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Author: Anamaria Iuga

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Intangible Hay Heritage in Şurdeşti



Anamaria Iuga

Researcher, PhD, National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Romania
anaiuga@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article presents the intangible heritage related to haymaking and shared by a specific community, namely the village of Şurdeşti in northern Romania. First the traditional knowledge associated with haymaking is introduced, as exemplified in the practices of cutting and gathering the hay. Secondly, the local beliefs associated with dangerous holidays (when haymaking is forbidden) are outlined. The two aspects of the intangible heritage are presented in their own dynamic and in terms of their moral values, while particular attention is also paid to the role collective memory plays in perpetuating them, as well as to how the members of the community constantly experience them through their practical behaviours and daily actions.

KEYWORDS

Hay, Şurdeşti, community, traditional knowledge, intangible heritage.



Introduction

Once upon a time, we don't even know when, a Transylvanian Saxon from Daia in Mureş County, in the north of Romania, went to gather the hay on St. Elijah's Day, which is celebrated on 20th July every year. All the Romanians from his village that he met on the way, seeing him going out haymaking armed with a pitchfork and a rake, warned him to turn back and not to work that day because it was a major festival. The man didn't listen to them and went on his way. He started to turn the hay and gather it into small haystacks (called *boghiuri* in the Târnave area). The work was going nicely because the weather was fine and the hay had dried well. Suddenly, however, a strong wind started to blow, so strong that it began to scatter the haystacks. Terrified at seeing his work ruined, the Saxon ran after the wind with his pitchfork shouting "St. Elijah, St. Elijah, don't destroy these haystacks as well, because I made them yesterday!" This is one

of the stories my grandmother used to tell me in my summer holidays when, as a child, would go and visit her in the countryside, in a village near Sighişoara, and help the family get in the hay.

What this account did for me, in addition to giving me a warning (I have never worked with hay on St. Elijah's day), was to sensitise me to stories about mishaps that took place on days when haymaking is forbidden. Later, during my university studies, I read similar stories from Transylvania collected by Tudor Pamfile at the beginning of the 20th century, focusing this time on the feast day of St. Phocas, celebrated on 23rd July. The punishment for working on this holy day is even more serious: any hay made that day will catch fire:

"Once a Swabian made haystacks as St. Phocas' day was approaching and on the day itself he went to collect some of what was left. All of a sudden he sees his haystacks catching fire; cap in hand, he started running to and fro, yelling out: 'Mr. Phocas, Mr. Phocas, don't burn those ones, 'cos I made them yesterday! Only these ones have been made today!'

And as he kept running around, crossing himself, he realized in amazement that only the haystacks made on St. Phocas' day had caught fire. The ones he had made the previous day had been left untouched" (Pamfile 1997, 136).

A similar story from Muscel, again recorded by Tudor Pamfile (1997: 137), tells us that:

"The people from certain parts of Muscel county celebrate 23rd July as *Opârlia*, as it is 'burn-sick/râu de ars'. The story goes that one day, out of the blue, the hay cut by some Turks caught fire. They had been exhorted by a Romanian not to work on that day but had taken no notice."

Two important conclusions can be drawn from these three incidents. Firstly, there is a strict calendar for hay-related tasks, with a precise period when the hay harvest should begin, in addition to good days for the work and bad days when it is forbidden to work with hay. This calendar is well known to the members of rural communities and perpetuated via local tradition, checked and applied in the people's practical activities, and also via beliefs which regulate a series of interdictions. Secondly, such knowledge is crucial, as can be seen from the fact that wilful disregarding of such beliefs and the related interdictions can put any outsider in a community in a precarious position. Failure to observe the interdictions will place the outsider in a position of inferiority (Stahl 2000: 151), even if he is a long-standing member of the community, because he does not share the same values as the rest of the community.

The current article discusses this type of intangible heritage associated with haymaking, as shared by the community in the village of Șurdești (Maramureș County, northern Romania). It begins by introducing some of the locals' knowledge regarding activities and beliefs. This kind of knowledge is called "traditional agricultural practices", "indigenous ecological practices" (Sillitoe 1998), or

"traditional ecological knowledge" (Berkes *et al.* 2000) in the specialist literature, the last of these terms referring to a genuine complex of information, practices and beliefs regarding relationships between man and nature and the management of natural resources within a given territory (Berkes *et al.* 2000: 1252). In the second place, we present in more detail the local beliefs relating to harvesting hay, highlighting the fact that in this community traditional knowledge is thoroughly grounded in a complex system of beliefs and a way of life (Berkes *et al.* 2000). The two characteristics of the intangible heritage are presented in their own dynamic, with a focus on the role collective memory plays in perpetuating them, as well as on how the members of the community constantly experience them via practical behaviours and everyday actions. Another aspect highlighted in the article is that of the moral valences of this heritage (see Csordas 2013), a morality reflected both in specific practices and in local beliefs. Last but not least, I wish to use these two aspects, practices and local beliefs, to argue for the importance of this type of heritage in the preserving and keeping alive of the incredibly rich cultural landscape and biodiversity that we find in Maramureș, as has been pointed out by experts in the field who have taken an interest in the area (see Munteanu *et al.* 2008; Wästfelt *et al.* 2012; Dahlström *et al.* 2013; Griffiths *et al.* 2013).



Rural communities

First and foremost, community is a quintessential element in the perpetuation of a particular body of knowledge and specific set of beliefs which regulate the day-to-day activities of people who live within a given territory. In fact, according to their ethnological definition, communities are primarily formed of small human groups, "social units" (Bonté and Izard 2007: 164) which share cultural values and social norms (Agrawal and Gibson 1999) and,



at the same time, live their lives in a well-delimited territory which provides them with most of the products they need (Bonté and Izard 2007: 164). However, for a more nuanced definition, it is important to mention the relatively closed nature of a rural community, where the social group is divided into families and takes into account kinship relations between individuals¹, which generates rules regarding the dividing-up of the territory depending on the members' claims (Stahl 2000, 148).

