix officiel, dix fois moindre que celui qui fonctionnait sur le marché. Un président de coopérative, bien dispos, installé en automne à côté de l'alambic fournisseur de tzuica (eau-de-vie), était une scène habituelle; il prenait bien entendu gratuitement la boisson, selon ses besoins.

4) Le combat des techniciens, ingénieurs agronomes, vétérinaires, comptables qui réclament eux aussi une partie des terres de l'Etat, refusant dorénavant d'effectuer leurs services autrement que de manière "privatisée", c'est-à-dire à être payés en argent.

5) Les tractoristes de même, refusent de labourer la terre, de semer, de moissonner, s'ils ne sont pas payés en argent.¹⁰

6). S'ajoute le fait que l'ancienne nomenklatura du village distribue elle-même les lots, bien entendu suivant les mêmes règles de l'abus et de la corruption.¹¹

7) Dans certains villages on a créé des installations techniques d'un haut niveau; élevages, stations viticoles, pépinières, serres pour la culture des légumes; pour leur création

¹⁰ Toutes ces oppositions se sont vite fait sentir.

¹¹ Il s'agit probablement de l'aspect le plus grave de la répartition des terres; ceux qui avaient eu le pouvoir sous le régime communiste et qui avaient donc profité des avantages d'une agriculture collectivisée, sont les mêmes qui distribuaient les parcelles. Si on aurait voulu que la prise de possession des parcelles par les nouveaux propriétaires ne réussisse pas, on aurait procédé de cette manière:

a – publier une loi confuse pour la répartition des terres, sans préciser ni comment elle doit être appliquée, ni qui doit recevoir, ni combien, ni ou;

b – si, "par malheur", à cause des pressions publiques et surtout à cause de l'intervention de la communauté européenne, on serait obligé de rendre les terres à leurs propriétaires, il fallait laisser les gens se battre entre eux, les faire courir devant les tribunaux, car les paysans ne savent pas se débrouiller dans de telles situations. Finalement, on a ajourné autant que possible les décisions des juges en leur enjoignant même de ne pas rendre les terres, les maisons, en général les propriétés, mais les laisser à ceux qui les avaient reçues comme une faveur de la part de la dictature;

c – il ne fallait pas dire qu'il faut que chacun reçoive ce qu'il a eu, et là où il a eu, je laisserais tout dans une zone imprécise, favorable aux fraudes, aux vols. Nombreux sont ceux qui, lors de l'entrée dans une coopérative, ne déclaraient pas les propriétés qu'ils avaient pour ne pas être classés comme "richards" et souffrir les conséquences d'une telle classification; au moment où on leur a rendu les terres on leur a dit "tu a déclaré posséder ça, tu recevras donc ça";

d – on a chargé avec la répartition des parcelles les personnes qui n'avaient aucun intérêt à le faire.

C'est ce qui est arrivé, la voie a été ouverte aux fraudes et rares sont les situations où les paysans ont eu la possibilité de faire la justice ou de recevoir leurs terres, là où ils les avaient. Dans cette situation, la société paysanne apparaît comme divisée en deux classes; a) les anciens exploités, trompés une deuxième fois et constituant la classe des naïfs; b) les anciens privilégiés, redevenus privilégiés.

On ne connaît pas encore exactement ce qui est advenu lors de la collectivisation et maintenant, lorsque on rend des terres aux paysans (car on a évité avec soin de faire quelque étude sérieuse que ce soit), mais on peut supposer les suivantes: on a offert des terres de prédilection: a - aux parents proches; b -aux membres de son propre parti politique, c - prioritairement à ceux qui avaient eu le pouvoir par le passé.

non seulement les paysans ont contribué, mais l'ensemble du pays aussi, à travers les impôts et la longue, interminable vie de misère.

Il n'est donc pas étonnant que dans ces conditions de chaos social est apparue la psychologie typique des paysans révoltés; et il n'est pas étonnant non plus de constater qu'ici ou là on a supprimé de manière chaotique des installations divisées parfois en petits morceaux par les paysans; chacun a pris une ou deux vaches, chacun a pris quelques briques des étables.

Si devant ces situations qui auraient pu être prévues, l'Etat aurait consulté les sociologues qui ont étudié et suivi l'évolution de la vie rurale, il aurait pu trouver les solutions appropriées permettant de résoudre tranquillement, progressivement, la crise sociale. Incomplètement informé, l'Etat a proposé des solutions qui non seulement ne préviennent pas le chaos social de l'après planification, mais l'aggravent en lançant le slogan "à chacun 5.000 mètres carrés ("omul și pogonul") sans indiquer à qui il faut distribuer les parcelles, qui les distribue;, avec quels titres de possession, car en effet, actuellement il s'agit d'un statut contradictoire de simple fermage provisoire, mais transmissible!

Le sociologue a le devoir seulement de montrer objectivement quels sont les problèmes sociaux qui doivent être résolus; les mesures à prendre sont du ressort de l'Etat. Les politiciens seuls sont responsables si le chaos n'est pas prévenu en appliquant des solutions cohérentes, claires, efficaces, mais laissent évoluer la situation sans contrôle.¹²

¹² *Un exemple de la méconnaissance de la vie rurale et du niveau de développement, est la discussion de la situation des forêts. Au moment où on a discuté des principes qu'il fallait suivre pour les rendre aux anciens propriétaires, on a ignoré le fait que pour une grande partie du pays la forêt était propriété communautaire, et qu'on aurait du rendre aux villages leurs forêts, le type d'agriculture qu'il pratiquent étant encore lié au passé, destiné en bonne partie aux besoins de chaque famille. L'ignorance des droits des paysans traverse comme un fil rouge l'histoire sociale roumaine; les faits actuels ne font que continuer une tradition inacceptable.*

A COMPARISON OF CSANGO AND VLACH CIVIC IDENTITIES

Stelu Șerban

This paper brings into attention two social groups, living in southeast Europe, SEE, which despite being rather less numerous, display a definite cultural identity. Whilst by Csangos, I mean the Roman-Catholics living in the Romanian part of the Moldova province¹, by Vlachs I am referring to the population speaking a language alike Romanian and located in north of Bulgaria in the nearby of Vidin, Nikopol, and Belene towns. In what coming further I will attempt to show that their civic identity does not ground in the ethnic identification, yet it is anchored in a sort of multicultural outlook. In order to do that I will make an analysis of how they themselves are looking to the two of their civic rights, the land property and the education in their own culture.

I would like to say that since the field researches did not unfold in the frame of a given project, my interest on the subject of this paper grew gradually². Nevertheless several dimensions make the analysis unitary. Foremost, it matters the methods and techniques of data collection, i.e. the direct observation, extended interviews and working-out the data found in the local archives. The reason of making such an emphasis would be easily noted. Thus I am pointing out that the remarks and conclusions stemmed further are merely provisional and opened to the debates and criticism. In the same time it should be said however that such a criticism have to ground instead an exhaustive bibliography and overgeneralizations mainly on the field works researches.

In fact, it has to put it that the state of the arts regarding the minorities' study from SEE is only embryonic. Not less wondering yet, is the decision-makers' rush to draft the public policies that have these minorities as subjects.

The ethnicity at Csangos and Vlachs

When the issue of the SEE minority cultures comes into attention the first impulse is to emphasize the particular features through which they became different in respect the rest of

¹ A short version of this paper was delivered at the conference **Endangered Heritage-Endangered Cultures. The Csangos from Moldova** organized by *Teleki László Foundation*, Budapest, 25-26 March, 2004. To that conference most of the participants have used the 'Csango' term to designate the around 60 000 Catholics from Moldova, who, following some field evaluations, are speaking a language alike Hungarian. They represent only a quarter of the all Catholics living in Moldova.

