

OLD BELIEFS OF THE SHEPHERDS FROM COVASNA

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ABSTRACT

Romanian popular culture and civilization in the Covasna area, the perimeter with so rich pastoral traditions, preserves a rich ethnographic heritage, both material and spiritual. This article researches to describe some of the old beliefs of the shepherds from Covasna: magico-religious practices used against predators and nature, for the growth and well-being of flocks, including sacrifices, both animal and human. But, above all this, along with non-stop work, faith in God seems to be the most important practice able to defend man and the animal he cares for.

Keywords: Covasna, shepherds, magical practices, beliefs, cross.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Romanian shepherding is an ancient occupation, which concentrates around itself folkloric creations, ethnographic objects belonging to the wood civilization, beliefs, customs that are the subject of ethnology. Shepherding is the bearer of both material and spiritual values, and its scientific approach cannot be unilateral, but can be approached from both occupational and cultural angles, and the perspective can only be socio-anthropological, ensuring an interdisciplinary approach to the whole endeavor. In the monographic sociology of the Bucharest sociological school, a pastoral sociology, understood as a component of rural sociology, was established through field research and syntheses. In the same scientific school created by Dimitrie Gusti and represented by Mircea Vulcănescu, Henri H. Stahl, Traian Herseni, Anton Golopenția, ethnography and ethnology were also practiced, which today we understand as subfields of cultural anthropology.

The sociological theory in which the researched theme falls is the sociological monograph theorized and applied by Dimitrie Gusti and his disciples and historically identified with the “Bucharest Sociological School” which represented the imposition of Romanian sociology both as field research and as sociological syntheses. Pastoral life was investigated by monographic teams in the campaigns of Nereju (1927), Fundu-Moldova (1928) and Drăguș (1929).

“Pastoral sociology is a differential sociology, along with agrarian sociology, the sociology of labor, the sociology of the bourgeoisie, the sociology of ruling circles, etc.,

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which seeks to establish the specific features of each kind of life or social type, as opposed to general sociology, which pursues the features of social reality in general, of society as such. Pastoral sociology is therefore concerned with pastoral life in its specificity and can only be fully understood by comparison with other social types”¹⁰⁹.

“Sociology does not want to abolish either ethnography or folklore, because these disciplines have fully proved their worth, but it is not satisfied with their results, because (...) it is capable of posing a number of problems in connection with the same facts of scientifically unraveling them, problems which have remained unresolved and untreated until today. Our path is one of collaboration, which is why we hope that our endeavors will benefit other disciplines as we ourselves have benefited from them”¹¹⁰.

Therefore, ethnography, ethnology and folkloristics represent a scientific source for the sociological study of pastoral life. Ethnographic, ethnological and folkloristic materials thus represent for pastoral sociology the quality of social documents.

This research paper is part of a larger research, in which the historical study was complemented by ethnological field research carried out by the undersigned, between 2019–2025, in order to show the forms in which pastoral life is practiced in the Covasna area. On this occasion, we investigated both the forms of organization, as well as the material and spiritual aspects (beliefs, customs and specific practices) related to this occupation. For the sociological understanding of shepherding as an occupation, Traian Herseni outlined an eight-point project, one of which dealt with

“The Frames of Shepherding Life. The extent to which shepherding life imposes a certain experience, a certain collective soul and spiritual structure, a certain tradition, which then become the frameworks of individual pastoral life”¹¹¹.

Trying to capture aspects related to the “occult endowments”, but also to the religiosity of the shepherds from Covasna, in this material we have used information obtained from field research carried out in Voinești¹¹², Covasna.

¹⁰⁹ „Sociologia pastorală este o sociologie diferențială, alături de sociologia agrară, sociologia muncitorimii, sociologia burghezimii, sociologia cercurilor conducătoare etc., care caută să stabilească trăsăturile specifice ale fiecărui gen de viață sau tip social, spre deosebire de sociologia generală, care urmărește trăsăturile realității sociale în genere, ale societății ca atare. Sociologia pastorală se ocupă deci de viața pastorală în ce are ea specific și nu capătă înțeles deplin decât prin comparație cu celelalte tipuri sociale”, in Traian Herseni, *Probleme de sociologie pastorală [Problems of pastoral sociology]*, Bucharest, Romanian Institute of Social Sciences, 1941, p. 187.

¹¹⁰ „Sociologia nu vrea să desființeze nici etnografia, nici folclorul, pentru că aceste discipline și-au dovedit pe deplin rostul, dar nu se mulțumește cu rezultatele lor, pentru că (...) ea este în stare să pună o seamă de probleme în legătură cu aceleași fapte și să le deslege științific, probleme care au rămas până azi neridicate și netratate. Drumul nostru este de colaborare, de aceea sperăm că străduințele noastre vor folosi și altor discipline, după cum noi înșine am folosit de pe urma lor”, in *Ibidem*, p. 18.

¹¹¹ „Cadrele vieții păstorești. Măsura în care viața ciobănească impune o anumită experiență, o anumită structură sufletească și spirituală colectivă, o anumită tradiție, care devin apoi cadre ale vieții pastorale individuale”, in *Ibidem*, p. 197.

¹¹² Until 1952, a separate village, Voinești is today a neighborhood of Covasna, inhabited by Romanians, who, especially in the past, had shepherding as their main occupation.

2. RESTRICTIONS AND BANS

Starting from the premise that, in the olden days, the spiritual life of pastoral communities was dominated, in most of its manifestations, by religious and magical elements, all of great significance, we have found that (too) few of these have survived over time. The great majority of the shepherds of the 21st century, while recognizing that their ancestors knew and used certain magico-religious practices, they no longer know them and state emphatically that they do not believe in their power. Generalizing, their response can be formulated as follows: “The elders used to, but I don’t remember”¹¹³. But how many of the shepherd’s habits have been lost?

But, even without knowing it, some of them let themselves be led by such “heresies (...) barely understood, full of meanings”¹¹⁴. I came to this conclusion after experiencing at first-hand how difficult it is for a woman to do research on the subject of shepherding: overcoming the difficulties of traveling to the sheepfolds, which are usually located in mountainous areas that are difficult to reach, I was surprised to see a certain reluctance on the part of the shepherds; although they did not refuse categorically, many prior appointments were postponed for various reasons, repeatedly, often without plausible explanations. I interpreted all these inexplicable postponements and difficulties as a reminiscence of the old belief that women are not allowed in the fold. Unlike in the Mărginimea Sibiului and the Țara Oltului north of the Carpathians, where women, from the 19th century onwards, even managed the farm, in the sheepfolds of the Curb of the Carpathians the shepherds were not allowed to go down to the village, nor to be visited by women until Sântilie. For the prosperity of the herd, they had to remain “clean” and not see the bodies of women¹¹⁵. In general, the sheep

“negatively connotes eros and the feminine universal; like the bee, the sheep provides vital products for the rural economy; at the same time, like the bee, she is feminine because she is fertile; therefore, she excludes the presence of the feminine, demands devotion and chastity”¹¹⁶.