Social and cultural values, which translate to norms, rituals, knowledge and belief systems are perpetuated and passed on from one generation to the next within the community by the operation of tradition, but these values are also adapted to the group's newer needs, since tradition itself is a dynamic process which blends continuity with change (Handler and Linnekin 1984; Glassie 1995). In rural communities, an important role in perpetuating traditions is played by collective memory, which facilitates cultural transfer. In fact, these communities are "memory-collectivities" *par excellence* (Nora 1997: 23) in which memory manifests itself under all its aspects, because it is "by its very nature, multiple and non-multiplied, collective, plural and individualised" (Nora 1997: 25). Furthermore, as Maurice Halbwachs emphasized, there is a close relationship between collective and individual memory, due especially to the fact that "while the strength and duration of the collective memory reside in the human support, it is the individuals who perform the act of remembering, in their role as group members" (Halbwachs 2007: 92). Thus, the collective memory becomes internalized and blends into the core of each community member: "each individual memory is a viewpoint on the collective memory" (Halbwachs 2007: 92). Extrapolating from this and following Ioan Petru Culianu's model (1996), it then goes without saying that personal experience blend into collective experience. In fact, "all previous

experiences appear to be convergent and to have a profound influence on what we regard as a new, fresh experience" (Culianu 1996: 40), all the more so since "each individual thinks within a specific tradition and, consequently, is 'thought' by it" (Culianu 1996: 43). This observation applies, in Culianu's writings, to religious experiences, but it can have multiple other applications, the current study included.

However, in order to characterize rural communities, referencing the mechanisms of transfer of tradition which are memory-based will not suffice; such mechanisms also have to be characterized on the basis of the management and usage of available natural resources. First, we should make it clear that all communities function by means of the appropriate management of existing resources within a determined territory. The exploitation of these resources has direct effects on the landscape which people model and thereby transform (Emanuelsson 2009); at the same time, as James C. Scott argues (1976), there are also socio-economic implications. The anthropologist analyses rural societies from the perspective of their attempts to avoid economic collapse and defines them as societies governed by the ethics of subsistence and by the moral system inherent therein (Scott 1976: 2). Moral reflexes are to be found in specific economic practices, as well as in cultural and religious ones (Scott 1976: VII; 31). Within this type of social organization, the social and economic micro-units are represented by the households, which function as both consumers and producers (Scott 1976: 13). However, the uniqueness of these communities resides in the fact that the way its members provide for their daily needs is based on the principle of risks avoidance, a rational behaviour which guarantees the family's economic safety, i.e. that first principle of safety which provides a security zone within the subsistence routine in relation to potential risks (Scott 1976). As will become evident, many of the actions undertaken by the members

1) See Golopenția (2001: 36) – the members of traditional communities know one another and are in verbal and ritualistic contact.

of the rural community I have studied in connection with hay production display the characteristics described by James C. Scott.



The location and context of the research

The current study presents the role of the intangible heritage of haymaking in the community of Şurdeşti village, located in an upland area of Maramureş County (Fig. 1). This is a community with a preponderantly semi-subsistence economy, as the households also have other sources of income in addition to the produce of the land they own. At least one member of each family has a steady job – a practice that

countries, the effect being to change the community dynamic in relation to social and cultural values². I carried out field research in this community³ in several different years, analysing the local cultural heritage⁴ (2005, 2006) and especially the traditional knowledge regarding agricultural practices (2010, 2013).

The village of Şurdeşti (total area 3316 ha, of which 312 ha residential zoned land area), part of the local administrative area of Şișești (total area of 9002 ha) in the region of Chioar in Maramureş county, is situated at the foot of Mount Igniș. The traditional occupation, determined by the geographical location, is animal husbandry, so a large proportion of the village land consists of hay meadows and pasture. The parcels of arable land are few and not very productive; in recent years, since 2000, some of them have been turned into hay meadows or fields where fodder (generally clover or alfalfa) is cultivated. The number of parcels used as hay meadows or pasture has increased because of this reallocation and reuse of land, as an effect of new farming strategies applied by the locals, to prevent its being abandoned. People are now much more connected to the market economy, leading to the acquisition of products which are no longer cultivated in the area (for example, wheat). Despite this, the number of animals in the local administrative area is falling⁵, which has led to the abandonment of hay meadows, especially those lying further away from the village centre (type 4, semi-natural hay meadows – see Dahlström *et al.* 2013: 199), places with a rich variety of plants, but which according to the villagers are less productive. Some of these grasslands have been used (with the owners' agreement), as pasture for the flocks of sheep that spend the summer near the village, or for those that go up to the mountains during the summer but come closer to the village during the autumn and can now graze on these otherwise abandoned areas. Even the EU subsidies which the locals have access to have been influencing the re-usage and

2) For instance, as a first result, there are more and more modern, two-storey houses being built.

3) The field research was grounded in methodology specific to the socio-humanistic sciences and I made particular use of the technique of the semi-structured interview regarding cultural heritage, but also an inventory of issues decided together with Anna Westin and Tommy Lennartsson of the Biodiversity Centre of Uppsala University (Sweden), within a common project studying traditional agricultural practices in upland areas.

4) Research carried out within the Socio-Cultural Foundation for Democracy "Identity, unity, generosity, action" in Baia Mare.

5) Between 1997-2000 in the local administrative area of Şișești 2286 bovines, 3049 ovine and 243 horses were registered; between 2001-2005 2200 bovines, 3060 ovine and 363 horses; between 2007-2011 2086 bovines, 3974 ovine and 235 horses and between 2011-2015 1997 bovines, 3545 ovine and 186 horses (data provided by the authorities in Şișești local administrative area, Maramureş).



Fig. 1. Hay in winter on a field situated in the vicinity of the UNESCO monument in Şurdeşti. Photo credits: Anamaria Iuga, 2010.

became widespread during the communist period, when the mines in the nearby town of Cavnic needed to draw in human resources from the neighbouring villages. Since 2000, when the mines were closed, the phenomenon of circulatory migration has intensified (Sandu 2000), with people now starting to look for work in neighbouring



Fig. 2. Temporary hay constructions. Photo credits: Anamaria Iuga, 2011.

maintenance of abandoned hay meadows in recent years, as these belong to the category of areas eligible for agricultural-environmental funds (being as a rule large and regarded as having a rich biodiversity).