² In 2002, from March to June, I have made the fieldwork and archive researches in Oituz, Frumoasa and Prăjești, villages with a Roman-Catholic majority located in Bacău county. In regards the Vlachs, in September 2003 and March 2004, I have conducted several interviews in Bulgaria, in Vidin and Belene towns as also in Vräf, a village near Vidin on the Danube shore. For providing the financial support I am indebted to the *Ethnographical Association Kriza János*, Cluj-Napoca, to the *Center for Advanced Studies*, Sofia (www.cas.bg) and to the *Romanian Academy*.

the society. Often this state of facts provides a salient level for building-up an identity framed by the ethnicity paradigms. In this way they challenge the patterns of the national identities in the countries when these cultures are alive. It seems that the adverse couple ethnicity – nation is a one-way road and further alternatives are excluded. However, at least from the post-modern perspectives, both of these concepts are vulnerable to the criticism. In order to draft a frame for a comparison the Csangos and Vlachs civic identities, I am focusing here only on the ethnicity concept. In any case, that does not mean its replacement by the national identity model. I skip that latter discussion only due to the space economy.

In regards to the ethnicity concept the SEE scholars argue that the classic theories are outmoded. In the area of ethnology/social anthropology it claims either a „shifting of both „primordialist” and „constructivist” logic” of ethnicity (Tzaneva 2001: 13-17), or a neat preference to the interactionist paradigms (Krasteva 1998: 36). In the same time, in the sociological approaches they highlight the strengthening of the ethnic markers under the pressure of the local market competition (Tufiş 2001). Although, most of the cases the critique of ethnicity leads, instead to its wholly putting away, to a kind of reworking its ‘logic’, there are points of view in which the ethnicity in SEE is seen as competed by the ‘andere Identitäten’ (Brunnbauer 2002: 14ff). The roots of these other identities are to be found in the remembering of the past time, in a reflection on the issue of the minority origin, and, not the last, in some *ad hoc* explanation of their particular features³. In regards to the Csangos and Vlachs that process of working-out novel identities was documented by recent fieldworks⁴.

In this concern worth to highlight first of all that both Csangos and Vlachs reject a definite ethnic denomination. What regards the Csangos, during my fieldwork I have recorded a manifold set of self-identifications. In the interviews they told that the ‘Csangos’ are the peasants who either migrated from Transylvania in the 18th and 19th centuries, or those speaking a Hungarian dialect. In addition, it has to say that often they used the term with a negative connotation in reference to the other groups of Catholics from Moldova. In Oituz, for instance, they have said the Csangos are the Catholics from the valleys of Tazlău and Siret rivers whilst for the Prăjeşti’s people the Csangos are living in the villages from south of Bacău town.

In fact, on the one hand, the Catholics self-identification differs in respect the speech context, precisely in regards of who asks for and with which interest the investigation unfolds. Yet, it has to say, on the other hand, that though they reject it, because felt pejoratively, they are aware about the meaning of this term. An old man said thus, that the ‘Csango’ derives from the irregular sound of the church bell in the war or disaster times. His remembrance had a very concrete reference: the battle from Siculeni in Harghita county, when the Habsburgs have massacred the Szeklers’ peasant army.

³ Although in reference to a quite different cultural area, i.e., in Turkey, the Eastern shore of the Black Sea, Chris Hann brings into attention a similar pattern (Hann 2003). Moreover, he pledges for a reconsidering of Fr. Barth’s theory on ethnicity, particularly its assumptions about the basic place of the ethnic identity in the belonging of a person to a definite social group.

⁴ For the Csangos s. a full bibliographical account in Pozsony 2002. In regards to the Vlachs indicative is the special issue of the *Bulgarian Ethnology*, vol. XXI, 1995 (in Bulgarian), as well as the papers and research reports done in the frame of the project *The Self-Identification of the Bulgarian Ethnic Minority in Romania and the Romanian Ethnic Minority (“Vlasi”) in Bulgaria on the background of Euro-integration*. In the team of this latter project enrolled several students in Sociology from Bulgaria and Romania, who, during March 2002-February 2003, made comparative fieldworks with the support of the Centre of Advanced Studies, CAS, from Sofia (website: www.cas.bg). I warmly thank Mila Popova, coordinator at CAS, for delivering me some results of the project.

Instead the 'Csangos', people use alternative terms. In Frumoasa both the Catholics and Orthodoxes use seldom the term 'Hungarian'. It is worth to note that the villagers, Orthodox at once, because the Tartars' devastations, had migrated at the beginning of the 18th century in Transylvania. They came back later when the local landowner called them. In the returning together with Orthodoxes have migrated and settled several Catholics. This is the reason they call the Catholics 'Hungarians', in the sense they originate beyond the mountains, namely in "Hungary". In addition, the villagers make a distinction between the Hungarians from Eastern Transylvania and the "less Hungarian" who the Catholics are.

Most frequent the people use the word 'Catholic'. Moreover, they added to it a supplementary 'n', so the word they utter 'Cathol~~ic~~*nic*'. Worth to highlight here that whether the 'Hungarian' belonging either they afford someone to deny them, or a part of them strongly reject it, in regards to the Catholic identity they are fully committing in. This is in fact a base on which they build up a convenient position when confronted with the issue of ethnic identity. Clearly, it sees that when one asks to answer about their relationship with the Romanian ethnic majority. They state that since they are first Roman-Catholics, allegedly they are Romanians due to the similar sound of the two denominations. That identification seems to be a comfortable shield recently induced by the Catholic hierarchy. In this respect, another convenient justification of their Romanian self-identification is that they are living on the territory of Romania.

The Vlachs too display a spared ethnic self-identification. However, to them the Vlachs/Vlasi terms, used especially by the Bulgarians, have not all the cases a pejorative meaning. Furthermore, they use it currently in the circumstances of asserting their differences both in regards Bulgarians and Romanians. Out of that particular situation their self-identification depends by the geographical areas. In Vräf, they indeed avoid the use of Vlach self-identification. Instead, they state to be 'Bulgarians of Romanian language'. And in order to support that they refer to their passport or identity card (foremost when they travel in Romania or Serbia), as well as to the territory when they are living, namely Bulgaria. Similar cases could be found in Belene too, yet not so often. That linkage of citizenship and territory is common with the Csangos. Moreover, that seems to be spread all over the SEE countries (Brunnbauer 2002: 18ff).

In the area of the Belene-Nikopol towns the Romanian self-identification could be met more often. Some people say that they are Bulgarian Romanians without to show a feeling of distortion. Actually, the uttering of Romanian denomination has here a different meaning. So, they often do not utter *români*, yet, *rumuni/rumâni*, these latter being a term that designates a former social stratum, i.e. the people from South Romania subjected in the medieval times to the great boyars (Giurescu 1943)⁵. According to the recent historical researches these people migrated from beginning of 1700s onwards and populated villages with the actual Vlach population (Zaiakov 1995: 45ff; Petrović 1995: 247). Whatever could mean Romanian denomination, amongst the Vlachs is openly recognized that they are not so Romanian as their neighbours from the north of the Danube. Likewise the Csangos who says

⁵ In Vräf too, the people use a peculiar term for designating the Bulgarian ethnicity. So they use the word *bugar/bugărește* for the Bulgarians of the rest of the country, a term derived from the Serbian spelling *bugarski* (Nestorescu 1996:182)

⁶ Elsewhere I have tackled more extensively this issue (Șerban 2004b). In regards to the Vlachs in the Balkan's social history it has to note the excellent works authored by Karl Kaser (Kaser 1995; Idem 1997)

that they are 'less-Hungarian' than their Transylvanian neighbours, the Vlachs are a sort of 'less Romanian' in comparison with people from the other bank of the Danube.

