V. Fieldnotes

Scuffling with the Wild Animal. Recorded Documents with Shepherds from the Carpathians

Laura Jiga Iliescu
"Constantin Brăiloiu" Institute of Ethnography and Folklore, The Romanian Academy, Romania
ORCID: 0000-0001-6688-6543

Laura Jiga Iliescu is Senior Researcher at the "Constantin Brăiloiu" Institute of Ethnography and Folklore from Bucharest, The Romanian Academy, and Associate Professor at the University of Bucharest. Her main fields of interest include relations between orality and literacy, folk narratives and their ritual continuity, devotional and charming practices, Christian religiosity in premodern and modern times, interconfessional exchanges, ethnology of the mountain, and video games.

Correspondence: laura.jiga.iliescu@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Whether harmonious or tense over time, the ways in which encounters with wild animals are narrated reflect perspectives on nature and human interaction with it. In this regard, the article reveals documents recorded by the author during fieldworks conducted among Carpathian shepherds.

KEYWORDS

Wild animals; bear; fieldwork; shepherds; Carpathian Mountains.

An almost unknown land to the ordinary person, the alpine plateau and, by extension, those who inhabit it, even seasonally it, embody attributes of otherness both in real and metaphorical terms. Human contact with this geographical reality is mediated and regulated through a set of everyday and festive rules, restrictions, and permissions, some of which are ritualistic.

While in modern times people revalue the ecological, sporting, spiritual, and recreational potential of the mountain and ascending it in both winter and summer, no more than 70-80 years ago, access to the alpine plateau was ritually permitted only during the summer season. Those who knew the high plateau area and who used to meet "up there" (*sus,* in emic parlance) were just a few: shepherds, hunters, blueberry gatherers, outlaws (*haiduci*, thieves, bandits, partisans), hermits, and only from a certain historical point onwards, the mountaineers. Like the mountain itself, these people were also somewhat marginal to the communities at the foot of the mountains. In this essay, I focus on the shepherds, who, until recently, played the role of mediators in constructing the symbolic imaginary of the mountain for people living at its foot.

[L.J.I. Do you know the names of the mountains we see from here?]
V.G. Well... what's it, old lady [addressing an older woman present at the discussion]? Păpuşa, Berhina, Bucura, Sighişoara [clear confusion], Peleaca [Peleaga]... many.
[L.J.I. Is there one called Retezat?]
V.G. Yes, yes, Retezat, yes.
[L.J.I. Why is it called that?]
V.G. That peak is... it's chopped. It's cut off, because you know, it's like this... They say there's a meadow up there about the size of a house. I haven't been there, but I've heard... [She mentions an unintelligible female name] has been there. It's just hard to get there, to reach its peak, that's all.

> That's what she said. The meadow is about the size of the house. From here, you can see it. You need to be a bit young to reach its peak. Oh, it's so beautiful! The Retezat Peak. And... I don't know, maybe somewhere there's another mountain taller than this one, I don't know. But this one is tall. Dani says that I don't know what mountain is taller than this one! I thought this was the only one, I said, "Retezat is the tallest mountain" [laughs]. But he says there might be another one, I don't know. He knows the mountains. He's been there with the sheep, yes. (V.G., woman, peasant, 67 years old. Ohaba Sibişel, Hunedoara County, 23 July 2012)[1]

We talk about men who move in a wild and dangerous environment, unfamiliar and even "close" to sedentary people at the foot of the mountain. Shepherds are a group of people on a seasonal journey at least, bound together by a common perception of space, danger, and nature, by the relation between permitted and prohibited and between living in solitude and living in isolated communities that are reconfigured each year. Shepherds have a profession that requires their periodic displacement from their community of origin, to which they continue to belong.

Between 2011 and 2018, I conducted field research in the high alpine area of the Carpathians. Some of the recordings have been integrated into studies and books (Jiga Iliescu 2013, 2020), while others remain unpublished. Among these, I will bring to light a corpus of recordings whose main subject is the interaction between shepherds and wild animals. The recorded documents I have selected refer to the summers spent on the mountain plateaus of the Parâng, Sebeş, Cindrel, and Retezat massifs in the Southern Carpathian Mountains. At a time when bears have become a national issue in Romania, both due to their high numbers and their transgression of territorial boundaries between wild and human-inhabited areas, I believe that the perspectives expressed by field interlocutors can be valued not only ethnologically but also socially and ecologically. Beyond the storytelling qualities of each interlocutor, the narratives share the fact that shepherds express a vision on critical situations that articulates the concrete with the numinous in which the wild animal acts as an agent between the sacred and humans. They express a mentality in which people position themselves in an active and reciprocal relationship with wild nature—a relationship that, even when tense, requires people to act and behave in a certain way, rather than feeling alienated. Last but not least, all these stories include dogs, true companions in defense and fight.