In order to provide sufficient fodder for the animals during the winter, the villagers work the land, mow the grass and build haystacks (Fig. 2), applying the knowledge passed down by their parents but also using new techniques, the result of the introduction of new technologies, which simplify the work. The inherited knowledge covers the haymaking calendar, the tools to be used (in Șurdești, mainly wooden tools made by the villagers themselves in their own homes, Fig. 3), the quantity of hay necessary for each household (depending on the number its animals) to get safely through the winter, strategies for surviving difficult times when bad weather spoils the harvest, types of hay constructions that can stand up to the winter etc. All this practical knowledge is part of the community's intangible heritage; it was passed down via cultural transfer and the activation of the collective memory, but also experienced by each villager through his own actions. In this article I will address only two aspects of this heritage: (1) knowledge of the environmental signs that tell the villagers

it is time to start mowing, together with a study of the steps involved in this activity, and (2) methods of gathering and storing the hay.

The article then goes on to describe, as another part of the community's intangible heritage, the set of local beliefs which regulate haymaking during the summer, when the weather in the mountains areas is somewhat unstable, with scorching hot days

being followed by devastating storms. We are talking about those "perilous for hay" saint's days (M.C., aged 65, 2006), on days that are "delicate", [when] "you're not allowed to make hay" (A.T., aged 60, 2006), because there are interdictions on



Fig. 3. Wooden pitchforks in the barn. Photo credits: Anamaria Iuga, 2010.

doing this work on particular dates: 20th July – St. Elijah, a red-letter saint's day, meaning any type of work is prohibited); 22nd July – St. Mary Magdalene; 23rd July – St. Phocas; 25th July – the Dormition of St. Anne – and 27th July – Pălie or Pintilei, folk names for St. Pantaleon (all these last ones are not red-letter saint's days and carry no current work interdiction). As will be seen, these beliefs passed down as local tradition appeal to community memory, which records and keeps alive the recollection of the consequences of violations of the ban; the locals tell stories of events they regard as true because they were experienced either by themselves or by people they know. Here again, in the area of local beliefs, we may observe the fusion of collective memory with experience, whether personal or that of known persons.



Traditional practices. Cutting the hay

The mowing of the grass is the first stage of haymaking and starts in June⁶, on a date that cannot be known in advance because it depends on the weather: “We don't cut the grass until its flowers are over, so that the seed falls; if you cut it before it's over, it won't come up again. That's what the old folks used to say” (R. P., 62, 2010). Knowledge of nature, the result of successive generations' observation, thus determines the rhythm of work on the land. In the case of mowing the hay, there is an important detail that can be taken as illustrating how deep-rooted traditional knowledge is in the community and how it influences actual practice. This is that cutting begins only when the “rattles” (locally called *clocotici*) (*Rhinanthus serotinus*, *Rhinanthus minor*) in the grass begin to sound. The signal given by this plant means that the grass is mature enough, and when the locals talk about this they mention that they know it from their forebears: “They're little rattles in the grass, when you walk through it they ring. That's what the old folks say, that's how

we learned it. When the bells start ringing in the grass, then it's ready.” (T. M., 64, 2010); or: “The old folks said that if you cut the grass before... they're like little flowers in the grass, that would dry up... it was like little bells that would make a sound as you walked through the grass. And they'd say ‘We must cut the hay now, because the bells are dry, the seeds of the flowers or the grass have fallen, they've fallen into the ground and sown themselves. They'll come up next year’” (R. P., 62, 2010).

Cutting the hay is done gradually; you start off in the places that have been manured, or are closer to the homestead, in type 2 of semi-natural meadows (see Dahlström *et al.* 2013: 199); as time passes, the cutting moves to places farther from the homestead (meadows of types 3 and 3A, Dahlström *et al.* 2013: 199). Areas in the mountains, semi-natural meadows at a distance from the homestead that fall into of the type 4 category (Dahlström *et al.* 2013: 199), are the last to be mown, starting either at the end of July or at the beginning of August. The entire process takes account of the weather and the signals given by the rattles⁷. Then, from August to October, it is time for a second cut of the grass in the type 2 and possibly the type 3 areas. In a good year, there can be two subsequent mowing in some places; in a drought year, however, there will be no second cut because of a lack of rain after the first cut. This was what happened in 2012. In fact, the hay cutting was postponed in 2012 because people were waiting for rain to make more grass grow. It is important to emphasise that mowing does not in fact take place on a fixed date but rather follows nature and so can begin on different dates, a feature which, as has been demonstrated in research carried out in northern Europe, more precisely in Sweden, is essential to the maintenance of seed production and therefore of the plant populations that depend directly on the time of sowing (Eriksson *et al.* 2015). The researchers concluded that we “need to abandon any prefabricated ‘standard fixed

6) In the second half of May comes the cutting of clover and alfalfa, which dries on young tree trunks called *sărcieri/clinceri*, whose branches have been cut and stripped of bark; these branches are pushed into the ground and the plants cut that same day are hung on them, after having dried a little (A. M., 56, 2010). They will dry on these *sărcieri* for 2-3 weeks, and after that the dry alfalfa is taken to the barn or made into stacks along with the hay.

7) In Swedish, these plants are called *höskaallra*, *ängskaallra* (*hö* = hay, *äng* = field, *skallra* = bell), an etymology that points to the same task, that of giving the signal for the grass to be mown (see Anna Westin, CBM researcher, Uppsala, Sweden).



Fig. 4. Mowing the grass with a mechanical mower.
Photo credits: Anamaria Iuga, 2013.

date' for management for conservation purposes of semi-natural hay-meadows" (Eriksson *et al.* 2015: 107), a piece of advice for which a case could be made in Romania too and which would lead to a greater appreciation and exploitation of traditional local practices.

With regard to how the hay cutting is done, eight out of the ten families interviewed in Șurdești in 2010 possessed motor mowers (fig. 4), which are far more time-effective for this task than the standard scythe still used for places which are inaccessible to the motor mower: around trees, in ditches, in areas with boulders, and particularly for fields on a slope. However, this innovation brings with it actual changes in current practices, as well as changes in the social practices associated with this activity. Before the introduction of motor mowers, the villagers would organize mowing "parties": normally, neighbours and families would form a group and go to mow the larger fields in a system of mutual assistance. "I would go haymaking with my friends: 'Come on, will you come with me? I'll go with you when you mow yours.' People used to help one another" (M. P., 64, 2010); "Each person mowed his own patch. Then he'd go and help the others; they would form mowing parties on Saturday afternoons. When there were less important holidays, they would

gather 10-15 young men, family members; they'd form a work party and mow everything down." (G. M., 68, 2010); "I never used to go mowing alone! Ever! [...] [With] the neighbours, the relations, four or five people, young people [...] [When we were done] we'd have a party. [...] We would lend to one another. We'd even pay money when we had no

alternative and get a man to mow" (T. M., 64, 2010). This same system of mutual aid between relations or between neighbours still operates when people are gathering the haymaking and building haystacks.

