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BELIEFS, CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS OF ROMANIANS IN THE PRINCIPALITY RECORDED BY FOREIGN TRAVELERS (1710-1810)

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the beliefs, customs, and traditions of Romanians in the Principalities as recorded by foreign travelers between 1710 and 1810. This period marked was marked by heightened Western interest in Eastern Europe, driven by economic, cultural, and political exchanges. The research examines how these travelers documented Romanian Orthodox practices, which often appeared foreign or confusing to them due to their differing religious backgrounds. The accounts reveal a complex interplay of admiration and critique, reflecting the travelers' own biases and preconceived notions about Eastern cultures. The methodology employed involves a qualitative analysis of travel narratives, focusing on the intellectual formation of the travelers, their motivations for visiting, and the duration of their stay in the Principalities. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how these factors influenced their perceptions of Romanian customs and traditions. While many travelers expressed curiosity about the local practices, their interpretations were frequently clouded by stereotypes and misunderstandings regarding Orthodox Christianity. The study indicates that foreign travelers often viewed Romanian religious practices as peculiar or even primitive compared to their own traditions. For instance, the veneration of icons and the observance of long fasts were seen as signs of a superficial faith. Travelers noted that many Romanians lacked a comprehensive understanding of Christian doctrine, attributing this to a lack of education among both clergy and laity. However, it was also observed that educated elites demonstrated a more profound engagement with their faith. This research contributes to a broader understanding of Romanian identity during a period of political fragmentation and cultural transition. It underscores how external perceptions shaped historical narratives about Romanian customs and traditions while revealing the complexities inherent in cross-cultural encounters.

Keywords: Romanian customs, foreign travelers, Orthodox Christianity, cultural perceptions, historical narratives.

I. Introduction

Ever since the end of the 17th century, interest in the spaces on the periphery of the Western world has grown considerably. Economic, cultural and political transfers took place there. Certain Western circles had already been made aware of the Eastern space of the continent, and their interest increased progressively with the passage of time[1]. "Now" – wrote

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[1] For travel in the Middle Ages and the Modern Age, see the following works: Hans Conrad Peyer, *Viaggiare nel Medioevo. Dall'ospitalità alla locanda*, Bari, 2009; Norbert Ohler, *I viaggi nel Medioevo*, Città di Castello, 2020; *Communautés et mobilité en Mediterranée de la fin XV^e au milieu du XVIII^e siècle*. Ouvrage collectif sous la direction de Eleonora Canepari,

Paul Hazard – "Italians have rediscovered their taste for travel; and the French were as restless as quicksilver"[2].

From the second half of the 18th century, there were changes in the reasons for the trip. The journey was no longer understood only as a personal experience, but would be aimed at the permanent search for solutions to problems in society. When discussing the economic motivation of travelers in making the Grand Tour, Sophus A. Reinert tells us about the solutions travelers seek for the development of their countries or for the expansion of their personal businesses[3]. These formative and cultural journeys were undertaken by artists and men of letters, but also by other socio-professional categories – the so-called scientists[4].

The foreign travelers who arrived in the Romanian Principalities left on paper the most interesting records about the beliefs, customs and traditions of the Romanians they encountered during their travels. Specialists in ethnography and folklore demonstrated, a long time ago, that Romanian customs and traditions are closely related to pre-Christian and Christian practices and religions[5]. On top of these, influences from the Romanian neighbors also accumulated. Consequently, it is appropriate that the description of religious sentiment and religious practices among Romanians should be investigated in this study, along with customs and traditions, in order to better understand the realities described by travelers about Romanians.

The foreigners who arrived in the Principalities were interested in almost all the things found in Romanians, but perhaps with much greater interest they recorded those elements that today would fall into the category of traditions and customs. The interest of foreigners in the specifics of Romanians could be attributed to their curiosity for traditions and customs different from what they found in their countries of origin. The Romanians were of the Orthodox faith, a denomination different from that of the great majority of the travelers. The religious practices, as they are described, generated curiosity, but sometimes also critical attitudes, because they are different from those of the Roman Catholics and the Reformed. The Romanians, in the absence of priests and a strong ecclesiastical organization, as well as education, had religious customs sometimes close to non-Christian practices, often causing confusion, questions and criticism from travelers.

Of course, the existing differences between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed denominations contributed to accentuate the difficulties of

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Paris, 2022; Sylvain Venayre, *Panorama du voyage (1780-1920): Mots, figures, pratiques*, Paris, 2012, *Voyageurs de la Renaissance*. Édition Grégoire Holtz, Jean Claude Laborie et Frank Lestringant, Paris, Gallimard, 2019.

[2] Paul Hazard, *Criza conștiinței europene 1680-1715* [The Crisis of the European Mind: 1680-1715], translated by Sanda Șora, *Foreword* by Romul Munteanu, Bucharest, 1973, p. 5.

[3] Sophus A. Reinert, "Mapping the Economic Grand Tour: Travel and International Emulation in Enlightenment Europe", in *Harvard Business School*, no. 17-005, July 2016, p. 1-5.

[4] Gilles Bertrand, *Le Grand Tour revisité. Pour une archéologie du tourisme: le voyage des Français en Italie, milieu XVIII^e – début XIX^e siècle*, Rome, 2008, p. 24; Idem, "En marge du voyage des élites dans l'Italie des Lumières. Du peuple regardé au peuple voyageur", in *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée*, tome 111, n°2, 1999, p. 847-881.

[5] Simion Florea Marian, *Sărbătorile la români* [Romanians' Holidays], vol. I–II, edited by Iordan Datcu, Editura Fundației Culturale Române [The Publishing House of the Romanian Cultural Foundation], Bucharest, 1994; Idem, *Nașterea la români, Nunta la români, Înmormântarea la români* [Birth to Romanians, Wedding to Romanians, Burial to Romanians], edited by Teofil Teaha, Ioan Șerb and Ioan Ilișiu, Editura Grai și Suflet – Cultura Națională [Rai și Suflet – Cultura Națională Publishing House], Bucharest,1995; Sabina Ispas, *Cultură orală și informație transculturală* [Oral Culture and Transcultural Information], Editura Academiei Române [The Publishing House of the Romanian Academy], Bucharest, 2003; Tudor Pamfilie, *Sărbătorile la români. Studiu etnografic* [Romanians' Holidays. An Ethnographic Study], Edition and Introduction by Iordan Datcu, Bucharest, 2018, 414 p.

understanding the Orthodox believers. The Orthodox often valued the veneration of icons, a certain religious devotion based on an intense experience, the observance of fasts, the so-called popular piety, specific to a people less educated but eager to acquire their salvation, all these practices appeared to the travelers as being close to pagan ones, and the Orthodox faith being practiced superficially, without a rational involvement. Foreign travelers did not understand why Romanians made the cross very often and invoked God's help at every opportunity, they prayed to the icons and crosses at the intersections of the roads or at the entrance to the towns, they kept long and exhausting fasts. In contrast, the Romanians were not able to recite the *Our Father* in its entirety, a fundamental prayer of Christianity.

In Transylvania, the reality was even more complicated than in the other two extra-Carpathian Principalities. Until the Reformation, the only official denomination was the Roman Catholic one, later Calvinism, Lutheranism and Unitarianism were also recognized. The Orthodox denominnation was only tolerated. From a political point of view, the Romanians were not part of the states of Transylvania. The status of the Romanians did not experience significant changes throughout the Middle Ages, perhaps with the exception of attempts to reunify the Christian Churches after 1204 and, later, after the Council of Ferrara-Florence. It is true that the Romanian elites, those Knez (lords) and voivods, made efforts to join the Kingdom's nobility, but the great majority of them fell from a social point of view. Major changes did not occur even after the central part of the Kingdom was transformed into a pashalik, and the Partium and the Transylvanian Voivodeship were organized into an autonomous principality placed under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Porte. In the Principality of Transylvania, the system of the four accepted religions (Catholicism, Calvinism, Lutheranism and Unitarianism) and the three political nations (nobility, representatives of the Saxons and the elite of the Szeklers) was consolidated, the Romanians remaining even further outside the political system.

The end of the 17th century, however, heralded political changes in Central Europe. The rivalry between the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Empire entered a new phase. The imperial counter-offensive started under the walls of Vienna and managed in two decades to recapture the territories that the Turks had tried to conquer for almost a century. The liberation of the central part of Hungary, transformed before into a pashalik by the Turks, and the penetration of the imperial troops into the autonomous Principality of Transylvania - under the domination of the Porte[6] – brought to the attention of Austrian political and military factors the complexity of the problems in the newly occupied provinces.

