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Title: "Haylife and Haylore in Starchiojd (Prahova county, Romania): from Present to Past"

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How to cite this article: Fruntelată, Ioana-Ruxandra, Cristian Mușa and Elena Dudău. "Haylife and Haylore in Starchiojd (Prahova county, Romania): from Present to Past." *Martor* 21: 87-100.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Ţăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/martor-21-2016/

The publishers wish to thank photographer Kathleen Laraia McLaughlin for providing interstitial images of this issue.

Haylife and Haylore in Starchiojd (Prahova county, Romania): From Present to Past

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ABSTRACT

Starchiojd village lies on Teleajen plateau, in a hilly area of the eastern sub-Carpathians, Romania, at the crossroads upon the border of historical provinces Wallachia and Transylvania. Animal (cattle and sheep) husbandry is still an active and dominant occupation for villagers in Starchiojd, therefore so is haymaking.
During our ethnological field research in 2013 and 2014 we collected different types of information on local hay culture, that were found in both written private documents and oral accounts, which we stored in the form of photographs, recordings or field notes.
Our paper relies mainly on audio recordings that suggest that hay culture imprints a certain organization of space, time and social relations at present, which could be coined "haylife". We also show that talking with informants about hay activates certain memories of the past village life, including "haylore", i.e. knowledge, beliefs and superstitions associated to hay.

KEYWORDS

haylife, haylore, home ethnology, local identity, community, hay culture, Starchiojd.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 20th century, when Ovid Densusianu and his disciples published their first regional monographs, Romanian field ethnology has developed one of its traditional orientations towards researching villages mainly to look for "traces" of a past rural civilisation. According to this tradition, the elders are privileged informants, as they can recall and tell of a previous (and therefore more valuable) stage in the life of their community. Nevertheless, Densusianu himself drew attention upon the importance of also collecting every-day facts and opinions of the folk (Densusianu. In Datcu 2009: 33). In the interwar period, Dimitrie Gusti set up the Sociological School of Bucharest, whose members developed an original method to draw monographs of rural communities, including thorough collection of field information that was both interpreted against a historical context and consisted in real-time data pertaining to the present life of researched communities[1].

After 1948, Romanian villages underwent deep and fast-paced transformations, induced by State policies to turn rural communities into agricultural urban settlements. Land owners were obliged to give away their property and form instead local "collective farms" (first called *colective* and later Cooperatives of Agricultural Production – C.A.P.s) and to give up their cattle as they could not pay the

1) For a detailed account of the method of rural monographs developed by Gusti and his disciples, see *Nerej, un village d'une région archaïque*, Sociological Monograph supervised by H.H. Stahl, *Institut de Sciences Sociales de Roumanie*, Bucharest, 1939.

high taxes imposed for those who wanted to keep them. Rural field ethnologists learned how to avoid politically dangerous topics when speaking with their informants[2]. They could not ask questions about the present economic life of the villagers constrained to work for C.A.P., for example. Superstitions and folk religion were also forbidden topics at the time and so were memories of veterans from the Second World War who had fought on the Eastern Front against the Soviets. As a consequence, some native ethnologists who still strived to approach rural community life exhaustively (such as the teams of researchers who gathered material for the Romanian Ethnographic Atlas approximately in the years 1960-1980) had to inquire only about the past because of these taboo topics.

Hayfield with cross, Starchiojd, 2014. Photo credits: Cristian Mușa

After 1989, Romanian society underwent deep and fast-paced transformations once more, affecting all areas, including research institutions and universities. Theoretically, everything could be done on the field, but time and money were always scarce or another project (more "politically correct") delayed the traditional initiation of home ethnologists; they could not afford to conduct long-term research in a village and study it at length to try to understand, in the holistic old-fashioned way, how things were and how they had become like that. Scholars would rather resort to short visits to a certain field or they would practise commuting from a nearby town to the rural area of their interest. Since 1990, a lot of books and papers have been published on Romanian contemporary villages, analysing either the memory of the communist past or more recent topics such as work migration or cultural tourism to other countries.[3]

At present, it seems that the monographic approach to traditional villages is revolute and maybe even useless, taking into account the fact that village communities have adjusted their ways to face new challenges of the globalized world and to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the information society; consequently, they can no longer be looked upon as classic examples of subsistence or ecological systems.