Modernising the grass mowing technique leads to the abandoning of work-lending practices and to the changes in the mowing process itself. While cutting grass with a scythe is better done in the early morning, in the dew, or in the cool of evening, the motor mower can only be used when the grass is dry. As the swathe left after the motor mower has done its work is wider, someone has to go after it to spread out the mown grass. Some interlocutors even think it is better to cut the grass with a motor mower as "The scythe shaves off [the grass] right to the ground. But the motor mower cuts it to a good length [...]. And the grass grows again faster after the mower than after the scythe" (M. T., 64, 2010); which also means that the second mowing can start sooner. However, grass cut with a scythe is cleaner. Because it is so large and hard to manoeuvre, the motor mower cannot avoid anthills, so when it cuts the grass it also scatters the soil from the anthills: "Now grass cut with a scythe isn't as dusty. The mower stops you seeing through the grass. It cuts everything, anthills included; it cuts down everything, you're mixing the earth in with the hay, when it dries the dust settles. Whatever



you do. I've seen it myself, I've worked with both" (A. M., 56, 2010). Discussion with this interlocutor, however, brought out a detail which is in fact an argument supporting the importance of traditional knowledge in this community: the fact that any hay is better if, immediately after being cut, it is rained on so that any dust from scattered anthills can settle out: "My father used to say... now and then it would rain when we were up on the hill. [...] Over there, the moment it got cloudy, you'd be rained on. You couldn't do any work. The rain would come and we'd run to the hut. It would rain on our hay. The old man would say: 'Don't worry that it's rained on the hay. All hay should be rained on a bit. The cows will eat it better. [...] If hay is rained on and then you dry it well', he'd say, 'It's just fine. It's cleaner' [...] And the old boy was right. I checked it out myself and he was right. If it had been rained on, [the cows] would eat it better" (A. M., 56, 2010).

Another change brought by the motor mower concerns the time allotted for the work: obviously, when you use a motor mower everything happened much faster. Larger areas can be mown in a shorter time, but, because of the rural economic strategy, a "moral economy" according to James C. Scott (1976: 24), the grass is in fact not cut over a large area. Instead, in the amount of hay mown in two to three hours is the same amount that could normally be mown in a day with a scythe, i.e. about 20-25 acres (I.C., 61; G. Ş., 71; G. C., 48). The principle applied is that of "safety first" (Scott 1976), with the grass being cut on an area large enough for the hay to be collected in due time. "The motor mower can do almost a hectare. You can do even more, but you don't. It has to be gathered! We don't mow it to leave it on the ground. Why? Because if it gets wet it's no good, the cow won't eat it" (I.C., 61 and M.C., 65, 2010); "You don't mow any more than you can gather. You don't take a risk by mowing and then the rain comes. I've seen people mow and mow, and then leave it on the ground until it turned black.

Animals have to eat whatever they get, or what can you do? But in our village the cows won't eat it if it's left like that to be rained on" (G. C., 48 and S. C., 43, 2010). These excerpts from the interviews show that the practices of hay production are geared not towards quantity but towards quality (Berkes *et al.* 2000), the purpose being to reduce the risk of losing the hay because of unpredictable weather conditions. We may find in Şurdeşti the same principles as described by James C. Scott (1976, 4): "The peasant household has little scope for the profit maximisation calculus of traditional neoclassical economics. Typically, the peasant cultivator seeks to avoid the failure that will ruin him rather than attempting a big, but risky, killing."

This preference for activities that will yield quality results, geared towards the prosperity of the household, but avoiding any risks, raises the question of the moral implications of haymaking. Firstly, the interviews make it clear that people who do not abide by the unwritten rules for this type of work and, for example, mow the grass very late, will be sanctioned (for example, M.C., 65, 2010 wonders how his neighbour's cows can eat hay which was mown as late as August the year before, although the best time is at the beginning of July; M.C. knows for a fact that his cows would not eat hay made from such old grass). Using the logic of the same morality associated with the need to maintain hay meadows, the fields that are not mown, especially those at a distance from the village, towards the mountain, are left to be grazed by animals. For example, A. M. (56, 2010) states with satisfaction that in his village there are no unused fields like those he has seen in neighbouring villages. Another example would be the limited area (as we have seen) mown in one day even with the motor mower; the people thus demonstrate a good understanding and appreciation of the size of their workforce.

As we can see, in addition to the need to avoid putting themselves at any economic risk, people in the community I have studied

also wish to avert any social risk that might lead to their becoming marginalized within the community, a risk resulting from the incorrect execution of field work.



Traditional practices. Collecting the hay

Concern for the hay is also reflected in collection practices and in the construction of haystacks. Everything is done according to very strict rules observed by the community members, involving knowledge that continues an old local tradition and at the same time applies practices internalised by working side by side with other family members (Fig. 5). In the first place, the locals know very well the moment when the mown grass is properly dry and can be gathered: “If you pick up a handful of it and half of it breaks off as you turn it, that’s a good sign. But if it doesn’t break off and just turns, give up the idea” (G. C., 48, 2010). In brief, the stages of hay gathering are as follows: after



Fig. 5 Transporting hay on wooden sticks. Photo credits: Anamaria Iuga, 2005.

being mown, it is spread out and turned a few times, so that it dries as well as possible; if it rains, or if it does not get dry enough in a day, it is collected into long “manes”, then made into small haystacks which are broken apart the next day, and this process is sometimes repeated over the next few days, as many times as necessary: “Our hay dries better if you put it in small haystacks. It gets hot and the humidity comes out of the hay. So you make it into haystacks for two days,



Fig. 6. Building a haystack. Photo credits: Anamaria Iuga, 2005.

you break them up, then you turn it again [...] You make haystacks again, on the third day you break them up again and turn the hay” (A. M., 56, 2010). When the hay is fully dry, it is gathered into one place by lifting the small haystacks with the help of thick but light sticks called *hoduri* and transferring them to the place where a permanent haystack will be made. This is repetitive work but the people of the village carry it out with a determination to do a good job and therefore pay attention to every detail.

