

THE PERILS OF SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH. TRANSNISTRIAN ROMANIANS REFLECTED IN THE SOCIOLOGICAL SURVEY CONDUCTED BY ANTON GOLOPENȚIA AND IN THE FILES OF SOVIET REPRESSION

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ABSTRACT

During the Second World War, the Central Institute of Statistics in Bucharest carried out a series of surveys in the territories of the Soviet Union under military administration between 1941 and 1944. The survey was coordinated by sociologist Anton Golopenția, director of the Research Office of the Central Institute of Statistics, with the aim of identifying the ethnic Romanians in the Soviet Union. The team led by Anton Golopenția produced a sociological monograph of the village of Valea Hoșului in the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (RASSM), which remained in manuscript until 2006. These studies lack references to Soviet repressions against the local population before the outbreak of the war, so we will try to establish what Romanian researchers actually have learned about these repressions in comparison with the data from Soviet archives that have been made public so far.

Keywords: Anton Golopenția, Romanians in Soviet Union, Transnistria, Soviet repression.

INTRODUCTION

The research carried out by the team led by Anton Golopenția east of the Dniester and Bug rivers between 1941 and 1944 constitutes an extremely detailed image of the situation of ethnic Romanians in the Soviet Union. The research carried out during the census of the Romanian population in this area sought to establish the main coordinates of the communities according to the principles of the monographic school founded by Dimitrie Gusti.

The reader of the research reports by Anton Golopenția's team is impressed by their penetrating depth, coherent methodology and attention to detail – but at the same time they lack accounts of important events: the famine of 1932–1933, the Stalinist purges of 1937–1938, mass emigration – in general the repressions of the Soviet state against the population across the Dniester. These events were close to the time when the researchers led by Anton Golopenția arrived in the Romanian villages east of the Dniester, events that were of a mass nature and affected the entire population of the region – but they do not find their place in the research reports that were preserved.

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The idea of a census of Romanians east of the Dniester was discussed on several occasions by General Ion Antonescu during the meetings of the government in Bucharest and was implemented at the end of 1941, the objective being to carry out a population exchange according to the plan drawn up by Sabin Manuilă, director of the Central Institute of Statistics⁷⁶. The field research project was entrusted to Anton Golopenția, director of the Research Office of the Central Statistical Institute.

THE TEAM AND RESEARCH IN THE VILLAGE OF VALEA HOȚULUI

Between 1941 and 1944 the composition of the research team led by Anton Golopenția east of the Dniester River changed several times. Here we present the researchers who participated in the field data collection in the village of Valea Hoțului. On 19 December 1941, the following people left Bucharest for Tiraspol, in addition to Anton Golopenția: Ion Apostol, Nicolae Betea, Gheorghe Bucurescu, Dumitru Corbea-Cobzaru, Nicolae Economu, Nicolae Marin-Dunăre, Corneliu Mănescu, Petre Mihăilescu, Ion Oancea, Gheorghe Retegan, Tudor Alexandru Stoianovici, Bucur Șchiopu - all members of the Research Office of the Central Institute of Statistics. They were joined by the student George Popescu (who was fluent in Russian) and the doctor Traian Georgescu⁷⁷. Anton Golopenția selected his collaborators for this project from his former students who had participated during previous years in sociological research in Romanian villages. The composition of the team was relatively balanced in terms of political orientation, as Golopenția recalled during his investigation after the end of the war, with Stoianovici, Mănescu, Betea, Corbea, Șchiopu and Oancea being considered left-wing; Economu, Bucurescu, Marin-Dunăre, Apostol were considered right-wingers, while Retegan and Golopenția were considered apolitical⁷⁸. In reality the “left-wing leanings” of some of the team members were much more than mere affinities, many of them were members of the illegal Romanian Communist Party and had certain pro-Soviet sympathies.

In these circumstances, the question of scientific methodology was raised from the very beginning of the trip: how was Soviet society to be approached? The methodology was recorded in contemporary documents, and survivors still remember it many years after the events⁷⁹. Following a discussion involving all team members it was decided that the elements of comparison would be between the Soviet and Tsarist regimes, so the comparison was kept within the same space. The

⁷⁶ Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă, *Stenogramele ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri guvernarea Ion Antonescu [Minutes of the Council of Ministers Sessions Antonescu s Government]*, Vol. V, National Archives of Romania, Bucharest, 1996, p. 130.