Beyond the thematic criterion, the second criterion for selecting the field documents is that they are first-person narratives. I will not comment further on the stories below. My aim is to provide researchers with fragments of discourse that can be interpreted, analyzed, and integrated into their own studies. To protect the anonymity of the participants, I use their initials. However, I provide information regarding their identity and metadata related to the location and date of recording.

Keeping wild animals away

The Book of Prayers

> [L.J.I. You said, you had a prayer book in the sleeve of your *cojoc* [sheepskin coat]?]
> D.Ş. Well, yes!
> [L.J.I. Was it printed or handwritten?]
> D.Ş. A book. Printed.

[L.J.I. And you said that when you read, the wolves and bears wouldn't come?]
D.Ş. Well, they would go away.
[L.J.I. From the prayer?]
D.Ş. Of course! You would fast and read. You would sit quietly, and suddenly: "Brrr, prrr, prrr!"
[L.J.I. Did everyone have a book in the sleeve of their *cojoc*, or just some?]
D.Ş. Some, those who believed.
[L.J.I. At what time of the day did you read, in the morning or in the evening, or...]
D.Ş. Whenever I had time. There is a lot of work to do. But when the sheep settled, I would take it and read.
[L.J.I. Did you read silently or a little whispered?]
D.Ş. No, you would read aloud, just like we are talking now. (D.Ş., Romanian, man, 97 years old, shepherd and former head of the stables. Gura Râului, Sibiu County. 3 August 2017)

Space and Sound. Prayer and Incantation

[L.J.I.: And there is no way to defend yourself from these animals?]
M.G. We can only defend ourselves with the barking of the dogs. With the barking of the dogs and with the noise, with shouting: Hoo! Hoo! This is our weapon to scare them off: Hoo! Ho! Ho! Ho. There is nothing else we can do. Because you don't have anything else. With hot embers. Many times, when they're nearby, I use the hot embers from the hearth. There's a fire (hearth) at the sheepfold. I take the ember in my hand, hoo! hoo!, and throw the ember at it. [...]
[L.J.I.: When you went up, in the spring, did you sprinkle the sheepfold with holy water?]
M.G. Some time ago, we used to sprinkle it, some time ago. But now I came a month later and I didn't... We sprinkle the cattle too, when we leave home. When we leave home to go to the mountains, we count them, I take the bowl with holy water, I sprinkle the cows, the sheep, and I tell them Our Father. With God's help, to protect us. And the beast doesn't attack. It scares you, it makes you, but it doesn't take anything from you.
(M.G., Romanian woman, 67 years old, shepherdess, born in Polovragi, Gorj district. Recorded at the sheepfold in Curmătura Olteţului, Parâng. 3 August 2011)

The first time I arrived in the mountains, at the sheepfold, I would shout and say: "As far as my voice reaches, your foot should not pass!" I was telling that to the bear [laughs]. And then I would put the hook [referring to the chain above the hearth]. (I.S., Romanian, woman, 78 years old, former shepherdess. Vaideeni, Vâlcea district. 2 May 2018.)

V.F.: You reminded me, because you said something about animals. When we were young, on the day we started fasting (*Lăsata Secului*), fasting, the old man or the old woman would go outside and say: "Uhuu!" "What is it?" the one inside would reply. "The bear passed by, the wolf passed by, the fox passed by, all the animals passed by, the wolf with its mouth shut," and I don't know what else they would say. "We didn't see them, we didn't hear them." They would say that three times. And there was something else: in the mountains, they would tie up the beasts, uh, so then when the wolf would come, it would come with its mouth shut. It happened that the wolf came, and it couldn't catch the sheep. But, [it would push] with its nose like this.
D.P.: Which beasts did they tie up?
V.F.: At the sheepfold, you saw there are some chains.
[L.J.I.: The chain to which the cauldron is tied above the hearth?]
V.F.: Yes, yes, yes. They would tie them up so that the wolf would have its mouth clenched. (V.F., Romanian, man, 65 years old, former shepherd. D.P., Romanian, woman, 43 years old, school nurse, joined the discussion. Baia de Fier, Gorj district. July 18, 2011)

