CHAPTER III



Detail of an adobe wall.



"Piatra îngăurită", The hollowed stone. Bozioru, 2025.

Socio-cultural Context of Buzău Land

Dr. Maria MATEONIU-MICU
National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest, Romania.
ORCID: 0009-0005-2093-2934

Dr. Anamaria IUGA
National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest, Romania
ORCID: 0000-0002-9516-2672

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ABSTRACT

Every local culture reflects how people use a given territory, how communities have interacted with one another, and how people value their local history. This chapter focuses on the sociocultural context of the Buzău Region, located in the northern part of Buzău County, southeast of the Carpathian Mountains. This context emphasizes the region's unique character, as reflected in its local cultural history. The chapter presents a brief history of how human settlements have developed over time, analysing not only historical events but also the region's demographics and political influence.

Introduction

Any territory inhabited by people, including Geoparks, use local knowledge[1] in order to benefit from the natural resources provided by the landscape. This knowledge is included in the intangible heritage that a community shares. It has been created and transmitted over generations, by means of cultural transmission, providing for a specific social and cultural context. It is interesting to note that the need to differentiate between social groups is very important. This is achieved both through distinct material culture and through the unique intangible heritage that each community possesses and shares among its members. This heritage includes aspects that make each community different from the others, and at the same time, it includes common elements—a shared heritage specific to a region, or an "ethnographic region," as researchers in Romania (see Butură 1978) refer to such areas with a shared heritage.[2] In recent years, this type of heritage has been impacted by rapid societal changes: some of this heritage has already been abandoned, many rituals are no longer practiced, and many traditional objects—and, consequently, the material culture—have been transformed and replaced by more modern ones. And, of course, some of this knowledge is no longer put to use.

Hence, it is necessary to involve specialists (from within or outside the community) to recover this endangered heritage and put it back to use in the region, bringing cultural—and, why not, economic—benefits to the local residents. In this way, when these specialists envision using intangible heritage for the region's sustainable development, they have to consider the

local communities as well, particularly by researching and analysing how local traditions and heritage have evolved over time. That is, they must take into account the historical, social, economic, and cultural contexts specific to a community. This can only be done by actively involving the local communities as well, and creating a participatory dialogue with them. In this way, the connection between people, natural heritage, and cultural heritage can serve as a valuable resource, capable of both showcasing local heritage to visitors to the region and, at the same time, contributing significantly to strengthening group cohesion. One of the secondary outcomes, from an economic perspective, may be an improvement in the quality of life for residents at the regional level and, perhaps, convincing people who have migrated for various reasons (usually labour migration) to consider returning to their home villages or towns.

This being said, any development strategy that either local authorities, or experts should consider must be tailored to the specific area and the specific sociocultural context in which it will be implemented. Consequently, in this chapter we will briefly present the sociocultural context of Buzău Land Geopark, which will help us understand the local history, and, perhaps, even the *genius loci.*

Over time, several communities have flourished within the Buzău Geopark, maintaining constant contact with one another as well as with neighboring regions, thereby fostering economic and cultural exchanges. It is important to note here that, from a geopolitical perspective, the region was situated at the border of three distinct historical regions: Wallachia (the southern part of Romania), Transylvania, and Moldavia—three of the regions that would go on to form the modern Romanian state after World War I. There is a long history attesting to the ties that the communities in the Buzău area established with one another, proving that these rural communities were not as isolated and immovable as we might believe today. Despite the rudimentary roads, people travelled extensively, even over long distances, for various economic reasons, such as the exchange of products, or even agricultural production itself. As early as the Middle Ages, the Buzău area developed into a distinct region with its own history and traditions.

The unique character of the geopark region—which was established to encompass the territory of 18 communes in northern Buzău County—lies in the important geological heritage sites located there: mud volcanoes, sandstone concretions, eternal flames, amber, salt mountains, the so-called "living" water springs (which contain sulphur; used in rural households) and "dead" water springs (which contain petroleum) as well as many others. But the Buzău Region Geopark is also a repository of cultural values and heritage that members of local communities have inherited and passed down to the present day. These include practical knowledge and skills regarding the use of natural resources, community-specific household management practices, as well as beliefs and rituals that add special cultural value to practical knowledge.

