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Did White Swallowwort *(Vincetoxicum hirundinaria)*[1] Exist or Did It not During the Organic Regulations Regime? Notes on some Previously Unknown Documents from Wallachia[2]

Nicolae Mihai

"C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor" Institute for Social Science and Humanities Research of the Romanian Academy, Romania
ORCID: 0000-0002-2219-591

Nicolae Mihai is researcher in the Department of History-Archeology, "C.S Nicolăescu-Plopșor" Institute for Research in Social Sciences and Humanities of the Romanian Academy (Craiova, Romania). His is interested in cultural history of the 19th Century with special focus on religious and popular culture of the Romanians, 1848 revolutions, culture memory (from 18th Century testamentary practices to the Great War) and sensorial urban history in the Romanian space.

Correspondence: nicomihai48@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The present text is a small commentary on a classic case of cultural conflict that occurred in Wallachia in 1835 under the Organic Regulations regime. Starting from the discovery of some unknown documents in the archives of Romanați county, relating to the public proclamation of the non-existence of the plant *iarba fiarelor* (white swallowwort), which was made use of by treasure hunters at the time, we have tried to establish what was at stake in this conflict. Popular culture suddenly became a threat to the authorities of a modern state that was operating a real process of socio-cultural *dressage* in that period, a move that inevitably brought it into a precisely datable conflict with those who still remained faithful to a folklore culture. One of those happy cases in which history comes to the aid of ethnology.

KEYWORDS

Iarba fiarelor (white swallowwort); Wallachia; Organic Regulations regime; cultural conflict; previously unknown documents.

Introduction

The question in our title may seem a strange one. It is connected with the issuing of an administrative document in Wallachia in 1835 in which, strange though it may appear, white swallowwort was officially proclaimed to be non-existent and any attempt to make use of it became a punishable offence. The question that naturally arises is that of how a plant could become such an inconvenience that it attracted the repressive attention of the Ruling Power at a particular point in time. But in our case we are talking not about any old plant but about a special one that had an established position in Romanian folk culture (Candrea 1928). There are few documented cases in which we can see an evident conflict between popular culture and a Ruling Power (whatever institutional form it takes), especially a conflict that puts the latter in a difficult position that forces it to take extreme measures. And we know of fewer situations in which the State intervenes in an aggressive way and demands that plants be prohibited. We could invoke the case in which the Spanish Empire in Mexico forbade the peyotl or peyote plant, as analysed by Alessandro Stella (Stella 2006, 129-37). This little cactus seems to have troubled the Spanish Inquisition, which banned it in 1620. Its ritual consumption as part of various religious ceremonies, together with its use in various practices linked to foretelling the future, possibly less so those connected with its therapeutic effects on certain diseases, seem to have irritated the Conquistadors, who did not hesitate to give it a suitable name, "devil's grass." Quite a contrast with the Amerindians, who had christened it "flesh of the gods!" From Bernardino de Sahagun, however, we learn a deeper motivation. A sharp-eyed ethnographer of this world *avant la lettre*, he made careful notes on a number of traditions, customs and practices among the Indians, as well as on their diet and on the flora and fauna he encountered. Regarding this white-flowered plant he tells us that for the Chichimecas Indians it was a standard food that gave them courage in battle and freed them from any sensation of fear, thirst or hunger. In addition, it protected them from all dangers. The drunkenness and altered consciousness that it produced strengthened the reputation of the plant as sacred, since it gave them access to a special type of knowledge that ranged from the revelation of all kinds of unforeseeable future events to the identification of the perpetrators of thefts (Stella 2006, 132). The ban on its consumption brought into force by the edict of June 19, 1620 highlights a definite cultural conflict, in which the superstitious side of the natives' culture stands in strong contrast to the "purity and simplicity" of Catholicism (Stella 2006, 132), and proclaims, in a manner a little similar to what we have in our case, the actual ineffectiveness of the plant concerned, which "cannot have the natural power and efficacy that are attributed to it to bring about the effects described" (Stella 2006, 132). Of course, the interdiction put out by the Inquisition is founded on religious presuppositions, with its punitive part being based in essence on excommunication and less so on corporal or other kinds of punishment (although it includes these too). It emphasises the shortcomings of a society which was attempting to construct itself in accordance with the Catholic Christian model but whose inhabitants were still characterised by "a natural simplicity" and a distinct inclination towards idolatry.