Meetings

Peaceful meetings

Some time ago, each shepherd had his own mountain, and the wooden vats (*putinei, troacă de smântânit*) to beat the cream, in fact, they no longer brought these down the mountain [in autumn]. They would put them in a hole somewhere. Because if they left when it was snowing, they would put them somewhere, in holes, like that. We found there in Urdele, a hole full of pieces of these earthen pots (sic!). We found many, many shards in that hole. I remember one older man said, "Hey, don't go in there, because that's the bear den." And I would go in, I wasn't afraid. (V.F., Romanian, man, 65 years old, former shepherd. Baia de Fier, Gorj County. 5 August 2012)

I would meet the bear over there, on the hillside. I met it several times. I was with the horses, and they were neighing. Suddenly, I looked up, and on the ridge, there was the bear. Well, the bear won't do anything to you, just don't annoy it. But if it came down, it would have killed me. (A.D., Romanian, man, 89 years old, former shepherd. Vaideeni, Vâlcea County. 3 May 2018)

It runs! I was going up to a place, walking through the forest. And somewhere, there was a peak. From here, there was a path, and here, another path [points to both sides]. I was going up, trying to reach there, it was climbing from the other side, but you couldn't see each other until you reached the top. When I got up here, on the top, it did too! When I saw it, it turned to me and went "Ueeea!" and spat. It spits at you. What should I do in fear? But all it did was to make a left turn and it took off running, but I didn't recover for a long time [laughs]. Because I had seen it before. But anyway, to meet face to face! I've seen it many times! Once, I was coming down and I saw it had two cubs at the top of the fir tree. And the she-bear was behind the tree. It saw me, but I didn't see it. It was looking around, at one side and then at the other side, at me. And the cubs were shrieking up there. I look at the top of the fir tree, "What bird is making such a noise?" When.... I see the cubs!
[L.J.I. In the fir tree, right in the fir tree?]
V.F. Well, yes, they climb like a person in a tree.[2] Yes. The she-bear was watching me, so I wouldn't do I don't know what. When I saw her, I quickly started to walk faster. And she was looking after me: sometimes on one side of the fir, sometimes on the other. I just minded my path, she didn't do anything to me.
[L.J.I. Where is it more dangerous to go? Through the forest or in the open?]
V.F. So, they won't attack you, madam. Nothing attacks you, they run away. What can attack you, I've heard, but I haven't seen it, is the lynx. (V.F., Romanian, man, 66 years old, former shepherd. Baia de Fier, Gorj County, 5 August 2012)

Attacks and chasings

[L.J.I. How do you defend yourself from the bear?]
D.A. With the dogs. They smell, you shout, turn on the lamp, and stand in front of it [the bear], because if you don't help the dogs, they can't do much. And they stop barking at it.
[L.J.I. How can you help them?]
D.A. You shout at it. "Huă! Huăă! Ţui!" So, you help them. And then they also gain strength, [they become] stronger. Because they think: "He's helping me," you know, like anyone would. Then the bear is sometimes scared. And, if it's not used to it... It is important, when you take the sheep up the

mountains in the spring, not to let it [the bear] get used to [meat]. You don't let it when it insists. [...] It's hungry; it comes and insists, to attack. And if you don't let it attack, it goes away, it changes the place, it sees that it's being disturbed, and you won't let it in peace. It goes away. If no, if it gets to learn, if it manages to take a sheep or a lamb, then it's tougher. Much tougher. Or, if the bears are those big ones. Older. It's tough. One year, there in the Clopotiva Mountains, when I was eighteen years old, I was with my father, my brother, and an old man who was there with us. There, we couldn't all eat together at the table in the evening. One of us had to eat earlier and stay with the sheep while the others ate. It was that dangerous the wolf or the bear.

[L.J.I. Did you sleep outside?]

D.A. Outside. We went... it was... we were on the left side of them [the sheep], and suddenly—we had a little black puppy—it started whining and barking upwards. I said, "Bro', what's wrong with it?" We had the enclosure up to the rams. The rams were separated from the sheep so they wouldn't breed too quickly. And then, I hear: "Brrrr!!" The enclosure where the rams were broken. A dark shape with something white hanging down. I didn't even have time to light the lamp, nothing. "Hăă! Huăă! Father!" I ran to the stream with my brother and the old man, old Teofil. I said, "Run quickly to the stream because the bear took a ram, or something it took!" The dogs ran after it! Because the other dogs were at the sheepfold, they were waiting for their food. Because after we all ate, then we would give them food too. They went into the stream... because the bear took a ram.