The main source of the Vlachs' distinctiveness is their spoken Romanian. However, whilst for the Csangos the Catholic faith is not at all a disrupted ground, the Romanian spoken by the Vlachs has several ways that explain its appearance and wide spreading. In Vrăf there are at least two different variants of appearing and using Romanian language. In one the people say that they migrated at once in Romania and after one or two generations came back. That should be happened in a confusing time interval; may be, they tell, one hundred and a half or two hundreds years ago. They don't know which could be the local language spoken before that refugee⁷. In the other version, they state that Romanian is their immemorial language coming on the same ground as the language spoken in Romania, yet also likely to the Vlachs' language from neighbour Serbian region.

In Belene they know very well that their ancestors came from Romania, but far time ago. That is because they themselves called that language either Romanian, or 'Vlashkian'. The latter comes from the older name of South Romania, namely Wallachia/Vlashka. There are examples however, of migrants from inner Bulgaria, Pirdop region, who have settled amongst Belene's Vlachs and now are speaking Romanian⁸.

The overview of Csangos and Vlachs self-identification challenges, in my opinion, the ethnicity theories. The fieldworks show that stable and aware full ethnic identification are missing to them. Moreover, the ethnicity issue in itself is far away from the people expectations. This lack of commitment explains, in my view, the acceptance of some artefacts of their ethnicity like, for Csangos, the derivation of Romanian affiliation from Roman-Catholic faith, or, for Vlachs the supposed learning of Romanian in that short-time refugee at north of the Danube. Instead these, it seems that matters for them, different questions, as for instance, the rapid depopulation, for Vlachs, or the deep poverty, for Csangos. This is the reason that I think that in order to approach their civic identities we should look for a more accurate perspective.

A multicultural outlook

The developing of some recent theories regarding the *multiculturalism* lay down an alternative to the ethnicity paradigms (Rex 1996; Idem 1998: 164-183). They are taking a part of their arguments from the interactionist theories of ethnicity (Fr. Barth and his school), mainly by deciphering a benign or gentle face of ethnicity (Ibidem 132). In addition, the reworking of the 'culture' concept provides another cornerstone for the multicultural building-up. They see thus the 'culture' either from the angle of cultural studies and political philosophy or being inspired by the ethnological field works.

Amongst the different multicultural outlooks that of the „liberal multiculturalism” (Will Kymlicka) seems to be the most reputed. On its ground is a concept of 'alternative

⁷ This version is one of the most widespread amongst the Bulgarian Vlachs (Vasseva 1995; Balkanski 1999). However, the Romanian researchers with a long fieldwork experience amongst the Vlachs have serious doubts regarding that version (Nestorescu 1996: XIV)..

⁸ The person from whom I have got such a story is P.T. Before 1989 he was more than twenty years the president/*predsedatel* of the House of the Culture from Belene. At the end of the 1980' he had the idea to make an inquiry for finding out his genealogy. He proudly have told that the results of that idea were a picture with his 'genealogical tree' and several feasts he organized gathering the about 170 members of the lineage. His authority is not at all contested amongst the 'pure' Vlachs. Furthermore, he did not hesitate to speak with me in Romanian.

societal culture' through which a minority should achieve a degree of self-government (Salat 2001: 106, 110-112). Yet, its contenders have raised critics and pinpointed the reification of the culture concept as well as the slipping away of the political and social dynamics (Ibidem 213). They have highlighted too an important hidden premise, that of a strong dependency between the cultural context and personal/individual autonomy. In this vein they doubt that the withering away of the local culture would dramatically impede the personal self-realization (Ibidem 216ff).

In addition to this criticism I would say that the 'liberal multiculturalism' is inaccurate just in regards the Csangos and Vlachs cases. The main reason of that is the lack in both cases of local institutions able to assure a degree of self-government. May be in Csangos case the church would have resources for a local self-government, yet in present these are not still fully developed.

The viewpoints based on the anthropological fieldworks shed the light on what I have named above the benign/gentle ethnicity. Moreover, they not only focus the analysis on that; yet also proceed to the ethnicity theories into an entire reorientation of the researches about the cultural/ethnic differences. Precisely, they rework this gentle ethnicity in the multicultural perspectives. Thus did the anthropologist Christian Giordano as a contention to some papers delivered at a conference about multiculturalism held recently in Cluj-Napoca (Giordano 2002). First, he has referred to a 'civic multiculturalism' whose main premise would be the replacement of the national state by the civic state. This latter would mean the state that whilst would root the legitimacy in the respect of the constitutional rights, regarding the cultural diversity it should be neutral or even to adopt a policy of affirmative action. Although Giordano qualifies that view as utopian, he supports the generosity and optimism of its basic assumptions. Worth to put the emphasis, he pinpoints, on its likeliness with the Jurgen Habermas's idea of 'constitutional patriotism'.

More realistic is, in Giordano's view, the 'normative multiculturalism', a theory developed by another participant to the conference. That theory brings into attention the ideas of collective rights and strengthening of local identities, most of the times as an alternative to and even against the central political authority. They scold thus both the societal and global identities. Nor this variant seems to be satisfactory. Giordano argues that by its consequences the multicultural idea changes into a 'given thing'. In addition, he put it its too close relationship with the case of the Hungarian minority from Transylvania.

Instead of both these outlooks, Giordano's proposal is to lay as the ground of the multiculturalism the results of the ethnology and social anthropology. By this way the 'everyday banality of multiculturalism' would replace the 'noble spheres of the political life', this latter being the real concern of the civic and normative multiculturalisms (Ibidem 147). The identities would become thus an object and a frame for 'an unending negotiation and mediation'.

When one comes closer to the citizenship issue an assumption common to the multicultural theories is that: 'Citizenship implies membership of a polity while identity implies the recognition of the common ties' (Delanty 1996). This follows from the scholars' concern according to which the citizenship is linked with an open policy of identity building-up (Leca 1986). In this respect, the French author Jean Leca argues that the citizenship is an outcome of five identity features, all of them yielded in course of the political modernization. He deliberately raises a viewpoint against the 'contractual' perspectives to which he contends the fully grounding on the citizens' self-interest. And in order to be precise Leca quotes the

statements of a 'contractual' theory, that of the sociologist Arthur Stinchcombe. He summarizes the Stinchcombe's point of view showing that citizenship relates to the institution toward that the people are committed. It has to put it that the institution is the key concept, its role being to cope with the matter of citizenship. An institution successfully does that if by its 'completeness' and 'development' (*plénitude* with Leca's word) it answers to the issues raised by the citizens (Ibidem 206). Although Leca does not see the Stinchcombe's theory wholly enrolled in the range of the 'self-interest' outlooks, he dislikes its 'procedural' way to approach the citizenship. His argument is that the institutional arrangements like these proposed by Stinchcombe only hint the people toward a 'civic loyalty', but in no way provide a full citizenship.

In what concerns the cases of Csangos and Vlachs cultures it has to say that alike the ethnicity theories also the planning of building-up the civic identity it seems to me little accurate. The multicultural outlooks reworked yet in a 'procedural' manner, like is, for instance, that of Stinchcombe, brings us closer to the fieldwork state of facts. An argument for this statement is that, as I have said above, the Csangos' and Vlachs' concern is far from ethnicity issue. In addition, as I will try further to show, instead to the commitment toward a definite social identity they display a vivid interest into putting on the way those local institutions that are able to answer to their needs and values. Therefore I will try to illustrate through the examples of the Csangos and Vlachs a sort of *institutional multiculturalism*, which roots in the 'everyday banality of multiculturalism' and gain its strength in the frame of the local institutions⁹.

In order to make that concrete I will refer to the ways in which the Csangos and Vlachs understand two of their civic rights. First is the *land property*, which at the end of 19th century, in a time when the SEE states already stepped on the road of modernization, was the very ground of gaining the people loyalty. The other is the right to the *own culture*, mainly their identity building-up in the frame of the local culture. Coming later, this demand was suppressed by the central authorities. The main reason of that was their embarking on a modernization program, which took the model of the political nation.