⁷⁷ Anton Golopenția, *Românii de la est de Bug [Romanians East of the Bug]*, Encyclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, Vol. I, p. XLV.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁷⁹ Anton Golopenția, *Românii de la est de Bug [Romanians East of the Bug]*, Encyclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, Vol. II, pp. 454–458.

preferred working method was the interview, with each team member setting the questionnaire under the supervision of Anton Golopenția, and in the evening the results of the day's research were presented. Anton Golopenția ensured the objectivity of the research, with all issues being checked repeatedly through cross-examination and by contacting as many informants as possible.

Anton Golopenția intended to start researching the Romanian villages east of Bug in the winter of 1942, but the German military authorities did not allow him to do so. Until the situation was clarified, the research team began a sociological survey of the village of Valea Hoțului on the left bank of the Dniester. The research from Valea Hoțului was prepared for publication in two editorial drafts that have been preserved as manuscripts⁸⁰.

The first such editorial project was entitled “Notes on the Soviet rural administration and on the problems raised for the Romanian administration of the territory between the Dniester and the Bug, drawn up following the survey of the Valea Hoțului (Ananiev), January–March 1942”. The articles written by the members of the team led by Anton Golopenția deal with each of the issues addressed according to the methodology described above: under tsarism, under Soviet rule and during the Romanian wartime administration. The problems investigated concern the organisation and functioning of the judiciary, health care, the commercial and credit system, the organisation of schools, the administration of the kolkhozes and demographic policy.

The second editorial project was called “Valea-Hoțului, a village in the Moldavian Republic. Research undertaken under the direction of Anton Golopenția, in collaboration with the Institute of Social Sciences of Romania, on the occasion of the census of Transnistria (January–March 1942)”. Some of the articles in manuscript for this editorial project are expanded versions of those in the above-mentioned project. The topics covered are generally similar: crafts and industry, Soviet administration, church and faith, education, demography, justice. What is striking about these materials is the lack of any reference to Soviet repression. The mechanisms of administration, justice, economy, and education are presented neutrally, with no mention of the violent way in which they were imposed. In the case of the kolkhozes, they are presented only from an institutional point of view, leaving aside their recent history of confiscation of property and punishment of peasants who refused to become members of the kolkhozes, etc.

SOVIET REPRESSIONS AS SEEN BY GOLOPENȚIA'S TEAM

In a report from the beginning of 1942⁸¹ Anton Golopenția analyses in several pages in great detail the question of the number of Romanians who were east of the

⁸⁰ Anton Golopenția, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 291–584.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–39.

Dniester River. The main purpose of this report seems to have been to try to systematize as much as possible the census of the Romanians in the Soviet Union, who had undergone an intense process of ethnic assimilation over several generations, and Anton Golopenția found that there were a large number of people who were in the process of renouncing their Romanian ethnic identity. The causes of this process are identified in the deportations practiced by Imperial Russia, in the famine organized by the Soviets, in the collectivization and the repression of those who opposed it, while Golopenția emphasizes especially the role of the school in the ethnic assimilation of Romanians in the Soviet Union.

In 1942 Gheorghe Bucurescu wrote a report in which he describes the population losses in the Transnistrian villages of Tarnauca, Sukleia, Caragaci and Butur as a result of deportations, killings by the Soviet army and famine orchestrated by the Moscow authorities⁸². This report is based on information provided by residents of the villages in question, who are well informed about such details (including a mayor and a doctor), some of whom were themselves victims of Soviet repression. Gheorghe Bucurescu's report shows, based on the figures provided by his informants, that 1480 people (out of a total of 13651, more than 10%) were deported by the Soviets from these 4 villages. 521 people died in the first famine in 1921–1922, 239 others during the second famine in 1933. This report by Gheorghe Bucurescu is extremely important because it is the only one of its kind in the entire preserved archive of research carried out by Anton Golopenția's team east of the Dniester. The fact that the report was compiled following systematic research carried out in several localities, is based on several informants, is structured in well-defined categories – all this indicates a “premeditation” of this direction of research, an extensive planning and deployment over time of the collection of information of this kind, we are not dealing with some information obtained accidentally. Several such reports may have been compiled, but only one has been preserved to this day. This report is all the more important as it stands in stark contrast to the lack of this kind of information (Soviet repression of the Romanian population on the left bank of the Dniester River) in most of the other data collected by Anton Golopenția's team. In another instance, a report on the census carried out specifically in Transnistria (that it is between the rivers Dniester and Bug) mentions for December 1941 that 9,8% of the population was missing due to the deportations, executions, and recruitment by Soviet authorities⁸³.