But a big one, not just any bear! A big bear. It gutted it because that's the first thing it does; both the wolf and the bear. To lighten the load so they can carry the prey further. It gutted the ram and then went into the forest. My father and my brother followed it with the lamp. It was around 10:30 p.m.; they only came out of the forest at midnight. I was desperate, along with the old man, thinking, "That's it, it killed them too." They had gone into the forest. We shouted, but we couldn't hear anything, at that time we couldn't hear anything, not even the dogs barking, nothing, nothing, nothing! Total silence. Nothing. I was certain. And by then, where could you go, to go and see [what happened]... by that time, only in the morning. We were desperate. We were desperate. But with God's help, it happened that they made it out safely. Around midnight, I saw the lantern shining very brightly. It was... like a firefly. I saw them coming out from the other side of the mountain. They kept chasing it [the bear] with the dogs...

[L.J.I. They wanted to recover...]

D.A. To recover at least the head or something, so they could give it to the owner.

[L.J.I. And you take a risk.]

D.A. Well, I have to take a risk, because if I don't, I pay. Let's say, for example, you gave me ten rams. To take care of them for three months, right? And then, in the fall, when I come down, I return only nine to you. But I don't give you a head, I don't give you a skin, an ear, a sign, right? What would you think? That I sold it, right? Or maybe that I slaughtered it to eat it. Right? And then, the next year, you wouldn't want to give it to me anymore. You wouldn't trust me again.

Now, anyone who doesn't own many animals or hasn't been to the mountains and hasn't taken such risks won't really understand these things. But those who have been there and experienced it, they know and understand. You might not recover anything, but you can recover something.

[L.J.I. And did they succeed?]

D.A. They managed to recover only the heads. But the bear ate it [the ram] as it moved. So, in the hour and a half they chased it, it ate the ram while moving. While moving. And that summer, we had a problem with that [bear]. It kept coming back, but it didn't manage to take anything because at night we would all gather near the sheep, along with the dogs, we used to light fires on both sides, and eventually we managed to drive it away. So, if it realized it didn't have access anymore, it left us alone. Yes, but it's very difficult to deal with it because... well, it's its home there [light laughter]. You trespass on its property, as the saying goes [light laughter]. That's where it lives. That's how

God made it, for them to be there, to live and earn their food. Yes. That's where… this is what God wanted, to be there, to live there, to earn their food. (D.A., Romanian, man, 36 years old, shepherd. Ohaba Sibișel, Hunedoara County, 18 July 2012)

And it's very hard, very hard. You see, during the day it's warm and nice, visitors come, they film, but the night is night. At night, it's pitch dark. Dark, and wild animals attack you. Up there, it [the bear] took three one night. It came, broke the leg of one, caught another one in its claws, and with the third one, I don't know what happened. Below the sheep, there's a wire enclosure (*obor*) like this, sheep pen where they stay. And that night, they didn't put the sheep there because they said the ground was too dirty with dung, and they didn't want the sheep to sleep there and get dirty, so they put them in another spot, where is clean, to put them on fresh ground, so they'd stay clean. The bear came down from the hill, it went through the sheep, it clawed one, it struck down another ne, and it took another one. They were many, I think they were wolves, it wasn't a bear. And it took it [the sheep] to the spring in the valley and they ate it entirely. (M.G., Romanian, woman, 67 years old, shepherdess born in Polovragi, Gorj County. Recorded at the sheepfold in Curmătura Olteţului, Parâng. 3 August 2011)

Direct confrontation

Madam, the bear... it's not a toy! I [pause] have fought off many bears with a stick. Twice I've been hurt: once during the day, once at night. And [pause] many people talk only from legends [from hearsay]. The bear seems clumsy, but... there are bears of all kinds of aggression. Those that are carnivorous are the most aggressive, those that eat a lot of meat. Meat is like a drug for the bear. That's how I understand it. They're like addicts: when they don't have meat anymore, they become aggressive, like drug addicts. They become restless, and because of that, they turn aggressive. They come at you, at the dogs, in force. You know, those are the worst. Now, here in the area here it hasn't been like that lately, it's rarer. But back then, during Ceauşescu's time, the bears were in the mountains, because in summer, the farm's sheep, the collective's sheep, went up in the mountains, and there were hired shepherds [watching the sheep], not each with their own sheep like us: small owners, but you cared for each sheep because you were poor, and a sheep was a fortune. You would give your life for them. And as for those guys, well, the bears used to eat meat. Unlimited. Can you imagine, the bear ate fifty, sixty sheep, it gained strength, it gained power. And when those shepherds came down, they came down earlier, because they had stubble fields (*mirişti*) to bring the sheep to; but we, where could we come down [the mountain], because there were twelve thousand sheep in this village? And only a few meadows. They would have finished in two, three weeks. So, we stayed up in the mountains much of the time. And when they came down, those bears stayed, they starved, and they became aggressive and wandered through the mountains, wherever they could find food, and they came after you in the mountains, out in the open, and then they came running to chase you, the dogs, whatever they found. They were very aggressive. And those ones would knock us down too back then.