I have mentioned this case of cultural conflict in order to (re)open a discussion in which there is much at stake for historians and ethnologists/anthropologists alike, this time for the Romanian space, by taking as my starting-point a document that is, in its way, amazing. Up until now, historians have had reasons to be cautious about ethnographers/ethnologists. What we learn, for example, from Simion Mangiuca (Taloș 1962-1964, 330) and from Tudor Pamfile on the subject of treasure hoards and the whole cultural context, presented as existing within an exclusively rural world (Pamfile 1916), and from I.A. Candrea (Candrea 1928; Dobre 1995, 147-72), who brought together information

that had appeared in older publications or in the works of predecessors (Mangiuca, Panțu), used to seem relevant as descriptions of a popular culture that had survived until the end of the nineteenth century, written by scholars who did not concern themselves too much with providing "historical proofs." And as historical evidence was slow to appear, the subject remained the exclusive property of a category of specialists in folklore research. But evidence did exist; it can be seen both in notices in the press of 1890 (*Lupta* 1890-06-14/no. 1148*, Universul* 1890-06-13/no. 133; 1890-06-17/no. 137) and 1899 (*Universul* 1899-02-23), and in much earlier periods, even during the time of the Organic Regulations (1835, for the case we are looking at). Leaving aside the press notices, which will be the subject of a future research study, the documents we discovered in the archive of the onetime county of Romanați struck us as so extremely interesting that we should dwell on them a little. A common element: both the mentions in the late nineteenth-century press and the documents bearing the seal of the Organic Regulations authorities associate white swallowwort with unscrupulous actions that affect the lives of individuals and communities. However, while at the end of the nineteenth century we can speak of the mentioning of this plant in a wide-circulation newspaper in the column devoted to "exotic" information, minor unusual and unrelated events, during the time of the Organic Regulations the viewpoint is different in substance, even though it starts from the same premise, a case of scoundrelly behaviour.

Historical context

We should note at the outset that there are few cases where the historian has the opportunity to verify information that popular culture has preserved only for the later enjoyment of ethnologists or anthropologists. But our amazement is even greater when we attempt to grasp what precisely it was that struck such fear into the authorities in 1835 that they went as far as forbidding having recourse to a magic plant. The way they took action – by making a public proclamation that the plant did not exist and, by implication, penalising anyone who made even the slightest use of it in the future – is also interesting in itself. The first important thing to mention is that there is a specific reference to white swallowwort in 1835. We find peasants, functionaries both local (prefect and subprefects, police officers) and at the ministerial level (the Department of the Interior; RO: *Marea Vornicie*), and the prince himself [*Vodă*] caught up in a round of communications sparked by this subject that became one of general interest. This is no small thing! The manner of speaking and the vision of the Ruling Power that these documents express are again useful to us in that they help us understand the universe of meanings that was constructed around this plant. Whereas for the Spanish authorities in Mexico in 1620 the Devil could be the author of the *deception* involving the peyotle plant, in the Wallachia of 1835 the Organic Regulations authorities preferred to speak only of the *cunning* of those who claimed to be the repositories of some special knowledge, thus trading on the naivety of people who were eager to find treasure.

Another interesting point, we believe, is the difference between the "titles" of the two files discovered, both made up of documents relating to the same subject and in effect making reference to the same measure. While on the one that contains the central document and the others related to it, connected with its promulgation throughout an administrative sub-unit of Romanați county, the local functionary thought it more fitting to write "Delă [file] for *the papers touching upon deceit* [emphasis ours] in connection with iarba fearelor" (OCSNA MP 117/1835), in the central file, drawn up in the county town, what is written is a little different: "Delă [file] for the orders received from the Department of the Interior [RO*: Marea Vornicie*] in the case of iarba fiarelor *which does not occur in nature* [emphasis ours]" (OCSNA. OJR 139/1835).

As white swallowwort is something that is spoken about, not written about, given that it is part of a *par excellence* oral culture, how do we explain its appearance in writing? We owe the recording of information about this wonder-working plant to a measure that came into force in Wallachia in 1833, under which written communication between authorities was made compulsory as soon as the residence of the subprefect was fixed in every subdivision of a county [*plasa*]. Consequently, the records of this administrative correspondence remained in the archives of the local chancelleries, given that, as I. C Filitti explains, "the subprefects were responsible for giving rulings in disputes between landowners and villagers" (Filitti 1934, 250). So it was that this information reached us when we undid the two files that had been tied up with blue and white cord and sealed in that era.