The Leopoldine Diploma of 1691, the result of the compromise between the new political power and the states of the principality, established the relations with the empire and the principles according to which Transylvania should be governed. The constitutional foundation of Transylvania, according to the text, remained its established political system: the three political nations and four accepted religions[7]. However, in the Principality of Transylvania, among the political nations, only the Saxons supported the policy of the Viennese Court. The Roman Catholic Church, the institution that was supposed to ensure the cohesion of the nations and provinces of the empire, although it was in a legal situation equal to the other reformed denominations, had few adherents. Calvinism was the dominant religion of the country, from among which the political

[6] See Călin Felezeu, *Statutul Principatului Transilvaniei în raporturile cu Poarta Otomană (1541-1688)* [The Statute of the Principality of Transylvania in Relations with the Ottoman Porte (1541-1688)], Cluj-Napoca, 1996, p. 107-119.

[7] David Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum. Din istoria formării națiunii române* [Supplex Libellus Valachorum. From the History of the Formation of the Romanian Nation], Bucharest, 1984, p. 134.

leaders were elected. Then, the Calvinist propaganda initiated by the principles of Transylvania among the Romanians, where force combined with privileges, succeeded in a few decades in causing a large number of Orthodox Romanians to switch to Calvinism. In this situation, the imperial authorities, in order to widen their base of support in the principality, had to either try to attract the current reformed people to Catholicism, or find other solutions. Although the return to Catholicism of the current reformed people was not really impossible, a simple calculation showed that the number of those who would accept the return to Catholicism would be reduced, instead the problems with the estates in the principality would be complicated.

Among the solutions for the regeneration of Catholicism on the territory of Hungary, proposed in 1689 by a commission led by Cardinal Leopold Kollonich, the most interesting from the perspective of its long-term effects was the church union. In the case of Transylvania, the ones targeted by this religious policy strategy of the Vienna Court were the Romanians[8].

In Moldavia and Wallachia, the realities were much simpler from a religious point of view. Here, Romanians made up the majority of the population, and Orthodoxy was the denomination of the majority of the country's lords, even during the Phanariot regime, when we witnessed a process of Hellenization and orientalization of Romanian society.

II. Research methodology

The first contact of foreign travelers with Romanians took place, most likely, upon their entry into the Principality, where the formalities of checking documents and luggage took place. As they entered the Principalities and followed the roads to the capitals of the provinces, the chances of getting to know the Romanians increased[9]. Foreign travelers from the principality established links and contacts with the native population along the routes followed, in the stopping places, in the means of transport used, in the inns, post stations and in the fairs, at the church and at the feasts organized and so on[10]. Most of the accounts of foreign travelers about the Principalities are devoted to these aspects. Foreigners who stayed longer had the chance to multiply their contacts and ties with the native population and to get to know the Romanians better in different situations.

Historians who discuss the degree of veracity of these documentary sources conclude that there are several indicators by which their degree of objectivity can be verified, namely: the

[8] Ovidiu Ghitta, *Biserica Ortodoxă din Transilvania la sfârșitul secolului al XVII-lea* [The Orthodox Church in Transylvania at the End of the 17th Century], in *Istoria Transilvaniei* [The History of Transylvania], vol. II, coordinators: Ioan-Aurel Pop, Thomas Nägler, Magyari András, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, p. 378.

[9] Sorin Șipoș, *Foreign Travelers in the Romanian Lands and the Symbolism of the Borders (1710-1810)*, in *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 2019, 54.

[10] Sorin Șipoș, *Viaggiatori stranieri nello spazio romeno: Dalle capitali degli imperi alle corti dei Principati (1710-1810)*, in *Temi e metodi della ricerca storica e filologica. Nuove riflessioni tra Est ed Ovest*, a cura di Sorin Șipoș, Dan Octavian Cepraga, Laura Ardelean, Iulia Cosma, Romanian Academy, Center for Transylvanian Studies, Cluj-Napoca, 2020, *Transylvanian Review*, vol. XXIX, Supplement no. 1, 2020, 320 p; Sorin Șipoș, *Călători străini în Transilvania, Țara Românească și Moldova (1710-1810). Intrarea în Principatele Române a voiajorilor și mijloacele de călătorie utilizate* [Foreign Travelers in Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldovia (1710-1810). Travelers' Entry into the Romanian Principalities and the Means of Travel Used], in *The Shades of Globalisation – Identity and Dialogue in an Intercultural World*, edited by Iulian Boldea, Târgu Mureș, 2021, p. 8-20; Sorin Șipoș, *Relatările călătorilor străini despre căile de comunicație din Principatele Române (1710-1810)* [The Accounts of Foreign Travelers about the Communication Routes in the Romanian Principalities (1710-1810)], in *Școală, biserică, stat și națiune în istoria României. Omagiu profesorului Cornel Sigmirean la împlinirea vârstei de 65 de ani* [School, Church, State and Nation in Romanian History. Homage to Professor Cornel Sigmirean on his 65th Birthday], Cluj-Napoca, 2021.

intellectual formation of the narrator, the reasons for the trip, the time spent in the Principality, the traveler's state of mind, availability and openness manifested to understand the world and customs of the Gates of the East. The intellectual formation, the degree of subjectivity and the time spent by the traveler in the Principality influenced the veracity of the information about the Romanians.[11]

The data from the descriptions of foreign travelers about the beliefs and customs of Romanians were ordered chronologically. More emphasis has been placed on authors who have left us valuable information both quantitatively and qualitatively. Of the 171 foreign travelers who left us records about Romanians, a relatively small number left us descriptions of Romanian customs and beliefs. The interpretation of the data was carried out taking into account the intellectual formation of the author, the reasons for the trip, the recorded information, in other words we tried to integrate the descriptions in a more general context, to be as close as possible to the truth and to remove, as much as possible, the subjectivity of the authors.

However, accounts with a high degree of subjectivity are also interesting for our approach. They allow us to see how the West is influenced by stereotypes gathered over the centuries about Central and Eastern Europe. Often, truths are mixed with false images and inconsistent with historical truth, which have been imposed over the centuries about Romanians and their customs. These were taken over by foreign travelers and resulted in descriptions that did not respect the reality of the time.

After foreign travelers entered the Romanian spaces, they had new experiences that they felt the need to record. After crossing the political borders of the Romanian Countries, the travelers came into contact with other types of borders – civilizational and mental ones[12]. The latter were, sometimes, stronger and more difficult to dislodge than the political-administrative borders, because they originated in stereotypes, in already outlined images of peoples and countries transmitted from generation to generation. The traveler coming from the West arrived in the Romanian territories - located on the border with the East - with certain preconceptions and prejudices.

In some situations, travelers modified their images of the Romanian world after direct contact with the realities here. Other times, they tried to find explanations to understand the gap between the principalities and the world they came from. But we also have examples of travelers who remained anchored in their own Eurocentric system of values and only critically evaluated the Romanian world. The most general representation born within Western culture of a radical, contiguous, profound and "exotic" otherness bears the name of the Orient[13]. According to Edward W. Said[14] and Sorin Mitu, in reality, even the West is nothing but a set of heterogeneous realities and hybrid identities (homogenized only in the imaginary), subjected to change, mentally

[11] Sorin Șipoș, *Between stereotypes and reality: omanians' image in the accounts of the foreign travelers (1710-1810). Research methodology*, in *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies,* vol. 19, issue 57 (Winter 2020), p. 145-162.

[12] Ioan Horga, Sorin Șipoș, *De la „Mica" la „Marea" Europă: Mărturii franceze de la sfârșitul secolului al XVIII-lea și începutul secolului al XIX-lea despre frontiera răsăriteană a Europei: Studii și documente. De la „Petite" à la „Grande" Europe : Témoignages français de la fin du XVIII*[e] *et du début du XIX*[e] *siècle sur la frontière orientale de l'Europe : Études et documents* Traducerea textelor. Traduction des textes: Delia-Maria Radu, Oradea, 2006, p. 6-7.

[13] Melinda Mitu, Sorin Mitu, *Ungurii despre români: Nașterea unei imagini etnice* [The Hungarians about the Romanians: The Birth of an Ethnic Image], Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2014, p. 29. See also Carmen Andraș, *România și imaginile ei în literatura de călătorie britanică* [Romania and its Images in the British Travel Literature], Cluj-Napoca, 2003, 447 p.