The final product of this work is the haystack, built around a tall pole (approximately 5 m high) fixed firmly into the ground. The hay is arranged in layers, starting from the base. It is laid on a wooden “flooring” (*podina*), usually formed of dead branches of fruit or other trees in the surrounding area which were pruned during the spring and whose dry branches were kept especially for the haystacks (Fig. 6). As an alternative to branches, old tyres can be used. The *podina* isolates the hay and stops it touching the ground, and thus there is no risk of it going mouldy and rotting. As

the construction of the stack progresses, salt is thrown into different layers in order to better preserve the hay. The more advanced the construction, the greater the need for someone to get up on the stack to skilfully arrange the hay. The person who does this is usually either a woman or a young man because of their lighter weight. The stack is “closed up” by a skilled person, who will cover the top with a “crown” made of twisted hay (similar to a rope), or in more recent days a piece of plastic, or a pot with holes in it, anything that can insulate it. The fate of the stack depends on this crown because it prevents rainwater or melting snow from running down the pole into the stack, which would ruin the hay. Once the haystack has been “closed up”, it is attached to the ground with three or at the most four pieces of wood the thickness of one’s arm, all round, so that it stands as firm as possible. The shape of the stack is well designed and aerodynamic, unusual but extremely practical since it ensures good protection for the hay, as proved by the fact that the stacks can remain in the field for as long as four years without the hay rotting. The stacks stay in the field while the hay already stored in the barns (relatively small but important structures, the old ones being made of resistant oak) is being used up.

In fact, keeping hay from one year to the next is part of the villagers’ strategy to prevent times of crisis when, because of drought for instance, little hay is made⁸. Such a year was 2012, with infrequent rain and consequently little hay. The people interviewed in 2013 about the drought and its impact on hay production accounted for the fact that they were able to survive the winter by referring to the fact that they still had stacks of hay left from previous years⁹, so they did not have to buy in fodder from other places.

The haystacks also serve a social function as well as the practical one of providing food for animals in wintertime. Thus, criticizing the owners of a stack when negative features can be seen (the stack is

not straight, or is hanging down, or has overturned) is frequent practice. This is why, as Adina Negraru, Eliza Sima and the present author have described (Negraru *et al.* 2005), haystack aesthetics are considered to be very important. After the construction of a haystack is finished, A. M. (66, 2005), for example, observes appreciatively: “Our stack is really nice-looking, tall and slim; he (Ionel) doesn’t make it thick at the bottom because then it would hang down to the ground like a frog” (*apud* Negraru *et al.* 2005: 47). We can see the operation of the same social constraints in the case of M. C. (65, 2010), who relates that on one occasion she was supposed to gather the hay, but it turned cloudy and a storm was coming. She asked the workers in the neighbouring house to help her and they did manage to finish the stack on time, but she was unhappy with it because it hung down on one side. The dissatisfaction was because the other villagers, unaware of the circumstances, would form a negative impression of the stack’s owners, so in the end brought it home as soon as they could in the autumn.

As we have been able to see, the villagers’ practical knowledge of mowing and collecting hay is something internalised as a result of lengthy experience, and they have had opportunity over time to test it out and to choose which of the practices they have inherited from their forebears are still valid for current activities. In the case of traditional practices and knowledge related to haymaking, collective memory and direct experience intertwine, showing a good understanding not only of nature but also of the social and moral values of the communities, since some of the activities have such valences. Although the community is largely a modern one, oriented towards new cultural values (especially newly built houses) that are readily adopted by the younger people, haymaking is still such a vital and valued activity that villagers who work abroad usually come back to the village for their

8) Other strategies mentioned by the interlocutors: purchasing hay, purchasing grass from people who do not make hay, selling animals.

9) For example, if G. C. (52, 2013) usually says that he can make around 18 haystacks using the hay from all his fields, in 2012 he had only 12, including the one on the field farthest from the village, in the mountain, which is normally used for grazing. The drought forced them to make hay there too.

summer holidays and sometimes even help with the hay.



Local beliefs. Dangerous holidays

Haymaking is also regulated by specific beliefs pertaining to religious celebrations that fall on set dates during summertime. For example, while it is a well-known fact that herbal tea plants that grow in hay meadows (Rose of Sharon, yarrow, lady's bedstraw) should be picked around or after St. John's Day (24th June), usually at about 9 or 10 in the morning "after the dew has come off them" (A. M., 56, 2010), a fact equally well known in the community is that there are some days when haymaking is completely prohibited. These days are dangerous and "angry" with the hay; they are grouped together at the end of July when up in the mountains the scorching weather produces unexpected meteorological phenomena, such as frequent thunderstorms and lightning: "The feast days of the prophet Elijah, St. Phocas, St. Anne, St. Pantaleon and St. Mary Magdalene... we don't work the hay here on those days because people say they'll strike the stacks with lightning! It's true, it really has happened!" (G. M., 68, 2010).

The villagers talk about these feast days, referencing their personal experiences and also those of other community members (either known or unknown to them) whose mishaps they have heard about from their community through the process of the transmission of folklore, i.e. via *memorata*. This term, according to Bogdan Neagotă, represents "the primary narrative genre which, in different cultural contexts and subject to certain isomorph processes of fictional alteration and formalization, undergoes a series of successive transformations that turn it into legend, fairy-tale or myth" (Neagotă 2005: 100). Research by Ileana Benga (2005) and Bogdan Neagotă (2005) identifies, depending on the referencing appealed to in



Fig. 7 Petrified haystacks from Șurdești, view from above.
Photo credits: Anamaria Iuga, 2006.

the *memorata*, four types of reminiscences: in the case of self-referencing, we are talking about type I *memorata* reminiscences; type II *memorata* occur when you know the referent, when "the teller supports the veracity of the story by invoking the name of the person who experienced it" (Neagotă 2005: 96); type III *memorata* pertain to generic referents, without precise identification data; and type IV *memorata* reminiscences are ones where the referents are heroic and the narrative has a high degree of fictionalization, followed by the "the fixation of the narrative structure into a fairy-tale" (Benga 2005: 89).