The oral histories in Csangos and Vlachs villages show the significance of getting the land. The Csangos' telling has as a start point the 1864's land reform, particularly the figure of Cuza Principe who ruled the two Romanian Principalities then. The people very clearly know that before to have land they were bound by being the boyars' serves. Giving the land the Principe freed them by this dependency, precisely by the obligation to do the *corvée*. However, not all the cases to endow the peasant with land have been an easy task. In a village, the people remind the muffled competition arisen between them and the great landowners. Having a bad will to enforce the land reform, the landowners made the peasants to embark on a long time competition to acquire the land. The state helped the villagers by setting an extended network of co-operative credit and popular banks¹⁰. It is important to note that the matter did not involve in the so-called 'class-struggle'. The people remind instead that they competed as equals with the landowners and sometimes they won. The local representatives

⁹ As a working definition I would say that an institution is a *procedure* through which the behaviors of the actors involved in a social action are *predictable* in a certain extent. Such an arrangement differs to the contractual understandings, mainly because its putting in practice depends by the prerequisites of the *local culture* and brings in attention the people's expectations, values and needs. That approach is close to the Stinchcombe idea of institution (Stinchcombe 1968: 107,182; Leca 1986: 164ff,206ff).

¹⁰ For the place of these institutions in the public policies of that time see (Lampe&Jackson 1982: pp. 372-373, 451-455).

of co-operative credit and popular banks helped them to do that. The land property was therefore not an exclusive economic asset, yet also a cornerstone of getting political and civic attitudes and values.

The land property is in the Catholics' oral history a theme rehearsed until recent times. Cuza's government gave them land in 1864. Afterwards they got land again in 1921 and in 1945, last time under the cover of a pro-communist government. In fact, at least in regards the Catholics from Moldova the central authority of the Romanian state displayed at the very beginning a kind of contractual relationship. In this sense, it is worth to quote the opinion of a Catholic scholar, Anton Coşa, who pinpoints that in 1857 when they elected a Representative Assembly to decide in the matter of the future of Romanian Principalities, to the Catholics they allowed to have a representative, yet under the condition to recognize themselves as 'Romanians' (Coşa 2001).

At the Vlachs the significance of the land property was in a way shifted by a long tradition of the collective ownership. In addition, since the Bulgarian state managed to do only one great land reform, that at the beginning of 1920s, the people tell less about the role of the state (Gospodinov 1996: 54). In fact, in regard to this reform the people do not speak about its economic benefits, yet they highlight that only from this date onwards the land property became individual.

The oldest reminds of the land property root, amongst the Vlachs, before 1878. Precisely they know that then the land was in the full property of the Turkish authority. They could however to require from the local bey an important land area, work it together the all family and pay the 10% of the products. Therefore, even today they name the arable land *merea* from the Turkish word *mirî*, what meant merely a right of using the land (Milkova 1970: 94ff). From that time they inherited also the word *tamazlâc*, but having a different meaning in respect the region of the two researched localities. So, whilst in Vidin area that means both the land and the kinship which work this land, in Belene, *tamazlâc* signifies only the most worthy lineages¹¹. This Vlachs 'ethnographic' appropriation of the land right wholly differs in comparison the Csangos. Amongst these latter there are not specific words to designate the land property (or during my fieldwork I have not found these)¹².

After 1878 the people kept their land property most of the times in the same juridical conditions like before. Moreover, they work it in large familial groups who were living in the same house and managed commonly the goods production and consumption. Until the late 1920s such an economic unit enrolled in Belene the members of a three generations and sometimes they counted up to 40 persons in it. This way of organizing the land exploitation is often referred to in the oral histories from Belene, yet less clear in those from Vidin. However

¹¹ In addition, they use it to designate the worthy sorts of the bred animals. They say for instance about a good sheep or cattle that is 'of a well *tamazlâc*'. Both the terms *mirî* and *tamazlâc* are common to the Vlachs and Bulgarians. Seldom the Belene's Vlachs are using too a specific word to designate the lineage, that of *gens*. Balkanski states that only amongst the Vlachs around Nikipol this term is used. Thus, they are uttering as *numele djinsului* the expression 'the name of the lineage' (Balkanski 1999: 131). More about this matter see in my article Şerban 2004b.

¹² Although it is missing to the Vlachs the vesting of the land property with the figure of a 'historical personality' (like Cuza's image in the Csango case), they took a great benefit from the *gospodarluk*, an economical system that the Ottoman administration put in practice in order to border the influence of the *âyan*-s, the administrators of the *ciflâc*-s (Adanir 1989: 150-154). Furthermore, under the pressure of local rebellions the Ottoman administration sold in 1851 the *gospodarluk*'s lands to the Vidin's peasants. They have to pay a money compensation (*otkup*), in exchange to the *tapiu*-s, the written documents that allow them the right to use the land (Milkova 1970 : 219). In Vräf several persons are still keeping these *tapiu*-s.

in both of regions the Bulgarian state supported this situation through the co-operative and credit policies. The people reminds in Vräf a regional co-operative named *Zlaten rog*, whereas in Belene they called it simply *zadruga*.

Although the right to the land ownership has a different meaning in respect the Csangos and Vlachs populations it should say that dealing with it the people made working some arrangements closely linked to their local culture. That right was therefore far more suitable to that process than, let to say, the right to vote¹³. From this point of view the land reform was in both of the cases a successful undertaking of a rudiment of citizenship. In present it is hard to state anyway that the land ownership would have significance in getting the Csangos and Vlachs trust toward the polities in that they are living. Both groups show instead more able to benefit from the economics incentives appeared after 1990. They are more mobile and adapt better than the majority of the population. Therefore the land exploitation takes in regards to their expectations only a marginal place.

Another right is however more and more demanding for them. That is the right to their *own culture* a requirement that should not be limited to the education in their mother tongue. In that vein I think that it matters more the bias common to Csangos and Vlachs to make working new local institutions through which they express their own culture. Regarding the Csangos, at least in the villages of my research, these institutions are strong and grant the people trust. The local organizations, like Association of the Csango Magyar from Moldova, Kolping Family, Association "Dumitru Mărtinaș" (Stan and Weber 1997: 21ff; Pozsony 2002:173ff; Vincze 2002:72ff), are influential mainly in making-up the opinions and attitudes. Worth especially to mention that they strive to strength a local elite and to encourage their leaders to openly and accurately express the ethnic issue.

Not less telling is the activity of the NGOs and foundations created under the umbrella of the Catholic Church. And I would remind here the village Frumoasa, when they have a very program based on the religious concept of 'community'. In an interview the local priest showed fully involved in that. In his view the church should display a strong social vocation. That would mean individual assistance, either spiritual or social, as well as the strengthening of the solidarity networks. In this latter respect he made an attempt to invent some new feasts, like the Family Day (at the beginning of December), yet the weight of his commitment is the organizing of the labour networks with the temporary migrants in Italy, Germany and France. Especially the young people benefit from this help and the priest is absolutely sure that they will came back in the village, build their own household and support the church.

¹³ It has to say anyway that ever since the interwar period both the Csangos and Vlachs got involved in the political life. On the one hand, that overlaps in a certain extent with the endeavors to assert their land property. On the other hand, there is, indeed, a difference in respect each of them. So whilst the Csangos remind their leanings for definite political parties (they were adherents of the National-Peasantists as well as, despite their Catholic belief, also to the extremist Legionary Movement), the Vlachs keep a fresh memory of the leading figures of the interwar Agrarian government under whose power they undertook the land reform. In Belene, for instance, besides the very popular figure of Alexander Stambolinski, they remember also one local deputy who supported at the beginning of 1920 the building of a railway between Svishtov and Belene. After the fall of Stambolinski regime this deputy died in the bloody suppression of Stambolinski's fellows. Another popular figure is that of the Communist Ghiorgi Dimitrov, called in an interview *moș Gheorghe/bai Ghiorgi*. In regards to this particular way of perception and reworking the politics in rural Bulgaria see the recent researches in Raduil, a mountain village from SW of Bulgaria (Dobрева 1997).