We should mention in passing that the Organic Regulations authorities had much to be worried about in 1835, the year that saw the issuing of the documents that aroused our interest. Alexandru Ghica, the first Organic Regulations prince in Wallachia, had only taken over the throne the previous year. This Romanian Principality had been affected by the last Russo-Turkish War (1826-1828) and was still the scene of large-scale organisational measures, initiated by the Russians, as a consequence of the introduction of the Organic Regulations regime and of the prolongation of the Russian occupation until April 1834 (Filitti 1934, 223-370). The new Organic Regulations regime, proclaimed under the authority of General Kiseleff, was an attempt at a settlement that was more intelligent, on the basis of a modern state, but without the granting of political liberty (the example of the Polish constitution of 1791 was still fresh in the Russians' minds). The extent of the reforms initiated, of the cataloguing of every kind, and of measures designed to prescribe in detail the functioning of society down to the last hamlet, demonstrates that we are witnessing a major process of socio-cultural *dressage*, one that the inhabitants of the Principality attempted to cope with, including by offering resistance to it. What interests us is the fact that all these measures compelled the appearance on the surface of cultural, mentality-related strata to which we would otherwise rarely have had access, even if it is not easy for us [to] "fight our way past the text to some hard and fast reality beyond it" (Darnton 1999, 116).

The document we publish here alludes in a subsidiary way to another phenomenon that is still to be elucidated, that of the practice of petitioning the authorities. Peasants did not hesitate to write *jălbi* [complaints, petitions] addressed directly not only to representatives of the authorities but to the prince or a person of similar prestige (Kiseleff, for example). Pavel Kiseleff himself received numerous complaints of this kind, "both orally and in the form of a *jalba* from the peasants of Oltenia" (Filitti 1934, 301); as early as November 1832 he had expressed his agreement to respect a principle that already had a past behind it, "the continuation of the right to appeal to the future ruler, following the custom that has always obtained in this country" (apud Filitti 1934, 242). This helps us understand how the story of people deceived by the use of white swallowwort came to the ears of the prince Alexandru Ghica. We are talking about the fact that increasing numbers of the complaints, the petitions from residents, peasants for the most part, came straight to the prince, who decided to intervene. 1835 was the year in which orders sent out by Alexandru Ghica responded not only to those of these documents that were concerned with abuses by the local administration (subprefects responsible for local administrative subdivisions) (Mateescu 2018, 12), but also to those referring to cases of deception connected with the use of white swallowwort. Sadly, we have not yet been able to discover any *jălbi* of this kind; they would have helped us enormously towards gaining a peasants' eye (and not just authorities' eye) view of the phenomenon. We do however find indirect references, reproduced from what the Organic Regulations authorities recorded in the investigation dossiers of the kinds of cases that we too will be referring to.

Analysis of the documents

The file on the issue is in fact made up of two files, in Cyrillic script. One comes from the Romanați County Administration archive (file 139/1835), contains two sheets, and is dated 13 September 1835; on its cover is written "Delă [file] for the orders received from the Department of the Interior in the case of white swallowwort *which does not occur in nature"* [RO: *Delă după porunca Mari Dvornicii în pricina erbi(i) fiarălor ce nu să află în natură*]. The other (117/1835), with a similarly small number of sheets, comes from the archive of an administrative sub-unit of the county, Mijloc plasa, is dated 18 September 1835, and has a title that has been slightly changed, "Delă [file] for the papers touching upon *deceit in connection with white swallowwort*" (with a different spelling of "swallowwort") [RO: *Delă pentru hărtiile atingătoare de vicleșug în pricina erbii fearălor.*]. Both files are derived from the official document issued by the Department of the Interior (RO: *Marea Vornicie* as it is sometimes expressed, the equivalent of today's Ministry of Internal Affairs), which was recorded in two different ways as a result of the fact that it was received first at Caracal, the county town of Romanați county (13 September), and then at the headquarters of Mijloc administrative area (18 September). The principal document is the one issued on 9 September 1835 by the Department of the Interior; it bears the signature of Mihai Cornescu and is countersigned by Iordache Crețeanu. The principal one is that received on 13 September, with the Mijloc *plasa* area one clearly being a copy. What tells us this is the absence from the Mijloc document both of the handwritten signatures of the two officials and of a special order, signed by Iordache Crețeanu, requiring not only that the response be communicated to the Prefect [RO: *ocârmuitor*] but also that copies of the central command should be made and sent as a matter of urgency to the sub-prefects and to the police of the town of Caracal so that it could be made generally known (OCSNA, RCP, 139/1835, 2r).