And here [he points to his abdomen] one of them hurt me. My wife was there with me. We had our kids with us. There was a bear... I don't know what to say... Like we talked about earlier [in a previous conversation]... about these evil things, or spells. Some people cursed me out of envy [laughs nervously], what do I know why they did it to me? On Fridays, they hold Holy Unction (*maslu*) here at the church. And people bring salt, flour... And someone who knew told me that they did it [the spell] on what was left over, flour, salt, whatever it was. They cast a spell on me and threw it... I saw that person going there, but I thought he was just passing by. I was with the sheep in that area, and I didn't think that...

At one point, the bear... I struggled with him for twenty-four nights. On the first night, it took a little ram, a lamb to be weaned, and ate it. After that, I mixed the sheep with milk and those without milk, and I slept in the milking pen (*strungă*). I made a kind of tent, and Maria and the kids slept there too. For twenty-four nights, the bear couldn't take a single sheep. I made torches out of old sacks, out of rags, I poured diesel on them, all the time I kept a small fire burning near the milking pen. When it came within ten or fifteen meters, I'd immediately light the torch. I had two dogs, but they couldn't stop him anymore. Then I had a flashlight and these torches. He'd even jump over at the torch, trying to grab it with his mouth and knock me down, you know? He'd roar, shake! And it couldn't take anything until Easter, the first of May that year. On the second day of Easter, I moved the flock to another meadow. Two kilometers away. And I didn't have the torches there. And it came. And I didn't have the torches. And it came around ten in the evening and until two in the morning, it came in three rounds until two in the morning; in four hours! And the third time, it broke into the milking pen. On the first round, it hurt one of my dogs, grabbed it, shook it around, took it out of use. I was left with only one. The second time, I managed to drive it off. But the third time, it broke into the milking pen. I had some rocks prepared there, to throw at him. I pulled a pole from the milking pen – not just a stick, because that has no strength! – I pulled out a pole from the milking pen, a pole from the fence, and... It leaped into the milking pen and took a *noaten* [two-year-old lamb]. But I charged into the milking pen after it, just with rocks. I threw a rock from about three meters away, and the rock came right back. And the bear didn't come at me, it just looked at me. Like that. But I didn't bend down to pick up that rock again.

[L.J.I. Did it throw the stone?]

No, I threw the stone at it, and the stone bounced back. And I didn't bend down to pick it up because, I thought, if I bend to grab it, it'll jump on me. So, I left it. It jumped out of the milking pen with the sheep, and then I grabbed the pole, and I measured the bear with it. About ten meters from the milking pen. Then the bear let go of the sheep, and I hit it on the back with the pole. When it turned around, I hit it again with the pole, but I missed, because here is the critical spot [points to his nose], at the root of the eyes, over the snout. I managed to hit it on the head with the pole, and its head... it was so big! It was as big as a cow. It sounded like... hitting a boulder with a pole. It just lowered its head, but it doesn't pass out, you know, it has no effect. And when I hit it the third time, and I thought I hit it well... It's like a cat. It's so quick in a fight. It's kind of slow-moving, but in a fight, it's like a cat. So, before I could hit it with the pole, it jumped with its head straight at my eyes, to grab me by the head. I had my hands like this [he covers his face]. That's all I managed to do before it closed its mouth; I pulled my head away just in time, or it would have grabbed me by the head. But one of its teeth reached close to my eye and caught me on this bone, and when it grabbed me, it pulled me down. And I let go because otherwise, it would have ripped out my bone. And when I fell, it grabbed me by the ribs.

[L.J.I. Weren't you wearing a leather waist belt (*chimir*)?]

Yes, I had one, but it grabbed me over the belt. But I had a leather vest on. It grabbed my clothes. It bit me here, on this thigh [points to leg]. You can feel it. Just put your hand here, you'll feel it, a bite mark. I was close. Because when it grabbed me, it threw me around like a big dog would throw a small cat. And it was banging my head against the ground. I got dizzy. I had pants on like a canvas, strong material, like it was back then, you know, and its tooth got through the pants. But the pants didn't tear. But inside, as it worked like that, it ripped my muscles, they came out through the hole. I couldn't put them back in. Anyway...