In Șurdești one can find all four types of *memorata* reminiscences about religious festivals when haymaking is prohibited. Type IV *memorata* reference not only a person from an immemorial time but especially a particular place, "the petrified haystacks" (Fig. 7), thus becoming – rather

than a narrative about a fabulous event – an etymological legend. I will start with these narratives, not merely for obvious aesthetic reasons, as one of the reminiscences is rich in detail, but because it defines the community as representative and exemplary in relation to the intangible heritage associated with these festivals. In brief, the story goes like this: “The old people used to say that the stacks were haystacks at first, made of hay. And then that they had been made during a holiday. On a Sunday or some other day. Then they turned to stone. That’s what the old people used to say” (A. F., 78, 2006, collected together with G. Iuga). A much more complex version of the same event was recorded from V. P. (75, 2005, collected together with V. Avram), referencing the same place in the village, the “petrified haystacks”: “This is how it happened there: the Red Stone, it’s called the Red Stone, but I don’t know where the name comes from. Over there, under the Red Stone, at about 600 m [...] there are fields, and on those fields people were making hay at about this time of year (in June – author’s note). And they were working on a religious holiday. [...] They were working with the hay, they were making haystacks. This was around now, around St. Peter’s day. So as the man was working the hay, an old woman said to him: ‘How come you’re working today? It’s a major festival!’ ‘Don’t care how much of a festival it is. I’m going to make my hay’. He was in a hurry and afraid it was going to rain. So the woman told him: ‘Get off the stack and go to the other one, finish the other one’. He just managed to get down but he couldn’t finish the other stack because the rain came and there was thunder and lightning. [...] And that old woman said [...]: ‘God will strike you down! Why are you even working today? Today is a major festival!’ It was some saint’s day or other. ‘Who cares about the festival, I’ve made my hay’. When he went to drink water from an oak tree – he had a wooden vessel there, so he drank water from it and was just putting the vessel down – the woman said: ‘Well,

Peter, what’s happened to your stack? Go and finish it off now!’ She told him jokingly ‘Let me see you finish it now.’ Then he fell to the ground in terror and didn’t want to believe what had happened to the stack. He got up, left the water and went to touch the stack, because it had turned from a haystack into stone. And it’s still there today. One’s as big as a haystack and the other one half the size of a haystack, they stayed like that as that was how much he had managed to get done. [...] And the woman said ‘Peter, today is a religious festival and you worked this very day’. He worked and took no notice of the holiness of the day. He spoke out against God and didn’t observe the festival, and then God showed him and turned the haystack into stone. Then he harnessed the oxen to the cart and all the way home he whipped them: ‘Now you’re going to suffer’, he said, ‘you’re going to eat stones this winter, I’ll come and bring you stones, so you’ll eat stones, because the haystack turned to stone because of you.’ So... that was the end of it. [...] The stone stacks are in someone’s garden.”

As one can see, the narrative is complex, with a dialogue that maintains a mysterious atmosphere and two well-defined characters who have a dynamic relationship. The narratives were recorded in June 2005, around the feast day of St. Peter and St. Paul (29th June), a red-letter obligatory saint’s day. This spills over into the story, with the interlocutor feeling the needs to delimit the time of his story by associating it (even though only by a suggestion) with this period. The association is all the more interesting in that the punishment for breaking the ban on working is the turning of haystacks into stones, that is, into the material that (in Greek) bears the name of one of the apostles, St. Peter, who in fact also lends his name to the main character in the story.

In fact, the main character in the reminiscence comes from a mythical time: the man responsible for the stone haystacks, Peter in our story, possibly the first member



of the community to have done wrong and worked on a day when haymaking is prohibited, receives a fitting punishment. Just like the character in this type IV *memorata*, the main characters in the other three types of *memorata* that deal with the same subject (haymaking on a prohibited day and the subsequent punishment) experience similar mishaps that are considered to be true. This is why the type IV reminiscence as well is appreciated as truthful. In fact, *memorata* of types I-III claim to be true and authentic for the reason that as Mircea Eliade emphasized, “popular belief is grounded in palpable experience, not in fantastical creation” (Eliade 1993: 39). And because personal experiences blend with collective ones (Culianu 1996: 40), finding their place in the framework of tradition, the reminiscences we will go on to describe, by referencing real experiences of known protagonists, fit within the collective representations of the community (an additional argument for them to be regarded as real events).

A further argument in favour of their authenticity is the fact that these events reflecting traditions are “part of the interlocutor’s biography” (Bot 2001: 144), so the cultural values of a community are “embodied” and presented as existing in a precise moment (Bot 2001: 144). The most convenient example of this is type I reminiscences, two of which we met in our village, referencing two of the religious holidays. The first one mentions the Dormition of St. Anne (25th July), experienced and told in detail and with great seriousness by G. P. (82, 2013): “About 20 years ago. The village was a collective when it happened, and the collective ended in the 1990s, so about 30 years ago. [...] I went to help one of my brothers with the mowing and we finished around one or two o’clock. And there were women there too, his woman and other female friends of hers. And they helped me finish the work. Around one o’clock we finished the grass. And a little cloud about this size came

up, low in the sky. It was hot, I was in my shirt, we knew the weather was going to be good, that it wasn’t going to rain. Now the hay had dried, because it had been mown before noon. I said ‘Let’s go and collect it’. So that cloud moved higher and we started gathering the hay. Pretty soon that cloud came over us at high speed, with thunder and lightning. The high tension line was somewhere near us. Thunder and lightning. And each of us as we were, in our shirts, took shelter. One under a bush, another under a lime tree. One of my sons got under an oak tree. ‘Get away from there! Oak trees attract lightning bolts’. [...] It’s a hard wood and it’s got magnetism. ‘Get out from under the oak tree’. I was under a bush and there was a huge beech tree, so an uncle of mine ran there, and I ran there too because the rain was coming through the bush. When I got there, he was right under the tree, I was a bit farther out, the lightning struck between us and hurled him out as far as from here to there. When I stood up, I knew I had been struck and I knew I was going to die, because anyone who walks after being struck will die. But I was conscious. [...] ‘Oh, my God, I’ve been struck’. Everybody ran through the rain, my wife, my brother, my sister-in-law, ‘Oh, it struck me, but I don’t know how your father is doing. He had fallen down next to the tree and there he had stayed. He was older, but it struck him worse than me. So they put us next to each other, they dug a hole in the ground with their axes, they put us in there and covered us with earth. After they had covered us, the earth drew it out, we knew earth did that. [...] But I thought that was it, I was done for, I’d been struck and I was definitely going to die. I was aware that I was going. And as we were lying there, our skin started to get better and we recovered, me faster but the other man more slowly. [...] So I told my old lady yesterday: ‘I’m not going to work tomorrow [25th July] at all. At about one or two I’ll go to Ocna and buy a bit of cheese’ because we use a lot of it, we like to put it in pies.”