[14] Edward W. Said, *L'Orientalisme. L'Orient créé par l'Occident*, Traduit de l'américain par Catherine Malamoud, Préface de l'auteur (2003), Traduite par Sylvestre Meininger, Préface a l'édition française de Tzvetan Todorov, Postface de l'auteur traduite par Claude Wauthier, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2004, p. 13-14.

represented and socially constructed, according to ideological goals, with the input of the political and intellectual elites[15]. The prejudices and preconceptions shown by some travelers towards the Romanian Countries, seen as representations of the Orient, have their origins in the imaginary geographies revealed by Said. Consequently, neither the East nor, implicitly, the Romanian Principalities, can be associated only with negative representations and truths.

III. Beliefs, customs and traditions of Romanians in the Principalities recorded by foreign travelers (1710-1810)

Erasmus Heinrich Weismantel, an officer of German origin, critically described the beliefs, customs and traditions of the Romanians. Residing for a longer period of time in Moldavia, following the defeat of King Charles XII by Tsar Peter I, the traveler became familiar with the realities of the country. He notices a synonymy between the customs and faith of the Romanians, described as mimetic practices, performed mechanically and little understood by believers.

According to the author, Romanians' theological knowledge is very poor. Their knowledge was reduced to the awareness of the fact that they are Orthodox Christians, that there is the Holy Trinity, angels and Satan, that there is Heaven and Hell. However, most of them knew nothing about the Word of God and the Bible[16]. The Romanians who frequented the Church listened to the religious service, made their crosses, prayed on their knees in front of the icons, mentioned and invoked the name of the Lord, but only a few of them knew their prayers. One of the causes identified by Erasmus Heinrich Weismantel for this situation present in Romanians would be the lack of education of the priests, some of them having only minimal knowledge of writing and reading, an aspect that had an impact on the religious service and in the relations with the parishioners[17]. The Swedish officer notes an interesting thing about the presence of religious sentiment among Romanians; the faithful wanted to say their prayers fully and correctly, but were hindered by their inability to read and write[18].

From the rough notes put on paper by the author, it follows that the Romanians were believers, that they had a different faith than that practiced by the Turks and Tatars, and that they were different from Catholics and Reformed, manifesting their religious feeling in a different form from what was in Sweden and in Germany. The Romanians, not knowing the prayers and not having the chance to listen to sermons delivered by trained priests, practiced their faith at the level of a primary Christianity, expressed through simple gestures and intense experiences, with the emphasis on keeping fasts, on an ascetic life, on material deprivations, all to obtain forgiveness of sins and eternal life[19]. The author of German origin does not find the same thing for the boyars

[15] Melinda Mitu, Sorin Mitu, *op. cit*., p. 29.

[16] *Călători străini despre Țările Române* [Foreign Travelers about the Romanian Countries], vol. VIII, Edited volume by Maria Holban (responsible editor), Maria M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, Paul Cernovodeanu, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1983, p. 352.

[17] *Ibidem*, p. 352-353.

[18] *Ibidem*, p. 353.

[19] "Just as their origin, nature, customs, and morals are, so too is their faith or religion, although they consider themselves Christians, specifically of the Orthodox rite. However, among the common people, their notions of Christianity do not go beyond knowing that they have been baptized, that there exists the Holy Trinity, angels and Satan, and that there is eternal life and eternal damnation. They have no knowledge of the Word of the Lord or of the Bible, and their priests have very little knowledge as well; they know no more than how to read, and many of them cannot even write. No one in the entire country knows what a sermon is. The priest chants the ritual songs and psalms only out of habit; beside the priest, the parishioners are unable to understand well or interpret what they hear (no layperson possesses a prayer book or any other book). Before icons – both those in churches and those that every householder must have in their home,

from Moldavia, who, knowing how to read, knew the prayers, proving again that among ordinary Romanians, it was not the absence of faith that was the cause of ignorance of prayers and Christianity, but the lack of instruction.

Erasmus Heinrich Weismantel dedicates a special place to the description of the fasts that in the Orthodox rite have a special role and were respected by the majority of believers. Himself being of Lutheran denomination, he admits that it is very difficult to follow the Orthodox fasts, which are long and numerous throughout the year. The consistency of the Romanians in keeping their positions, the officer wrongly attributes it to the infatuation and pride of the Orthodox, in relation to the other Christian denominations, to show that they are the true Christians[20].

The traveler of German origin dwells in his description on the manner in which the foreigners were perceived by the Orthodox Romanians from the perspective of religious faith. "In all this, they stick close only to the Russians, and they don't consider us Christians because we eat meat on their fast days, we don't make the cross before their icons, and we generally don't follow their heresies"[21]. Erasmus Heinrich Weismantel recognizes that there is a unity of faith between the Orthodox Romanians and the other Orthodox Christians of the East, especially Russians, and that the existing differences between the two denominations, Orthodox and Reformed – namely the rite, the fasting, the worship of icons, mural painting, etc. – it causes the Romanians to consider themselves as true Christians in relation to the other Christians in the West. For an illiterate people, the Orthodox ritual and the related practices, some simple but full of content, the worship of icons, crosses, and fasting represented the essence of religious faith. Consequently, Romanians will judge the foreigners in the Principalities according to their own reference system regarding the practice of faith. Starting from this reasoning, it seems that even our traveler is not convinced of the existence of religious feeling among Romanians, because few of them professed and most of them were not aware of Christian teachings.

Among the differences noticed by Erasmus Heinrich Weismantel between the Orthodox and Catholics is the way in which communion was done in the Orthodox, with prosphora, called prescura, while in the Catholics it was with host, the communion having a special meaning for all believers. Contrary to the practice in the Roman Catholic Church, however, the Orthodox priests send prescura to the sick or those who had not participated in the religious service, in order to preserve and strengthen the feeling of faith among the inhabitants[22]. The German-born

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and which they use instead of holy books or even as idols – they fall to the ground as if the icon were the saint himself or even God. They would like to pray as well, but they do not know any prayers; very few people in the entire country know even the Our Father. They simply kneel before the icons morning and evening, both young and old, and instead of a prayer, they make as many crosses as they wish and only say the Russian words: "Hospodi pomilui" [Lord, have mercy]. Many do not even know how to pronounce these words in full; they bow down and make the sign of the cross 20-30 times; they kneel down, kiss the ground, and throughout this ceremony mumble continuously: "Gospodi, Gospodi", and this is the prayer for both old and young. The biyars, who learn some of them to read and write in schools, understand somewhat more. However, to show that they are true Christians and that on top of that they belong to the only true religion, they boast about fasting but actually fast very much and strictly, eating during these days only food prepared with oil, like Russians and Muscovites. They generally fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, while those who adhere to ancient customs fast also on Mondays and eat meat on Saturdays" (*Ibidem*, p. 352-353).

[20] *Ibidem*, p. 353.

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 354.

[22] "The youth do not confess, but only the elderly, and very few among them, they know that baptism and communion are church sacraments. The blessed bread for them is not a host, but real bread, cut into small pieces that the priest distributes to those who partake. They call them "prosphora" and send them through a layperson across the fields to the sick, or they give them also (to people) to take home" (*Ibidem*, p. 354).

author also noted other practices, some of which he understood, while others he did not[23], largely due to cultural and educational differences.

Some information recorded by the author about the rite, practices and religious ceremonies of the Orthodox Romanians have been transmitted to the present day, due to the conservatism of the church and the desire of the faithful to continue the practices inherited from their parents. For example, the custom of the Orthodox believers to consecrate the dishes in the church during the great religious holidays is preserved, a practice described, but misunderstood by Erasmus Heinrich Weismantel[24]. On the contrary, he looks at it critically and does not understand its spiritual meaning, that of sanctifying the dishes prepared for the great feasts. The great Romanian holidays were preceded by long and exhausting fasting periods. Also, the resistance of the Orthodox believers to the foreign officers' intention to bury the dead of another faith or denomination in the cemetery of their community, is considered by the traveler as a sign of religious incivility and intolerance. In reality, this attitude, present until recent history in some rural communities, has more to do with ignorance and the conservative attitude of the peasant world that often acts respecting the tradition of the ancestors[25].

The author describes in detail even the unfolding of important events in the life of rural communities, namely: the ceremonies related to baptism, marriage and burial, the most important moments in the life of the individual and the community. In the village, festive events were rarer, weddings, christenings, marriages, holidays, in general, were occasions for joy, socializing, for strengthening ties in the community, even occasions for reconciliation between quarreling people. In general, joy and sorrow in the rural community in the Middle Ages and the Modern Era created solidarity among its members. The peasant world operated according to often unwritten rules, passed down from generation to generation, which often seemed to the uninitiated to be outdated and incomprehensible.