[L.J.I. How did it leave?]

How did it leave? It left without any sheep. From down there, when it let go of me, I quickly grabbed the pole and jumped to hit it again.

[L.J.I. Could you still jump?]

And it got me a second time, even harder! And the second time I blacked out. I didn't know. When I blacked out, how long was it? Two, three seconds. A blink of an eye. But I didn't realize that it was still here, watching me, to see if I moved. And I lifted my head to see, but I couldn't see with this eye, only with the other. It was watching me. Its head was right next to my feet, and it was watching me. When it saw that I moved, it grabbed me by the feet and dragged me, trying to take me away. Then I realized that if I moved, I won't make it. So, I didn't move anymore. Just like in stories [laughs]. And it stayed there for a few minutes next to my feet, it kept looking, and then, after that, it turned around. It walked two, three steps, it looked back to see if I moved, it walked another two, three steps, it looked again. And the sheep were still there, it could have taken another sheep, because the milking pen was broken. But it left without eating any sheep. It was just it and me...
[L.J.I. And you believe someone sent this bear? Because you mentioned the spells.]
Yes, the bear was sent. They cast a curse to kill you. They cast spells so you would die. And it was meant for me to die, but God helped me. They couldn't succeed with their nonsense. And now I'm alive [laughs]. They did it [the spell] to me to die, but I didn't. God forgive them because they both died. But they struggled to die [...] He sent someone to steal food from our house, to take it to him, because his soul wouldn't leave. To take food from our house so he would eat from us. Like a form of forgiveness, a remission of sins (*dezlegare*). (I.M. Romanian, male, 64 years old, shepherd. Jina, Sibiu County, 12 August 2018.)

We were there, because I have been married for forty years, and we have only been in the mountains. Every summer, every summer.[3]
My daddy... We went to Negovanu, I don't remember what year it was, and one evening... We are obliged on the day of Macavei to fast. And, on that day, but I can't remember the year, my daddy takes some people from the town hall and went with them to the sheepfold. My mummy tells him that... They came, took a sheep, prepared it, they roasted it at the edge of the forest for the barbecue, they cooked it, they took out a box of beers... My mummy at the sheepfold told him: "Hey, don't eat anything that is not vegetable! Hey, don't eat anything that is not vegetable!" After tasting a glass of beer and whatever else he tasted, he forgot. I was like children, like that girl [points to her 12-year-old granddaughter], I wasn't any older. I was fifteen, sixteen years old back then. It's been more than forty years [from then]. They tasted and ate, my father took his guests, left with them, they had a car, the mayor was there, anyway, someone higher up who went down into the valley. The rain came in the evening. The wolf came, err, the bear. It was a bear. The bear came next to the enclosure of the milking pen, the bear came and caught the biggest ram and, bam, over the sheepfold, it ate it. The next evening, the bear came again, took another sheep, again my daddy's sheep, over the sheepfold, and ate it again. My mummy sent word: "Hey, Marcu, come to the mountain, the bear is coming, you did not fast, come to the mountain, because it's only taking your sheep." Daddy came. He didn't have boots then. It was raining. [He was wearing] sandals (*opinci*) and foot wraps (*obiele*). He came next to the hearth, he took his foot wraps off, he put on another pair of dry foot wraps, and said: "I'm going next to the sheep." He lit the gas lantern—because we had a lantern—he lit it, and went to the edge of the pen, next to the sheep enclosure. Back then, there were no fire matches. And... with *iască* (dry vegetable material to light the fire). He tried to light the fire, and with the lit lantern, and with the pile of branches. The sheep in front of him were inside the pen. The pen made of branches, twigs. The bear came from the hill, took another ram, one of my daddy's rams, prrrrr, over the enclosure and, bam, with the ram over him, into the valley. What could he do? He didn't have time to spark the fire, he sparked, sparked, sparked, it was very hard to spark a fire—Ramona, be quiet [addressing the oldest children at the sheepfold]!—to light the fire. He took the club from there and with the lantern, boom, hit the bear on the head. Daddy moved aside. It: mmmmm, mmmmmm. It: with the ram. It had it in his mouth, muuuuurrrr. Daddy