To understand what exactly gives the local culture its distinctive character, it is necessary to provide an overview of several events in the region's history that have directly contributed to its development. This will include an analysis of the land tenure system as recorded in medieval documents, as well as of the major land reforms that had a direct impact on the communities. Such an approach is particularly relevant, given that the villages in Buzău County are largely "communities of memory" (Nora 1998), where oral cultural transmission is still alive. Nevertheless, these communities have been transformed and shaped by significant historical events. Last but not least, the chapter analyses the area's demographic data, providing an overview of statistical data on population dynamics in recent years—an analysis that can reveal contemporary macrosocial phenomena specific

to a community (Rotaru 2009). The population, considered as a "system," intersects with and directly influences the other "systems" studied by the social and natural sciences—namely, society, the economy, the environment, the habitat, and local culture (Trebici and Ghinoiu 1986).

Thus, in this chapter we will explore the impact that socioeconomic changes, which have occurred over the centuries, have on collective memory and local cultural heritage. We will focus on how collective memory contributes to the preservation and promotion of cultural assets shared by community members, as well as on the role it plays in defining local identity in the Buzău area.

Founding of the rural communities

The villages in the Buzău area are built mainly in river valleys, such as those of the Buzău, Slănic, and Bălăneasa rivers. These settlements are sedentary in nature, with residents identifying with a well-defined territory that has been established and delimited since ancient times. The identity of rural communities has its origins in the founding of villages (most often during the Middle Ages), following land grants made to boyars (nobles) or free peasants by the Wallachian rulers (from southern Romania) of the time (in Romanian: "voievod"), as evidenced by ancient documents (see Djuvara 1995). From an administrative standpoint, the territory of Buzău County was established in successive stages, with the distinction between villages being extremely important based on the property regime between "moşneni" (free landowners) and "clăcaşi" (servants/serfs).[3]

Owning land as one's own was a sign of belonging to the "moşneni" social group. The land was either owned by the community, and it was cultivated by all its members together ("în devălmăşie"[4] system, see Stahl 1998), or it was owned by individuals, although the cadastral registration of properties started only with the modern age. Distinctively, the "clăcaşi" had no land of their own, apart from the one around the house. For this reason, they had to work on the land owned by the local nobles (boyars), or on the land of the monasteries.

The freeholder peasants had a very strong connection with the land. This was reflected in their social status: owning land would not only provide for livelihood, but also secured freedom of movement and social ascent. Land played an equally important part in each person's inheritance, as it was passed down within the family.

Since they did not own any land and, therefore, could not grow crops on their own land, serfs worked the land belonging to the local nobility or monasteries, dividing the harvest into three parts: one for the peasant labourers, and the other two for the landowner. As the locals explained (for example, Ioana L., age 80, 2015, Cojanu), this was how the system operated even at the beginning of the 20th century on the estate of the boyars Georgescu and Atena Fotescu in the village of Cojanu, in accordance with the old organizational system, which remained in effect even after the Agrarian Reform (see also Nacu 2015).

Oral tradition played an important part in the process of transmitting and demarcating landowners' properties, since the cadastral registration of land is a relatively modern practice. As far back as the Middle Ages, land ownership was based on the community's collective memory: oral tradition was used to establish property boundaries. In this regard, each family claimed a specific lineage to justify its right to the estate. In Beceni community, for example, the main landowners were members of Becean family (from whom the village

takes its name), the Beldimănescu, Enăchescu, Enculescu, Mărgăriți and Potlogea families, each with its own ancestor (Iorgulescu 1892). Even after 1989, when the communist regime fell, this type of memory helped recreate the ownership of the land in the villages, proving its practical character. During the communist era, most private land was confiscated by the state to establish collective farms. After 1989, this land was returned to its rightful owners, and the restoration of property rights was carried out not only on the basis of archival documents but also by drawing on the memories of the community's oldest members.

This memory is still kept alive in the villages from Buzău region. Sometimes, it separates the villages of the freeholders from the ones of the former servants. A representative example is the legends talking about the founding of Nucu [Walnut] village. It is believed that the village is the result of the union of two separate villages: a "moşneni" village, and a "clăcaşi" [serfs] village, the border between the two being signalled by an old walnut tree. "The border was the walnut, but afterward, the village became one and incorporated the walnut, hence the name of the village, Nucu" (Andrei D., 56, 2014, Bozioru).

Landownership was so important that, at times, places' names were chosen based on the name of former, or current owners. For example, in the village of Muscelu Cărămănești (Colți commune), the territory is divided into distinct areas, named according to the nicknames of the various families: Cârcegi, Lăcșor, Popești, Dimineşti, Greci, or Camburu (Dumitru R., nicknamed Cârcegi, 84, 2014, Muscelu Cărămănești).