A common topic is done yet by the post WW II time when the communist repression stroke altogether Bulgarian and Vlachs, Csangos and Romanians.

The Vlachs too display a bias to be different by some particular features of their culture¹⁴. At the first glance it is striking their preference for the so-called, 'popular songs', a topics that stick together the people from Vidin area with those from Belene. Most of them watch that on TV, either at the Romanian national post, or at the local ones, which broadcast in Romanian¹⁵. In addition, to the Romanian TV also, they watch some 'soap-operas' transmission very successful in Romania amongst the rural and low educated people¹⁶. By making redundant references during the interviews they often appreciate these transmissions as more pleasant and meaningful than the similar ones at the Bulgarian TV posts. In this way their cultural preference changes in a sort of identity marker.

These topics are not only a source of media consuming, yet also an occasion for an institutional undertaking. In Belene for instance the cultural centre¹⁷ has a band of popular songs almost entirely formed by the Romanian-speaking people¹⁸. Their repertoire grounds mainly on the popular dances from south Romania. Despite that, they are invited many times in Bulgaria at the folklore festivals and even are reputed in the country. Besides, they often are called in the towns from South Romania to perform at the local festivals and feasts. It is worth to say that this tradition was initiated almost two or three decades ago under the umbrella of the communist authorities.

On the one hand such kind of local institutions roots mainly in a spontaneous sociability that I met in all researched Vlach localities. I mean that the people accustom to be together, either using the meaningless occasion to do parties or meeting by chance in the locality' centre in cafés, shops or on the streets. And even that might not be met in all Vlach villages, as some recent fieldworks show (Staevska 2004), in my opinion that networks of sociability could be seen as a distinctive cultural feature of this Vlach population¹⁹.

On the other hand, these local patterns are quite far from the formal associations, and I mean here the Association of the Vlachs from Bulgaria. Although this association grants a larger participation (in Belene for instance there are almost 300 persons)²⁰ its goals as well as internal procedures are confused, that giving the way to the accusation for corruption. In opinion of a Belene local leader the stake of the game are the funds' wasting and its 'parochialisation' in Vidin. This is the reason because they feel closer to the Mayoralty and local school, the frames in which they prefer to negotiate and mediate their identity.

It was said sometimes that small cultures like these of Csangos and Vlachs accommodate to the political programs of national building-up. They even have coined the

¹⁴ On this issue see also Anastassova 2001.

¹⁵ The people from Vrăf watch the local TV post from Zajecar, the neighbor Serbian region, where there are a great number of Vlachs.

¹⁶ The most popular transmissions are *Surprise, surprize* and *Iartă-mă*, both at the Romanian national post, TV Romania 1.

¹⁷ This Cultural House/*Chitalishte* is extremely important at the level of the local society from Bulgaria. In some cases they even replace the church (like it is in a village near Belene, wholly Bulgarian, where I have conducted interviews in the frame of Centre for Advanced Studies' project). There is no doubt anyway that the *chitalishte* is a strong source of identity in these cases (s. also Kaneff 2000).

¹⁸ Recently yet, in 1997, at the Cultural House they set up another band of folk dances which competes the older one. Their repertoire is 'Thracian', yet as a choreographer they have someone who commutes from Plevna, the capital of the district.

¹⁹ The same pattern I have observed in south Romania, but that times making distinct a village with Bulgarian speaking people, located near Alexandria (the capital of Teleorman district).

²⁰ The figure was delivered by the personal evaluation of the association members.

term 'civic nation' to express this desire. However, by a close analysis of the nation concept as well as to the ways of nation building-up they have concluded opposite statements. The 'civism' is merely an intermediate stage. In fact, to get a national identity means to transform the civic attitudes into an active political participation at the level of the national society (Schnapper 1994: 43ff;100ff).

In this respect what might happened with the distinctiveness of the cultures, with the local identities and nonetheless with the individual self-identification? The defenders of the Csangos' and Vlachs' identities seem to support the project of building up new national minorities. Their main argument is that the Csangos and Vlachs use a wholly different language in respect the rest of the society. It was argued yet that knowing in a certain degree a language is not at all a marker reliable for building-up the group identity. The marginal groups, like Csangos and Vlachs are, learn very easy an outlandish language and use it with no more than an instrumental significance (Anderson 2000: 124). Actually, in order to get a group/national identity the language should be, in the Benedict Anderson's words, 'written'.

Taking this perspective I have tried to show that institutions matter more. Particularly for the Csangos and Vlachs, I have argued that a kind of institutional multiculturalism preserves both their local identity and civic affiliation toward the state inside whose borders they are living.

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I N T E R V I E W S

WHY AM I STUDYING THE EAST ?

An International Inquiry

Marin Marian-Bălașa

(Bucharest, senior researcher, „C.Brăiloiu” Institute of Ethnography and Folklore)

„Dear [Professor/ Dr/ colleague] ...

This is an international inquiry addressed to several scholars reknown as paying a great deal of attention and research to the study of traditional culture in the East and the Eastern Europe. As you are one of them, this letter is turning towards you: What would you say, if asked for a moment of sincerity and confession? In case your temper reacts positively, I am kindly asking you to rise to yourself, and answer, the following question: **WHY AM I STUDYING THE EAST ?**

Question accepted, I would like to have your answer (no length limits) in writing; answer that should be as subjective, introspective and spontaneous, warm or distant, as you feel like. Please have the kindness of ‘spicing’ your contribution with a representative listing of some academic titles (published books or articles) of yours. Together with many other colleagues’ response, your self-introduction will be published in Romanian academic publications. Looking forward to get and publish your professional selfportrait as soon as possible, with all sincerity...”

The text above was handed out or sent directly to several experts in the field of ethnological disciplines, who belonged, either genetically or educationally, to the West. Hereby I selected some of the most diverse, perhaps surprising or provocative, reactions and replies, that revealed intellectual options which are not very common among ethnologists in Eastern Europe. I am referring to options and attitudes of an openness, flexibility and sincerity that are capable of complementing in an particular way the history and performance of research and scholarship as they have developed nowadays worldwide. This inquiry has started from the desire of knowing the internal or private motivations that made scholars to orient themselves toward domains or sphereas initially unfamiliar to them. In accordance with its results, the inquiry represents the try for verifying whether there is indeed a critical difference between Eastern and Western scholars – in terms of attitude and approach towards the „ethnos” –, as well as the try (Easterners’) for understanding... the „Others” (the Westerners). In the end, the result of such an inquiry has become capable of shaking the provincial prejudice that, for instance, believed that Westerers turned toward foreign geocultures, or at least different from those that were close to their native environment, only because of the precariousness or lack of field material within their own country, within their own traditional spirituality. The joyful knowledge one can acquire from the following schematical self-biographies ends up by forwarding a call to dialogue and universality. Many of the answers printed here come with their generosity – more in terms of wit than information, although the latter is far from missing – to share with us different experiences and mentalities, and, by doing so, to offer us (unfamiliar) suggestions for our own (East-European) episteme.

The here present answers are a continuation of the two packages of ethnological selfportraits that were published in „East European Meetings in Ethnomusicology” (Bucharest: Romanian Society for Ethnomusicology) vol. 5/1998, pp. 131-147, and vol.

6/1999, pp. 139-154, which were signed by ethnomusicologists Bruno Nettl, Philip V. Bohlman, Vesa Kurkela & Risto Pekka Pennanen, Peter Russell Crowe, Warwick Edwards, Robert C. Provine, Martin Clayton, Michael Beckerman, Christina Crowder, Craig Packard, Franklin J. Evans, Jim McJill.