On reading the documents, we were struck not only by this urgency but also by another feature. So that the rationale of the principal document, the manner of its conception and, above all, its importance may be fully understood, it would perhaps be no bad thing for us to make it clear that no mere official signed it. Mihail Cornescu, the principal signatory, is far from being just another historical character. His name recurs again and again in the records of the composition of several important committees of the time: the one charged with translating the French commercial law code in 1831 (Filitti 1934, 271), that set up to study the administration of the wealth of monasteries in 1831 (Filitti 1934, 275), that charged with putting together a "full political and criminal register" in April 1832 (Filitti 1934), and that for reducing the number of counties in Wallachia in 1833 (this last along with Lieutenant-Colonel Fanton de Verrayon) (Filitti 1934, 249). To all these positions we could add that of his role as a member of the Extraordinary Administrative Council (Filitti 1934, 281) and, in particular, as a member of the "executive council of the Extraordinary Assembly for the revision of the Organic Regulation for Wallachia, inaugurated on 10 March 1831, in which he was responsible for the part concerning the "militia" (the army) (Filitti 1934, 82). These details tell us all we need to know about the authority, importance and experience of this as yet insufficiently known frontranking contributor to the new administrative reforms who also set his signature to our official document dealing with white swallowwort. And this shows us that the subject was treated, at the time, with greater attention than we could have imagined.

In that period, the moving of villages from the hinterland to along the roads and the opposition this met with, the cases of robbery that affected the stability of the quarantine line and perpetuated suspicious to-and-fro movement across the frontier, and the setting-right of abuses in the administration (Mateescu 2018) would have seemed to the Regulation

authorities to be much more concerning phenomena. Even so, reading the items identified in these two files from the archive of the erstwhile historic county of Romanați faces us with a conundrum: could the unrest caused by people having recourse to white swallowwort have come to pose such a threat to social harmony as to have necessitated the specific intervention of the prince and of the Department of the Interior? Was this plant really so popular in 1835, and if so, in what context?

To understand the fascination exerted by white swallowwort in this period, we need to view it within the context of two closely connected aspects of the historical background that helped it maintain its reputation. On the one hand we have to bear in mind the existence of numerous hoards of buried treasure. These originated both as a consequence of the prevalence of bands of robbers, who were coming under greater pressure since the Organic Regulations administration had taken power, and from the fearfulness of the wealthier inhabitants, whatever their social background, who were attempting to protect their valuables. Information went around, some robbers disappeared without trace, the tendency being for capital punishment to be commuted into their being sent to the salt mines or beaten with staffs (Vulpe 2006, 195), and access to the treasure hoards they left behind – the memory of which was kept alive by the stories that still circulated regarding them – was keenly coveted, despite the fact that their precise locations were not always known. Another category of information had to do with treasures from classical antiquity, from the time of the emperor Trajan, and stories of this kind, which described treasure hoards containing large gold coins, "and other jewelled implements by the cartload," could still be heard even in Bucharest establishments in the late nineteenth century (*Universul* 1890-06-17/no.137, 3). Some counties in Oltenia, including Romanați, were already in the Organic Regulations period well known for the traces of classical antiquity to be found there; it was not difficult to discover coins, medallions and other "Roman rarities" there, as the Russian doctor Stepan Fyodorovici Dobronravov noted in 1831 (Cernovodeanu 2006, 30).

On the other hand, white swallowwort is connected with this context of robbers, bandits, who were still very active in the period from which our document comes. The plant in question, used as a means to discovering treasure, also ensured the escape of captured or imprisoned bandits. It is no accident that I. A. Candrea mentions its second common name, "robbers' plant," and this meaning was confirmed and written about, including by the press of the late nineteenth century, before it was recorded as such by our folklore specialists, which indicates that this meaning too was fixed in popular culture.

