

## **FROM CARPATHIANS TO PINDUS. TRANSHUMANCE – A BRIDGE BETWEEN ROMANIANS AND AROMANIANS**

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**Abstract:** Grazing and farming were the main activities of this people from Carpathian to Pindus Mountains since the ancient Thracian-Dacians time until the early 20th century. If agriculture in the plains of Thessaly and Wallachia filled the bread basket of the Roman, Byzantine and then the Ottoman Empire, shepherding flocks, sometimes semi-nomadic was more than an economic activity, it was the bridge between Romanians in various provinces subjugated by foreign empires and, also a factor of cultural emancipation and preservation of values, traditions and Romanian identity.

In the current study we wish to highlight the role in the Romanian provinces that this noble activity, transhumance had over the centuries through space-time strength and size of the seasonal swing movements between mountain and plain, made on paths and ancient rules which ignored borders or possessions. We also propose a parallel analysis between Romanian pastors north of the Danube and Balkan Romanians, the Aromanians, to highlight the similarities and differences, and how this activity could have been the spark that lit the consciousness of identity and belonging of Aromanians to the block of Romanianism.

**Key words:** transhumance, Romanians, Aromanians, migration, similarities, identity

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Grazing is not and it was not an exclusively Romanian activity, it can be found to all the old and sedentary peoples of Europe from the French to the Basques, Italians, Spanish, Albanians, Serbians and so on, however what is specifically Romanian, is its millennial continuity and the large territorial spread.

It goes without saying that the pastoral activity turned into transhumance when the livestock become sufficiently numerous so that the home areas could not provide its necessary food, what can't be inferred directly is the moment of the history when this happened and what were the factors that have triggered this massive movement of people and animals on a scale so large that came to constitute the subject of regulations between empires (Georgescu, 1925).

In addition to the activity itself, shepherds were the factors that contributed to keep the unity and the national consciousness in all the provinces inhabited by Romanians by preserving the language, toponymy, religion and traditional customs and transmitting them from generation to generation.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is based on bibliographic study and on the research of documents from medieval times to interwar and recent times in which we found evidence of some foreign travelers about Romanian regions and about the countries in the Balkans inhabited by Aromanians, historical maps, studies about transhumance of some researchers from various fields from historical to linguistic or ethnography. It is also based on a field research made in the Mărginimea Sibiului and Braşov areas, two centers of radiation of this phenomenon from the Carpathians until Pannonian Plain, Silesia, Balkan Mountains to the Caucasus.

## THE HISTORY OF SHEPHERDING AND TRANSHUMANCE AT ROMANIANS AND AROMANIANS

Regarding the age of shepherding, which developed in close connection with the agriculture, it seems that it dates from the time of the ancient Thracian-Dacian tribes, determined on the basis of archaeological discoveries and ancient inscriptions found in Dobruđa, related to the economic exchange between the Dacians and the Greek cities of the Black Sea coast. This occupation is also attested during the Roman occupation (Ghelase, 1971). The age of this activity is also proven by the fact that the old name of „*Vlach*”, given both to Romanians and to Aromanians, became to be considered as equivalent to or synonymous with that of „*pastor*” (Capidan, 2010).

The shepherding continuity in Roman times is also proven by the fact that all important terms related to grazing and herd like „*wool*”, „*sheep*” and „*whistle*” are of Latin origin (Meteş, 1925). In addition to these terms, seniority is attested by passages toponymy across the Danube<sup>1</sup> as „*sheep ford*” (Dragomir, 1938).

Simon Mehedinti (1943) reveals that even Traian’s Column has pastoral scenes of the Dacians. He believes that the transhumance was first concentrated in the Transylvanian Plateau and only in safe historical periods it extended towards the periphery of Carpathians. As a core area of the birth of this phenomenon, he indicates Retezat Mountains as the oldest pastoral area of Romania. Also in his work, quoting Nicholas Bethlen Count of 1662, we find that most of the revenues of the Hungarian nobles were based on the Transylvanian shepherds.

Evidence for the medieval period are more numerous both for Romanians and Aromanians, Romanian transhumance related references appear especially in the Hungarian chronicles, which were trying to induce even the idea that Romanians are a people of nomadic shepherds that come from south of the Danube after the Hungarians, while about Aromanian pastors in the Balkans wrote the Byzantine chroniclers, who described them as a fickle nation of nomads and savages but recognizing their bravery and rebellious spirit (Capidan, 1927).

Transhumance had an important role in maintaining the unity of Romanian ethno-linguistic, and an important place in the Romanian popular creation. Many folk songs of pastoral life inspiration also appear in the oral tradition of Aromanians (Densuşianu, 1922).