The distribution of the villages and households can be strikingly different. There are villages very close to the water source, with houses clustered close together, sheltered from the wind and frost, such as those on hilltops and mountains. Such villages are those built along the watercourses of large valleys, like the Slănic Valley: the villages of Gura Teghii, Lopătari, Mânzăleşti, Vintila Vodă, Niculeşti, Gura Dimienii, Beceni. Unlike these "valley villages," there are also scattered villages, such as those in the commune of Bisoca, which have a different type of structure, with houses being scattered throughout the landscape. The average distance between the houses is 200 metres; some houses are as close as 50 metres apart, while others are as far as 1 kilometre apart. For example, Bisoca commune consists of 1.200 households spread over 7.200 hectares. As for a village like Bozioru, mainly located in the valley bottom, the area is smaller, approximately 3.600 hectares.

Another important criterion for the location of villages is the orientation of the land in relation to the sun's path. Since the climate is harsh in winter, sunlight is essential, which is why the houses face south. "We sought the midday sun. Since ancient times, villages have been oriented toward the sun. Also, in Aluniş or Scăieni, wherever you go, the houses face the rising sun" (Dumitru R., nicknamed Cârcegi, 84, 2014, Muscelu Cărămănești).

Roads and communication routes are another important aspect taken into account when founding a village. Since the Middle Ages, the most important route that crossed the region was known as "Buzău road" and was connecting Transylvania (mainly the city of Braşov) to the Danube, especially Brăila's port (Petrescu-Sava 1973). The traders who used this route came from the city of Braşov and, as early as the 15th century, possessed written documents that guaranteed them free passage through the territory of Wallachia. In this way, merchandise was transferred to the Danube on the "Buzău road", as well (Bogdan 1905). In the city of Buzău, where the administrative and customs offices were located, this road intersected with another that connected the seat of government of Wallachia (located at the fortress of Târgovişte) with the seat of government of Moldavia (located at the fortress of Suceava). This second road was referred to in documents as "Bogdan's Road" (after the name of the ruling family of Moldavia) and passed through the town of Râmnicu Sărat, which in turn became a border town with a customs office responsible for transit trade (Petrescu-Sava 1973).

It wasn't just merchants who used the old medieval roads, but also shepherds during the transhumance season. As a result, different communities maintained close ties with one another, both economically and culturally. Between winter and spring, shepherds from the mountainous regions of Transylvania, as well as from the Buzău area, would drive their flocks of sheep to the plains of Ialomița, Brăila, or Dobrogea. As transhumance became increasingly difficult to practice due to restrictions (of an administrative nature, such as crossing land owned by others), many shepherds chose to establish new settlements on the plains and settle there. As a result, the "mountain people" (in Romanian: "munteni") founded villages bearing names traditionally used to designate sheep pens (e.g. Târla, Târlii).

Monastic communities in the Late Middle Ages

The Buzău region experienced significant development between the 16th and 17th centuries, when the local boyars distinguished themselves politically and even fought for the throne of Wallachia. One of Wallachia's rulers, Vlad Vintilă Vodă (who reigned from 1532 to 1535), was born in the village that bears his name today (Vintilă Vodă). As a result, economic and cultural development surged in the region, and trade flourished (as mentioned above, the Buzău area was located on the trade route connecting Brașov to Brăila).

A turning point was the decision of Prince Radu Vodă (1496–1508) to institutionalize the Orthodox Church, which he would go on to strengthen through generous donations. It was he who appointed Nifon (between 1503 and 1505), the former Patriarch of Constantinople, to lead ecclesiastical affairs. Nifon advised the prince to establish two new bishoprics in Wallachia, one in Râmnic and one in Buzău (Iorgulescu 1892).

During the same period, the Diocese of Buzău was established, and numerous monasteries, hermitages, and churches were built. Before long, the diocese came to own extensive agricultural lands surrounding the monasteries and hermitages. All of these properties were transferred to state ownership following the secularization of the monasteries in 1864.[5]

However, the large number of churches and places of worship dating from this period is one of the reasons why the residents of Buzău are proud of their area. This region is home to the largest number of religious settlements in medieval Wallachia. Among the ancient churches and monasteries that have survived to this day are the monasteries at Poiana Mărului, Găvanu, Rătești, and Ciolanu, as well as the churches in Gura Dimienii, Vintilă Vodă, Berca, Cârnu, Bălănești, Bozioru, Brăești, Ruginoasa, and Pinu.

Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Buzău's villages still have a strong spiritual and economic connection to the church as the land belonging to monasteries and boyars was cultivated by the „clăcași" peasants, in a shared crop system.





The wooden church from the Monsatery Poiana Mărului, 18th century monument, Bisoca commune.





Fragment of the iconostas of the Găvanu Monastery,
18th century monument, Mânzălești commune.

The wooden church from Găvanu Monastery,
18th century monument, Mânzălești commune.



Sideroad cross in Scăieni village.



Sideroad cross in Dogari village.



Wooden fence and roadside cross in Bozioru village.

Modern Age and possessions laws

The land reforms involving the distribution of property from 1864 to 1921 played an essential role in the relationship between the inhabitants of Buzău and the territory. Following Alexandru Ioan Cuza's[6] reform in 1864, the peasants were given land from the boyars' estates, monasteries and the Buzău Episcopate. The land reform was accompanied by the secularisation of the monasteries' properties, as mentioned above.

Much of the land owned by the Buzău Episcopate is distributed to peasants. To commemorate this event, the people of Bisoca still perform the „Pluguşorul" tradition on the first day of the New Year. This custom is intended to ensure the health and prosperity of the households in which it is performed. This tradition is performed in many regions, but what makes it unique in Bisoca is that it is known as „Cuza's Pluguşor" (Constantin M., 56, Bisoca, 2016), which reminds us of the significant role that the secularisation of monastery lands played in the lives of local peasants.

Locals also received land as a result of their participation in the First World War, but these plots were located far away in the plains of Buzău County or in the south-eastern regions near Buzău, in the counties of Ialomiţa and Brăila. The advantage of the plain crop land is that it is more productive from an agricultural point of view, complementing the hilly and mountainous areas where the villages were situated. Thus, the main crops (wheat, corn, rye, etc.) were planted there.

The constant movement between the mountain households and the plains is one of the characteristics of the collective identity of the Buzău peasants. Villagers would spend much of their time working seasonally in the plains: in spring to plough and sow, in summer to weed the corn or reap the wheat, and in autumn to harvest. Only some family members would go to work in the plains: usually the men and older children. The women would stay at home with the younger children and elderly grandparents. They took care of the household and were in charge of animal husbandry and other typical activities (Stelian D., 84, 2015, Ulmu).

To reach the plain, the Colţi peasants travelled in an ox-drawn carriage for six days and six nights (Stelică V., 81, Colţi, 2014). They travelled in groups, with several families coming together to follow the Colţi – Pătârlagele – Ciuta – Pârscov – Măgura route. When the animals were getting tired, the convoy stopped and the people rested. „They cooked near the wheel of the wagon" to avoid being attacked by thieves, which is why they travelled together. They took turns to stay on guard at night. Sometimes, they changed the route to avoid the Ciuta forest, which was considered the most dangerous place for thieves to attack during the period between the two world wars (Filofteea B., 72, 2014, Colţi).

As previously mentioned, shepherds would settle in the plains, and sometimes peasants from the Buzău mountain region would also settle there, founding new villages. One spectacular example is the village of Munteni Buzău in the Ialomiţa department, which was founded in 1882 by new landowners born in the north-western part of the Buzău area. They brought not only their personal belongings from their native mountain village, but also wood from their former churches to build a new place of worship in their new settlement. The church's patron saints are the archangels Michael and Gabriel. The stone used for construction was also brought from the Buzău area (Stoian 2016).

This oscillation between the mountains and the plains continued until the establishment of collective farms by the communist state between 1949 and 1962, when inhabitants of Buzău villages were forcibly displaced from the land they owned in plains villages.

Old house in Pănătău village.



Old house in Cojanu village.



Restored old house in Bozioru village.



Old barn in Valea Salciei village.



Old house in Odăile village.



Window from inside an old house.

Wooden gate in Pănătău village.



Communist regime and pre-emption of properties

Starting from the communist period, peasants in the Buzău area were left without a significant portion of their property. Their land was taken by the state and forcibly incorporated into "Gospodării agricole de producție" [Agricultural Production Establishments]. First, the peasants lost the land in the plains, and then the land they owned in the mountains, mainly forests, which became state property managed by Forestry Administrations (see Buzea-Abagiu 2009). The first years of "collectivisation," as the process is known, were extremely dramatic. To make the peasants give up their agricultural possessions, the state forced them to accept the state quota system, meaning they had to give part of all their produce, such as fruit, animal products, various crops and hay, to the state. The wealthier a family was, the more quotas they had to give to the state on all their products. The wealthier peasants were therefore subjected to greater hardship, as they were considered by the local administration and politicians to be part of the "chiaburi" [rich] category and to have exploited the other peasants. Not only did these people lose their land, but they were sometimes arrested and their families were pushed to the margins of society.