moved aside. It took the ram, boom, once again, father took the stick from there, bam, on the bear's back, a second time. He moved behind a big fir tree; he moved behind a big fir tree so it wouldn't catch him. The bear: mmmmmmmmmm. He went and hit it again, bam! Once again. A third time. Kicks. When he made the third kick, father bam! A man as big as the gentleman, strong and big, my daddy, a big strong man. Madam, he hit it a third time and when it threw him away... It turned back, daddy didn't have time to go behind the fir tree and it caught him, it took him in the mouth, it jumped on his eyes, and it put him, it grabbed him with its mouth from here [shows her shoulder]. From the shoulder, it broke his shoulder, with one paw... Our shepherds wear leather waist belt (*chimire*). It caught the belt, tightened the belt and the other paw on this leg, it tore the muscle to the bone. It crushed him. In the meantime, he: "Hey bear! Hey bear!" In the meantime, when it made those jumps, "Hey bear!" I was like this girl, milking at the pen and the shepherds who were milking, who were there, jumped to help him, because he was shouting "Bear, bear!" They found him down, on top of the ram, and the bear on top of them: the ram towards the valley, my daddy above it, and the bear on top of them. They took him—three, four shepherds—they took my daddy. Two, three shepherds took the ram. They entered the sheepfold, they put him on the bed... He was screaming, screaming, screaming and blood was running on the bed – we had pine needles because what else could you lay down to sleep? There were no mattresses in the mountains; now there are some, I have mattresses, but back then there weren't. Pine needles. Blood was flowing through the pine needles, and it went through the sheepfold, so that, that... so much blood was flowing. A shepherd said quickly: "Hey, start quickly and cut the ram and skin it, start quickly!" The other shepherds started to skin the ram. They took out the tripe (*prapurele*) and made the wound. They put the flesh back and put a kind of... like this.

[L.J.I. Did they glue it?]

M.G. You couldn't glue it, because there was the poison inside, but they quickly put it back and they put it like this [she shows as if putting a bandage over a shoulder wound]. Luckily, it caught the waist belt. Because it would have broken and took the guts out and he would have died. Here, the shoulder broke. The shoulder was tightened, and it broke here the shoulder joint with its mouth; so upset because he hit it with the club. He fought with the bear. All night we cried, cried, cried beside him, cried... He screamed so you couldn't stay, from the pain. In the morning, when it was an hour, two before dawn: "Let's take him down to the valley. Let's take him down to save him." Four shepherds. Two in front, two in the back, on a wool blanket (*ţol*), we call it, this kind of thin blanket weaved by us. They took him on the blanket and walked slowly, slowly, slowly with him down the slope. Halfway down the slope—it was getting late—the worker's van came, dropped off the workers and went back; "Let's go one of us." One of the four left, three remained with him, and announced the car. "Don't leave, don't leave." Look, that's it, that's the blanket that we called *ţol* and.... [points to a blanket in the sheepfold]. They announced through men and a worker who was a driver and came with the workers into the forest, put him in the car and took him to the hospital in Novaci.

And my father lived for another seventeen years! He spent three months in the hospital. The doctors at the hospital washed the wolf, err, bear poison. It took his flesh—It wouldn't stick anymore. They removed tissue from this hip [points to his right hip] and stitched the wound on the bone, on the bone, to patch it up. Here, they put it in a prosthesis [points]. His shoulder. Because he broke this rotator cuff. And he got well, but he couldn't raise his arm anymore because it broke his joint, his joint when it squeezed him. He lived for another seventeen years and went to the hospital in Bucharest – in the meantime, after he got better, he went to some hospital in Bucharest to get medication.

But when he died, he died from the bear's death, from the bear's poison. He developed, in the end, ringworm, just like this, like this, the poison was coming out through the skin, from blood, the

doctors couldn't get it out. Here, on his thighs, where the doctors had patched the flesh, the flesh cracked, but it was just like this, and it would make a scab, and you could scratch and it would come off, like ringworm. And on his belly, where the poison was, on his belly, it would come ff. And his death came from that illness.

[L.J.I. Does the bear have poison?]

M.G. Yes. Yes. The bear has its own poison! It's not like domestic cattle. The bear has poison. Its saliva... It has poison, yes!

In the same mountain, but a bit further from my daddy, we had donkeys. And we were just like this, you see, as we are now, more of us... And the neighbor tied the donkey's leg to the beam of the sheepfold. Here, at the door, he tied it up at night so the bear wouldn't take it. Not in the Muntinu, because it was in Negovanu, still in Negovanu. It was bad weather and drizzling, like that, so you couldn't see anything. Ion, being a shepherd with the sheep, put on his coat and a nylon on his head so that the water wouldn't get in. The bear passed by him. Măria Strungăreana tells me, I say "Aunt Măriuță, did you tie the donkeys? – add another piece of wood to the sour soup [addressing her granddaughter]. Did you tie the donkeys?" But she said to me: "Oh, Mărioară, wow, I tied mine. Didn't you tie yours?" But I say: "Aunt Lenuță [sic], if you tied yours, I'll move mine away from them." At night, the bear came quietly, quietly, it caught my donkey because it wasn't tied, it took it by the nose, it was raining and drizzling—it took it just like this, like this [she shows] —with its legs, with its legs, with its legs, it took it to the edge of the forest.