During our research in the commune of Starchiojd, in 2013 and 2014, we were well aware of the problematic aspects of our endeavour, although it was not our intention to complete an ethnological monograph of the oldest rural settlement in Prahova county. Nevertheless, we attempted to survey the cultural heritage of the local community in Starchiojd, selecting what we considered to be representative aspects for a few ethnographic and folklore categories, such as dwelling, occupations, home textile industry, crafts, calendars, rites of passage, folk magic, children's games, poetic and music oral creations. In our view, the results of our work prove that local cultures are still a first-hand topic for home ethnology/anthropology, at least in Romania, because they display meaningful instances of intercultural communication, documenting both resistance to change and adjustment to it, reinterpretation of tradition, as well as appropriation of innovation. Walking the paths and pastures of a contemporary

2) With regard to ideological constraints in ethnological discourse, see Nicolae Constantinescu. 2006, pp. 49-56. See also, Iordan Datcu. 2014.

3) See a useful review of post-communist anthropological work in Romania in Șerban and Dorondel. 2014.

Romanian village and talking to the people, we have tried to understand the fine and intricate pattern that still holds together humans and nature in a particular community. Since the main occupation in Starchiojd is animal husbandry[4], hay culture seems to be the *total social fact* (as coined by Mauss) around which the life of the inhabitants is centred. This makes it the most representative fact for the cultural heritage of Starchiojd people and therefore an appropriate topic for study.

Now, haylife is indeed visible everywhere, from the landscape to the households, but it is also a memory object, influencing the worldviews of the members of this sub-Carpathian rural community. As a consequence, we have to distinguish between the tangible part of hay culture (present haylife) and its intangible components (past haylife, knowledge, beliefs, superstitions, and personal narratives associated to hay in our informants' oral accounts).

Therefore, our intention in this paper is not to provide a complete ethnographic description of hay culture in a contemporary Romanian village. Instead, we are interested in exploring in what way hay culture is still part of people's everyday life and an identity marker for them.

Context and description of field research

Each of the three authors of this article had a different background and different motivations to conduct in field research at Starchiojd in the summer of 2013.

Elena was a second-year Ethnology student at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest. She had grown up in a rural environment and had chosen to study Ethnology as she was very interested in the "alternative" culture outlined by the beliefs and the oral narratives of the people she knew. An accomplished story-teller herself, she would later complete a degree paper on Romanian folk magic. Elena was also interested in practising fieldwork and Starchiojd was the first research she took part in.

As an experienced ethnologist and a professor, Ioana went to Starchiojd in order to guide her students on the field and help them shape a part of their research output in a conveniently scientific manner.

Hay flower wreath, Starchiojd, 2014. Photo credits: Nicoleta Şerban

While Elena and Ioana saw Starchiojd for the first time in 2013, Cristian had been born there and spent almost all his life in the researched village. He had been fascinated since childhood by rural civilisation with all its inherited folkways and had always been "old soul", as his mother would put it. He had already completed a BA and an MA in Ethnology at the Faculty of Letters (University of Bucharest), preparing two degree papers on Starchiojd. Therefore, Cristian was both a native Starchiojd villager and a junior ethnologist and, actually, he was the one who started a team of field researchers to do ethnography "at home", hoping that enough material would be collected in order to prepare an updated monograph of his beloved commune.

Although the research conducted in two successive years, 2013 and 2014, during

4) Hayfields and pastures amounted to 1,497 hectares in 2010, approximately 18% of the total surface area of the commune (www.rga2010.djsct.ro/inceput.php?cod=13&codj=29, accessed on 03.12.2016). In 2013, almost every family had at least one cow. Only the oldest persons had no cows, but they would raise a few goats instead.

summer and autumn[5], did not last long enough for us to be able to investigate the chosen rural community in an exhaustive manner, the advantage of having Cristian in our team as host, guide and permanent informant helped us fill information gaps and ensured almost familiar encounters with people who would have otherwise considered us total strangers. However, the problem of self-referentiality in the anthropological/ ethnological discourse was more acute for Cristian than for the other two authors as it was sometimes very difficult for him to distinguish between his researcher and his informant status in the academic discourse he produced.

Little girl raking, Starchiojd, 2015. Photo credits: Cristian Mușa

Starchiojd commune lies in the north-east of Prahova county, at the bottom of the southern Carpathians. The closest town (approximately 20 kilometers away from Starchiojd) is Vălenii de Munte. The commune lies on a 500 meter high plateau in a kind of natural fortress, being surrounded by hills. Three small rivers and several springs provide water for the inhabitants. Nowadays, the commune includes five villages: Chiojd (also called Great Chiojd or Old Chiojd), Brădet, Gresia, Valea Anei and Rotarea (Fruntelată, Mușa 2014: 10-11).

The oldest mention of the name of the settlement dates back to 1418. The records refer to three founding fathers (*moși*) of the village, who co-owned the land and passed it on genealogically, to heirs in their family. Later on, other people bought land in Starchiojd, some of them coming from Transylvania. As it was located on the border of two historical Romanian provinces (Wallachia and Transylvania), Starchiojd was a border village until the end of the nineteenth century. A local *plateau captain* (*căpitan de plai*) was paid by the State to watch the passage way to Transylvania, to fight thieves and to collect taxes from the neighbouring villages (Fruntelată, Mușa 2014: 12-13).