According to the foreign traveler, the religious ceremony of the marriage took place in the church, being officiated by the priest, but also outside the church. The procession and the musicians accompanied the bride and groom to the church, where the priest officiated the religious marriage, while outside the musicians sang and played music and the young people danced. The marriage

[23] "Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, especially the feast days of the saints, and all other holidays are observed by them, but according to the Julian calendar. In church, they make the bells ring, but they also strike a wooden board with a wooden mallet that is hanged in the church or at its doors. On Easter, they strike the board and ring the bells twice as much; on Epiphany, they go outside with a procession, and the lord and the metropolitan bless the water" (*Ibidem*, p. 354).

[24] "On major feast days, as well as on the days of the apostles and saints, they take most of their food to church to be blessed, and often the churches are so full of dishes that one can hardly pass through because of them; this takes place in the middle of the church" (*Ibidem*, p. 354).

[25] "With their great Christianity, they despise our religions, and they are so stubborn that they do not allow us, even out of goodwill, to bury our dead alongside theirs, or at least in the same cemeteries, even though in the end they have come to understand clearly that we are also Christians, even if we do not observe their fasts, in which all their Christian religion is limited to ostentation. When I arranged for the late Major Radeker to be buried at Furceni, they did not want to allow me to dig his grave in or near the cemetery at all; instead, I had to have it done further away, which they did reluctantly under the guard of the dragoons placed there specifically for that purpose. Thus, word spread among them that they would unearth the body, which, however, remained well buried afterward. The foolish people said: "at the resurrection of the dead, our natives here will not recognize him, and then there will be a great quarrel among them and to prevent this, you could bury him in the fields", and it was impossible to dissuade them from this idea. In Varnița, a separate cemetery was made for our people, although the late Colonel Ribbing was buried in the Moldavian cemetery. When a poor person dies among them and has no means for burial, they lay the corpse on a board and take it out into the street so that passersby can give something for his burial" (*Ibidem*, p. 355).

was an occasion of joy for the whole community, therefore even during the religious ceremony those who did not enter the church for the service sang and danced in the churchyard.

Erasmus Heinrich Weismantel also describes what happened after the completion of the religious ceremony, namely how the entire procession, according to rank and degree of kinship, led by the bailiff, an elderly and respected man of the community, holding in his hand a staff decorated with scarfs, accompanied the bride and groom on their way home, and on the way all the participants danced and sang. This fact surprised the speaker very much, because he had never encountered this custom before. The traveler also describes a dance performed by Romanians holding hands and forming a circle, the musicians were in the middle of it and played from the violin, whistle and mouth, while the earth shook from their game that could last even half a day[26]. Although he liked the dances of the Romanians, the traveler of German origin recorded them with originality and luxury of detail[27].

Erasmus Heinrich Weismantel also proved to be interested in the description of the Romanian life cycle, namely the ceremonial that accompanied birth, baptism, and death, with all the moments associated with these fundamental stages of life. Although he often criticized the religious practices specific to the Romanian world and the Orthodox denomination, proves to be scrupulous in their documentary recording. This is how he does it, for example, when he describes the ritual of the great passage, describing the funeral service and, later, the commemoration of the dead by family members. The foreign traveler is fascinated by the practices associated with this important and tragic moment for the community, most of which he does not understand and considers to be pagan practices. Many of them were for Christianity. The Eastern Church tried to remove them, but as it failed, it had to keep them and finally gave them a Christian aura. Erasmus Heinrich Weismantel describes the washing and dressing of the dead or dying person in his last moments of life, the lighting of a candle at the head, the three-day vigil, the presence of the mourners, the priest and the musicians, as well as the family members who cried out for the pain of the deceased in the kingdom to the righteous. The funeral scene described by the officer was interesting and somewhat unnatural in its development: the mourners wept, the priest prayed at the dead man's head, and all the while the musicians played at his feet[28].

The association of the priest, the mourners and the musicians at the funeral seemed unnatural for a foreigner of another denomination who arrived in the Principality. The pain caused by the passing of the deceased to the eternal was complemented by the prayer of the priest for the soul of the dead and the sad music of the fiddlers[29]. The traveler describes the ceremonial

[26] *Ibidem*, p. 360.

[27] "[...] and if I were forced to stay with them and endure such things for a long time, I would rather do any other hard work than continue to dance in front of them. But they can keep it up for whole hours, and they can endure even half a day without feeling tired" (*Ibidem*, p. 360).

[28] *Ibidem*, p. 362-363.

[29] "As soon as a person dies, even while they are taking their last breaths, they light wax candles all around according to each person's ability to pay. They also hire women from outside who are supposed to mourn, standing next to the deceased the entire time, and until the burial, and as long as the body remains in the coffin at home, they do not cease to cry when anyone is present. As soon as there is no one near them, they sit down in complete peace and happily sip a drink of wine. As soon as a stranger is seen approaching from afar, they quickly get up and take their place next to the deceased, crying out again and starting to weep once more, and no matter how much one might say about them that they have trained their eyes to cry. The priests (where they can be well paid) also take turns sitting by the head of the deceased day and night for at least three full days until the burial, while at the feet and alongside them sit fiddlers and gypsies who play on instruments, and the priest chants his psalms until then, along with the entire procession, they bury the dead in the ground. Among the boyars, a black horse is always led at the front of the procession" (*Ibidem*, p. 362-363).

of the funeral and the despair of the family, who treat the dead as a living person, dialogue with him, ask him questions about the reasons why he chose death. Obviously, some things said in distress by the grieving family members are not understood by the traveler. At the same time, the author could not understand many other things from Romanian customs, such as the lighting of candles at the head of the dying, the memorials made by the family at the grave, and the clothes and money that were placed in the coffin next to the dead. Obviously, most of these practices were pre-Christian, but the memorials were made by the family for the forgiveness of the sins of the deceased, whose soul had to pass the customs to Heaven or Hell. If among the Catholics the souls of the dead went to Heaven or Purgatory, among the Orthodox the souls went to Heaven or Hell. Hence the special concern of the Romanians towards the souls of the deceased, for whom they prayed, made memorials, so that their souls could reach Heaven[30]. In addition, the numerous memorials made by the family for those who passed into the kingdom of the righteous, sometimes with great sacrifices due to financial lacks, were for the forgiveness of sins of the deceased and for their souls to reach Heaven.

Among Romanians, fasting and the sign of the cross, if analyzed from the perspective of religious feeling, are the most obvious and universal forms of spiritual experience. Foreigners severely judge these forms of popular piety, considering them a form of faith emptied of content and close to pagan ones.

What remains of the descriptions of Erasmus Heinrich Weismantel, officer in the army of Charles XII, German by origin? From the German officer's records about Romanian beliefs and customs, the most significant and important part is their description. The historian currently has a documentary source of prime importance to understand how Romanians understood faith and how they related to traditions. Sometimes the interpretations made of the realities encountered among Romanians by Erasmus Heinrich Weismantel are subjective and tributary to the world to which he belongs. However, we are dealing with a person eager to record and understand Moldavia and the Romanians, a country from which he wanted to leave as soon as possible. His subjectivity accents are due to education, denomination and profession, they are the very ones that make him have a critical attitude towards the world that has adopted him for a period of time.

Antonio Maria del Chiaro, royal secretary who resided in Muntenia for six years, also wrote about the faith and traditions of the Romanians. For him

> "the Wallachians, like the Moldavians, belong to the Eastern Church, which they call Orthodox, different from the Latins, who call themselves Catholics. The era of their Christianity is difficult to find out. Some argue that it dates back to very distant times, before the Bulgarians, Serbs and other neighboring peoples embraced the Christian

[30] "When they bury the dead in the ground, they give them bread and wine or water (!) sometimes even some money to take with them to the grave, so that, as they justify it, they do not die of hunger on their long journey to the eternal life; and so that they can see at night, they give them a candle in hand and also bring glowing coals to the grave at the end of the night from which they can light their candle. And even if you do not find then on all the graves, you will still find them on many fresh graves, for the dead do not envy each other; rather, each dead person along their long journey gladly allows the other to light their candle if needed until they all arrive together at their (sought-after) resting place and, according to their belief, to eternal life. Then, for the nourishment of the soul of the deceased, a splendid feast is held at the burial, even if it costs the sacrifice of the last remaining cow, and food is given as alms to the poor, all dedicated to the well-being of the deceased's sustenance. Four weeks afterward and then again a year, these commemorations are repeated again, and by then it must be that the deceased has finally arrived in Heaven, no matter how long their journey may have been" (*Ibidem*, p. 363).