It was believed that the goat must be kept clean, otherwise the sheepfold would be very bad:

¹¹³ „Aveau bătrânii, da’ nu-mi mai aduc aminte.”, Informant: Emil Olteanu, Voinești, b. 1941.

¹¹⁴ „eresuri (...) abia-nțelese, pline de-nțelesuri”, line from the poem „Trecut-au anii...” [“The Years Have Passed”] by Mihai Eminescu.

¹¹⁵ Ion Ghinoiu, *Sărbători și obiceiuri românești [Romanian Holidays and Customs]*, Bucharest, Elion Publishing House, 2003, p. 302.

¹¹⁶ „conotează în mod negativ erosul și universal feminin; ca și albina, oaia oferă produse vitale pentru economia rurală; totodată, ca și albina, ea este feminină, pentru că este fertilă; de aceea, exclude prezența femininului, solicită devoțiune și castitate”, in Romulus Antonescu, *Dicționar de simboluri și credințe tradiționale românești [Dictionary of Traditional Romanian Symbols and Beliefs]*, 2009, p. 198, Digital edition 2016, Available at: <https://cimec.ro/Etnografie/Antonescudictionar/DictionardeSimboluriCredinteTraditionaleRomanesti.html>, Accessed on February 24, 2025.

“my grandfather used to say: if a woman comes to the sheepfold, the milk is not curdled, the sheep loses the milk; I don’t know why these stories were told, I have no idea; yes, it was true”¹¹⁷.

“Eh, the woman with the sheep (...) The woman with the saucepan! It has happened. It was no good, sir!”¹¹⁸.

I have also encountered this prohibition (of women going up to the sheepfold) in other localities of Covasna County, such as, for example, in Dobârlău:

“Before women were not allowed to go to the sheepfolds, to the shepherds. Not at all. Not even to sleep with the shepherds. Bad things would happen”¹¹⁹.

So, the women’s reluctance to go up to the sheepfold was dictated by the fear of “bad things happening” to the sheep. It was the shepherds’ first concern that the sheep should do well. And while we’re on the subject of prohibitions, here are a few more, this time applied to the shepherds in their daily work of tending the animals. It is well known that

“it’s not good to leave sheep on the *hillside*, on a steep slope, or their milk will be too low”¹²⁰.

Likewise, where you want them to graze, and they don’t want to:

“If they don’t like it, you can’t force them in. If you force it, it’s already known by the bucket”¹²¹.

After many years of being around sheep, the shepherds recognize the good places and the bad places, avoiding the latter:

“And you have to hurry down the valley, along the coast, you know? And to keep them away from the thorns, from the marshes, you know? Keep them as far as you can. That was it. That was a rule”¹²².

It was also, “Don’t step on them (...) walk like eggs (...)”¹²³. Another bad place, with repercussions on the ewes’ growth rate, is also considered the “dry bank”:

“You took them to that dry bank, because they said that you should keep them away from that bank, that bank, one bank at a time, so that you can keep the fillies away

¹¹⁷ „bunicu-mio zicea: dacă vine femeie la stână, nu se încheagă laptele, pierde oaia laptele; nu știu de ce era poveștile ăstea, habar n-am; da, era vorba, într-adevăr”, Informant: Nicolae Porumboi, Voinești, b. 1964.

¹¹⁸ „Eh, femeia la oi (...) Femeia la cratiță! O mai fost. Nu era bine, dom’le!”, Informant: Nicolae Guiu, Voinești, b. 1948.

¹¹⁹ „Înainte n-aveau voie femeile să meargă la stână, la ciobani. Deloc. Nici să se culce cu ciobanii. Că se întâmplă lucruri rele.”, Informant: Nicodin Olaru, Dobârlău, b. 1956.

¹²⁰ „nu-i bine să lași oile la sfulgeriș, coastă mai devale (adică abruptă), că le scădea laptele”, Informant: Ioan Lazăr, Voinești, b. 1946.

¹²¹ „Dacă nu le place lor, nu le poți băga cu forța. Dacă ai forțat-o, deja se cunoaște la găleată.”, in *Ibidem*.

¹²² „Și s-o repezi dă vale, pă v-o coastă, știi? Și să le ferești de smârcuri, dă mlăștini, ăstea, știi? Să le ferești cât poți. Aia erea. O regulă erea asta”, Informant: Nicolae Guiu, Voinești, b. 1948.

¹²³ „Să nu le paști pă râpă (...) să umbli ca cu ou’ (...)”, Informant: Valer Muntean, Voinești, b. 1969.

from the herds, so that they don't go that way, because they get sooty instead of milk, they run away to the herd, because you took them to the dry bank"¹²⁴.

Of course, a good shepherd knows how to understand what the sheep want:
"Yes, the sheep tells you. She's not going there. Unless you push her. But the normal sheep you have to let go. She tells you where she likes"¹²⁵.

Only that this connection, without the need for words, between man and animal, in symbiosis with nature, is reached after years and years of craftsmanship, a job in which the work routine and order are inherited from previous generations and is based on ancient knowledge and experience of sheep care. Breaking the prohibitions was unacceptable, as the life and well-being of the family (and of the whole community) depended on the well-being and prosperity of the flock.

I don't know if it's the same in other parts of the country, but for the wellbeing of the flock, the shepherds from Voinești will never tell strangers how many sheep they have. If you ask them, you'll get an evasive answer, which is sure to contain the adverb *about* (*vreo*). "About 300" can mean anything between 300 and 399. Or, if the man's the boastful type, it could mean 250. If you insist, however, you'll be invited, smiling: "count them" or "count the legs and divide by four". Incidentally, I have encountered other restrictions on counting sheep:

"When you knock on the door, don't count them, when there are few in the stall, or they will break"¹²⁶.

As for the fact that outsiders must never know the exact numbers, we believe that this is a practice that has its roots in the past, when shepherds hid the truth from the landowners in order to reduce tax:

"There were about 5000 sheep in our sheepfold alone. At that time, almost all the inhabitants of Voinești had sheep. I don't realize how many there could have been in total; the shepherds of Voinești were then more numerous than the shepherds of Sibiu, Voinești was fortified. Our ancestors had many sheep, but we can't find them in the archives, they didn't write them all down in the documents, because of taxes. Rare who didn't have a thousand sheep, very rare. Nobody knew them (...)"¹²⁷.

Such a "glorious" past has left traces in the way of being of the shepherds of Voinești, and I am referring here to the pride of having beautiful and healthy

¹²⁴ „le-ai dus pe malul ăla sec, că zicea că p-acolo să-l ferești, malul ăla, câte-un mal, așa, să te ferești cu mănăzările, să nu treacă p-acolo, că, la uger, le vine zămă în loc de lapte, se răsfugesc la uger, că le-ai trecut pe mal sec”, Informant: Nicodim Olaru, Dobârlău, b. 1956.