Soviet repressions and ethnic assimilation mechanisms set in motion against Romanians in the Soviet Union are also reflected in several documents compiled during the research period – but apart from Bucurescu's report, these issues have not been systematically followed up. Instead, these details have remained in the memory of the surviving members of Golopenția's team almost half a century after the research was carried out. Thus, Gheorghe Retegan described in detail in an interview

⁸² Anton Golopenția, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 636–640.

⁸³ Anton Golopenția, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 33.

conducted in 1985 by Zoltan Rostas the repression of the Romanians east of the Dniester following the purges of 1938 caused by the use of the Latin alphabet for the “Moldovan language”⁸⁴.

Ion Apostol and Nicolae Economu describe in an article published in 1992⁸⁵ the decline of Romanian villages east of the Dniester as they perceived it in 1942, the explanation received from the locals at the time being that this was the effect of the collectivization of Soviet agriculture and the famine of 1932–1933; in this context a case of cannibalism during the famine is also mentioned, which was investigated by the researchers of the Golopenția team, but which did not appear in the official research reports. In another article⁸⁶, Ion Apostol recalls the fate of the churches in the town of Nicolaev, where in 1942 only one had kept its religious purpose, while three others were transformed into a shooting club, a dormitory for pupils and a mechanical repair shop – in all of them the altar was used as a toilet; other cases of destroyed churches in villages east of the Dniester are also mentioned. In the same article Ion Apostol summarises what he learned about the Soviet project to create a Moldovan language: the phonetic transcription with Cyrillic letters of the regional dialect of the Romanian language used on the left bank of the Dniester, followed by a short period of using the Latin alphabet, the purging of those who supported the use of the Latin alphabet and the return to the “Moldovan language” with the Cyrillic alphabet. In the same article, Ion Apostol returns to the famine organised by the Soviets and recalls the information gathered from a doctor in Odessa who claimed in 1942 that more than 7 million people died as a result of the famine in Soviet Union during 1932–1933.

Another member of Anton Golopenția’s team, Anton Rațiu, had the chance to recover some of the notes compiled during the research east of the Dniester, which he published in 1991⁸⁷. In one of these files, the case of the school taught in Moldovan in Novoiganitievca near Mariupol is reported. A Moldovan-language class was taught here until 1938, but during the Stalinist purges it was disbanded and the course coordinator (originally from Dubăsari) was arrested on charges of being a Romanian spy. Anton Rațiu mentions in his articles about the research east of the Dniester and the fact that the churches in the villages had been closed or demolished by the Soviet authorities⁸⁸.

⁸⁴ Zoltan Rostas, *Parcurs întrerupt. Discipoli din anii 30 ai școlii gustiene [Interrupted course. Disciples of the 30's of the Gustian school]*, s.l., Paideia, 2006, pp. 235–407.

⁸⁵ Ion Apostol, “Contribuții la cercetările etnosociologice privind așezările românești de la est de Bug (I)” [“Contributions to the ethno-sociological research on the romanian settlements East of Bug”], in *Sociologie Românească*, New Series, Year III, no. 6/1992, pp. 639–647.

⁸⁶ *Idem*, “Contribuții la cercetările etnosociologice privind așezările românești de la est de Bug (III)” [“Contributions to the ethno-sociological research on the romanian settlements East of Bug”], in *Sociologie Românească*, New Series, Year V, no. 6/1994, pp. 623–631.

⁸⁷ Anton Rațiu, “Cercetări etno-sociologice în comunitățile românești de dincolo de Bug (II)” [“Ethno-sociological research in Romanian communities across Bug”], in *Sociologie Românească*, New Series, Year II, no. 5–6/1991, pp. 375–382.

⁸⁸ *Idem*, “Cercetări etno-sociologice în comunitățile românești de dincolo de Bug (III)” [“Ethno-sociological research in Romanian communities across Bug”], in *Sociologie Românească*, New Series, Year III, no. 1/1992, pp. 63–67.

SOVIET REPRESSIONS EAST OF THE DNIESTER

The registers made public by the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova on the Stalinist purges of 1937–1938 record a number of 12 people from the village of Valea Hoțului who were subjected to political repression⁸⁹ and a number of 18 people from the village of Valea Hoțului who were sentenced by military courts during this period⁹⁰. The team led by Anton Golopenția found a population of about 10,000 people in Valea Hoțului at the beginning of 1942⁹¹, the number of 30 people subjected to Stalinist repression does not seem to be very high. However, if we consider that most of those subjected to Soviet repression were prominent people in society (teachers, doctors, heads of institutions, civil servants, etc.) it is worth noting that the Stalinist repressions in Valea Hoțului were not recorded in the observations of the team of sociologists in Romania. It should be noted here that most likely the Soviet documents relating to the repressions were not preserved or made available in full – so the number of people in Valea Hoțului who were victims of Soviet repression may have been much higher.