The second type I reminiscence refers to an event that happened on St. Pantaleon's Day (27th July) and is told in an amusing way by A. F. (78, 2006, collected together with G. Iuga): "With the wind, with the whirlwind, it happened to me as well [...] it was on St. Pantaleon's day [...] it came and raked my 'manes' all over the place and shoved them into holes in the ground [...] It took me a while to take it [the hay] out, or what was left of it. That's what happened!"

Of the two Type I reminiscences, the first is more dramatic. Even the consequences of this event are more radical, because since then the protagonist has not made hay on any of the forbidden days. The collective representations that refer to these "tender with the hay" days actually materialized in the case of both interlocutors, so that they now match their activities to the moral implications of local beliefs.

Most of the Șurdești reminiscences referencing the religious holidays in question are, however, type II *memorata* and talk about people the interlocutors know, such as family members, neighbours or other people whose experiences have become known throughout the village. The fact that the protagonists are not strangers causes the events to be seen as all the more real. And to highlight this, the interlocutors insist: "I mean, as the story goes, so it happened!" (A. F., 78, 2006, interview taken together with G. Iuga); "These are things that have happened here, in our village!" (M. C., 65, 2006).

A first category of protagonists consists of the interlocutors' family members who broke the interdiction and were punished, either immediately afterwards or after a longer period of time. Here are some examples.

"A brother of mine worked with some alfalfa either on St. Phocas's day (as it might be today) or on St. Mary Magdalene's day. Overnight all the wooden poles he was using to dry the alfalfa on caught fire" (V. P., 67, 2006).

"Well! On St. Mary Magdalene's day many things have happened! So and so brought hay into his barn and worked it. It burned. [...] The barn also burned down. Something happened up there above the church, at the home of an uncle of mine. He brought some sheaves of hay in so they wouldn't get rained on and put them in the barn. On St. Mary Magdalene's day it rained and lightning struck the barn and burned it down. That's why working the hay on such days is tricky" (A. F., 78, 2006, collected together with G. Iuga).

"Happened at my uncle's. He had a field where Gobi lives now. [...] That very hillock down there, it belonged to an uncle of mine. Not now, he's dead, a cousin of mine has it now. On St. Phocas's day, he didn't make hay, but he thought he might at least go and put a pole in place in preparation for the following day. A haystack pole, like we use, and he took that pole and he hammered it into the ground and that was all. That afternoon the weather turned bad and the lightning struck just the pole. There was no hay on that stack. That pole was struck by lightning. And it happened here, at the home of another uncle of mine, Vasălie lui Gheorghe a Petrii we called him, he was my grandfather's brother. He put some hay in the barn and lightning struck the barn and destroyed everything in it" (M. C., 65, 2010).

"My grandfather, father to my mother and my godmother, worked on St. Pantaleon's day. One of those terrible winds came, the ones that twist round like this, and it took his swathe of hay, one of those 'manes' he had made, which was all collected together ready to make into haystacks. And the wind came and swept down on it and carried it away and dropped it in Plopiș [the neighbouring village], in the woods. And the gaffer said: 'Pantaleon, Pantaleon', he said to the saint, because that was whose day it was. He said: 'It isn't all today's work, some of it was done yesterday!' You know, he said that so he wouldn't take all of it, because he had been working the day before too, not just on that scorching hot day. So



the wind left what it left, but that big ‘mane’ was all gone” (A. M., 56, 2010).

“On St. Elijah’s day the same thing happened to him again! And on Pintilie, and Pintilie punished him. That time a strong wind came and he said to the saint: ‘Pintilie, Pintilie, it isn’t all today’s work, some of it was mown yesterday!’ So he told him it was cut on those other days, but Pintilie took all of it. In our village there was a man [...], an uncle of mine and he was a church deacon, and because he was a church deacon he was freer to work the hay on those days. But then the wind came and took all his hay. And when he saw it, there was one haystack left, so he lifted it up on his pitchfork and told the saint to take that one too, as that hay too had just been mown. He was very angry. And the saint did take it across the river. These are real things that happened!” (M.C., 65, 2006).

The second category of protagonists of type II reminiscences are people known in the village and identified by name. Here are some examples:

“There are times when it’s fine weather and people say: ‘Oh, it’s so nice outside, I’ll be able to work.’ An old woman was working here, the old woman was working a little further down from here. Winter had come, so there was still snow. And her haystack was struck by lightning and caught fire because she had worked on the day of the prophet Elijah. Nobody could put the fire in the haystack out. It burned to the ground. [...] I don’t remember if it was autumn or spring. Yes, I remember, it had snowed. And it was all charred and so it was worthless. That haystack was no longer good for anything. I don’t know how many days it burned for. People threw water on it, but in vain. The fire wouldn’t go out. Neither the hay nor the pole was good for anything after that. Even the pole had been struck” (A. M., 56, 2010).

“On St. Mary Magdalene’s day too there is no haymaking here, because people say lightning will strike the stacks. That is, it’s true. It happened here to Lița from the shop, whom we know. She said that she had only

put the haystack pole into the ground... [on that day] and that three days later bad weather came and it thundered and there was lightning and the stack caught fire. It also happened to Vasile a lui Petre, close to the church, above the church; if you go along the track, as you take a right there, by the church [...]. An old couple used to live there, Ioana lui Vila and Teofil, in a small house by the road. And they worked on those [forbidden] days, which was when they were able to get help, because he was old, his legs hurt him, he couldn’t walk, they hurt him really badly. So only the old woman worked of the two of them. [...] Then on January 3rd lightning struck their haystack and burnt it. Lightning struck the haystack and it burned. The stack made on those holy days, St. Phocas, St. Mary Magdalene and St. Anne” (G. M., 68, 2010).