Gheorghe Ganea from Pârscov was part of such a family. It is said that the family became wealthy by finding a treasure containing several kilos of gold. True or not, Gheorghe Ganea was a renowned fruit tree cultivator. He produced brandy which he transported himself to Constanța harbour. Even before the Second World War, Pârscov was a well-known village for its brandy trade. Alongside the brandy, Ganea would also transport sheep pastrami to Constanța. It was for this, and for the 800 hectares of land he owned in the plain region, that the communist regime imprisoned him. Above all, Gheorghe Ganea was a fabulous character, even for the wealthy peasants of the time. It should also be noted that anyone who owned fewer than 3–4 hectares of land, a few more animals, or simply a brandy boiler could have been included in this social group of "chiaburi," or affluent peasants.

The political regime installed in 1945 violated private property rights and radically changed people's lifestyles. However, it did not succeed in completely replacing the rural economy, which was based on subsistence farming and working from home. From the 1950s onwards, the lack of land forced men to seek employment in industries such as petroleum exploitation, construction and local manufacturing. The establishment of small industries in villages transformed them into small urban communities, as is the case with the Berca commune, which is now a small city. During the communist era, there was a fruit processing factory and a local construction materials processing industry.

Although men commuted to work, this did not significantly alter village life or the way households were sustained. Even between the two world wars, men worked away from home for months at a time, either in the fields or as shepherds in the plains, or in the forests. Women were responsible for running the household, a role they continued to fulfil when the communist regime was established. The peasant household proved strong enough and the state started exploiting this by imposing strict quotas and regulations on the acquisition of agricultural products. Each household had to pay the state in products, such as a certain number of animals or a certain quantity of milk or eggs. In return, they would receive sugar or oil. Each village had a consumer cooperative where people could purchase these goods in exchange for the produce they themselves had grown or reared. To prevent goods, particularly young animals, from being hidden, censuses of household goods were organised frequently, even unannounced.

Although the communist regime made an important contribution to the modernisation of the villages, this modernisation was relatively approximate. Some roads were paved, but not as many as would have been necessary. Villages situated higher up in the mountains still have poor road access, which is difficult even today. Connections between villages and big cities were usually by bus, with one leaving in the morning and returning in the evening, mainly for men working in industries. In Bisoca, for example, car transport only appeared in 1972; until then, people used chariots pulled by two oxen.

> Until 1982, no family had fewer than a pair of oxen, a cow, a heifer and at least ten sheep and two or three pigs. To provide for a pair of oxen in winter, hay from two hectares was needed, and this had to be cut, gathered, transported and placed in barns. In total, one would need around six hectares of land for all the animals. (Costică H., 68, 2014, Bisoca)

Changes after 1989

Following the collapse of the communist regime in December 1989, life changed across the country. For peasants in the Buzău region, this meant recovering the land that had been taken from them by the state for collective farms. Although there were immediate attempts to address the injustices of the communist period, such as the passing of the Land Law No. 18/1991, it was not until 2000 that a law was enacted (Law No. 1/2000) to specify how the restitution of agricultural land taken by the communist regime should be managed. The land was returned to its rightful owners, but this process encountered numerous difficulties due to legislative gaps and the area's specific property regime. The local memory played an important part in setting out the boundaries of ownership: these were still remembered by the elderly population. Currently, most of the land in the plain region is owned by small local associations that use the land for crops and repay the owners in products and money. This is because the local population is ageing and no longer has an interest in working the land themselves.

For this reason, it is important to consider the region's current demographic situation, given that it is under threat from population decline and rapid ageing. In this respect, the statistical data from the last three censuses is relevant. For example, while the 18 communes had 53,971 inhabitants in 2002 (Census 2002), the same territory had 48,277 inhabitants in 2011 (Census 2011), a decline of 10% in just 9 years.[7] The Census in 2021 was even more dramatic, with a considerable decrease in population of more than 18% since 2011. The figures speak for themselves: in 2021, the population was 39,439 (Census 2021). In fact, in 2014, one of the years in which we conducted research in the area, only one birth was recorded in the village of Colți by October, as one of our interlocutor (Ștefan F., 65) observed.