¹²⁵ „Da' oaia-ți spune ea. Nu să bagă. Numa' dacă o împingi tu. Da' oaia normal tre' s-o lași. Ea îți spune unde-i place”, Informant: Valer Muntean, Voinești, b. 1969.

¹²⁶ „Când dai la ușă, să nu le numeri, când ți puțin în strungă, că se rup”, in *Ibidem*.

¹²⁷ „Numai în târla noastră erau vreo 5000 de oi. Pe atunci, cam toți voineștenii aveau oi. Nu-mi dau seama câte ar fi putut să fie în total; ciobanii voineșteni erau pe atunci mai mulți decât sibienii, Voineștiul a fost întărit. Moșii noștri aveau multe oi, dar nu găsim în arhive, nu le scriau în acte pe toate, din cauză de taxe. Rar care n-avea mia de oi, foarte rar. Numa' nu-i știa nimeni (...)”, Informant: Constantin Costea, Voinești, b. 1939.

animals, such as those for which the shepherd of the mioritic was envied. In my childhood, I always thought of the verses “He has more sheep/ Proud and horned/ And learned horses/ And more manly dogs”¹²⁸ when I heard the shepherds on my street talking, with unrestrained pride, of “my sheep/ my dogs/ my horses!”. Because, as I learned from a shepherd who “even now, if I look at the sun, I tell you the time to the nearest 10 minutes”¹²⁹:

“that was the shepherd’s love – to have milk the next day (...) We had healthy sheep, they didn’t limp or anything. That’s what it means to stay with them, to look after them!”¹³⁰.



Fig. 1 – Sheep of the Cojan family.

3. MAGICAL-RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

However, in addition to staying with the sheep day and night (improperly said *they stayed*, because, in fact, the moments of quiet were not very numerous), the shepherds resorted to various magical-religious practices for the growth and well-being of the flock, against predators and “spoiling the sheep”. Today’s shepherds are aware¹³¹ of such practices and rituals, that they may have happened

¹²⁸ „Ș-ară oi mai multe/ Măndre și cornute/ Și cai învățați/ Și câni mai bărbați”, in *Miorița*, the version taken from Soveja, reworked and published by Vasile Alecsandri.

¹²⁹ „și acuma, dacă mă uit la soare, îți zic cât e ceasul cu aproximație de 10 minute”, Informant: Mircea Cojan, Voinești, b. 1952.

¹³⁰ „asta era dragostea ciobanului – să aibă lapte a doua zi (...) Aveam oi sănătoase, nu șchiopătau sau altceva. Asta înseamnă a sta lângă ele, a te ocupa de ele!”, in *Ibidem*.

¹³¹ Eh, mai făceau toate felurile de prostii, da. Eh (...) eu nu știu că n-am făcut”/“Eh, they used to do all kinds of stupid things, yes. Eh (...) I don’t know that I didn’t”, is an answer received, in similar forms, from several shepherds when asked.

once upon a time, but they do not believe in their effectiveness. I also found that, speaking of spells and charms, although they had heard of their existence, most of the time “it was not our people who did them, it was some people from Buzău, from other places”; probably, considering them as “a sin from God”, they tried to shift the blame to the mountains.

Although the shepherds accept in their hearts the damage caused by the wolf or bear (when it is acceptable, of course, for the wild animals have their share, God-given, they say), they fight the wild beasts of the mountains, helped by their sheepdogs. In the past, however, they used to use a variety of charms and spells to “bind” the wolf’s mouth:

“Uh, I don’t really believe in those. They used to do and say that they were after someone, they used to say that the wolf was after him. Maybe it’s them too. I’m not saying they’re not. They used to do all the (...) all the bad things. So, I heard. I don’t really believe in those things”¹³²;

“We didn’t do them, but I heard in those parts of Buzău. I heard that he used to tie the wolf’s mouth, he would tie their mouths and go to catch the sheep and he couldn’t catch the sheep, because his mouth wouldn’t open. I heard the same thing. These were the kind of charms, you don’t want to, you don’t want to (...) I used to get these. How should I know? Because I didn’t really get that kind of thing to do it at the sheepfold”¹³³;

“Hă, hă! I heard that one guy tied the wolf’s mouth. ‘Go to hell!’ With charms, with talk, all that nonsense. He says: ‘The wolf jumped and couldn’t catch the sheep’. ‘Go to hell!’ What? It’s nonsense”¹³⁴;

“I heard they tie the wolf’s mouth (...) Not that (...) if I knew, I’d tell you. Yeah, the story about how they say, ‘Look, it keeps bothering me (...) it bothers these wolves all the time. But I’ll shut them up!’ It’s a shame, you know? It would come to the sheep, it would take your sheep, but it just (...) it couldn’t (...) it couldn’t (...) And then he’d untie him, you know? He’d unbind it (...) that. That’s what I heard from the elders, like he said. Old people talk to old people. If it was, it was if it wasn’t, it wasn’t”¹³⁵.

¹³² „Ăăă, eu nu prea cred în ălea. Mai făceau și mai ziceau, că era după câte unu’, zicea că se ținea dihania dă un’ să ducea, numa’ după el. Poate că sânt și d-ăia. Nu zic că nu sunt. Înainte făceau toate (...) toate drăciile făceau. Și-am auzit și eu. Eu nu prea cred în ălea”, Rapporteur: Rareș Lazăr, Voinești, b. 1974.

¹³³ „Noi n-am făcut, da’ am auzit în părțile ălea de Buzău. Am auzit că și-i lega la lup, le lega gura și să ducea să prindă oaia și nu putea să caște gura, că nu i să deschidea gura. Tot așa am auzit, da’ (...) Astea erau niște farmece d-ălea, nici nu vrei, nici nu (...) cam primeam d-ăștia. Da’ de unde să știu? Că eu n-am prea primit așa ceva s-o facă la stână”, Nicolae Cășuneanu, Voinești, b. 1951.

¹³⁴ „Hă, hă! Am auzit pă unu’ că i-a legat gura la lup. «Mă, dă-te dracu!» Eh, cu farmece, cu vorbe, cu prostii d-ăstea. Zice: «C-a sărit lupu’ și nu putea să prindă oaia». «Mă, du-te mă dracu!» Cum dom’le? Îs prostii”, Informant: Nicolae Guiu, Voinești, b. 1948.

¹³⁵ „Auzeam că leagă gura la lup (...) Aia nu (...) dacă aș ști, ți-aș spune. Da, povestea că cică: «Mă, uite, tot mă (...) deranjează lupchiiăștia mereu. Da’ le leg eu gura!». Da-i păcat, știi? Că el vinea la oi, îi lua oaia, da’ numa’ o mozgolea di gât, știi, că nu putea să (...) aia. Și după-aia îl dezlega, știi? Îi dădea dizlegare că să (...) aia. Asta am auzit și io de la bătrâni, cum a zis ăla. Din bătrâni în bătrâni se duce vorba. Dacă a fost, a fost, dacă nu, nu”, Informant: Constantin Uță, Voinești, b. 1941.