Beginning with the seventeenth century, some of the land owners lost their property to others, which brought about social differentiation. The pauper inhabitants of the settlement had to become serfs to their rich neighbours or to boyars who had bought land and owned large estates in the area. In 1948, the former land owners recovered some of their property in court or by buying plots back from the last descendant of the boyars Macovei. In 1962, almost all the lands were taken by the communist collective administration. After 1990, people were entitled by law to regain ownership of their lands, but the local administration has yet to issue all the ownership certificates for the inhabitants of the commune (Fruntelată, Mușa 2014: 15-18).

In 2011, the population of the commune consisted of 3,770 people (Fruntelată, Mușa 2014: 15). The main occupations are animal husbandry, cultivation of fruits (especially prunes), and forestry work. Especially in the villages of Valea Anei and Rotarea people cultivate maize. There are also a number of sheepfolds (actually, in the one we visited in 2013, shepherds were raising cows, sheep, goats and pigs). A few inhabitants engage in apiculture. Traditional crafts, like working

5) In 2013, our seven-people team spent a week in Starchiojd and in 2014, the eight-people team split according to distinct research interests and personal agendas and smaller groups approached the field at different times.

wood, have almost disappeared and so has the home textile industry. People still remember the time when they used to trade local products from their carts. Nowadays, a regular local fair is organized and many people travel regularly into towns, by car or by bus. Many of the young people in Starchiojd work abroad and come home only for short periods of time, on holidays or during the summer, "at haytime" (Fruntelată, Mușa 2014: 18-22).

A local museum of folk art was opened in the village in 1944. Today, the ethnographic collection of the museum is stored in the central school of Starchiojd (Fruntelată, Mușa 2014: 33-34). The three priests and the intellectuals in the commune support the maintaining of local folk tradition. Their attitude is partly explained by the prestige conferred to the settlement in the interwar period, when important cultural personalities visited Starchiojd and spoke apologetically of its long history, but also of its folk "treasures."

To some extent, the community that we try to understand seems to be one in which *the old way of life is still working*, and local tradition is continued by integrating *new meanings and manifestations* that harmoniously match the formerly acknowledged patterns (Iuga 2014: 191).

Theoretical framework

A community, as defined by the ethnology of peasant societies, is a bounded social unit, whose members share a partially closed economic life on a territory that provides most of the products needed for their subsistence. A community shares collective and private property to variable degrees and subjects its members to a collective discipline as if a kind of permanent and necessary tension is needed to maintain the cohesion and continuation of the community's existence (Chiva, in Bonte, Izard 1999: 164).

Our interest in the hay culture of Starchiojd springs mainly from the need to understand the typical occupations of the locals, much in the manner of the Sociological School of Bucharest (or Dimitrie Gusti's School), whose members investigated rural areas in the interwar period and organized the collected data according to "frames" and "manifestations" of social life (Vulcănescu 1997). Nevertheless, we do not indulge in the illusion that by reducing various aspects of local culture to certain "types" we could capture some kind of "essence" of the investigated community. Taking into account the fact that anthropological writing results from the interaction between researchers and informants, in the context of the research field, we embrace a hybrid essentialist and interactionist anthropology. Namely, we start from the premise that our field of research has its own existence exceeding our perception of it, and we accept the fact that, up to a point, we construct that field ourselves, by interfering with it and, more importantly, by "writing" it.

With respect to methodology, we favour life history as one of the established methods of qualitative research. We have listened to our informants narrating their lives and have tried to build, from bits and pieces, a comprehensive picture of hay culture in Starchiojd, a "rabbit's eye" view as it were, i.e. as reflected in the everyday life of individuals, as visible in both their material world and their thoughts and memories.

It was not our aim to provide an exhaustive description of the history, demography and economic development of the settlement. Instead, we based our research on archival documents[6] and the available literature. The result is the outline of a "hay cosmology", including the organization of space (dwelling), time (calendar, daily routine), work (tools, activities), and the intangible heritage (knowledge about nature and world, beliefs and haymaking oral accounts and narratives) of our informants from Starchiojd. We group as "haylife" the field data concerning the practical aspects of

6) We have included in our two-volume work on Starchiojd (Fruntelată, Mușa 2014; Fruntelată, Mușa 2015) references to archive historical and ethnographic documents published in: a) Rîpeanu and Simache 1968; and b) Ion Ghinoiu 2009.

hay culture (space, time, work) and we coin the term "haylore" for the oral expression of knowledge, beliefs and memories that complete the overall picture with mythical, symbolic and psychological dimensions.