[L.J.I. It dragged it.]

M.G. Yes. It took it by the nose and dragged it, dragging it from here to the edge of the forest. Rain, drizzle.... My Ion, with the nylon on his head, he hears nothing. He didn't hear the bear. In the morning, he went away for himself, like any man, to the edge of the forest. He heard growling, he heard growling... What could it be? But it didn't occur to him to call out or say "Hoooo, bear!" He went... "What is that sound, what is that sound?" He went for himself to the edge of the forest, when he got close to where the bear was with the donkey, bam! with the club. The bear: "Hrrrrrr!" to grab him by the nose too. We, on the [feast days of] the Servants of Saint Peter (*Slugile lui Sântu Pătru*)—the oldest shepherdess says: "Hey, damn you, because you beat the man's foot wraps with *bătuca* in the spring! Last evening you beat the man's foot wraps (*obielele*) with *bătuca* in the spring"—we are celebrating the days of the Servants of Saint Peter. We don't work. Saint Peter is [the day] before[4] and he has two servants after him. And I, with the rain and not having boots on my feet, just the sandals (*opinci*)—at the milking pen, mud gets in here and here—before milking the sheep, I go to get a bucket of water and pass the foot wraps in the puddle, like this. Măriuța Strungăreana: "Hey, you struck the man's foot wraps with *bătuca* at the spring!" Ion says to me: "What did you do, did you strike the foot wraps with *bătuca* at the spring?!" I would beat them with a piece of fleece, so the mud would fall off them.

[L.J.I. What is this *bătuca*?]

M.G. A piece of fleece, with a little tail, something like that, and we beat the wraps so that the dirt would go off them, in the spring, in the water. I told her: "I didn't beat." I lied to her. The bear came, it came at night, and it ate my donkey.

[L.J.I. Because of that?]

M.G. Yes. We are used to fast on those days. I don't even let anyone taste anything [that is not fasting food]. We are used to it. At night, the beasts attack us. They attack our cattle.

[L.J.I. But the servants of Saint Peter, who are they?]

M.G. It's Saint Peter, he's before [on 29 of July], and he has two days more after his day. Yes! The servants are worse than the master. Saint Peter is Saint Peter from Heaven, who was with God. And we keep them [these days of feat].

[L.J.I. But does Saint Peter have a connection with the animals? Does he control them?]

M.G. Yes, yes, yes. But if you keep [the feast], it protects the cattle from evil. If you ruin it [the day of feast] and do not fast and give.... Sometimes, the forest keeper comes, and you have to set the table [says in a very low voice], you are forced... Well, then at night the bear attacks you! And I don't taste anything, because we don't eat, I put [on the table] and let them eat... You take out from *putină* (wooden vat), the beasts attack you.
[L.J.I. Even if you just give to others?]
M.G. Yes, yes. (M.G., Romanian, woman, 67 years old, shepherdess, born in Polovragi, Gorj district. Recorded at the sheepfold in Curmătura Olteţului, Parâng. 3 August 2011)

Epilogue

[L.J.I. Do you miss the mountains? Do you still go there from time to time?]
V.F. There hasn't been a summer I haven't gone to stay at least one night or more. I go, I go. I go because I miss it. I have a friend who has many sheep. And he takes me to replace some [shepherds]. Not anyone knows how to milk or make cheese anymore. They don't know anymore. Not even how the bear comes, because you asked me. The young don't know anymore.
[L.J.I. Well, if the young don't know anymore, what will become of this profession?]
V.F. I don't know. Well, I think that ultimately, the tradition will be lost. (V.F., Romanian, man, 67 years old, former shepherd. Baia de Fier, Gorj County, 19 July 2012)

NOTES

1. All recordings and transcriptions in this essay have been done in Romanian language by Laura Jiga Iliescu.

2. Many Romanian folk etiological legends assign to the bear an human origin.

3. Parts from this interview have been published, in Romanian language, in Laura Jiga-Iliescu (2020, 132-3).

4. In the Orthodox calendar, the day dedicated to St. Peter of the Summer is 29 of June.

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