> religion, which, in my opinion, is not without foundation, if we take into account that the Wallachians use the Cyrillic alphabet and above all, that the church words are not taken from their language, nor from Greek, but from Illyrian, and are used in almost all churches at divine services and liturgies. In some churches, services are also held in the Wallachian language, and to my surprise, in the presence of some boyars, I was answered that this innovation was introduced recently, because the young priests know no other language than Wallachian, and they claim that the assistants they understand the services in the country's language better than in Slavonic or Greek, which are completely foreign to them"[31].

Antonio Maria del Chiaro manages to capture the differences between Christianity in the West and that practiced by Romanians of the Orthodox rite. He tries to specify the moment when the Romanians converted to Christianity, and by appealing to the help of linguistics he concludes that the Romanians converted before the neighboring peoples. Anton Maria del Chiaro is more concerned with describing the feeling and religious practices of the Romanians of his time, whom he personally knew.

> "In general, the Wallachians" – writes Anton Maria del Chiaro – "are not very pious. On the other hand [the Romanians] are very careful to always make crosses when they pass in front of any church or icon, and they keep their fasts with such extremeness that they don't even want to hear about exemptions from their holy canons for cases of illness or any other need. Hence their belief that they can attack us Catholics, imputing ease in not observing the fasts, and considering themselves good Christians. Four fasts a year are observed by Wallachians. The great fast called Păresime, which is held for 40 days, and the fast of St. Peter, which begins after Holy Trinity Sunday and has no fixed calendar days"[32].

The account of Anton Maria del Chiaro has a large dose of veracity, because he resided in Muntenia for many years and managed to get to know the realities of the country, as well as the behavior of the Romanians. The royal secretary notes the existence of a form of popular faith manifested by the frequent crosses made by the Romanian peasants, the invocation of the name of the Supreme Divinity, but also by the long fasts that the Romanians kept with great devotion, sometimes defying illnesses and other trials. Most likely, the attitude of the Romanians, who are described as the true practitioners of the Christian faith, has historical roots and originates in the theological, political and military disputes between the West and the East, Western and Eastern Christianity. The disputes between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholics were acute even at that time.

If the Romanians displayed a certain attitude of superiority towards the foreigners, this can be explained by the difficulty of keeping the fasting over the year. It took a lot of faith and strength on the part of Orthodox believers to observe the fasts over the year. And the efforts made by the Romanian believers offered them an argument in relation to the other denominations, considering Orthodoxy being the true one in Christianity. Since ordinary Romanians did not

[31] Anton Maria del Chiaro, *Revoluțiile Valahiei* [The Revolutions of Wallachia], According to the text reedited by Nicolae Iorga, in Romanian by S. Cris- Cristian, with *Introduction* by Nicolae Iorga, Iași, 1929, p. 24.

[32] *Călători străini despre Țările Române* [Foreign Travelers about the Romanian Countries], VIII, p. 375; *Revoluțiile Valahiei* [The Revolutions of Wallachia], p. 25.

excel in the field of science and erudition, in writing of important theological works, their identity remained in the fasts they kept with great efforts. In his description, Antonio Maria del Chiaro also refers to the over the year fasts held by Romanians, namely: the Christmas fast and the Easter fast, the longest and most difficult to keep, supplemented by other shorter fasts[33]. The Orthodox believer could consume fish on Wednesdays and Fridays in order to better cope with agricultural work and harsh winters, as a fatty diet was important for survival.

Unlike many other travelers, Antonio Maria del Chiaro was particularly interested in describing the ceremonial events at the royal court, being fascinated by the solemnity of religious services in Wallachia at the time. He writes the following in this regard: "Certain religious solemnities are celebrated with such pomp and splendor in Wallachia that, apart from Muscovites, no Eastern Christian country equals it"[34]. But we also find information about the customs and traditions present among Romanians, those related especially to the great religious holidays, when religious services are combined with the entertainments of the inhabitants of the capital[35] and which are put and judged in a historical context[36]. A special attention is given to baptisms, weddings and funerals among the political elite, attended by the lord, the great boyars, as well as the ecclesiastical figures of the country. In this context, Antonio Maria del Chiaro describes the funeral service of Mrs. Pulheria, the second wife of Phanariot Nicolae Mavrocordat. The royal secretary describes the

[33] "The Holy and Great Lent, also known as the Forty Days Fast, the Pre-Lenten Fast, or the Paschal Fast, is established for the purification of the soul through fasting, prayer, almsgiving, confession, and communion with the Holy Mysteries. It symbolizes the forty-day fast of the Savior. It lasts for seven weeks and is connected to Easter, a feast with a movable date. During this fast, Romanians do not eat: meat, eggs, or cheese. They also abstain from fish, wine, and oil. They only eat foods without grease (oil), vegetables, and fruits. Another fast noted by travelers is the Fast of the Holy Apostles or St. Peter's Fast, which was established by the Church in honor of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, as well as the other apostles. This fast is an opportunity for the elevation of the soul. It is associated with Easter and Pentecost, both feasts with movable dates. Therefore, it does not begin on a fixed date but varies in duration. However, it always ends on All Saints' Sunday evening and lasts until June 29, the day of the Holy Apostles; if this day falls on a Wednesday or Friday, we do not eat sweet foods. During this fast, we do not eat meat, eggs, or cheese. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, we do not consume oil or drink wine. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, we are allowed oil and wine. The Fast of the Assumption of Mary, also known as August Fast, is observed in honor of the Mother of God, who spent her time before her Dormition in constant prayer and fasting. It lasts for two weeks: from August 1 to August 15. The Nativity Fast or Christmas Fast again provides us with an opportunity for bodily and spiritual purification. It symbolizes the forty-day fast of the Prophet Moses as well as the fasts of the patriarchs from the Old Testament. Just as they awaited the coming of the Messiah with fasting and prayer, so Christians should await and greet through fasting "the Word of God" born from the Virgin Mary. This fast lasts 40 days: from November 15 to December 25" (*Ibidem*, p. 25).

[34] *Ibidem*, p. 26.

[35] "Easter is celebrated with great festivities and many entertainments, such as the swing, which is set up not only in every village but also in the square near the princely palace, where other outdoor amusements are installed, charging two coins [gologani] per person for a spot. This money is then shared among the paici, servants tasked with supporting the Prince by the arm when he climbs the stairs, or any Turkish dignitary when he comes for an audience. The paici number twelve or more, depending on the will of the Ruler, and are chosen from tall and well-built men. During Holy Week, the paici traverse the city with small silver or fine porcelain vessels containing fragrant water, with which they sprinkle passersby on their faces and hands, saying: *Christos anesti* [*Christ has risen*]. It is worth noting this custom preserved among all Orthodox nations that from Easter until the Ascension of the Lord, they greet each other only with: *Christos anesti* to which the response is: *alitos onestii* meaning *Christ has risen: Truly He has risen*" (*Ibidem*).

[36] "It should not seem superfluous to the reader that I will describe the childhood games of the Wallachians, for they will see in them yet another proof that they are the descendants of the ancient colonists left by Trajan after the conquest of Dacia, who have passed down to generations, up to this day, the same games: ball, spinning top, nuts, buzzing, a game with horses, swings, blind man's buff, and others, all practiced in their season" (*Ibidem*, p. 16).

entire ceremonial of the funeral[37]. But perhaps more interesting are the traveler's descriptions of ancient, pre-Christian practices that persist into modern times, such as the dance of so-called Călușarii, the Drăgaica, and Christmas Eve ceremonies[38]. Unfortunately, the author does not understand the significance of these pre-Christian rituals with apotropaic and healing meanings. Also interesting are the ceremonies and practices around Christmas, when the birth of the Lord is announced through carols and ritual dances performed by masked characters.