Spells or *charms* were also made for *taking the milk*:

“The *Regateni* had some spells, which I didn’t believe in – they would take your milk away from the sheep. The same thing happened if they buried something under the loft in the back, where you milk the sheep”¹³⁶;

“I had a shepherd myself, but I can’t tell you what his method was, but he often asked me, he said: ‘don’t you want me to bring you the milk from such-and-such a barn on such-and-such a hill?’. I say: ‘I don’t want to, I don’t need it, leave the milk from our sheep’. (...) He knows what he was doing, I didn’t see. He didn’t tell me, but I didn’t let him bring it to me. The old people used to say, ‘Don’t talk such nonsense, that cheese is only good for ten hours, or not even ten hours, or it’ll make worms if he brings you that milk’. Anyway, do I know what their methods were? But someone else said: ‘yes, indeed, when I was with the sheep, I don’t know what year, there was one of them and he was making such a bad face, he was making such a bad face, but we milked three buckets of milk more’”¹³⁷;

“That he had put a spell on the sheep, that if (...) Yeah, it happens to sheep. Eh, people talk nonsense (...) this are not (...) I don’t believe in charms and such. He came and took my milk, like hell he did. He took it, he didn’t give it (...)”¹³⁸;

“I heard that they used to take the milk, I don’t know, just like that, somebody knew how to charm. They did something to the cow or sheep and took the milk”¹³⁹;

“I heard it in Vrancea (...) Eh, they said that they took the milk(...) if, for example, you saw on a hill the sheep, that they knew(...) but I didn’t do such nonsense. And then he says: ‘Look, those are fillies’. One of them had a job to put a knife in the ground. And if he pulled the knife out of the ground, if he pulled the milk out, it was foals, if he pulled the (...) if it was sterile, it was blood. And (...) after that, he was still, you know, you know, doing stupid things, so we didn’t have any”¹⁴⁰.

¹³⁶ „Regățenii aveau niște descânțece, în care n-am crezut – îți lua laptele la oi. Același lucru se întâmpla dacă îngropau ceva sub podina la spătar, unde mulgi oile.”, Informant: Mihail Manea, Voinești, b. 1949.

¹³⁷ „Am avut și eu un cioban, da’ nu pot să vă spun ce metodă avea, da’ mă-ntreba de multe ori, zice: «nu vrei să-ți aduc laptele de la stâna cutare din dealul cutare?». Zic: «nu vreau, că mie nu-mi trebuie, lasă laptele de la oile noastre». (...) El știe ce făcea, că n-am văzut. Nici nu mi-a spus, da’ nici nu l-am lăsat să-mi aducă. Că spuneau ai bătrâni că «nu umbla cu prostii d-astea, că brânza aia e valabilă numa’ zece ore, sau nici zece ore, că face viermi dacă ți-aduce laptele ăla». Mă rog, eu știu ce metode aveau ei? Da’ spunea altu’: «da, într-adevăr, când am fost eu la oi, nu știu în ce an, era unul și așa se strâmba de urât, așa făcea de urât, da’ câte trei găleți de lapte mulgeam în plus»”, Informant: Ioan Șerban, Mărcuș, b. 1952.

¹³⁸ „Că le-a făcut farmece la oi, că dacă (...) Sînt, se mai întâmplă cică la oi. Eh, vorgește câte unu’ câte-o prostie, nu mai e dom’le (...) ăstea nu. În farmece și-n d-ăstea nu cred. A venit ăla și mi-a luat laptele, a luat pă dracu’. A luat, că nu dă (...)”, Informant: Nicolae Guiu, Voinești, b. 1948.

¹³⁹ „Am auzit că se lua laptele, nu știu, tot așa, știa cineva fermece. Și din urma la oaie sau la vacă făcea de-i lua laptili”, Informant: Constantin Leu, Voinești, b. 1944.

¹⁴⁰ „Am auzit și eu către Vrancea (...) Eh, zicea că le lua laptele (...) dacă de egzemplu, le videai într-un deal oile așa și care știa (...) da’ eu n-am umblat cu prostii. Și-apăi, cică: «Uite, alea-s mînzări». Avea unu’ treaba lui de băga cuțitu-n pămînt. Și dacă scotea cuțitu’ din pămînt, dacă ișea lapte era mînzări, dacă ișea (...) dacă era sterpe, ișea sânge. Și (...) ăla, dup-aia tot s-auzea, știi, că face prostii de-alea, d-apăi noi n-am avut de-alea”, Informant: Constantin Uță, Voinești, b. 1941.

The shepherds used to protect their animals from evil eye with a red tassel:
“They got the evil eye. Like with an animal, if you give them the evi eye, you’re out of luck. And a little boy, if he’s handsome, they kept him there (...) so you don’t bite him. Spit him out! Eh, what can you do, on an animal I’d put a little red tassel, a red one (...) on a horse, on a foal (...) a red tassel, a tassel”¹⁴¹.

And all the spells in the world lost their power in front of the shepherd who was doing his job well: “That’s all I know: you should have taken care of the sheep you had!”¹⁴².



Fig. 2 – Voineștenii Toader and Mihai Muntean, at the sheepfold at Dealul Negru.

4. ANIMAL AND HUMAN SACRIFICE

In the course of my research on this topic, I have encountered ancient (but still present in the early 20th century) sacrificial practices, both animal and human. It seems that the most common sacrifices were young goose:

“Many went, after weaning the lambs, in the summer, they would go and where they found young geese, they would take them, burn them and put the ashes in salt – to keep the lambs one after the other and eat all the time, like the young”¹⁴³;

¹⁴¹ „Mai deochea, da. Ca la animal, dacă-l deochi n-ai noroc dă el. Și-un băiat micuț, dacă-i frumos, și-l țineau acolo (...) să nu-l deochi. Scurpă-l! Eh, ce să-i faci, la un animal îi puneam un ciucuraș roșu, un d-ăla roșu ceva (...) la un cal, la un mânz (...) aicea la ureche, un ciucur roșu, ciucur”, Nicolae Cășuneanu, Voinești, b. 1951.

¹⁴² „Eu atâta știu: trebuia să ai grijă de oile pe care le aveai!”, Informant: Emil Olteanu, Voinești, b. 1941.

¹⁴³ „Mulți se duceau, după ce înțărcau mieii, vara, se duceau și unde găseau boboci de gâscă, îi luau, îi ardeau și le puneau cenușa în sare – să se țină mieii unul după altul și să mănânce tot timpul, ca bobocii.”, Informant: Din Preda (Grecu), Voinești, b. 1965.

“There were some old people here who used to burn the young lambs to keep the yearlings (...) They used to salt them. They burned them, put the ashes in salt and put them on stones, on (...) And they licked the salt and he said, ‘I’ll keep the salt like a freshman’. Probably [they were stealing the freshmen]”¹⁴⁴;

“And with the freshmen that’s what I heard that he said to walk slowly like the freshmen. He burned them and mixed them with salt. He gave them salt, not rock, not stone, salt. They put a stone slab and he put salt. Anyway, once a week or so”¹⁴⁵.