As a result, we organized our field data along two axes, one going from the outside to the inside of the researched reality, and the other leading from present to past, as the discourse of our aged informants often "slips" to descriptions of things as they used to be some fifty years ago. Thus, we come to comprehend hay culture in Starchiojd both as landscape and mental reference, and also as both present state of the art and object of memory.

We also take into account the cultural dialogue between past and present or tradition and innovation as a means to sketch an identity outline of the community we study, the result of the tension between continuity (fidelity towards tradition, transmission of collective memory) and discontinuity (doubt, crisis) (Ferréol, Jucquois 2005: 332).

Last but not least, we believe that *anthropology at home*, a concept developed by British scholars in the late 1980s (Segalen 2002: 248-249) is a more adequate frame for our approach than that of the anthropology of identity. The field data presented below also appear in Romanian, in the two volumes dedicated to our research in Starchiojd (Fruntelată, Mușa 2014 and Fruntelată, Mușa 2015).

Haylife

As in any other Romanian village, people's life in Starchiojd has depended on the landscape and on the material resources of the place. Of course, it has also been influenced by the occupations and crafts that people have developed since the settlement was founded in the fifteenth century, which helped them earn their living. As already mentioned, Starchiojd people traditionally engage in animal husbandry (mainly cows, horses, sheep, goats and pigs) and the cultivation of fruit trees (especially prune trees).

According to the most recent count of animals, from 2012, there were 5,287 sheep and goats, 709 cows, 491 pigs and 174 horses in Starchiojd. Animal husbandry has led to the development of a hay culture as hay was needed to ensure the livestock's food supply.

Carrying the hay to the stack, Starchiojd, 2015. Photo credits: Cristian Mușa

Space

Besides natural hayfields, people cultivate part of their fields mainly with lucern, oat, clover and mangel. People would mark the boundaries of their property (named "ropes of land") by planting trees or raising fences. Other types of boundary markers are stones, furrows or poles. Today, hayfields are surrounded by fences made of wattle or of horizontal planks nailed to wooden pillars, which they "pad" with acacia trees

planted along the fence. One can pass from one hayfield to the other by leaping over stiles (*pârleazuri*).

Some hayfields are located directly in the back of the owners' houses, an extension of their gardens, with no back fence. As houses are scattered here and there, it takes a long time to reach from one place to another following the road, so everybody uses shortcuts through hayfields, crossing *pârleazuri*. Cattle are taken to pasture and brought back home directly over the hay-covered hills, too.

In the absence of pasture commons (*islaz*), people took their animals on their own lands. Cattle would graze "in the front end of the plot", and as some of the lands were quite far away from their owners' households, a kind of swarming process occurred as people would build seasonal shelters (*odăi*). They worked and lived for long periods of time to take advantage of the readily available pasture and save the effort of transporting the hay in the village.

People used to cut trees to make hayfields and arable land up to the beginning of the twentieth century (Fruntelată, Mușa 2014: 42). After clearing out the place, they would build a one-room shelter (*odaie*); they would also claim the surrounding forest, using natural boundaries such as springs, hilltops or mountains and ridges. The new land was occupied by a nuclear or extended family, taking the name of that particular family (for example, "at *Colțeni*" was the land of the Colțeanu family; *Colțeni* is the Romanian plural of the family name Colțeanu). Mother Lica Diaconu (1913-2008), acknowledged by Starchiojd community as an emblematic heritage bearer, wrote down in one of her notebooks all the names of the lands surrounding the commune.

Haystack surrounded by pen, Starchiojd, 2013. Photo credits: Cristian Mușa

Clearcutting was done by either felling or burning trees to obtain a "clearing" (*curătură*). Naturally occurring small glades (*ochiuri de pădure*) could add to the surface area of the *curătură*, expanding it. The cleared land was turned into a hay or/and corn field, and the *odaie* was built there, surrounded by other outbuildings for the livestock (a specific outbuilding was *polata*, a shelter that had a common wall with the back or lateral wall of *odaie*). As late as the nineteenth century, one-room shelters grew in number, so almost any valley had several hamlets. "People would live there and they used to call the place Chiojdul Two, because many stayed there" (Nicolae Oprea). Old family members usually went to live in *odaie*, to take care of the animals: "The elders have always lived there, since we can remember. My father's grandfather also lived there. They would live there. People would spend there winters and summers too" (Nicolae Oprea). "My father lived there, in odaie. He wouldn't come back home. And when we saw that he was ill, because he was old, we said to him: 'Come on, dad, let's take you home and we'll bring you back here in spring.' We would put his things in the cart, but he would take them off. He lived there, he couldn't bear to leave the place" (Alexandrina Antonoiu).