Instances of robbery were frequent in this period and were the subject of painstaking investigation by the authorities, who initiated a serious policy of repression aimed at stamping out the phenomenon (Vulpe 2006, 304, 308). Sometimes it was possible to capture the robber bands and recover their booty, even if only partially. At other times it was not, the assumption then being that the perpetrators had buried their ill-gotten gains, if indeed they had not come from across the Danube ("people from the Turkish country," Vulpe 2006, 302). And not surprisingly, the local people themselves, living in a social context characterised by frequent instances of this kind of violence, learned to conceal their money in places that were as well hidden as they could possibly be and unsuspected even by members of their own families. Tudor Pamfile gives us a graphic example of this: an inhabitant of Dolj proved by the use of witnesses – his wife and his neighbours – how well he had hidden his money in a horse head; not one of his witnesses had been able to find it, even though they had walked past the spot again and again (Pamfile 1916, 2-5). The range of places chosen for the burying of large sums of money during the Organic Regulations period was very wide. Investigations carried out by the authorities into cases discovered between 1831 and 1833 show us that a priest might bury his money

under a boulder (Father Andrei from the village of Zmeurăt, robbed of 2400 lei, Vâlcea county) (Vulpe 2006, 186). Another victim concealed it under "the roots of a poplar" (the case of Nițu Brătuianu of Iași, attacked in Gorj county on St Basil's Day in the winter of 1833, 100 lei buried; Vulpe 2006, 188).

The authorities took seriously any losses that exceeded a threshold of 150 lei, as we learn from an 1842 case involving the inhabitants of the village of Corlățelu, Mehedinți county: "given that the honourable Court, as we have understood, is restricted to deciding especially murder cases and those involving losses of over 150 lei" (Vulpe 206, 303). The reason for providing this data is that it makes it a little easier to understand the raft of meanings that had built up around white swallowwort. Access to this magical plant did not come cheap. In line with its renown and the fact that it could lead one to extremely valuable treasure hoards, the asking price could be a very high one, definitely exceeding that punishable threshold of 150 lei. So, in one of the few cases identified, investigated by the competent authorities and recorded at the Dolj County Court (DCSNA, DC I, 8/1837), the people of the village of Punghina in Mehedinți county are found entering a plea against Gheorghe "the Arnăut" (Albanian mercenary soldier) and "Mihai sârbu ot Ciutura" for the recovery of the sum of 1257 lei, which they had paid to these two men "who had given them their word that they would give them white swallowwort" (DCSNA, DCC, I, 8/1837, 1).

What is beyond doubt is that our nineteenth-century archives covering this period contain more and more requests from groups and individuals seeking approval for digging to be undertaken in places where treasure was "believed" or "suspected" to exist. This is true of both Romanian Principalities, Wallachia and Moldova. The subject of going "digging for money," preferably at night, even came up in people's everyday conversations, as we learn from the record of an 1842 interrogation of a goatherd called Ioța from Băilești in Dolj county (Vulpe 2006, 264). The variety of indicators used here to identify with "precision" places where it would be worth digging drew on popular culture. Not only places over which witnesses used to tell of having seen candles burning, but also those that had appeared recently, where various natural phenomena (storms, rivers bursting their banks) had made it possible for valuable artefacts (especially gold and silver coins) to be unearthed.

The principal document, which we will reproduce *in extenso* in the Annex, demonstrates to us the existence of a real problem, given that no less an institution than the Department of the Interior [*Marea Vornicie*], the equivalent of today's Ministry of Internal Affairs, needed to intervene and regulate it in an official way. What exactly was it that had caused an inconvenience so great that an administrative decision had to be taken against a fact of popular culture? Does more turn on this conflict than the seeming elimination of one specific kind of scoundrelly behaviour that was becoming increasingly frequent at the time and that was linked to another socio-cultural phenomenon, an absolute obsession with finding treasure? We should note that the surprising administrative initiative does not belong entirely to the institution we have mentioned; the official measure taken was the result not only of complaints or petitions addressed to it but also of those received, directly or indirectly, by the prince Alexandru Ghica. In any case, the principal document speaks of "many *jălbi* [petitions]" on this subject. It appears that the administrative measure was directed against the scoundrels and that one of its functions was certainly to protect the inhabitants of the principate, *led astray* "by some of the crafty people" and also *deceived* "into spending money." However, the phenomenon was an extensive one, which indicates the strength of the belief in the efficacy of this plant. This explains the measures taken and the command that they be publicised in all the small towns ("târguri") and villages: "this order from the Department is to be announced in all the small towns and villages in the county, within the hearing of all the customary inhabitants, that wherever a deceptive claim of this kind arises,