The Venetian Francesco Griselini, cartographer and naturalist, stayed in Banat in 1774-1776, becoming the author of the *History of Banat*[39]. The first months of Griselini's stay in Banat were

[37] "The body of the Princess, beautifully dressed, was laid out on a table covered with carpets in one of the audience halls, surrounded by large lit candles. On her chest was an icon of the Holy Virgin holding the child in her arms. The hall was filled with the wives of the great boyars, who had come to form the procession for their deceased Lady and maintained a majestic attitude of deep silence. On Saturday morning, the burial took place with great pomp in the metropolitan church of Bucharest, in the following order: At 12 o'clock, all the guard of seimeni waiting in the palace courtyard in two lines began to walk, two by two, unarmed, each holding a lit candle. Following the guard was a group of Cossacks in the same formation, then came the guilds of craftsmen and afterward, the staff of merchants. The priests from all the churches in Bucharest followed in their vestments, as did the abbots of monasteries, with their banners unfurled. The body of the deceased, which had been placed in a coffin lined with red satin, was lifted and carried by six of the highest dignitaries of the country: namely, the Grand Ban, Grand Vornic, Grand Logofăt, Grand Spătar, Grand Vistier, and Grand Clucer, who were replaced from time to time by other boyars taking their place. Upon descending from the stairs, the Ruler appeared from a room where he had been conversing with the Patriarch of Alexandria and having him on his right side, took his place behind the coffin and followed it on foot, dressed in a red uniform like his son from his first wife. An old chamberlain followed him with her face covered by a long black veil, then came the wives of the boyars, followed by 14 or 15 disheveled maidens who were mourning for their mistress. At last came the carriages of the deceased, drawn by six white horses. To the sound of bells, the procession reached the Metropolitan Church, where the religious service began, concluding with a funeral prayer offered by the Metropolitan of Wallachia. Finally, the Ruler followed by his son approached to bid farewell to his former companion, which stirred weeping and wailing among all those present that deafened their ears. In the end, the coffin was lifted by the first six high dignitaries and brought next to the tomb; it was covered with a lid that during the procession had been carried on shoulders by an officer and then placed in the tomb. The Patriarch took earth with a shovel from four sides in the shape of a cross and threw it over the coffin while intoning Psalm 23. The Prince knelt down, like his son, and threw a handful of soil as well; then others followed suit until the tomb was filled. After completing the services, priests received each a valuable handkerchief, while those more prominent also had money wrapped within it; then the Ruler mounted and followed by boyars returned to Court where rich alms were prepared for the poor for the soul of the deceased" (*Ibidem*, p. 22).

[38] "From Easter until the Ascension of the Lord, every Thursday, boys dressed from head to toe in sedge or other herbs, which they uproot with the soil clinging to the roots, play and sing in front of the doors of the residents and do not leave until the housewife sprinkles them with water from a bucket. Their cheerful and playful song is called in Romanian: *Paparudele*. During the week of Pentecost, groups of gypsies wander through the fair masked and with tin plates attached to their heels that produce a strange sound during their dance, jumping until they collapse from exhaustion and foam at the mouth. These dancers are referred to by Romanians as *călușari*. Another interesting performance occurs on St. John the Baptist's day when girls dressed as men, one of them holding a sword, go from house to house where they dance and reenact the story of Herodias with the executioner who beheads St. John the Baptist, which should more appropriately be celebrated on August 29. The girl dancing with a sword in hand is called *Drăgaica* by Romanians. In December, there is another performance featuring repulsive masks, tolerated even in boyars' houses. The action is represented by two characters, one with a stork's beak that keeps the rhythm of the music like a pair of castanets, occasionally jumping on the back of the other, who wears a large false beard. The first is called *cloanța*, while the second, the one with the beard, is known as *unchiașul*" (*Ibidem*).

[39] Griselini Francesco, *Lettere odeporiche ove i suoi viaggi e le di lui osservazioni spettanti all'istoria naturale, ai costumi di vari popoli e sopra più altri interessanti oggeti si descrivono, giuntevi parecchie memorie dello stesso autore, che riguardano le scienze e le arti utili*, Tomo I, Edizione e introduzione a cura di Angela Lasorsa, Edizioni CISVA 2008, p. III; Paul Cernovodeanu, *Societatea feudală românească văzută de călători străini (sec. XV-XVIII)* [The Romanian Feudal Society as Seen by Foreign Travelers (15th-18th Century)], Bucharest, 1973, p. 58.

devoted to excursions and study trips. He was concerned with several aspects in the description of the Romanians. The Venetian traveler, trained in the atmosphere of the Enlightenment, was eager to contribute to the development of Banat and the prosperity of its inhabitants through the solutions proposed to Count von Brigido. Consequently, he made numerous trips to the province, managing to get in touch with most of the inhabitants and describe their customs, traditions, and manifestation of religious beliefs. Francesco Griselini considered that an important aspect of his approach was the description of religious practices among Romanians in the conditions in which the church and faith were perceived by the Enlightenment as hostile to progress.

The author quickly familiarized himself with the realities of Banat; he understood that the Romanians were Christians, mostly Orthodox, and only a small part Greek-Catholic. He laments this because he considered the Roman Catholic Church, which he had also served, to be much better organized and willing to eliminate the superstitions or heresies present in the Orthodox Church[40]. According to Francesco Griselini, Romanians make spiritual mistake because they are not literate, and their priests, who could guide them, are not much more enlightened. The knowledge of the Orthodox priests is limited to reading and singing and they do not really bother to rid the people of some customs that are contrary to the divine commandments and the spirit of the true religion[41]. Among the errors evoked by Francesco Griselini would be those by which Romanians consider that they have done their entire duty to God if they keep the four fasts during the year, if they confess and take communion[42]. The idea of a certain form of practicing the Christian faith among the Orthodox Romanians, through the strict observance of the fasts, is found in most of the travelers who tell us about the religious feeling of the Romanians in the Principalities. Therefore, it is not surprising that Francesco Griselini also feels the need to describe in detail what fasting means and how Romanians keep it during the year, even if he does not fully understand its meaning for Orthodox Christians:

> "Romanians fast on Wednesday and Friday; on Saturdays and on all other days of the week they also eat meat, if these do not fall during fasting. Not only are they content only with bread, greens, and vegetables, but some go so far with self-restraint that they separate themselves from their wives during the fast, and even do not even let their blood flow, no matter how severe the disease that afflicts them may be. would threaten"[43].

The idea of strictly observed food fasts also reappears at Francesco Griselini, Romanians consuming only vegetables and fruits, refusing even minimal medical treatments that would have required the consumption of meat and milk. Some also understood by fasting a sexual abstinence. The author also describes the pleasure of the Romanians to dance during the holidays and in the sacred space of the church, like other authors linking the dance to ancestral religious ceremonies and sensing its thaumaturgic power.

> "The greatest pleasure of this people is dancing. This people adopted the dance from the earliest times of Christianity, and it is closely connected with its religious traditions. They even dance on the biggest holidays (such as: the Annunciation, the Nativity and

[40] *Călători străini despre Țările Române* [Foreign Travelers about the Romanian Countries], vol. X, 1st part, volume edited by Maria Holban, Maria M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, Paul Cernovodeanu, Bucharest, 2000, p. 390.
[41] *Ibidem*, p. 390-391.
[42] *Ibidem*, p. 391.
[43] *Ibidem*, p. 391.

> Resurrection of the Lord, the Ascension of the Lord and, on the Day of the Dead, which for them falls the day after Easter), when they play on holy ground, i.e. in the churchyard, where before, everyone brings the dishes from home that they eat together, all of them. These games, which are danced by both men and women, to the whistle and bagpipes, consist of certain circles, in which they spin sometimes faster, sometimes slower, making different movements with their heads and bodies; during the game, the lads throw gale glances at their fiancées or girlfriends"[44].

The dance practiced by Romanians on the days of the great holiday is a form of release after a long period of deprivation, but also a mean of socialization within rural communities, where disputes over girls are resolved or arise, or loves are formed that lead to marriages. The dance is often associated with great holidays, and takes place in churchyards, perpetuating the idea that it is played on holy ground.

Ignaz von Born (1742-1791), a well-known Austrian mineralogist, was born on December 26, 1742, in Alba Iulia, where his father was a mine engineer. At the age of eight he left Transylvania. He studied philosophy in Vienna and entered the Jesuit order, which he soon left. After that he moved to Prague, where he studied law. From here, he went on a long journey through Germany, France, Netherlands; he later returned again to Prague, where he abandoned law and turned to the study of natural sciences, mineralogy and mining. Very soon, he came to be known in the scientific world, being appointed a member of the academies or societies of science in Stockholm, Siena, Padua, London. However, he did not limit himself only to specialized studies[45]. Ignaz von Born had a serious general culture, he knew several languages, and in addition to scientific activity, he dabbled in literature and even history.