*

Prof. dr. Klaus Roth

[Profesor's presentation was done by an interview, taken on the occasion of the 2nd Conference of the 'Association for Balkan Anthropology' (in the text: ABA), whic took place in Bucharest, on 4-7 September 1997.]

My first contact with the East was as a young student at Freiburg University. In the early 1960s, I sang in a Russian Choir for two or three years. Alexander Kressling, a white Russian emigrant from St. Petersburg, was the conductor. We sang mostly old Russian songs and gave concerts, all over Germany and abroad. I liked it very much, as he was a very inspiring personality. He also taught Russian language courses and I learned quite a bit of Russian.

My area of interest was to become Southeastern Europe, however, not Eastern Europe. In 1964, I made a first trip to the Balkans, which took me to Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Romania. On that fist encounter I saw many of the important places of the region. I was a young student with a backpack, which was quite unusual in those days; the countries were not prepared for this kind of tourism. Nevertheless, I had a good time, and in that trip I met my wife. She was a student at Sofia University and worked on the Black Sea as a tourist guide. We got married in Sofia in 1967 and she moved to Germany.

These first contacts with the Balkans were of a private nature, although I already met Bulgarian folklorists and ethnographers in Sofia. My scholarly interest in the Balkans really arose in 1975, when my wife conducted linguistic field work in Bulgaria and I traveled with her all over the country. In late 1970s, when I was assistant professor at Münster University, in Northern Germany, I became more and more involved in Balkan studies. Meanwhile I spoke Bulgarian fairly well. It occurred to me that my students might want to learn something about what the Balkans, especially about South Slavic countries, which I knew best. In 1978-79, I gave my first seminar on Bulgarian folk culture at Münster University and, together with my wife, began doing ethnological fieldwork in Bulgarian villages and publishing articles on our findings. It was a very fortunate coincidence that in 1981 the position of a professor was to be filled at Munich University. Its focus was to be on Southeast Europe, because the emeritus, the great scholar and prolific writer on Balkan folklore, Leopold Kretzenbacher, had established that tradition. In April 1982 I became a full professor at the Institute for German and Comparative Volkskunde (ethnology/folklore) and moved to Munich.

Ever since 1980 we spent our summers in a village in the eastern Balkan mountains, not far from the small town of Kotel. Gradually my interest in South Slavic cultures and Balkan cultures in general expanded. It was a time when most communist Balkan countries were hard to access for western scholars and students. At Munich University I tried to create an interest in this area, which – for political and linguistic reasons – was not very easy. In the summer of 1984 we made an excursion with a group of 18 students. With two VW-microbusses we traveled all the way through Hungary and Yugoslavia to Sofia and spent two

very impressive weeks all over Bulgaria. After that several students became interested in Balkan folk culture and wrote their MA theses and dissertations of this area.

This experience and our own research inspired me to begin a major research project on various forms of Balkan popular literature, including street singing and songsters. In some Balkan countries (like Romania) there already had been a strong interest in this kind of literature, so I concentrated on those countries in which it had not yet received due scholarly attention. The project was financed by the German Research Association (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, Bonn) from 1984 to 1990, and produces quite a number of publications. Apart from these research activities, regular lectures and seminars on southeast European topics always were part of my curriculum at Munich University; in addition, as a visiting professor I lectured on South Slavic folk culture at Zurich University and at the University of California, Berkeley.

Due to the fact that my wife's family has a house in the Balkan mountains, we were free to do whatever research we wanted. We did a lot of research in villages and towns, not only on popular literature, but also on socialist rituals such as socialist weddings, baptisms, burials, and all the rituals and festivals of the yearly cycle created by the socialist state. We observed many such weddings, and in 1990 we published an extensive article on this in the journal 'Ethnologia Europaea'.

In 1993, after the collapse of socialism, we began another research project on the consequences of 40 years of socialism and the extent to which it had created, determined or influenced the everyday culture of the socialist countries: the way people act, their techniques, skills, and knowledge. Their strategies of life management. In a socialist country people needed very different cultural techniques, how to get things, how to do that, how to behave and how not to behave, all the necessary strategies of everyday life. The German Research Association supported our comparative project on a Bulgarian village and a village in Thuringia in the former GDR, a comparison that turned out to be a very fruitful. Two Bulgarian colleagues, Doroteja Dobрева and Petar Petrov from Sofia, and Gabriele Wolf (Munich) investigated a Bulgarian village in the Rila mountains. This co-operation is extremely fruitful, because it provides both the inside and the outside perspectives. At the same time, a German colleague (Barbara Schreier) studied the village in Thuringia and wrote her dissertation on it. It was highly interesting to discover how people once coped with the authorities and with the deficit economy in which they had to provide scarce consumer goods or materials, school education for their children or a permit to travel abroad. They studied archive materials and made many interviews and came up with a comprehensive picture of what everyday life was like in the period of forced collectivization in the 1950s and how people coped with the encroachments of the state and the Party. This project is still going on.

I made many trips to all the Balkan countries except for Albania. My relations with the Balkan countries have always been both scholarly and personal. I have always cooperated with my wife, a chemist turned Slavist and cultural anthropologist. It is from our joint research and intercultural experience in Southeast Europe that we established the new discipline of *Intercultural communication* at Munich University. Working together in the same field and being married and having a family at the same time has always been very fruitful, although it has also been stressful at times. I have profited a lot from her emic (Bulgarian) perspective, and I myself provided the etic perspective.

For an ethnologist it is one of the most valuable assets to be able to look at things both from an inside and an outside perspective. To my mind, this dual perspective is what Balkan ethnology needs most, and it is certainly one of the great achievements of the ABA

conferences to put together people with an emic and an etic perspective, insiders and outsiders. In most Balkan countries, folklore and ethnography have for many decades been emic disciplines, Romanians studying Romanian and Bulgarian studying Bulgarian folk culture on a national basis. On the other hand, there is a strong tradition of studies by west European or American ethnologists or anthropologists coming in for limited empirical field work. Their theses or books are usually not available in the Balkan countries – two separate perspectives and two discourses. With our joint efforts ABA tries to overcome this dilemma. Taking both perspectives should become a basic approach in Balkan ethnology.

My wife and I have two daughters who both speak Bulgarian fluently and are attached to Bulgaria. Our elder daughter got her MA degree in political sciences and American studies, but now she is turning to a Balkan subject with a dissertation on the recent American influence on Bulgaria. Our younger daughter studies languages. For almost 20 years, we have traveled to Bulgaria regularly and held close connections. As a consequence, we have witnessed various phases of socialism, the Jivkov era, Gorbachov's glasnost and the turnabout of 1989. Actually we flew to Sofia in December 1989 on the very day Ceaușescu was arrested. We watched the protest meetings in the new trade unions in Sofia, and ever since those eventful days we observed the very difficult process of transition from "real socialism" to a modern, pluralist democracy and market economy. It turned out to be a process that was longer and more painful than anyone had expected. In addition, it is an open process, a process, as Dobrinka Kostova put at the conference, of which we don't know the outcome. What kind of elite will emerge and has already emerged? What will happen to the once so important intelligentsia? Where is it today? It seems to have disappeared in view of the new economic elites. This is a very sad story. We have many friends among them, in Sofia, and we find it very depressing that many of them have been marginalized and lost their economic basis. The present economic and political elites would benefit from their intellectual and moral standards, because the new elites seem to be almost void of such standards.

One of the tasks I took upon myself to make the Balkan countries more accessible to outsiders and to the scholars in the Balkan countries themselves was my bibliography on South Slavic folk cultures. I discovered that there is wealth of German, English, and French literature on the Balkan countries which is unknown or unavailable in Southeast Europe and elsewhere. Gabriele Wolf and I published the bibliography in 1993 in the US. Generally speaking, I am very sensitive to problems of international communication between scholars and across language boundaries. Being a philologist by training and having been a teacher in Scotland and Germany, I have always tried to make my work available in other languages, mostly in English or Bulgarian. In 1997, my colleagues translated a volume of six German articles on "The Southeast European Village between Change and Tradition" into Bulgarian; it came out in December 1997 in *Bálgarski Folklor*. We are trying to return some of the information we got from our informants in the villages to the Bulgarian public.