This depopulation process is due to the fact that, over the past 20 years, more and more people have sought work in other areas, especially in nearby cities, but also in other countries. This has led to a migration strategy (see Sandu 2000). One of the cities in Romania that people choose to move to is Bucharest, which is situated less than 120 km away. There is a significant community of people from Buzău here. At the end of the GeoSust project in April–June 2017, an exhibition was organised at the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant to present the results of the research conducted in the area. This exhibition attracted a large number of visitors and brought together a community of researchers from various institutions who had

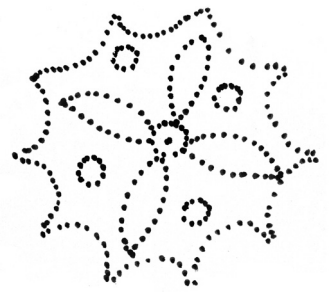
been conducting fieldwork in the Buzău area. It also brought together people from the region who were proud to see the wonders of their region exhibited to a wider public. Although migration is one of the major triggers of change in the contemporary period, people still keep the memories of their native villages alive and feel part of these communities, even when they are far away.

Meanwhile, those staying at home must deal with being separated from their loved ones and, above all, keeping the group's memories alive. This has a positive impact on people's sense of belonging to the community and is important for social cohesion, although it faces several challenges brought about by new socio-cultural phenomena, such as migration.

Conclusions

Buzău Land is a rich cultural area. Although the local economy and traditional culture have undergone dramatic changes in the past hundred years, the people here still know how to use local resources to meet their needs. These communities have evolved in close connection with their territory for centuries. Even during the communist regime, when they suffered losses of land and people who commuted to the city or moved away from the villages, they managed to preserve a significant proportion of the skills and knowledge of local crafts, passed on intergenerationally. There are still people here who know the history of the sites and can recount stories that breathe life into the landscape. They commemorate their ancestors or recall particular events that occurred in the area. They also participate in rituals that define community life. The people of the area have an active memory of social and political events that have influenced community life over the past century.

Many cultural elements that can be used to promote local values and contribute to the sustainable development of the territory are still kept alive in the collective memory of the communities in the Buzău Land Geopark. Situated at the crossroads of different historical provinces, the Buzău area is currently facing cultural challenges. Local intellectuals and cultural workers from outside the communities are collaborating to raise awareness of the area's cultural richness among the locals, thereby strengthening their identity.



NOTES

1. Local knowledge concerning land management has been referred to as "traditional ecological knowledge" (TEK) in recent years, particularly under the influence of the natural sciences. It is considered a cumulative body of knowledge, practices and beliefs about the relationships between living beings and their environment, which has evolved through adaptive processes (see Berkes et al., 2000). This definition has many similarities with the definition of intangible cultural heritage (see Article 2 of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted in Romania by Law No. 410/2005), so we will refer to it as such.

2. Valer Butură (1978) identifies 49 ethnographic regions in Romania.

3. In old Wallachia, the "moșneni" were free peasants ("moșnean" being derived from "moș," meaning "common ancestor"), while the "clăcași" were dependent peasants who shared the harvest with the boyars or monasteries (those who worked took one part of the harvest, while the owner took two). The villages of Pinu, Lopătari, Colți, Odăile and Robești, for example, were owned by "moșneni," while Valea Salciei, Cojani and Pârscov were owned by former "clăcași."

4. "Devălmășie" is a specific form of land ownership and use, whereby all members of the community own and use the plot with no specific quotas for each owner. How the land is used is decided by the community according to each member's needs. In Romania, this was common in the south of the country (Wallachia) and in Moldova (see Stahl, 1998).

5. The secularisation of land belonging to monasteries was a process initiated in 1864 during the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza as ruler of Romania (Moldavia and Wallachia combined between 1862 and 1866). Consequently, ecclesiastical institutions owned a quarter of the agricultural land rather than the newly formed Romanian state, which had unified the regions of Moldavia and Wallachia.

6. Elected ruler of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859, Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1820–1873) united the two Romanian historical regions. He was the first Romanian ruler to introduce land reform, abolishing feudal and monastic properties and conferring ownership to peasants.

7. There are in fact abandoned or almost abandoned settlements: Examples include Mățara (in the Colți commune), Grabicina de Sus (in the Scorțoasa commune), and Țâțârligu (in the Berca commune).

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