At the beginning of his scientific career, in 1770, he went on a study trip to Banat and Transylvania. He first explored the mines of Upper Hungary, then headed for the Banat. He passed through Pest and Szeged, and at the beginning of June he arrived in Timișoara, where he stopped for ten days, after which he visited the rest of the Banat, studying, among other things, the mines of Sasca and the smelters of Bocșa with great interest. In the first half of July, he left Banat and explored the mines of Săcărâmb, Zlatna, Baia Mare, Baia Sprie[46]. In this trip, Ignaz von Born met the Romanians from Banat during the first part of his scientific expedition. The mineralogist preferred to record his impressions in the form of letters sent to I. Ferber, a famous mineralogist at the time. According to Ignaz von Born, there are some interesting habits:

> "As to religion, I do not really know what to tell you, yet they confess that they belong to those whom we call *graeci Ritus non Unitorum*. But in fact, they have no more religion than their cattle; besides their repeated fasts which extend for nearly half a year, and which are so strict that they dare not eat any meat, eggs, or milk, they have scarcely any idea of other religious duties. But this fast they observe with such sanctity, that nothing can make them lighten or break it, even if they disregard all other divine or human laws. A robber will not allow himself to rebel against this abstinence, nor will he disgrace his wife or another for fear that God will no longer bless his exploits. The rites or ceremonies of these people have more to do with paganism than with the religion they profess"[47].

[44] *Ibidem*, p. 395.
[45] *Ibidem*, p. 90.
[46] *Ibidem*.
[47] *Ibidem*, p. 96.

And in Ignaz von Born letters, the difference between religious practices, associated by the traveler with fasting and certain superstitions present among Romanians, is indicated. We observe from a good part of the travelers that the fasts, the worship of icons and the frequent crosses made by people represented the maximum form of faith that the Romanians were capable of in that era. For the Austrian traveler, the true faith presupposes the existence of an organized church, with an educated clergy and parishioners, with the elimination of pagan practices and traditions unrelated to Christianity. If in other travelers we have also identified the cause of the difficult religious situation in which the Romanians found themselves, namely the lack of education and the lower social status, in the case of the Austrian traveler the effects, but not the causes of this situation are evoked. Consequently, Ignaz von Born associates Romanians with animals in terms of religious sentiment, and rites and ceremonies bring more with pagan practices. Among the practices of pagan origin, Ignaz von Born lists the burial practices of the Romanians, at the head of which a large stone is placed next to crosses to protect the body from turning into moroi; and the grave is frankincensed so that witches and evil spirits have no power and come near the grave[48].

Another aspect identified by the foreign traveler in the Romanians of Banat and Transylvania was that of avoiding entering the Roman Catholic churches, and if this happened the Orthodox Romanians returned home and washed, purifying themselves from contact with the church. Of course, the practices were identical on the part of the Roman Catholic parishioners in relation to the Orthodox churches. Most of them did not enter the Orthodox churches and despised the Orthodox denomination and its rite. But perhaps more interesting was the reaction of the Romanians to the manner in which the holy water was sprinkled in the Catholic Church with a brush made of pig hair. Romanians considered using pig's hair for this to be sacrilege, it was considered unclean, and when they got home they would wash and clean their clothes[49]. Of course, the significant differences between the Christian denominations in Transylvania were numerous, but at the level of the rural communities they manifested themselves in forms close to primary Christianity, at the level of the mentality present at people without education, but who lived their faith in simple forms inherited from their ancestors. In this regard, Ignaz von Born perceives very well the Romanians' philosophy of life and religious beliefs and offers pertinent explanations for the practices and customs practiced by them associated with phenomena that they did not understand.

> "Regarding their religious canons", wrote Ignaz von Born, "they are very different from ours. Theft and adultery are counted as nothing to them; instead, raping or cheating a girl is a much greater sin, and murder cannot be forgiven by their priest. God alone (they say) can forgive him. However, robberies and murders are very common among them. The cause of these contradictions may be found, I think, in the imperfect idea they have of divinity and soul, for how could they have clear ideas of the duties of man and society? All phenomena or effects of causes that they cannot understand, they regard as supernatural

[48] "And his relatives let out terrifying cries. They remind the deceased of his friends and parents, of children and livestock, of home and those in the home, and they ask him why he has left them. As they receive no answer, they fill the grave and place a cross and a large stone at the head, so that he does not turn into a moroi (vampire). They pour wine on the grave and burn frankincense all around to drive away evil spirits and witches, and then they return home" (*Ibidem,* p. 97).

[49] "They avoid entering our churches; and if sometimes some of them are forced to enter a church, they wash themselves as soon as they return home to purify themselves. The act of being blessed in our churches or participating in any service where holy water is used fills them with horror because the blessing is done with a brush made from pig hair, and they believe that this 'defiles' them to the highest degree: the clothing that has been sprinkled (with holy water) is never worn again without being washed. Their priests or ministers sprinkle them with a sprig or a small bouquet of hyssop" (*Ibidem*).

> facts; a solar eclipse is a battle between the werewolves and the sun, so as soon as they see this phenomenon, they always make noise and shoot to drive away these werewolves who, if they defeated and ate the sun, would throw the world into eternal darkness"[50].

For foreigners, the Orthodox Romanians from Transylvania, as observed since the Middle Ages, were considered schismatics, i.e. something between Christians and non-Christians, due to the differences in the rite and the way of manifesting popular piety. The fact that the Romanians were of the Orthodox rite did not mean that they were less faithful than the followers of the Roman Catholic one. The negative image about the way Romanians practiced their faith was transmitted in the collective mind of the Western world throughout the centuries. This is how some of the foreign travelers, especially the church leaders, but also some intellectual followers of the Enlightenment, criticize the religious practices seen in Romanians. The former, because they were of a different denomination than the Romanians, and the Illuminists because they considered the priests uneducated and greedy, thus being negative models for their community of believers. Certainly, beyond the many true things reported by foreign travelers regarding the lack of instruction of priests and parishioners, of superstitions mixed with religious practices, we notice piety and religious feeling in simple forms, but manifested in an intense spiritual experience. In another register, most travelers did not notice the inferior social, political and religious status of Romanians in Transylvania, which could explain many of the religious heresies among Romanians.

Abbot Francois-Xavier de Feller, another traveler interested in Romanian beliefs and customs, follows the road from Szolnok to Coșevița, Debrecen and Oradea, enters Transylvania, reaches Cluj and, finally, Bistrița[51]. On his route, the Jesuit monk had the opportunity to meet Romanians, towards whom he has reservations due to the advice received from the authorities[52]. In his journey from Oradea to Cluj, he was accompanied by Romanians, and following the experiences he went through with them, some of his negative impressions will change. Romanians often appear in the notes of our traveler in different poses, including those related to their origin and the language they speak. Thus, upon entering Maramureș, the abbot makes the following entry in his travel diary:

> "I saw several times at Szolnok groups of Ruthenians and Romanians living in Maramureș. These people are of the Orthodox religion, but united with the Romanian church [...] The other Romanians, who live in Banat and Transylvania, are mostly schismatic and much crueller (!) than those from Maramureș. [...] The Ruthenians speak the Muscovite language, which is a Slavic language. Romanians have their own language, which is very similar to Italian. They say they are a Roman colony, which is very possible"[53].

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[50] *Ibidem*, p. 97-98.

[51] *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 10 (11th ed.), Cambridge University Press, p. 242-243; *Călători străini despre Țările Române* [Foreign Travelers about the Romanian Countries], vol. IX, volume edited by Maria Holban (responsible editor), Maria M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, Paul Cernovodeanu, Publishing House of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, 1997, p. 556.

[52] "The priest wanted to test my magnifying glass and examine my medal; I immediately told him, through the interpreter, that it was made of brass, fearing that he might kill me in the forests I had to traverse if he knew it was gold; for I had been warned about this. However, I later acknowledged that this fear was futile and vain, just like others that some had tried to influence me with" (*Ibidem*, p. 560); *Itinéraire, ou voyages M. l'abbé de Feller en diverses parties de l'Europe*, Liège and Paris, 1820, vol. I, 266 p.

[53] *Călători străini despre Țările Române* [Foreign Travelers about the Romanian Countries], vol. IX, p. 558.

The abbot is well-informed about the origin and religious orientation of the Romanians. Therefore, he knows that the Romanians in Maramureș have become united religiously with the Catholic Church, something that has made them more open to new things. They are presented in antithesis with the Romanians from Banat, whom the author writes are cruel. Most likely, the negative image that the traveler has about the Romanians from Banat originates from the religious movements led by Visarion Sarai and Sofronie from Cioara and the connections with the Serbian hierarchy from Karlowitz. It is known that especially after the last movement against the union with the Church of Rome from 1759-1761, most Romanians returned to Orthodoxy. However, the abbot's trip took place three years after the religious conscription carried out by the imperial authorities in Transylvania, but the events produced were still vivid in the minds of the authorities. Our traveler manages to see the differences between Romanians and Ruthenians, even if both populations had been Orthodox, and later came under the authority of the Church of Rome.