I received similar information from Dobârlău, also to keep the lambs grouped together, like goose chicks:

“And with the young ones, to catch them, to put them in salt. In the mountains they used to put salt like this, on slabs, and they also carried loose salt, not just boulders. And before, before, before, they used to do silly things with these sheep, the shepherds. The shepherds were wilder too”¹⁴⁶.

In Brețcu, on the other hand, the *problem of* lambs not being killed was solved without sacrifices:

“they used to give the young yearlings ashes from burning goose feathers and bees’ feathers, so that they would stay together like goose feathers and bees’ feathers”¹⁴⁷.

Or:

“When the lambs were being marked, they threw the leftovers into a mound of ants, to keep the lambs like ants”¹⁴⁸.

In Voinești, the remains from the lambs’ ears “were tied in a cloth and put on the roof, and left to rot”¹⁴⁹, but we were unable to find out what was the cause or what the aim of this process was. In another village in Covasna County, Mărcuș, there was a belief that chains, and not the killing of the freshmen, kept the sheep together:

“When they left with the sheep to the sheepfold, because they left from here, from the garden, before they left with them, they put long chains in front, where the sheep

¹⁴⁴ „Erau niște bătrâni aicea la noi care ardeau bobocii ca să, zicea, ca să să ție cârlanii (...) Le dădea în sare. Îi ardeau, cenușa aia o puneau în sare și puneau pe niște pietre, pe (...) Și lingeau sarea și zicea că să țin grămadă ca bobocii, merg ca bobocii. Probabil că [furau bobocii]”, Informant: Constantin Leu, Voinești, b. 1944.

¹⁴⁵ „Și cu bobocii așa am auzit, că zice să umble încet ca bobocii. Îi ardea și-amesteca cu sare. Sare le-o dădea nu bolovan, nu piatră, sare. Puneau o lespede de piatră și puneau sarea. Mă rog, le dădea o dat’ pe săptămână parcă.”, Informant: Valer Muntean, Voinești, b. 1969.

¹⁴⁶ „Și cu bobocii, să-i prinzi, să-i dai în sare. Pe la munte puneau sare așa, pe lespezi, mai duceau și sare vrac, nu numa’ bolovani. Apăi mai făceau, înainte, înainte, făceau prostii și pe la oile astea, ciobanii. Erau mai sălbatici și ciobanii”, Informant: Nicodin Olaru, Dobârlău, b. 1956.

¹⁴⁷ „aveau obiceiul să dea cârlanilor tineri scrum rezultat din arderea penelor de gâscă și din albine, ca să stea adunați la un loc precum fulgii de gâscă și roiul de albine”, in Ioan Bercu, *Viața bisericească a românilor din depresiunea Brețcului sau a Târgului Secuiesc [The Church Life of the Romanians in the Brețcu Depression (or Szeklerland)]*, 1973, manuscript, CEDMNC Documentary Archive, File 123, p. 109.

¹⁴⁸ „Când se făceau semne la miei, aruncau resturile într-un mușuroi de furnici, să se țină miei la furnicile”, Informant: Petru Iacob, Brețcu, b. 1956.

¹⁴⁹ „se legau într-o cârpă și se puneau la acoperiș, la cosoroabă, se lăsau să putrezească”, Informant: Nicolae Porumboi, Voinești, b. 1964.

came out. And sand. And they used to say: 'how to hold the chain, so the sheep will hold it, and then they'll take your milk, when all the sand is counted!'. There were old people who knew (...)"¹⁵⁰.

Not only baby domestic fowl were slaughtered, but also larger animals such as foals:

"*Mânji*, from the horse, said that they were to make them big. I don't know how he did it. That's the part I've heard when I was a child"¹⁵¹.

As the owner found the absence of a foal more difficult to bear, he often took revenge, even resulting in the death of a man:

"So, he had foals around here, it happened. Foals. They killed a foal or something and burned it and (...) happened. Oh, what. And on the mountain where I am, there are crosses where they died. One beat him up, shot him because he took his colt and roasted him and put him in salt in the lambs to (...) That's his cross, his cross, his cross, his cross (...)"¹⁵²;

"They used to do before (...) Dad's own brother, you saw, I told you. They had him kill a colt at one' and this one was about 16. He says: 'Kill the foal, burn it and put the ashes in (...) they used to make salt on the slab, you know, crumble it up and mix it with salt to go to the yearlings to fly, I don't know what. And the meat from the colt. and then they went to kill it (...) the colt's master, but he didn't know this one had a gun, and shot him like a dog. He ran the hell off, went through the Kingdom, lost his trail. I don't believe them"¹⁵³.

Of great ethnographic interest has proved to be the information revealing the existence of human sacrifice practiced for the herd's gain, in order to have fat and beautiful yearlings. The specialized literature offers very little data on this subject. Traian Herseni mentioned a similar practice, but his informant spoke of digging up a human hand and not of the actual killing of the man:

"It is not customary – one told me, but I did not want to learn – when he told me to dig up a human hand to burn it and give it to the sheep in salt, so that the sheep

¹⁵⁰ „Când plecau cu oile la stână, că plecau d-aici, din grădină, înainte să plece cu ele, puneau lanțuri lungi înainte, pe unde ieșeau oile. Și nisip. Și ziceau: «cum se ține lanțul, așa să se țină oile și atunci să-ți ia laptele, când o număra tot nisipul!». Că mai erau bătrâni care știau (...)”, Informant: Ioan Șerban, Mărcuș, b. 1952.

¹⁵¹ „Mânji, de pe la cal, zicea că să facă mari. Nu știu cum făcea. Aicea pân partea asta am auzit, când eram mai (...) eram copil”, Informant: Constantin Leu, Voinești, b. 1944.

¹⁵² „Așa că avea mânjii pă la noi, s-a mai întâmplat. Mânji. Au omorât un mânz sau ceva și l-au ars și (...) s-au întâmplat. Ce să mai (...) Și-n muntele unde sînt io, sînt crucile care-a murit. Unu' l-a bătut p-ăla, l-a împușcat pentru că i-a luat mânzu' și l-a prăjit și l-a pus la miei în sare, să (...) Îi crucea lu' ăla, crucea lu' ăla, crucea lu' ăla (...)", Nicolae Cășuneanu, Voinești, b. 1951.