Time

While living at *odaie*, people did animal husbandry and forestry work. The latter was done especially between September

and February each year, because that was the time when the sap did not circulate and the wood was solid and protected against bugs (*Anobium pertinax).* During the warm season, after finishing their work in the village, people would also go to *odaie* for haymaking and building haycocks and haystacks (*căpițe* and *clăi*). For many people from Starchiojd, their dwelling in *Chiojdul Two* would become a second household in time. One of our informants, Alexandrina Antonoiu, who preserves the old pattern of alternative habitation, in the village and in *odaie*, has told us that her grandmother would even sow hemp on the field near *odaie*.

Cart with hay, Starchiojd, 2015. Photo credits: Cristian Mușa

Life spent between the two places determined a certain rhythm of mobility and an exchange of workers who went from village to the woods and back. The most reliable workers in any family would always be wherever they were needed. After haymaking in the village and finishing other household chores, old people and children would stay at home while the middle-aged members of the family would go to *odaie*. During winter time, they would change places and old people and children would go to *odaie* to watch and feed the animals until there was no fodder left. Then they would bring the animals down to the village.

One reason for this type of habitation was the bad state of the roads that made impossible the transportation of hay to the village before the 1960s, as our informants remembered.

Many times, people would know that haymaking time had come by hearing folk songs. "We would hear people singing and we would say: 'Listen to that, X has started haymaking.' The valleys were ringing with our songs. One would sing here, another one there, each next to his or her *odaie*" (Elena Mușa).

The hay calendar begins in autumn or in spring, when lands are cleaned using rakes and dry weeds are burnt. In spring, people cut down the small trees (usually, prune trees) to make mowing easier. Natural fertilizer (manure) is carefully minced by using a small rake and is spread over the hayfield. Manure is absolutely necessary for fields cultivated with lucern or clover.

Haymaking starts at different moments, depending on the position of hayfields. Usually, people start mowing in their gardens after July 2nd. Hayfields on hills are ripe after St. Elijah (July 20th) as cattle have been allowed to graze on these fields until May 10, and the new grass needs longer to grow. The last to mow (after August 1st) are the hayfields in the woods where vegetation grows slower in the shade of the tree canopies.

The work day on hayfields starts early, before sunset, as mowing should begin when the grass is wet with dew.

Work

The tools necessary for haymaking are: the scythe made of heel, chine, toe, grips, and snath; the hammer and anvil to peen the scythe; the rake; the pitchfork with two, three or four prongs to gather the hay; the whetstone to hone the scythe (twice for a swath), and a case (*corn*) for the whetstone.

People would go to the hayfields before sunrise, sometimes having breakfast when they reached their plot. They would start mowing after breakfast and only stop for lunch at noon, and then they would start working again until they finished the plot, sometimes late at night, as "grass is better cut on cool weather": "On cool weather you would do your work in a better way. Everything comes into place if you do things as you should" (Olimpia Gârbea).

One should mow a swath from one margin of the land to the other, in the opposite direction to that of the grass inclination. The cut off grass is left on the field to get dry and from time to time, it is tossed up to be dried by sun and wind on all sides. When it is dry, hay is gathered in small heaps and the remaining grass is collected with rakes. The hay is then built into haycocks around a stake (*prepeleac*) or into haystacks.

During haymaking, people would eat cheese, boiled eggs, mutton sausages, chorba. They need highly nourishing food when they are mowing. When their hayfield was far from home, they would stay there until they finished mowing, cooking on an open fire.

The hay was difficult to carry home, because of the rough terrain. People would use a *popârțag*, a piece of wood to which tree branches were attached, on top of which they would load some hay. Then people would drag it to their homes. Another simple tool for transportation was the *târș*, a bunch of branches on which they would load the hay and then drag it. If the road was in a better state, hay was loaded in the carts pulled by oxen or cows.

The haystacks brought home were stored in the barn or in the stable loft. The outbuildings for storing hay were usually made from wattle.

When the time to go to *odaie* approached, people would start preparing: they would repair their tools and gather supplies and warm clothes for unusually cold or rainy weather. For children who did not have the opportunity to get out of their village often, the journey to *odaie* was a joyful moment. The carts pulled by oxen would cross Chiojd Border and went through the villages of Chiojdul Mic and Bâsca, in Buzău county. A cow was attached with a rope to the back of the cart, and a dog would run along. The cow was needed for milk, and the dog would watch the family possessions, while the oxen ensured the transportation. But some families would walk to their *odaie:* "I would carry the kid on my back, I would take scythe, pitchfork, rake, everything I needed; with a pumpkin in my sack, I would cross the Pleşi mountains to reach the odaie where the old man was" (Maria Oprea). Or: "We would load scythe, rake, pitchfork, cauldron, pot, pan, corn flour, all of it on our backs, and we would go to the woods, 'on the yews' [where the yew – *Taxus baccata* – grew]. We went there and we would mow and make the hay there and in the winter we went to eat it there in the woods with the animals (…) There was no road then, these times now are fit for boyars, one couldn't imagine how it was then compared to now. We would follow the creek's course, we went to the woods and we stayed there with our animals, feeding them with hay, because there was no road on which to carry it home. We stayed there until we finished the hay and then we came home" (Olimpia Gîrbea). When they reached their *odaie*, people whitewashed their room, improvised a cooking stove (*cujba*), mended the beds and the pallets, cleaned the wells and fixed the corrals and mangers.