Communication is awfully important for international understanding. Articles should be available in more than one language. In the socialist period our scholarly traditions were isolated from each other for political reasons. Outside the Balkans, only a few experts can read Balkan languages. So, in order to establish an international discourse and to overcome nationalistic perspectives, translations have become more important for our discipline than ever. There is so much literature on Bulgarian and Romanian folk culture, but if it's not in an international language, there is no discourse. In principle, the idea of our bibliography on South Slavic folk culture was the same: to further the communication between ethnologists from all countries. I am glad to hear from colleagues that our bibliography fulfills that

function. It is a modest contribution to the better understanding between Western and Balkan colleagues who still know too little about each other.

Generally speaking, there is too little factual information about the Balkans in the Western media, and too little communication between the Balkans and the West in general. There is still something like a curtain between them. It is no longer an Iron Curtain but, as Vaclav Havel put it, a 'Velvet Curtain', and sometimes you get the impression that this curtain is getting stronger. Right after the changes in the socialist countries there was an impressive openness, and today people seem to be more reluctant to approach each other than five years ago. Many Romanians, Bulgarians, and Serbs are focussing more and more on "their own" culture. It's like a pendulum swinging from one side to the other: focussing more on the own, opening more to the West, back to the own, and so on. This was most clearly demonstrated in the paper by Sl. Naumović on the "two Serbias". In Serbia this dichotomy between conservative nationalism and western modernism is certainly strongest, but there are also two Bulgarias and two Romanias. In the Balkans, these two orientations of preserving your own traditions and identity, and opening up to Europe, are interwoven in a very specific way. From an ethnological point of view, this is a highly interesting and often very painful process in the Balkans.

I have published quite a number of articles and books on southeast Europe. Every year the Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft, a Munich based society of scholars working on Southeast Europe, organizes a University Week (Hochschulwoche) and invites scholars and students from all Southeast European countries. In 1990, I convened a University Week on 'Southeast European Folk Cultures in the Modern Era' on Lake Starnberg. For most participants from southeast Europe this was their first time in the West, the first time they participated in a free discussion. We had heated discussions between Albanian communists and liberals from other countries like Hungary. I published the proceedings of this wonderful conference in the volume "Southeast European Folk Culture in the Modern Era". This is a volume I like very much. A year later I brought out a volume on southeast European popular literature, which I think, offers substantial articles on Greece, Yugoslavia, and mostly on Bulgaria. These two books and, of course, the bibliography on South Slavic folk culture I would consider the most representative of my work on southeast European folk culture and popular culture. I should not forget to add that one of the important results of the 1997 ABA conference was that I will soon publish the first issue of *Ethnologia Balkanica*, a journal that will hopefully help to achieve some of the goals I mentioned above.

Books on Southeastern Europe

[ed.] *Handwerk in Mittel- und Südosteuropa. Mobilität, Vermittlung und Wandel im Handwerk des 18. Bis 20. Jahrhunderts*. München: Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft 1992 (Südosteuropa-Studien 38).

[ed.] *Southeast European Folk Culture in the Modern Era*. Munich: Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft 1992 (Südosteuropa-Jahrbuch 22).

[ed.] *Südosteuropäische Populärliteratur im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert*. München: 1993 (Südosteuropa-Schriften, 13).

[with G. Wolf] *South Slavic Folk culture. A Bibliography of Literature in English, German, and French on Bosnian-Herzegovinian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Montenegrin and Serbian Folk Culture*. Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1993.

[ed.] *Typenverzeichnis der bulgarischen Volksmärchen*, von L. Daskalova Perkowski, D. Dobрева, J. Koceva, E. Miceva. Trad. și ed. de K. Roth. Helsinki 1995 (FFC 257).

[edited with Doroteja Dobрева] *Seloto između promjena i tradicija* [The Village between Transformation and Tradition]. No. 3-4 of journal *Bългарски Folklor* 23 (1997). Other articles, by Holm Sundhaussen, Petar Petrov, Gabriele Wolf, Christian Giordano and Dobrinka Kostova).

Barbara A. Cellarius

[Department for Anthropology, Kentucky University, USA]

As a cultural anthropologist trained in the American tradition of anthropology I find the question “why am I studying the East?” to be a rather strange and slightly troubling one. Compared to my professors and fellow students who work in East Africa (e.g., Tanzania and Kenya) or East Asia (e.g., India), not to mention South America, the Philippines, and Australia, my working in a country on the European continent means that I am working remarkably close to home (albeit farther away than Eastern Kentucky). In working with undergraduate anthropology courses at the University of Kentucky, I try to emphasize to the students that anthropology is holistic, comparative, and rooted in the concept of cultural relativism. The latter is the idea that cultures, or sub-sets thereof, should be looked at first as systems in and of themselves without making value judgments about how they compare to other societies and avoiding the application of stereotypes, such as those associated with “Orientalism” or “The East.”

That said, I decided to do my dissertation research in Bulgaria for a combination of reasons. It began with a desire to do research in a country and culture other than the ones in which I was born and raised, this because I believe there is value in experiencing other cultures – both for what they show us about our own culture and for what we see about them as outsiders. This came, however, after previous research projects in the American states of Alaska (on pre-historic environmental adaptation) and Idaho (on community response to residential environment contamination). I also have a long-standing interest in Central and Eastern Europe that began with my German language teacher in high school and was renewed when my sister spent time in Hungary in the early 1990s.

But the specific factors leading me to do research in Bulgaria were and are very much associated with my professional interests in the areas of ecological and development anthropology (particularly the social and cultural dimensions of environmental issues), nongovernmental environmental organizations (NGOs) as a form of social organization, and mountain regions as havens for cultural and biological diversity. Environmental issues in the country, including nature conservation, have received considerable attention in recent years. A notable player in these discussions has been a community of nongovernmental organizations, which has grown considerably in the last decade. And, despite the natural resource exploitation and environmental pollution associated with the socialist era in Central and Eastern Europe, Bulgaria still has considerable areas of relatively unspoiled mountain landscape, which are populated to varying degrees by peasants engaged in agro-pastoralism, gathering, and hunting along with their involvement in more manufacturing or industrial activities. It was the opportunity to examine the interaction or confluence of these factors, rather than the desire to work in a specific geographic area, that drew me to Bulgaria. In fact, the strongest influence of geography has been the fact that I wanted to do my research in a country that was not already well studied by, much less crawling with, anthropologists working in the traditions of American cultural anthropology or British social anthropology.

This steered me away from working in the Andes or Himalayas or highland of East Africa and towards the Balkan Peninsula (which I have been told takes its name from a Turkish word for wooded mountains).

So, I hope that you will not be too disappointed when I say in the end that “Studying the East” played very little part in my decision to do research in Bulgaria. What mattered the most was specific factors related to my chosen research topic of rural communities, nongovernmental organizations, and the conservation of biological diversity.

Catherine Durandin

[Profesor of Romanian at INALCO (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales), Paris]

Je me suis intéressée à la Roumanie parce que je travaillais comme jeune historienne sur la question nationale au sein du bloc soviétique.

Puis je suis venue travailler à Bucharest chaque été de 1973 à 1980 et j’ai été fascinée par le système communiste roumain. L’aliénation collective m’a étonnée de même que la méconnaissance totale de l’Occident. J’ai alors travaillé sur les relations Est-ouest, les images, les représentations, la sublimation ou la haine de l’Ouest par l’Est.