¹⁵³ „Făceau înainte (...) chiar frate-su lu' tata, ai văzut, ți-am povestit. L-au pus să omoare un mânz la unu' și ăsta avea vreo 16 ani. Zice: «Omoară-i mânzu'», să-l ardă și cenușa s-o bage (...) că înainte făceau sare pe lespede, știi, de-o mărunțișau și s-amestece cu sare să meargă la cârlani să zboare, să nu știu ce. Și carnea dă mânz o (...) și după ăsta s-a dus să-l omoare (...) stăpănu' mînzului, da' n-a știu că ăsta are pistol, și l-a împușcat ca pe-un câine. A fugit dracu', s-a dus prin Regat pe-acolo, și-a chierdut urma. Eu pă ăștia nu le cred”, Informant: Nicolae Guiu, Voinești, b. 1948.

would graze, and you would have no more to do with them. His sheep grazed alone all summer, he stayed in the sheepfold and the lambs grazed alone, when they reached the border with another mountain they ran away like a bear. He was from Rășinari, he didn't go with the lambs, they set off, they returned alone to the fair. I saw that one with my own eyes, but when he told me, I didn't want to, I said I didn't understand. He wanted to teach me and in return I would bring him food all summer (...) My parents like his didn't even turn out, you said they were all poor"¹⁵⁴.

Memories of human sacrifices I met in Dobârlău:

"And he also said that (...) the shepherds must have done it before, that (...) he said that if they saw a little child in the village, small, they would take it and give it to the moors. They'd salt it and feed it to them. She says that's how the moors used to do it, to (...) I don't know, it was just a fairy tale"¹⁵⁵.

Echoes of the custom have also reached Brețcu, where, in the past, children were "threatened" by their grandparents that

"if you don't behave, the moccasins will come, steal you and kill you"¹⁵⁶.

In Covasna, more than 80% of the shepherds interviewed had heard that in the past such things happened. They told me this in a whispered voice, apparently with fear and with their request/promise that I would not write about it. I even learned the names of shepherds who had done "such a blast", but "God punished him, and he died in terrible torment". I was even able to establish a temporal boundary: at the beginning of the 20th century, human sacrifice was still practiced to "make good lambs" in the mountains around Covasna. I will therefore quote only those who have given their consent for what they have said to be known.

"I've heard that too. We didn't (...) In the stories, I heard that to make good lambs, to grow well (...) and ducklings, or they made them with little boys. I've heard it from Buzău, in the Kingdom. And they put them to lick, in that salt ashes, to lick to make good lambs. And I've heard that too. That's how they were. They say they were old, but they died. No, that Vasile Tășcanu. Tășcanu. The old people died. That's how they talked. I don't know what to (...) A duck or a lamb, but no one loses the boy, because everyone took care of his boy. They used to steal or (...) You hear a lot of this nonsense, and it was true, it turned out. To make them grow up. I mean, that ash, you know, they mixed it with fine salt and put it on a slab. There, where you were in

¹⁵⁴ „Se descântă – mie mi-a spus unul, dar n-am vrut să învăț – când mi-a spus să dezgrop mâna de om să o ard și s-o dau în sare la oi, ca să pască oile să nu mai ai treabă cu ele. Ale lui pășteau singure toată vara, el sta în bordeiu și mieii pășteau singuri, când ajungeau la hotarul cu alt munte fugeau ca de urs. Era din Rășinari, acela nu mergea odată cu mieii, ei porneau, ei se întorceau singuri la târlă. Acela am văzut-o eu cu ochii, dar când mi-a spus mie, eu n-am vrut, am spus că de astea nu înțeleg. A vrut să mă învețe și să-i aduc în schimb toată vara de mâncare. (...) Miei ca ai lui nici nu s-au mai dovedit, ziceai că-s mioare toți.”, in Traian Herseni, „Stâna din Munții Făgărașului” [“The Făgăraș Mountains Stables”], in *Boabe de grâu*, Year 5, No. 6, June 1934, p. 352.

¹⁵⁵ „Și mai zicea că (...) or fi făcut ciobanii înainte, că (...) zice că dacă vedeau un copchil prin sat, mic, îl lua și îl dădeau la miori. Puneau sare și-l dădeau să-l mănânce. Zice că așa miori făceau, de (...) Nu știu, s-auzea din povești”, Informant: Nicodin Olaru, Dobârlău, b. 1956.

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Goru, in Mănișca, there's a hole there, towards Nioaca mountain, that's what they call it. That's where we used to put them before. There was no rock salt, the sheep were licking salt in the basket. We put salt on the stone, and they licked them there and then they had appetite. In Mănișca"¹⁵⁷;

"I've heard some, but I don't know how true it is. He says that one of them made him lay the wood. He [the child was] in the middle and put the wood on the wheel and then set fire to it. Near, not in the barn, outside somewhere. To build wood as big as himself. The ashes were supposed to salt the yearlings. I don't know what the logic was. Around here. But the old folks, by hearsay too. So, a couple generations back. [The elders have heard] but still, stories, they haven't seen. Just to say a name, that x was burned by who knows who (...) I didn't ask such details. I think it must have been in the spring, I'm thinking [they burned them]"¹⁵⁸;

"Before, and children like that, little children! He used to kill them, buy them from those old widows (...) but less often, because after that it was heard. And he put them in salt and gave them to the barns, not to the fillies, to the barns only. He'd put them, he'd have the sense to find a slab like this (...) and he'd put them, like all the courtyards around here, and he'd put a handful of them like that and eat that salt, you know? To make good yearlings, you know? So, he'd watch, and he knew, 'Oh, that'll sell it'. He'd burn it on the fire, maybe he'd kill it, I don't know, I never did, I heard it. He killed him and burned him there and then he put him between (...) "¹⁵⁹.

Those who committed such murders were considered to be "those abnormal old men", "savages", and nowadays these things are hard to believe, especially as the shepherds of Voinești were faithful, God-fearing people. Future field research, together with specialists, will bring new data and further clarification in this regard.

¹⁵⁷ „Și d-ăștia am auzit. Noi n-am făcut (...) Dân povești, am auzit că ca să să facă mieii buni, să crească bine (...) și boboci de rață sau au făcut și cu băieți mici. Am auzit din partea Buzăului, în Regat. Și i-a pus ca să lingă, în cenușa aia cu sare, ca să lingă să să facă mieii buni. Și am auzit și d-ăștea. Așa s-auzeau. Și dă la noi d-aicea, nu-i mai dau pă nume, cică ar fi fost bătrâni, da' au murit. Nu, alde nea Vasile Tășcanu. Tășcanu. Au murit bătrânii. Așa vorbeau. Apăi nu știu ce să (...) O rață o chierzi sau un miel, da' băiatu' nu-l pierde nimeni, că avea grijă fiecare de băiatu' său. Mai furau sau (...) S-aude multe prostii d-ăștia, care au fost și-adevărate, s-au dovedit. Ca să le meargă bine, să crească. Adică cenușa aia, știi, c-o amesteca cu sare d-aia fină și-o puneau pe-o lespede. Acolo, unde-ați fost în Goru, în Mănișca, așa e o gaură acolo, către muntele ăla Nioaca, așa-i spune acolo. Ș-acolo le puneam înainte. Nu era sare bolovani, de lingeau oile sare-n coșar. Sare le puneam pe piatră și lingeau acolo și dup-aia aveau poftă de mâncare. În Mănișca", Informant: Nicolae Cășuneanu, Voinești, b. 1951.