“Pintileu brings the wind and the whirlwind that takes the hay away. [...] It happened to our deacon. In a place we call Baltă, he went to work with hay and rain came and it soaked the hay. So he started cursing the saint: ‘Here you go, take it and give it to Your animals!’ That’s what he said to the good God. I don’t know what he said to him. And in winter, like it is now [February], he had plans to take the hay home, but a whirlwind came and blew it all away, taking it to the other side of the forest, to His animals. Because that was what he had said, to take the hay to His animals. So, it went to the goats in the forest. So it is said and it indeed happened!” (A. F., 78, 2006, collected together with G. Iuga).

The type II reminiscences above demonstrate that the collective memory registered unusual events that happened to community members and put them in cultural categories known through people’s beliefs and transmitted by local tradition. There is a certain unity in these evocations, precisely because they are a reflection of the collective memory and fit into patterns determined by local tradition. In addition, it can be affirmed, following Maurice Halbwachs, that those who remember the



events do so from the perspective of the community, “the memory of their group records faithfully all you can capture in the deeds and gestures of each member because it acts on the entire society and contributes to its modification. In such environments, all individuals think and remember together” (Halbwachs 2007, 128).

As part of the same collective memory, the type III reminiscences, with a generic referent and lacking precise identification data, are uncommon in Șurdești. They are usually very schematic, speaking in a general way about penalties incurred for breaches of the prohibitions, but there are some others, as in the excerpt below, which contain more details: “You see what people are like, how they’ll say ‘Lord forgive me, I’m going to work, even if I fear God.’ [...] On Mary Magdalene’s Day, close to Cetățele where Augustine lives, there were haystacks. And there were people there. [...] Some of them were upon the haystack and the others were down below. And they finished the haystack and got down off it and they were still there when the lightning struck it and it caught fire. There are delicate days, there are religious festivals when you’re not supposed to work the hay. [...] Phocas, Mary Magdalene, the prophet Elijah, Anne... You’re not allowed to work with hay inside the house either, it’s delicate inside too. On the day of Mary Magdalene some people put sheaves in a barn. They only put them in the barn so they wouldn’t get rained on because they were outside and the weather was bad. They put them in the barn and they were struck by lightning and burned and the barn burned down too” (A. T., 65, 2006, collected together with G. Iuga).

The abundance of accounts of type II reminiscences highlights the need for the residents of Șurdești to emphasise the veracity and authenticity of the occurrences, that “the *initial fact* is a real *experience*” (Eliade 1993: 39) but one which, by processes of alteration and exaggeration of reality (Eliade 1993: 39), becomes part of

the system of local beliefs. A characteristic of such beliefs is that they moralize in the sense of “a retrospective rationality based on the sacred order attributed to the world” (Mihăilescu 2004: 187), something specific to traditional societies characterized by a cosmos-centric vision of the world (Mihăilescu 2004). The *memorata* presented therefore moralize in relation to extra-human powers (Van Gennepe 1997: 37), especially since the various punishments meted out by the saints are quite specialized, depending on the specifics of each feast day: St. Mary Magdalene – fire and lightning; St. Elijah and St. Pantaleon – strong winds and rain; St. Phocas – fire and lightning; the Dormition of St. Anne – lightning.

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Conclusions

For people over 40, traditional knowledge and local beliefs about haymaking in Șurdești are part of their daily lives, not only because they have been passed down from their predecessors and inherited through cultural mechanisms, but also because they are practised and reflected in current activities. The places where the villagers usually go to make hay are useful because they supply the fodder required for wintertime; at the same time, they are also part of a landscape modified, influenced and maintained in its own essence (biodiversity) through human action (Dahlström *et al.* 2013). The landscape is, therefore, a cultural one (European Landscape Convention 2000), a man-made artefact endowed with cultural values (Taylor 2008); in Șurdești, its defining brand is hay, as there are haystacks everywhere you go. But the landscape is not represented exclusively by concrete spaces, but also by the memory these spaces bring with them: unusual events have occurred in these places and have been stored in the memory of the community by reminiscences / *memorata* ranging from type I to type IV. Thus the space where the members of the community live their lives is not a barren

one but is customized through collective memory (Nora 1997).

Nevertheless, we have to ask what this intangible heritage represents for the youth of the community, who are far more attuned to modern times. What does this intangible heritage represent for the entire community nowadays, when the tracks the villagers once used to walk along between the hay meadows along are being abandoned? Or when the hay meadows themselves are increasingly being abandoned, or mown very late because there is no longer a need for so much hay since the animals are being sold? This is why initiatives are being taken by mediating institutions with the purpose of making the younger generation aware of these values. This has been the case with a number of projects undertaken by the “identity, unity, generosity, action” Socio-Cultural Foundation for Democracy in Baia Mare, which aims not only to document the cultural heritage of the area, but also to exploit among younger people the capital it represents.

In its programmes undertaken in the community of Șurdești¹⁰, the Foundation is contributing to the dialogue between

generations and, consequently, to the transmission of cultural values, even in this rather artificial (because mediated) way. Appropriate exploitation of the materials (through publications, exhibitions, dialogues between young artists and the local community) raises the awareness of community members of different generations of the importance of their heritage, and a good example here is the heritage concerned with working with hay. The reminiscences recorded in the community have been published in part in an issue of *Calendarul Maramureșului* (2006); young designers used hay as an inspiration for an exhibition in 2008, and also for the creation of fashion items; hay doll making workshops for the children have given the material a new, creative use. Thus, working with hay has proved to be not only a result of specific activities carried out in the local community to provide winter fodder for livestock, but also, briefly, a source of creativity. The story of hay is not limited to carrying on a tradition still alive in the community of Șurdești, but has shown that it can develop and acquire new values.

10) Projects carried out in partnership with the Șurdești local authorities: “Dig where you stand” (2005), “From YOUNG to adult. Memory and Identity within Șurdești in a European context” (2006) or “mc2 - Cultural Heritage and Creation” (2008) and “Developing Creative Design” (2005) – carried out in partnership with the Cluj-Napoca University of Arts and Design.

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