Depuis 1990, je viens en Roumanie chaque année deux à trois fois par an. Je ne peux m’empêcher d’être passionnée par le changement et par les résistances au changement, par la rapidité des mutations et par certaines formes d’éloignement de l’Ouest.

Publications

Révolution à la française ou à la russe, Paris: PUF, 1989.

Ceausescu, vérités et mensonges d’un roi communiste, Paris: Albin Michel, 1990.

Histoire de la nation roumaine, Bruxelles: Édit. Complexe, 1993.

Histoire des Roumains, Paris: Fayard, 1995; Romanian edition: *Istoria românilor*, Bucharest: Institutul European, 1998.

La trahison; Paris: Édit. L’Aube, 1996, a Romanian version was published in Bucharest by the Fundația Culturală Română (a novel on the 1989 Revolution in Romania).

La bel été des camarades, Paris: Édit. Michalon, 1998 (novel about the 1990 in Romania).

Risto Pekka Pennanen

[Professor, Department for Folk Traditions, University of Tampere, Finland]

For me, the East is quite opposite to the overwhelmingly rational, organised, well-functioning, standardised and dull Central Europe. To put it shortly, the East is the Other. The East is interesting *per se*, but Eastern reactions towards Western influences make the subject still more fascinating. I am making research on the Balkans and the Middle East because of the interesting fusions in cultures, ideologies and musics.

[Although frugal, the Scandinavian colleague’s answer concentrated the essential. It was sent together with the illustrating/exemplifying book *The Structure and Idea of Maqām. Historical approaches* (Proceedings of the Third Meeting of the ICTM Maqām study Group, Tampere – Virrat, 2-5 October 1995), Department of Folk Tradition, University of Tampere, 1997, 202 p., edited by Jürgen Elsner & R. P. Pennanen. In this volume, the Pennanen’s bibliography, which is attached to his own essay, lists six other articles that dealt with themse which are specific to several musical cultures in Southeastern Europe.]

Prof. dr. Peter Kloos

[Faculty of Sociocultural Studies, Department for Cultural Anthropology, Amsterdam University]

I'll try to answer your question – stressing 'how' rather than 'why'. I am not so sure about my ultimate motives why I became an anthropologist, but I do know how it happened.

Until I was 17 year old I was certain that I would embark on a career as a professional violinist. During the years at secondary school I spent as much time on playing the violin as on school work.

I suddenly began to doubt: I had a lot of other interests as well and I suddenly realized that being a professional violinist not much time would be left over for other things. So I undertook an experiment: summer 1954 I spent one week studying violin for eight hours per day. The results I found impressive, but I also learned that this was not how I wanted to fill my life. So, no study at the conservatory.

Music in a wider sense remained attractive, and via Serbian folk musicians who where in the Netherlands at that time I decided that ethnomusicology would be interesting (I was also discovering Bartok and Janacek). But alas, in the Netherlands there was no possibility to read ethnomusicology (even though one of the founding fathers of ethnomusicology, Jaap Kunst, was working in Amsterdam at that time). A role might have played the son of our neighbors, who during the war built a gamelan – and I played gamelan music with a few interested friends.

The dean of my secondary school advised me to approach 'ethnologists', it might be possible to approach ethnomusicology along that line. However, I found out that it was not possible to read ethnology either – what I could do was to read human geography. At Amsterdam University this included, for historical reasons, a good amount of anthropology. I always had found geography interesting as well.

So I began to study human geography in 1955. In that context I had to follow lectures of a young professor who had carried out field work in Côte d'Ivoire, and who lectured with great enthusiasm about the Akan people and their culture. Within three weeks I was lost: this is what I wanted to do.

I did graduate in geography – but I also graduated in cultural anthropology (this had become a possibility in 1958).

What motivates me? A number of things, I think (and many more probably in the murky depths of my mind). One is that I am fascinated by the incredible variation people are capable of – in behavior and in conceptions. In this, I think, I am right in the middle of what anthropology is since the 19th century: the Aufklärung idea of what humans share, and the Romantic love of cultural difference. And, I am afraid, I just like being abroad!

I began doing fieldwork in 1960 – in a rural community in the Netherlands (I was working to pay my own studies, so I could not go very far away). In 1960 and 1961 I spent twice two months in a farmer's household, working as a farm hand and asking questions. I then carried out research in a big reclamation/colonization project in the heart of the Netherlands. I was a consistent objector at the time and was not allowed to go abroad.

I then went for two years (1966-1968) to Surinam – at that time still part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands – where I worked among costal Caribs: shifting cultivators *cum* fishermen. This became the basis for my PhD degree, *The Marony River Caribs of Surinam*

(Assen: Van Gorcum, 1971). In 1972 and 1973 I was again in Surinam, now among the nomadic hunters and gatherers, the Akuriyo.

At that time I was junior lecturer at the University of Amsterdam and chargé de cours at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. In 1974 I became Senior Lecturer at the University at Leiden. Fieldwork brought me to Sri Lanka in 1977-1978 and many, many months afterwards. I started doing fieldwork in an old, cultivators village – the consequences of colonial land policy for present-day cultivation practices. But events in Sri Lanka in the 1980s, when I moved to the Free University in Amsterdam as full professor, forced me to redirect my attention to issues of ethnicity, violence and state formation. That is what I am basically doing now.

So, by and large I did what I found so interesting: doing research among hunters/gatherers, fishermen/shifting cultivators, peasants, modern farmers, etcetera. My work with PhD students opened new vistas: China, Irian Jaya, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, etc. If I were to do it again, I would follow the same path!

Timothy Rice

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When I am asked to think about how I got involved in the study of “Eastern European” music, I am struck by how little I regarded it as Eastern European in the beginning. Eastern Europe, as a geographical conception, seems clearly in retrospect, if not at the time, an artifact of the situation in Europe between about 1944 and 1989. It was, in other words, defined by politics and political opposition, not by culture and not by a longer historical view. One might think that any American who chose to study Eastern European music in that period should surely have had some interest in these politics or perhaps his study was defined by that division.

In fact, in my own case, nothing could be further from the truth. In retrospect, I was astonishingly naïve about the politic dimensions of my chosen field of study. I got involved in the study of Eastern European music only because I was first engaged by it as an art form and an aesthetic activity (dancing, singing, playing music) that I encountered in America in university “international folk dancing” clubs. I fell naively in love with this music as I might have the works of Brahms, and I wanted to know as much as I could about it. In fact, whereas I had been a musician in the classical and jazz traditions, I had never asked an intellectual question about those kinds of music. The first intellectual question I asked about music happened to concern Bulgarian music. And it was an essentially aesthetic or structural musical question. “They tell me in record jacket notes that this dance piece is in 7/16 time. Where is the 7/16 time in the music? How do you count it?” That simple question—my fist about music that really was my own, that really excited me—led me eventually into the academic study of music in general (ethnomusicology) and of Bulgarian music in particular. That Bulgaria was situated in Eastern Europe was completely an accident and irrelevant to my fascination with it—at least at the beginning.

Of course, eventually I had to deal with the political reality of the period: the bureaucratic details, the suspicions, and so forth. And eventually some of my analyses of the Bulgarian musical tradition concerned themselves with the political life in which it was embedded. But by then it was too late. I was, like a fish, hooked by Bulgarian music as art, and the cultural and political entanglements came later.

Of course, the Bulgarian interior ministry of the period could not be expected to understand that there could be such a naïve American, and they suspected that I was an American spy during my fifteen-month period of doctoral dissertation research from 1972-73 in Bulgaria. One of our friends confirmed this to me after they interviewed him to discover what my “real purpose” in the country was. They told him: “Not only is he a spy, he is one of America’s best spies! He brought with him his wife and child. He is interested in music, which is harmless. He has a very sincere smile. And we have been following him for over a year, and we haven’t seen him do anything wrong!”