¹⁵⁸ „Am auzit pă unii, da' nu știu cât îi de adevărat. Zice că pe unu' l-a pus să așeze lemnele. El [copilul era] în mijloc și așeza lemnele roată și la urmă i-a dat foc. Lângă, nu în stână, afară undeva. Să clădească lemne așa cât el. Cenușa cică le dădea la cârlani în sare. Nu știu care era logica (...) P-aicea. Da' și bătrânii, din auzite și ei. Deci căteva generații în spate. [Bătrânii au auzit] da' tot așa, povești, n-au văzut. Că să zică un nume, că x a ars pă nu știu cine (...) N-am întrebat așa amănunte. Cred că primăvara, mă gândesc [îi ardeau]", Informant: Valer Muntean, Voinești, b. 1969.

¹⁵⁹ „Înainte și copii de ăia, copii mici! Îi omora, îi cumpăra de la muieri de ălea vădane (...) da' mai rar că dup-aia s-a auzit. Și îi puneau în sare și le dădea la sterpe, nu la mânzări, la sterpe numa'. Le puneau, avea seninuri de găsea lespede așa (...) și le puneau, cum îi toată aicea curtea așa, și le puneau câte-o mână așa pân aia și mânca sarea aia, știi? Să facă cârlanii sau sterpe bune, știi? Așa (...) observa, și știa că «Mă, asta-l vinde». Îl ardea pe foc, poate îl omora, eu nu știu, n-am fo', am auzit și ieu. Omora și-l ardea acolo și dup-aia îl băga între (...)”, Informant: Constantin Uță, Voinești, b. 1941.

5. FAITH IN GOD

In the mountain ridges, alone with their animals, the shepherds had to face the harshness of the weather: storms, thunder, lightning, etc. From a conversation that journalist Ioan Drăgan had in 1984 with Constantin Furtună, from Voinești, who was 84 at the time, he learned that

“In summer, in the mountains, when the storm broke, when the wind brought a deluge of rain over the sheepfold, when the weather was so wild that you felt like smashing the sky against the ground, the shepherds would stick their axes in the roof of the sheepfold to protect them from the lightning. In their haste to change everything, the youngsters abandoned the custom. Only a few old shepherds have kept it”¹⁶⁰.

In 2022, there are still old people who remember this custom:

“My father always had an axe in the ground. Like this in front of the rock. He took the axe and stuck it in the ground”¹⁶¹.

Believers, they knew that strength in difficult situations, as in the daily routine, can only be found in the One Above. Few were those who didn't have a prayer book in the sheepfold or in the chimney:

“My father always had [a prayer book]. I didn't. But he had a holy book and he used to light a candle made of wax, when the weather was hot, in the cheese barn. He had a holy book. He used to read (...) say prayers and that. Yes. It was like a candle, only it was made like this, you know? And the wheel, and then it was pointed up, the tip, you know, to burn and he'd open it up, point it up again. In the barn where we used to (...) where we used to put the curd. There, in the cheese shed [he held the stick]. That was there on a little table, you know, on a stool there. He'd light it when the weather was hot. And he prayed in the Comarnic, he read, he had a holy book. By day if it was (...) and read. Yes. In case of such hard times”¹⁶²;

¹⁶⁰ „vara, la munte, când se stârnea furtuna, când vântul aducea potop de ploaie peste stână, când vremea se sălbăticea de-ți venea să dai cu cerul de pământ, ciobanii își înfigeau topoarele în tinda stânii, să-i apere de fulgere. În graba lor de a schimba totul, tinerii au părăsit obiceiul. Îl păstrează doar câțiva ciobani bătrâni.”, in Ioan Drăgan, *Pasul ursului [The Bear's Step]*, Arcus Publishing House, 2006, p. 194.

¹⁶¹ „Avea tata mereu, toporu-l înhinea în pământ. Așa-n fața stânii. Lua toporu' și-l băga acolo-n pământ”, Informant: Nicolae Guiu, Voinești, b. 1948.

¹⁶² „Tata avea mereu [carte de rugăciuni]. Eu n-am avut. Da' avea carte sfântă și toigel dâna ăla dâna ceară făcut, dă vreme tare, îl aprindea acolo în stâna brânzii. Că avea carte sfântă. Mai citea (...) mai spunea rugăciuni și d-ăstea. Toigel. Da. Păi da' ca și-o lumânare, numa' erea făcută așa colac, știți? Și roată și erea dup-aia îndreptat în sus, vârful, știți, ca să ardă și-l desfăcea, îl îndrepta iară în sus. În stâna unde făceam (...) dă băgam cașu'. Acolo, în stâna brânzii [ținea toiagul]. ăla erea acolo pe-o măsută, știți, pe-un scăunel acolo. Îl aprindea când era vreme tare. Și se mai ruga în comarnic, citea, avea o carte sfântă. Ziua dacă erea (...) și citea. Da. În caz de vremuri d-ăstea tari”, Informant: Nicolae Guiu, Voinești, b. 1948.

“We still had those old men, he used to put a candle in the sheepfold. Some of these old men who still know about church, more faithful. But the young ones didn’t. But these old ones lit a candle in the barn”¹⁶³.



Fig. 3 – The sheepfold at Piliș, 1965. From left to right:
Țică Ucă, Ion from Vrancea, Florea Cojan, Gheorghe Cojan

They couldn’t celebrate holidays as they did in the village, because sheep don’t know about holidays, they have to be milked three times a day and then taken out to graze

“We were always working, man! We had no Sundays, no holidays. (...) You didn’t stay, because those sheep had to be milked and I don’t know what else (...)”¹⁶⁴;

“Well, you worked because you had no choice. You had to milk, you had to make curds. We didn’t cut wood because we had wood for more than a week (...) That’s all. Milking and such (...)”¹⁶⁵;

but they fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays. Lest we forget that they came from a community where much was overlooked by people, but the fact that he “ate meat on Good Friday” was regarded as an unhallowed offense¹⁶⁶.

¹⁶³ „Mai aveam bătrâni d-ăștia, mai puneau câte-o candelă în stână. Mai țineau bătrâni d-ăștia care mai știu dă biserică, mai credincioși. Da’ăștia tineri nu puneau. Da’ăștia bătrâni mai aprindeau câte-o candelă în stână”, Informant: Nicolae Cășuneanu, Voinești, b. 1951.

¹⁶⁴ „Noi munceam mereu, măi! Noi n-aveam duminică, n-aveam sărbătoare. (...) Nu stăteai, că oile alea trebe mulse și nu știu ce (...)”, Informant: Constantin Uță, Voinești, b. 1941.

¹⁶⁵ „Păi lucrai că n-aveai încotro. Trebuia să mulgi, trebuia să faci cașu’. Lemne nu tăiai, că lemne cam aveam de câte-o săptămână (...) Atâta. Mulsu’ și ăsta (...)”, Informant: Nicolae Guiu, Voinești, b. 1948.