According to written historical sources it seems that the most flourishing period of this phenomenon was at the end of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, a period that saw a great flowering of transhumance and related industries such as textile and dairy products and expanding trade and markets (Dragomir, 1938).

After 1920, transhumance knew a continuous decline because of the war period and because the shepherds had to limitate their activity to the national territory but also because

<sup>1</sup> Such sheep fords were located at Bechet, Giurgiu, Olteniţa, Călăraşi and Hârşova

the graze areas were taken out of the pastoral use and converted into cultivated land. The most difficult situation occurred in the first years of communist period when the flock were dramatically reduced by the politics of forced collectivization.

The transhumance was even forbidden between 1952 and 1955, being again stimulated between 1965 and 1989, when the shepherds used to be one of the few millionaires of Socialist Romania (Drăgănescu, 1998).

Nowadays, transhumance is an endangered activity because of the decline of wool price, the European agricultural policy, sometimes restrictive, requiring aberant standards, aging of rural population and the lack of interest from young people for such occupation, seen as difficult and considered suitable just for old people (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Romanian shepherd and his flocks from Hateg region

Source: <http://gazetavaii.ro/diverse/oieritul-meserie-pe-cale-de-disparitie/>

## TRANSHUMANCE'S CAUSES AND VECTORS

Transhumance has its origins in mountainous areas where environmental conditions and soil quality do not permit farming and also because the climatic conditions and slope inclination and fragmentation, so the only remaining viable economic activity remains shepherding.

At an initial phase, in which livestock are small, they are grown locally on the village's estate. In a next phase, with the growing of livestock, when they can not be fed on pastures on the village's estate, the distance at which they arrive increase, this being the intermediate stage between a local shepherding and the transhumance, namely the swing between a summer and a winter grazing region, generating secondary establishments as *târle* (sort of huts) in the plain regions and mountain sheepfolds.

Transhumance was favored by the increasing demand for diary products supplied by sheepfold, the emergence of new markets, periods of relative peace and socio-political privileges and the exemption of some grazing fees abroad, especially in the Romanian Principalities (Dragomir, 1938).

Generally, transhumance routes followed the radial valleys system from the water castles of the Carpathians, the Balkans and Pindus Mountains in all directions.

Shepherds were the factors that contributed to the advancement of Romanian culture and Orthodox spirituality by many donations made everywhere they passed through, and come later to help the strengthening of Romanian element in the former Romanian provinces occupied by foreign powers, especially in Dobrogea (Meteş, 1925).

### **SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ROMANIAN AND AROMANIAN TRANSHUMANCE**

Both branches of the north-Danubian Romanians (Daco-Romanians) and the south-Danubian Romanians (Aromanians) shows that they have practiced transhumance since antiquity, as attested by written sources and oral tradition and shepherd terms inherited by them from Latin.

The points of contact between the two branches of Romanian and Aromanian shepherds were Balkan Mountains and Tisza Plain, sometimes even Dobrudja.

The existence of nuclei of origin for both Romanian pastor branches, in Central Carpathian depressions and mountain area for Romanians (areas of Săcele, Braşov, Covasna and Vrancea) and Pind-Gramos Mountains for Aromanians (areas of Samarina, Vlahoclisura, Gramoşte, Corcea, Veria, Grebena etc.).

Romanian shepherds from the area of Mărginimea Sibiului and Bran-Rucar-Săcele wintered mainly in the Danube meadow and marches in Dobrudja, sometimes directed toward Moldova and even to the Crimea, while Aromanians were heading especially towards the Plain of Thessaly and Meglen Plain in Greece or Muzaquia Plane in Albania. For summer pastures, Romanians preferred the Carpathians, the Balkans or the Caucasus Mountains while Aromanians bound for Pindos Mountains, Epirus or Dinaric Mountains till Istria (Figure 2).

Fixed Dates for climbing and descended from the mountain, that coincided with the religious holidays of St. Demetrius and St. George. (Capidan, 2010). Type of organization and association between cattle owners, “the *celnic*” at Aromanian shepherds and the “the *păcurar*” at Romanians, had similar functions.

Both are suppliers of products for the Ottoman Empire and more than that, assured significant funds for treasury of Turkey, Austria and Principalities of transit taxes to taxes paid as rent for pastures of entire mountains because these pastors had huge herds. Ion Ionescu de la Brad mentions only Dobrogea in 1850 over a million sheep and Capidan gives us for the year 1936, the number of 150,000 sheeps only for the Aromanian common Gramoštea in Greece.

Occurrence of synergistic point routes like fairs, huts, tents - future villages and cities. It is well known that Mocanii from the Sibiu Surroundings founded permanent settlements in Wallachia and Dobrudja, where another time came with their flocks, they bought land and became large landowners and became sedentary there (Georgescu, 1925), as did the Aromanians, which have founded settlements in Thessaly plain, becoming farmers.