The famine on the left bank of the Dniester in 1932–1933 was a phenomenon that affected the entire population and represented a collective trauma that has not been recorded in the final reports compiled by Romanian sociologists. In March 1932, in the context of the famine organized by the Soviet authorities, 80 women from the village of Valea Hoțului attacked and opened the grain warehouse in Jerebeiovca railway station – one of the frequent forms of resistance against the abuses of the Soviet administration⁹². This event, which took place only 10 years before the research carried by Golopenția's team, was large in terms of the number of participants and with a high level of violence, should normally have kept a significant place in the memory of the community – yet it is not among the information collected by Romanian sociologists, at least not in the preserved manuscripts.

The Stalinist purge of 1937–1938 hit hard the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (RASSM), which included the village of Valea Hoțului. The main mechanism of this repression was the so-called “troika”, an extra-judicial tribunal made up of the local NKVD chief, the general secretary of the communist party and a prosecutor. The “troika” examined files compiled by the NKVD and handed down death sentences or prison sentences based on percentages set by the NKVD

⁸⁹ National Archives of the Republic of Moldova, *Colecția documentelor persoanelor supuse represiunilor politice în perioada regimului sovietic totalitar [Collection of documents of persons subjected to political repression during the totalitarian Soviet regime]*, Chișinău, 2022.

⁹⁰ National Archives of the Republic of Moldova, *Colecția documentelor persoanelor condamnate de către tribunalele militare [Collection of documents of persons sentenced by military tribunals]*, Chișinău, 2022.

⁹¹ Anton Golopenția, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 493.

⁹² Igor Cașu, *Dușmanul de clasă. Represiuni politice, violență și rezistență în R(A)SS Moldovenească, 1924–1956 [Class enemy. Political repressions, violence, and resistance in the Moldovan SSR, 1924–1956]*, Cartier, Chișinău, 2014, p. 71.

leadership in Moscow. In the RASSM, two parallel lines of repression were carried out: the so called “kulak operation” (against rich peasants and those opposing the kolkhozes) and the “Romanian operation” (against those suspected of having links with Romania, this was directed in particular against Romanian speakers in the region). The figures for these repressions are as follows according to incompletely preserved files: in the “kulak operation” 4,762 people were tried by the RASSM troika, of whom 3,497 were sentenced to death and executed, 1,252 persons were sentenced to prison and for 13 persons it was decided to re-examine the charges; in the “Romanian operation” 2,185 persons were arrested, of whom 1,389 were sentenced to death and executed, 752 persons were sentenced to prison and for 44 persons it was requested a re-examination of the charges⁹³. The total of 4,886 people executed and 2,004 sentenced to prison in a one-year period for political reasons following closed-door trials could not have gone unnoticed in the RASSM.

CONCLUSIONS

Members of Anton Golopenția’s team who researched the situation of Romanians east of the Dniester between 1941 and 1944 learned about the repressions carried by the Soviet administration before the war. This is visible in several reports in which information was collected about the famine of 1932–1933 and the purges during the great Stalinist terror of 1937–1938. However, at the same time, no reference to these issues is made in the materials intended for publication, most likely as a conscious decision to exclude issues related to persecution by the Soviet administration from field research.

This decision seems to have been a fortunate one, given that the vast majority of Anton Golopenția’s team members were arrested, investigated, and sentenced to prison after the end of World War II. Their research east of the Dniester did not constitute an indictment in its own right, but the investigators of the new Soviet-style regime in Romania were extremely interested in the details of this research and repeatedly inquired about the sociologists’ research in Soviet territory. Anton Golopenția died in prison in 1951 without having been tried and sentenced⁹⁴, while the rest of the team managed to survive prison and even to publish some of their memoirs after the fall of the communist regime in Romania. No doubt the fate of the Romanian researchers would have been much harsher if the pro-Soviet investigators had found information, they had collected reflecting Moscow’s repression of Romanians east of the Dniester.

⁹³ Gheorghe Negru and Mihai Tașcă, “Represiunile politice din RASSM în anii 1937–1938” [“Political repressions in the RASSM in 1937–1938”], in Sergiu Musteață, Igor Cașu, *Fără termen de prescripție. Aspecte ale investigării crimelor comunismului în Europa [Without a statute of limitations. Aspects of the investigation of the crimes of communism in Europe]*, Cartier, Chișinău, 2011, pp. 429–456.

⁹⁴ Anton Golopenția, *Ultima carte [The Last Book]*, Encyclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001.

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