¹⁶⁶ The case of the author’s grandmother, who never forgave one of her grandparents for breaking the fast-during Holy Week, which was considered the cause of the difficulties that arose in his family later on.

More rarely than in other parts of the country with a pastoral tradition, priests also happened to go up in the mountains, usually to the shepherds' huts:

"The priests also went to the shepherds' huts to (...) the sheep, to (...)! Let's take them to the church, to (...) to give them a theory, to keep them healthy, so they don't get damaged in the ewe's ear, so they don't have (...) like that, no!"¹⁶⁷.

For the rest of the year, shepherds would settle their soul problems by making a cross on a tree (usually fir, but not exclusively) to which they worshipped. Traian Herseni writes:

"In the old days, shepherds used to confess to trees (especially firs). They would make a cross in the bark of the tree (with an axe or a penknife) and confess their sins in front of it, as in a priest's office, while beating rosaries. They then cut a few splinters from the tree with the axe and threw them away. According to the oath they swore, if in a year the tree would or would not wither, they were forgiven or not forgiven of their sins. The shepherds claimed that this confession was better than that made to the priest"¹⁶⁸.

In the case of the evergreen conifer, the existence of an ancient cult of the fir tree should be taken into account –

"the mythical profile of the fir tree is the oldest and perhaps the most complete of all the other trees mentioned in Romanian beliefs and rites"¹⁶⁹.

We learn that, when they felt the need,

"They would make a cross, they would notch it, they would make and bow and confess to the fir tree, the beech, whatever it was. Yes, and I used to do it too"¹⁷⁰.

It is worth mentioning that such testimonies about the confession to the fir tree are few because the shepherds of Voinești preferred to build, to make themselves crosses, with their well-known and indispensable apotropaic role, to which they worshipped. They were more or less resistant, depending on the material at hand and the shepherd's technique and skill. Of course, being made of wood, they rotted long ago. But some of the shepherds, in old age, with the help of their sons and grandchildren, erected massive crosses made of sturdy materials in places where they had hewn in their youth:

¹⁶⁷ „Mai duceau popii la stână să le (...) la oi, să le (...) no! Să le ducem la biserică, să le (...) no, să le ție acolo o teorie, să fie sănătoase, să nu se strice la uger, să nu aibă (...) așa, no!”, Informant: Nicolae Cășuneanu, Voinești, b. 1951.

¹⁶⁸ „Pe vremuri ciobanii se mărturiseau la copaci (mai ales la brazi). Făceau o cruce în coaja copacului (cu toporul sau briceagul) și-și mărturiseau în fața ei păcatele, ca la preot, în timp ce băteau mătânii. Tăiau apoi cu toporul câteva așchii din copac, pe care le aruncau. După jurământul pe care-l făceau, dacă într-un an copacul se va usca sau nu se va usca, erau iertați sau nu erau iertați de păcate. Ciobanii susțineau că spovedania aceasta este mai bună decât cea făcută la preot.”, in Traian Herseni, *Forme străvechi de cultură populară românească [Ancient forms of Romanian folk culture]*, Dacia Publishing House, 1977.

¹⁶⁹ „profilul mitic al bradului este la români cel mai vechi și poate cel mai complet dintre toți ceilalți arbori de care vorbesc credințele și riturile autohtone”, in Romulus Antonescu, *quoted work*, p. 77.

¹⁷⁰ „Făceau câte-o cruce, o creștau, făceau și se-nchinau și se spovedeau la brad, la fag, ce-a fi fost el. Da, și eu făceam și mă-nchinam.”, Informant: Militon Gheorghită, Voinești, b. 1938.

“But on every mountain I’ve walked, I’ve made crosses. Out of wood. I used to make wooden crosses, but they all rotted. But now I made one, a few years ago, and I took it to the top of Lăcăuți, from railroad tracks. And I’ve taken it from the meteorological house a little way down, everybody knows it. They told me not to put it right next to the weather station, they might do some construction and take it out. It’s made of iron rail, I wrote my name on it. It’ll last for a long time if some gypsies don’t scrap it. I poured concrete, my son Neculai and I laid it with my tractor”¹⁷¹;

“In ‘57, I made a cross out of fir with an axe in Tomoșoiu. It lasted 52 years. My grandchildren, with their ATVs, passed by, saw it barely holding on, it was tied to a fir tree with a blue string, probably by a hiker. It still had 57 and *tin*, from Constantine. They told me that they had seen it and what state it was in. Then, around 2009, I went by car, then on foot, I saw it and thought of making another one that would last 150 years. I made one out of oak, I took sand, cement, tools, Florin and my nephew, we went and fixed it in concrete. People come and say: ‘Mr. Dine, I saw your cross!’. Two years later, we put it up, cleaned the creek, made a water fountain, a table, a bench, a signpost to the spring. Last year we put a tricolor on it! You know how beautiful it waves? People come and tell me (...)”¹⁷².



Fig. 4 – Constantin Costea, next to the cross in Tomoșoiu, erected on the site of another one, which stood for 52 years.

¹⁷¹ „Dar pe orice munte pe unde-am umblat, am făcut cruci. Din lemn. Făceam cruci din lemn, da’ toate-au putrezit. Da’ acum am făcut una, de vreo câțiva ani de zile, ș-am dus-o în vârful Lăcăuțiului, din șine de tren. Și-am dus-o de la casa de meteorologie puțin mai încolo, o știu toți. Mi-au zis să n-o pun chiar lângă stația meteo, că poate mai fac ceva construcții și-o scot. E din șină de fier, mi-am scris numele pe ea, să rămână! Aia stă mult, dacă n-or tăia-o niscăi țigani la fier vechi. Am turnat beton, am pus-o cu fiu-meu, Neculai, cu tractorul am dus-o”, Informant: Constantin Muntean, Voinești, b. 1933.

¹⁷² „În ‘57, am făcut cu toporul, o cruce din brad, în Tomoșoiu. Și-a rezistat 52 de ani. Nepoții mei, cu ATV-urile, au trecut p-acolo, au văzut-o că abia se mai ținea, era legată de un brad cu un jiner albastru, probabil de vreun excursionist. Se mai vedea pe ea scris 57 și *tin*, de la Constantin. Mi-au zis c-au văzut-o și în ce stare era. Atunci, prin 2009, m-am dus cu mașina, apoi pe jos, am văzut-o și m-am gândit să fac alta care să țină 150 de ani. Am făcut una din stejar, am luat nisip, ciment, unelte, pe Florin și nepotul, ne-am dus și am prins-o în beton. Vin oamenii și-mi zic: «nea Dine, ți-am văzut crucea!». Peste doi ani, am înălțat-o, am curățat pârâul, am făcut o fântânița pentru apă, o masă, o bancă, tablă indicatoare către izvor. Anul trecut i-am pus și-un tricolor! Știi ce frumos flutură? Oamenii trec pe la mine și îmi zic (...)”, Informant: Constantin Costea, Voinești, b. 1939.

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