Francois-Xavier de Feller was educated in the spirit of the age, but he had already formed an opinion on the majority population in the Western parts and in Transylvania. As a result, when he approached the County of Bihor, he had a heart attack and was tormented by the darkest thoughts about how he would travel in the regions dominated by the Romanians. From Oradea to Cluj, the traveler chose the cheapest option, namely to travel with the help of the Romanians, a people on who he had made a negative view even before he met them. Let's see further how our author describes his passage to Cluj, which wound on one side and on the other side of Crișul Repede river.

> "On April 17, I arrived at Borod at dinner time; but not a thought of dinner. The priest and his schismatic Romanians were holding a meeting at the pub. This priest was dressed like any peasant; he was drinking with the priestess [our note – his wife] and soon he was as drunk as his parishioners. He immediately came to greet me, showed me his church which was terrible (!) and told me a lot of things that I didn't understand. These people marveled greatly at the rosaries <which I wore> and at my magnifying glass. The priest wanted to test my magnifying glass and examine my medal; I immediately told him, through the interpreter, that it was made of brass, fearing that he might kill me in the forests I had to traverse if he knew it was gold; for I had been warned about this. However, I later acknowledged that this fear was futile and vain, just like others that some had tried to influence me with. I must add that Mr. Tokodi, the inspector of estates, had given me his horses and an outlaw with the imperial crown, which made the Romanians respect me very much. These people are not so bad by the way; they respect the priests and the large cross which I always wear around my neck, according to the custom of the Jesuit fathers of this province, when they travel. The state of poverty and unenlightenment of this people is unbelievable. At noon, when I got to the place where the names of those entering Transylvania are registered, I wanted to drink some milk, but a Romanian woman didn't want to give it to me because it was Monday, this Monday was really very bad for me. My men told her that I had not eaten for two days. The woman relented and gave me milk and eggs and did not want to accept any money"[54].

The contact with the Romanians and the Orthodox priest was made at the tavern in Borod. The traveler notes that there was no difference between the priest and his parishioners. The priest

[54] *Ibidem*, p. 560-561.

seemed to be curious, he showed him the church and spoke to him in a language unknown to him, Romanian. Perhaps the abbot, when he described the church as awful, meant that it was a wooden church, full of icons, with a mural blackened over time by candle smoke. The traveler criticizes the level of instruction of the priest, the fact that he drinks with the parishioners at the tavern, but he equally notes the Romanians' respect for the imperial insignia, and although they seem fierce, they are rather peaceful and obedient. Even when they should respect the strict rules of fasting, they still make exceptions with foreigners, as in the case of the abbot who, arriving at the border between Hungary and Transylvania without eating for two days, wanted to buy milk and eggs. As it was a fast day, the Romanian woman did not want to sell them. It took the plea of his Romanian companions to convince the woman to give food to the traveler.

Johann Lehmann (Christopher Seipp), theater director, transited Transylvania many times, and left us a moving account of what he felt upon entering the Pricipality. Rarely do travelers describe the moods and emotions that come over them when they see certain things that particularly impress them. Johann Lehmann was an educated and sensitive man, with an empathetic character towards the sufferings endured by Romanians.

> "From Coșevița, we head uphill. At the top, there is a cross that marks the border with Transylvania [coming from Banat, our note]. Your heart warms even in the depths of winter when you look at the land around this cross. I have been to Tyrol, the Harz, and Switzerland; I have always had my eyes wide open and my heart open. I have never felt what I felt next to this cross. Nature here is majestic, wonderful, powerful, varied, and of enchanting beauty; there I saw it as a terrifying beauty. There my eyes gazed at the cross, wandering tearfully all around. I do not trust my feelings from the first word. Every time I made the journey, I stood in the same place, and each time, I felt indescribably good. On the right and left, you can see small beautiful villages, wandering herds, cultivated fields, lovely meadows with lush grass, forests, orchards of fruit trees, and isolated peasant households. Even in winter, I could linger here for as long as I wanted"[55].

Johann Lehmann is among the few travelers who experience profound feelings in certain places visited in Transylvania and Banat. More precisely, he describes his emotions at the border between Banat and Transylvania, in a special place, Coșevița, from where he has a panoramic view of the two provinces. The deep feelings are accentuated by the presence of a cross, most likely Orthodox, which was placed in special locations, at crossroads or on hilltops, to spiritually mark the place and the travelers passing through the area. The sense of well-being felt by the traveler makes him tear up and express words of praise for this "blessed land". While Johann Lehmann is enthusiastic about what he felt here, upon reaching Deva, he is unpleasantly surprised by the local realities, including the famine that was wreaking havoc among the inhabitants and the obtuseness of the religious authorities who did not grant their parishioners permission to eat anything other than fasting food[56].

[55] *Călători străini despre Țările Române* [Foreign Travelers about the Romanian Countries], vol. X_1, p. 572.

[56] "The misery of the inhabitants of Deva at that time, due to their circumstances, deeply shook me. People were not allowed to eat meat during the fasting period. In general, fasting can have its benefits. However, cases of force majeure should warrant a dispensation from the voluntarily accepted laws. Here was the most dreadful case of force majeure. The prices were high for everything. I don't eat much, but as much bread as can be bought for a coin [groșită], I gulp down in one go. Eggs were so rare that you couldn't get three for a groșită; fish is very expensive in the region and

IV. Conclusions

There are several notable elements revealed in the accounts written by foreign travelers about the Romanians. First and foremost, the records of the beliefs and customs of the Romanians are among the most interesting information conveyed by these foreign travelers. They touch on a fascinating and equally intriguing subject regarding the image of Romanians, as it emerges from the narratives of these travelers. The description and understanding of Romanian beliefs and customs are becoming increasingly interesting to foreign travelers. What are they like? What is their religious faith? How do they practice it? Are Romanians more devout than the compatriots of the travelers who come to our region?

All the traits identified in Romanians are somewhat mixed between Western and Eastern heritage: their origin, geographical position, language, and religious faith. Romanians are descendants of the Romans but also have a significant Slavic component. They are Christians, but of the Byzantine rite, with certain specificities that are not always understood by foreigners. Foreigners particularly note the expressions of religious faith among ordinary Romanians: long and strict fasting, the sign of the cross, kissing icons, and those practices in Christianity that arise from the blending of pagan elements with Christian ones, such as commemorating the dead and placing stones on the chests of the buried, etc. These practices are contrasted with expressions found in Christian churches in the West. There, Christians know their prayers well, while here, they do so less. There are heated theological debates, while here they exist only at the elite level. In other words, most travelers associate the practice of Christian faith with education and a good understanding of Christian teachings. However, for ordinary Romanians, education and instruction were almost nonexistent, leading to religious practices often misunderstood by foreigners. For Orthodox Christians, however, the veneration of icons, the sign of the cross, and fasting are important and represent the highest form of expression of Christianity among ordinary Romanians. It is true that Romanians did not know how to recite the *Our Father* in full, that they were not educated, and that they did not adhere strictly to Christian teachings; however, their intense spiritual experience and devotion to Christianity, characteristic of Orthodox Christianity, cannot be denied.

In the same way, Romanian customs are associated with major holidays and significant moments in a person's life: birth, marriage, and death. At weddings, the religious ceremony is accompanied by the dances and music of the wedding guests who escort the procession to the bride's house, and along the way, the guests led by *starosta* dance continuously. At funerals, mourners are present alongside priests and musicians at the deceased's bedside. Carolers, "călușarii", and "drăgaica" are also marginally described by travelers as exotic practices whose significance is not understood by them. We will have to wait until the end of the 19th century for specialists in ethnography, folklore, and ethnology to reveal the importance and antiquity of these practices for Christian civilization.

Another conclusion that emerges from analyzing travel accounts is that they are important documentary sources for describing the beliefs and customs of Romanians at that time, serving as valuable resources for ethnologists, folklorists, and historians of religion.

scarce. What could these poor people do? There were sick individuals in every household. They drank a lot of wine, and as is customary in Transylvania, it was from that year. People complained to me with tearful eyes about their demise that they could witness" (*Ibidem*, p. 573).