that white swallowwort is to be found, people are not to give it credence and are immediately to bring the person concerned to the knowledge of the Prefecture" (OCSNA, RCP 139/1835, 1r; MP 117/1835, 1r). The official document shows that the view of the subject adopted by the Organic Regulations regime is that of a modern state. People who remain in thrall to a cultural universe that sets store by the magical virtues of a plant belong to the category of "the most stupid people" who "would believe something like this" (OCSNA, RCP 139/1835, 1r). The document sets out with clarity the existence of cultural barriers. With the good logic of a modern disciplinary state, "if any superstition remained, it was restricted to the common people (*cei proști* [the stupid people])" (Darnton 2009, 133-34). However, we would be naive to believe that "the upper orders had withdrawn from the activities that had engaged the whole people several generations ago, and had shut themselves up within their own cultural forms" (Darnton 2009, 134). The examples we find in the press of the Old Kingdom of Romania in the late nineteenth century, involving judges and notaries being "seduced" by white swallowwort, show us that the situation was rather different. In addition, can a parallel to this obsession with treasure, this wish to get rich, that we have seen evidence of at the popular level be found in a different wish to get rich that existed among the elite and whose essence was captured by one Nicolae Filimon in a well-known novel written after 1862?[3] Returning to our document, we note that it makes a direct attack on what it claims is the credulity of these common people, since it is this that provides fertile ground for the scoundrelly schemes practised by various people who claim to know the whereabouts of the universally desired plant, the key to the fabulous universe of hidden treasure.

The strategy proposed by the official document is an interesting one. On the one hand it makes a frontal attack on the kind of knowledge that the "charlatans" in question claim to possess, by proclaiming the non-occurrence of the plant in nature, not only (and this is an important detail) in Wallachia but also in other neighbouring countries: "because such white swallowwort is not evident anywhere, either here, in our country or in other areas" (OCSNA, RCP 139/1835, 1r). This is one of the main points to be emphasised, and it is also taken up in the orders sent by the Prefect of Romanați county to the subprefects and to the police force of the county town, Caracal. The official interdiction attempts to make use of a credible argument: the non-existence of the plant, officially proclaimed, is based on its non-existence at the "natural" level. If it cannot be identified, known in reality, it can be seen to be a creation of the imagination. But this might have undesirable effects as well, and this impels the government to give a second proof after it has already introduced a classification, by placing "white swallowwort" among things that belong not to magic, as we might have expected, but to deception. Consequently, there is a natural progression from here (and this is the other part of the approach) to the language of courts and penalties by the establishing of a collective culpability (as already applied in other situations, such as that involving keeping secret the whereabouts of outlaws) that includes both the deceived and the deceiver and ruling that both categories are to be punished, since both are responsible for the existence of this "popular belief": "both the one deceived and the deceiver alike will be subject to punishment." A situation that confronts us with a problem: by eliminating both of the mutually dependent categories, was the Government achieving anything beyond the elimination of a simple problem of a socio-economic type? And again, not only the elimination of a particular kind of scoundrelly behaviour but also the dragging of the population out of a universe of superstitions, the cutting-off at the root of any connection with it? A lost cause from the outset, as we know from other examples from history and as we see both from the reappearance of these cases in the Romanian press of the late nineteenth century and from the records of information collected by Romanian folklore specialists in the same period and in the early years of the following century.

Conclusions

These considerations take us back to the question from which we set out: how dangerous had white swallowwort become in this period? And we could go on to ask, if we reevaluate our reading of the document which articulates the vision of the Organic Regulations regime in Wallachia, to what extent did the new administrative arrangements lead to the disappearance of this aspect of popular culture? Those cases from the late nineteenth century have shown us the persistence of this cultural vein. Far from having disappeared, this relic of a popular culture that was being subjected to ever more aggressive attacks from an expanding culture of modernity, white swallowwort, had miraculously survived and was attacking new victims, this time from the ranks of professional people such as judges and notaries. It was only a few years before it would find its place in the research work of Romanian ethnographers or of tireless local seekers after treasures of a different kind, this time those connected with the national tradition, folk culture.