Women would take care of the shelter

and of the small garden around it, and they would also prepare food. But this did not mean the women were spared of joining in the main activity, i.e. haymaking, alongside men.

The appropriate filling food for the hard work of haymaking were chunks of salted and smoked pork or mutton, kept in earthen pots. Pork ribs were kept in lard and they were taken as food supply for the summer work in the hayfields (Elisabeta Tănăsescu). The chorba cooked in *odaie* was spiced with field thyme, a plant also used to make tea.

When the hayfields were confiscated by the State, in 1962, people who gave their land to the collective farms were allowed to work a piece of land (approximately 90 meter long) for themselves. Of course, the harvest was not sufficient for them to feed their animals. During that time, if a worker made ten haystacks, he could only take one of them for himself (Olimpia Gîrbea). For those who had cows, there was the option of having a contract with the collective farm, under which they would give 100 litres of milk per year in exchange for getting a bigger hayfield (the system was called "global work"). They could claim for themselves one out of three haystacks from that land. In addition, they had to work for free another half a hectare of hayfield.

Even after the setting up of the state-owned collective farm in 1962, some people still preserved their previous way of life because for working in the woods they would get half of the hay they made, while in the village only one haystack out of three was given to them as payment for their work (see above). There were two landowners who gave away their village land in exchange for the wood land and they continued to live and work at *odaie*. After 1989, Starchiojd people were given back their lands, but many hayfields were abandoned, because a lot of the villagers migrated abroad in search of better paid work. That change favoured the extension of sheperds' pastures in the mountains. Sheepfolds can be found nowadays in almost any valley, with modern accommodation (two-room houses, cellar, hallway, running water, electricity).

Nevertheless, the heirs of Lache Savu (one of the landowners who kept his land in the woods even during the communist era) still preserve the habitation at *odaie*. The youngest of the family and his grandmother live in the village only during school time, while during holidays all the family goes to *odaie*. Their household there consists of one *odaie* – house with two rooms and a hall, one separate kitchen and outbuildings for animals: corrals, stable, hen houses. Their main occupation is still animal husbandry.

Hay in the stable loft, Starchiojd, 2013. Photo credits: Nicoleta Șerban

Haylore Knowledge

Livestock animals like plants such as the soft wide blade grass (*iarbă lată*). Other plants growing in the hayfields are wild clover (*trifoi sălbatic – Trifolium repens, Trifolium pratense*), *ghizdei* or *ghizdrei* (*Lotus corniculatus*), *smântânică* (*Galium cruciatum*), daisy *(margaretă – Leucanthemum vulgare*).

The hayfields of Starchiojd also provide a lot of medicinal plants. In time, many of these have been forgotten, but people can still name: wild thyme *(cimbrișor – Thymus vulgaris*), milfoil (*coada șoricelului – Achillea millefolium*), horse tail *(coada mânzului –*

Equisetum arvense, a rough weed that resists cutting), chicory *(cicoare – Cichorium inthybus*), melilot (*sulfină – Mellilotus officinalis*), St. John's wort (*sunătoare – Hypericum perforatum*), centaury (*țintaură – Centaurium erythraea*), Our Lady's bedstraw *(sânziană/ drăgaică – Galium verum*), wormwood (*pelin – Artemisia absinthium*). People can remember the vernacular names of a few other plants (such as *one-staff flower – floare de-un băț/ floare în crăci*) but they cannot identify the plant any longer. To be effective, medicinal plants should be picked at the appropriate times. Most of them are picked in the month of May, when they have just bloomed. There are still some beliefs preserved about how medicinal plants should be picked. To be sure of the plants' efficacy, one should pick them while walking, from place to place, as if not on purpose. Once picked, plants are to be dried in the shade, and after they are dried, women put them in textile bags and use them for tea. "Horse tail from lakes is not good, the one on the cornfields is good for kidneys and the one on the hayfield is good for healing baths" (Zoe Roman). For rheumatism, *hay flower* (all dry seeds remained in the stable lofts after the hay is finished) should be used in a bath. Plants like garden mint (*izma de* grădină – Mentha *piperita*), wild mint (*izma sălbatică – Mentha silvestris*), wormwood and *calomfir* (*Tanacetum balsamita*) are used to give a nice odour to home made soap.