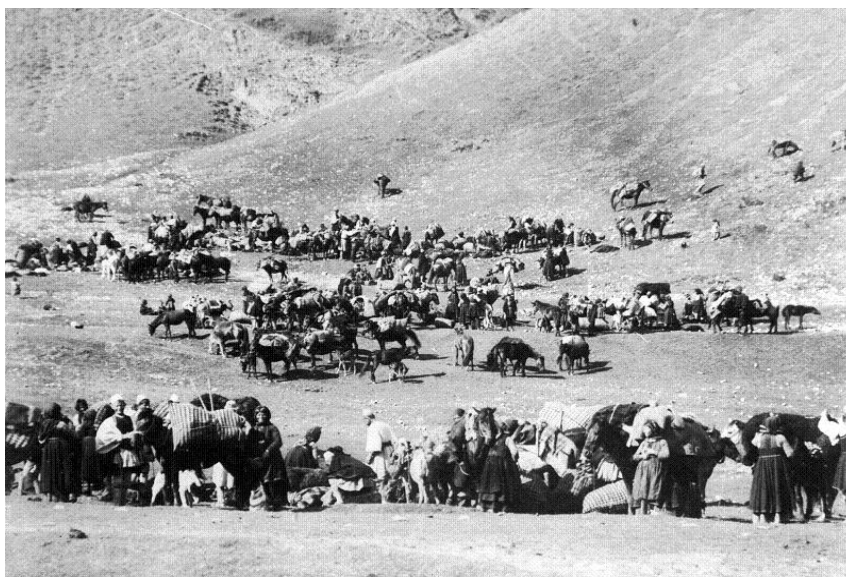
Another similarity is the existence of places and routes of transhumance kept from generation to generation, like trodden paths of history, some shared between the two branches such as the Balkan Mountains and the Tisza Plain.

The main difference between Romanians and Aromanians is that, at Romanians there was only transhumance, while at the Aromanians with transhumance nomadic pastoralism is also met (Figure 3).



**Figure 2** Directions of Romanian and Aromanian transhumance in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries

Source: Drăgănescu, 1998



**Figure 3** The nomadic shepherding of Aromanians in the Balkans in 19<sup>th</sup> century

Source: [http://www.proiectavdhela.ro/index.php?pag=media&id\\_prod=27](http://www.proiectavdhela.ro/index.php?pag=media&id_prod=27)

If in the Romanian's case, we have no historical evidence about nomadism, transhumance being the only shape, in the case of the Aromanians, especially the Farsherot branch; it looks like there was a predilection for nomadic life (Capidan, 1927).

Another difference is that in the case of Romanians, the main house was in lower regions and the secondary residence in the mountain area, while for Aromanians the main house was in the mountain and in the plain they were living in tents or in rented homes, this being called a reversed transhumance (Capidan, 2010).

Although the organization and association of owners of herds was almost identical between Romanians and Aromanians, however, in situations when products obtained from them had to be valued, the Romanian shepherds and sold more on their own or to intermediaries, while in the case of Aromanians, the sale was made directly and collective, never individual, following that the celnic gave to each owner the money according to the number of herds of animals that he had, thus obtaining a better price (Capidan, 2010).

## CONCLUSIONS AND DEBATES

Community living material and spiritual traditions of the Romanians in all provinces inhabited by them, the territorial unity consciousness, language and aspirations steadfast in the path of ancient Dacia, formed by centuries of Ottoman rule, the lines of force which ensured the continuity of the Romanian people and therefore the ascendancy to fully achieve full unity state. (Duciu, 1995)

Although the Romanians and the Aromanians were separated by centuries of history and large geographic areas, the transhumance was the element that has maintained in the contact between them, helping to keep alive the Aromanian consciousness identity that they belong to the great family of the Oriental Romanity.

In their pastoral journey, both Romanians and Aromanians, crossing different countries, coming in contact with all the people in this part of Europe, they spread the Romanian culture but also were a shift factor when they returned to their native lands, being influenced by other cultures too. This observation of new territories, allowed them to see what is offered and what is required on various markets, helping them to develop their business flair, so that the pastors began to focus on trade too, getting among the richest and influential people, many arriving to be dignitaries with important functions.

By keeping the unity of the Romanian language and culture, by their religiosity and donations to monasteries, churches and schools, transhumance pastors have been a key factor in the spreading of culture within the territories inhabited by Romanians and Aromanians, and saving this activity today, is more than an act of economic rescue of an ancestral activity, it is an act of saving the national cultural heritage.

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