NOTES

1. There is as yet no clear consensus regarding this plant. In the sixth edition of his well-known dictionary, which first appeared in 1896, Lazăr Şăineanu explains it as "a poisonous plant, with yellowish-white flowers, which (according to popular belief) can open locks and for that reason is much sought out by thieves, who carry it in their belt or in the little finger of their left hand (*Asclepias vincetoxicum*)" (Şăineanu 1928, 300 s.v.). In an article on Latin-derived nomenclature in natural history, G. Crăiniceanu describes *iarba fiarelor* as the same as *iarba ferului*, v. *Rănduniță* [swallowwort]; *Ochiul boului* [bull's eye]; *Rocă* [rock] (Crăiniceanu 1890, 564). George Bujorean also conflates white swallowwort with another plant, in his case with *Măru lupului*, and uses different terminology – *Cynanchum vincetoxicum* – from Şăineanu, even though he is referring to white swallowwort. In fact, the plant is recorded using classic botanical terminology, with no connection with white swallowwort (Bujorean 1936, 384, s.v.). White swallowwort also appears as *Vincetoxicum hirundinaria* or St Lawrence herb in Wolf D. Storl (Storl 2017, 200 sv), being thus associated with one of the early Christian martyrs. For the Romanian space, the standard work is still I. A. Candrea (Candrea 1928; Dobre 1995, 147-72).

2. I am immensely grateful to Dorothy Elford for her sincerely helpful and supportive way in providing the best translation in English to my Romanian paper and to Ileana Benga for her final careful reading of the text, continuous encouragement and entirely trust in my research.

3. Our reference is to the novel *Ciocoii vechi* și *noi* [Parvenus old and new], first published in parts in 1862 and in its entirety in 1863.

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ANNEX

OCSNA (OLT County Service of the National Archives), Slatina, Romanați County Prefecture archive
Dossier 139/1835
Correspondence regarding the non-existence in nature of white swallowwort

No. 19
Romanați county, 13 September 1835
File for the orders received from the Department of the Interior in the case of white swallowwort which does not occur in nature
(on cover)

1. 9 September 1835. Department of the Interior to the Prefecture of Romanați (Orders, original) received September 13

Department of the Interior
To the Prefecture of Romanați county

Since from the many petitions that have been presented both to His Highness the Hospodar ["Măria Sa, Vodă"] and to this department by some of the inhabitants saying that they have been making great efforts and spending money in order to find white swallowwort[1] and use it to discover buried treasure, being led astray by some crafty people who deceive them in order to put them to expense, it has been given to understand that only the most foolish of people would believe something like this, which consequence is not to be endured, because such white swallowwort is not attested anywhere at all, not only here in this country but also elsewhere, His Highness the Hospodar has ordered that those who claim that they can find it be reproved as deceivers, and that therefore a command be sent in writing to the Prefecture from the Department: it should be announced in all the small towns and villages in the county, in the hearing of all the regular inhabitants, that wherever such a crafty claim arises, that white swallowwort can be found, they should not give it credence and also should immediately report the person concerned to the Prefecture, who should reprove him sternly and make him give guarantees that he will stop making such crafty and deceptive claims, because if he does not, if such evil consequences arise and if there are any future petitions saying that someone has spent money to find white swallowwort, not only will he not be listened to, but both the deceived and the deceiver alike will be punished and the Prefecture is to be informed of the result.