As rainy weather spoils hay (it gets mouldy), people are very attentive to signs of rain, like the cry of the owl or the halo round the moon. If it rains when the moon is waxing, people postpone haymaking for a few days or even weeks, because that is, according to their local experience, a sign that the whole month will be rainy.

Also, if some kind of geese shaped clouds appeared on the clear sky, people would hurry to gather the hay as this meant that "the next day it would rain a little, and if the rain touched it, hay was of no use for you" (Elena Pătârlăgeanu).

When they are up on their hayfields, people can approximate the time by sticking a straight rod into the ground and watching where the shadow of the rod falls (solar watch; Maria Bejgu).

Beliefs and ritual practices

People would ask for God's help and cross themselves before leaving home and before starting work.

On March 9th, celebrated as the Day of the 40 Martyrs according to the Christian Orthodox calendar, in Starchiojd, they celebrate the folk holiday of *Măcinici.* People would make fires in their courtyards and they wouldn't get out of the gate without leaping over the fire, as they believe that this will bring them prosperous times ahead. "We use a rag to make a fire, before even washing our faces in the morning. Then we leap over the fire to be protected against snakes, mice, lizards, frogs, reptiles like those who scare us when we go to the hayfield" (Elisabeta Tănăsescu).

Another folk spring celebration is the feast day of St George (April 23rd). In Valea Anei village, the first person in a house who woke up "would go with a spade and take out a piece of soil with grass growing on it. That person would bring the grass bed at the stairs and every member of the family had to step on that green piece. It would do you good and you would be green (young, healthy) and handsome. On the feast day of St. George they would also bring a 'little tree' (*copăcel*), a branch of beech tree, you take a green one and you stick it in the gate for the family to pass under it and be blessed all the year long" (Zoe Roman).

On the feast day of *Drăgaică* or *Sânziene* (June 24th, the Orthodox celebrate St. John the Baptist's Birth), "the woman of the house would go out in the morning, bare-footed, without washing her face, she would collect melilot (*drăgaică*) and bring it home. First she would put it next to the icons, then next to children's heads (who

were asleep at that hour), she would put a stem of melilot near each of their heads, she would also bring it in the stable for cattle and on thresholds. If there was a service at the church, she would take the plant to the church and give it also for alms together with a pretzel or something. (...) When the wind blows and it hails outside, when it is raining hard, you take melilot and a walnut tree leaf kept from the Pentecost Sunday, or willow from the Palm Sunday, you put them in a clean pan and you set fire to them with a match. This, they say, casts away evil things, people have kept to this belief, and they still do. Especially the old ones, but you know what, even the younger people hold this belief" (Sultana Hristea).

The most important "days of prohibition [of work]" (*zile oprite*) at Starchiojd are included in the farmer's calendar, so they are an implicit part of hay culture. As haymaking time is in midsummer, midsummer feast days are particularly

Odaie at "Plateau Head", Starchiojd, 2013. Photo credits: Cristian Mușa

observed in the commune. The religious holidays, like the feast day of St. Peter (June 29th) and St. Elijah's Day (20th of June) are held in high respect, but so are folk holidays such as the feast days of Judah (June 19th), The Stones of Saint Peter (June 30th), or Marina (July 17th). Of course, there are a lot of occupational syncretisms (especially agropastoral) and confusions specific to orality milieus (for example, dates of folk holidays are still mixed up, or Marina is considered to be a masculine sacred representation instead of a feminine one), but the local variants of the specific prescriptions and interdictions associated to these folk celebrations in Romanian villages are well known and preserved.

Living in a hay culture, Starchiojd inhabitants also remember some ritual practices associating their main vegetal resource with the rites of passage. For example, a pillow filled with *otavă* (after grass) used to be put in the coffin to help the dead person integrate into the other world. One of our informants, Ana Frigea, remembers that her mother-in-law would give hay for alms: "My Mum would always give away a parcel with hay in the autumn. She said she wanted to have on what to feed animals if they crossed her path in the other world."

Memories

Elena Pătârlăgeanu, an 86-year old informant in 2013, was not satisfied with the fact that young people wouldn't go to the woods and to *odaie*, to clear the weeds and underbrush, and use the land like they used to do.