9 September 1835

Mihai Cornesc<u> [2]

Besides the answer that will be [ocl.?]:[3] copies are to be made specifically to be sent to the Subprefects and the police as well! Iord <ache> Crețeanul[4]

f. 1r-v

Section 3
Table 1
No. 1669

2. Reply to the Department of the Interior

The humble Prefecture hereby acknowledges receipt of the worthy command number 1669 touching upon the halting of the deceptive agitation that some people are causing because some are searching for white swallowwort[5] and others are being financially ruined:[6] in their efforts to find it whereas such a plant is not known as existing in nature, and this humble official makes it known that he will carry out the orders to the letter. 15 September 1835

Section 3
Table 1a
No. 47136

3. Orders for the Subprefects and the Police

By sending you this copy in accordance with command number 1669 of this Department of the Interior we are writing to you on the one hand to make it a matter of general knowledge[7] and command all the people that no one should again venture to search pointlessly for so-called white swallowwort, or promise that he can find it as this is a thing that[8] is not known to exist in nature. And on the other hand you are to take care that if [...] to discover without fail those people who in secret will be tempted to move in one way or another and immediately send them to the Prefecture with a report on the circumstances of their movements.

16 September 1835

No. 4777 To Balta
4778 To Mijloc
4780 To Olt
4780 To Olteț
4781 To Cămp
4782 To the police

f. 2 r-v

OCSNA MP. (Olt County Service of the National Archives), Slatina, archive of the subprefecture of Mijloc administrative area
Dossier 117/1835

Mijloc administrative area 18 September 1835
File for the papers touching upon deceit in connection with white swallowwort
of archive no. 5504, no.4727 (on cover)

1. 9 September 1835. Department of the Interior to Romanați Prefecture (orders, copy)
(in left corner, diagonally) received September 18

Department of the Interior
To the Prefecture of Romanați county

Since from the many petitions that have been presented both to His Highness the Hospodar ["Măria Sa, Vodă"], and to this department by some of the inhabitants saying that they have been making great efforts and spending money in order to find white swallowwort and use it to discover buried treasure, being led astray by some crafty people who deceive them in order to put them to expense, it has been given to understand that that only the most foolish of people would believe something like this, which consequence is not to be endured because such white swallowwort is not attested anywhere at all, not only not in this country but also elsewhere, His Highness the Hospodar has ordered that those who claim that they can find it should be reproved as deceivers, and that therefore a command be sent in writing to the Prefecture with this command from the Department: that it should be announced in all the small towns and villages in the county, in the hearing of all the regular inhabitants, that wherever such a crafty claim arises,[9] that white swallowwort can be found, they should not give it credence and also should immediately report the person concerned to the Prefecture, who should reprove him sternly and make him give guarantees that he will stop making such crafty and deceptive claims, because if he does not, if such evil consequences arise and there are any future petitions saying that someone has spent money trying to find white swallowwort, not only will he not be listened to, but both the deceived and the deceiver alike will be punished and the Prefecture is to be informed of the result.

Mihail Cornescu, 9 September 1835
Iordache Crețeanu

Section 3
1st Table
No. 1669

2. Romanați Prefecture to the subprefect of Mijloc administrative area
Received 18 September

No 742 Romanați County Prefecture
To the Subprefect of Mijloc administrative area

By sending you this copy in accordance with command number 1669 of this Department of the Interior we are writing to you on the one hand to make it a matter of general knowledge and command all the people that no one should again venture to search pointlessly for so-called white swallowwort, or promise that he can find it, as this is a thing that is not known to exist in nature, and on the other hand you are to take care specifically to discover without fail those people who in secret will be tempted to move in one way or another and immediately send them to the Prefecture with a report on the circumstances of their movements.

18 September 1835
G. Coțofenea, Prefect
A<ndrei> Prejbeanu, Secretary

f. 1r-v

3. Reply to Romanați Prefecture

The worthy subprefecture, understanding the content of the copy of order no. 1669 from the Honourable Department of the Interior, and of order no. 4778 of the Honourable Prefecture [...][10] which touches upon craftiness regarding white swallowwort, makes it known that they will follow them to the letter.
No. 1667 19 September 1835

f. 2

NOTES

1. It is interesting that the author uses two different forms in the course of the same document: first a form that reflects a pronunciation in common use in Moldova, "hiarălor," and elsewhere one that reflects the usual Wallachian pronunciation, "fiiarălor."

2. Original signature.

3 We have not been able to identify the word of which this is an abbreviation.

4. Original signature.

5. Supra, „they were not able to find treasure hoards."

6. Supra, crossed out, „that finding it, they should take it."

7. "[A]nd on the other hand via the subprefects take care that if [anyone] ma," crossed out.

8. "[N]either," crossed out.

9. Superscript, crossed out, „ară ară."

10. We have not been able to identify the word.