In 2013, Olimpia Gîrbea told us spontaneously a short personal narrative that associates haylife with youth and family relationships: "I was once preparing the *mămăliga* (a kind of thick polenta), and my husband had just honed the scythe and he went to the edge of the plot to rest. I was stirring my *mămăliga* there, we had made a fireplace for cooking and we had such a small trivet and would put it there and I was cooking *mămăliga* and suddenly we heard a trot... it was a stag, a beautiful stag, vivid brick red, vivid red. And he came and when he saw me he stopped short, as there was quite a slope, so he stopped and he looked at me straight in the eye and then suddenly he went to the right and started to walk by the edge of the forest. I forgot my *mămăliga* and everything and went to look at him. He was such a beauty, so beautiful he was. Look, I have a pair of antlers here [we were

talking in her house]. My husband has found these in the forest. And my son took them [both the husband and the only son of our informant were dead when we spoke to her]. I wanted to mount them, but we haven't done it, I don't know why..." *Tanti* Olimpia concludes her story by saying that more than one person wanted to buy the antlers from her, but she wouldn't sell them.

Conclusions

The studying of a small community such the one in Starchiojd can also be theoretically approached from the side of nature *versus* culture. Societies' relationships with their environment is a fundamental research topic, which includes, besides exploration of traditional cosomologies, ethnological inquiries into matters of preserving biological diversity, of managing protected areas or activating new concepts such as, for example, "heritage landscape" (Segalen, 2002: 131)[7]. In researching "the interrelationships of man and nature, the concurrent regularities, natural and artificial" (Redfield 1960: 26), we approach our field as an ecological system.

However, "if what we want most to understand is their own view of things, we need concepts that will describe the inside view, as much of it as we can come to share" (Redfield 1960: 32).

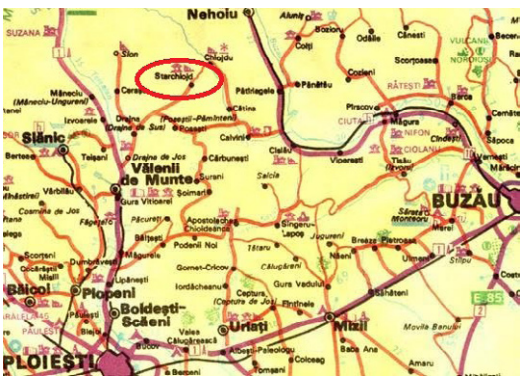
In that connection, there is the noteworthy field account mentioned by Gheorghiță Geană (Geană 2013: 128), which shows a surprising way in which insiders assess religious values associated with contemporary hay culture: "Let me tell a significant story from my fieldwork. It happened some years ago, during a field research in a village of the Western Carpathians. One day, a young man, who was the son of my host, left home to attend a clacă[8] for haymaking for the benefit of an old man. It was Sunday, so I approached him: 'It is a holiday, isn't it a sin to work on such a day?' He answered simply: 'On the contrary; it is a *clacă* for an old man, and this will be appreciated by God."

Also we have to consider the age and gender issues in the interpretation of our research, because most of our informants are elder women. Therefore, a certain emphasis on gender role in their discourse on hay culture could provide insight as to a biased emic perspective our topic.

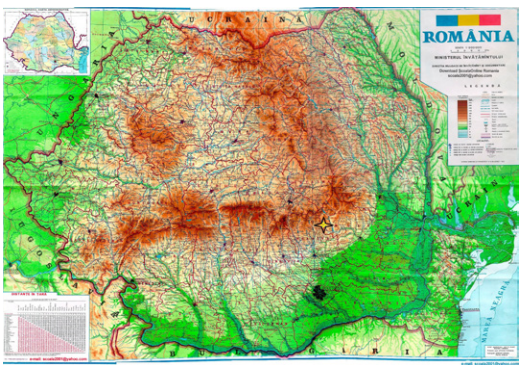
Conversely, we need to take into account our own subjective projections upon the field. Especially in the case of Cristian, a self-referential deconstruction of his scholarly production could lead to useful observations concerning the identity of ethnologists/ anthropologists when they identify with the studied community.

7) For the *ecological* perspective in anthropology, see also Vintilă Mihăilescu 2007: 324-330. For *oekological* studies applied to anthropology, see Marianne Mesnil, in Mesnil and Popova 2007: 71-100.

8) *Claca* = "the gathering of individuals in informal groups to work together; for example: *claca* for haymaking" (Geană 2013: 127).



Commune Starchiojd on a local touristic map.
Source of the image: https://sites.google.com/site/romanianatura35/carpatii-rasariteni/subcarpati-la-est-de-prahova/piatra-rotarii-gauri-cu-provenienta-neelucidata (accessed on 15 June, 2016)



Commune Starchiojd on the map of Romania.
Source of the image: http://www.geotutorials.ro/Harti-Romania/ROMANIA%20 1_800000.JPG (accessed on 15 June, 2016)

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Sultana Hristea (b. 1935)
Elena Mușa (b. 1955)
Maria Oprea (1919-2014)
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Elena Pătîrlăgeanu (1927-2014)
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III. Drivers of Change in Hay Culture