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# The Healing Gurban

## On the Traces of the Rudari from Southern Romania

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*“I just found myself in this condition, just like that, from the Saintly Ones. God only knows how. I may have stepped on something ... I know not; God only knows.”*

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### 1. The Rudari and their Disputed Origin

**T**HE RUDARI are a pan-Balkan Romanian-speaking population consisting of mainly rural communities that are dispersed over a large territory: southern Romania (Muntenia and Oltenia), Bulgaria, northern Greece, Serbia (in the south-Danube area), Albania. The Bayash (Băieşi/Băiaşi < Ro. *baie* = mine), isomorphic from an ethnic perspective, are spread especially throughout the former provinces of the Habsburg Empire: southern Transylvania, eastern Hungary, northern and eastern Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia (Vojvodina), Slovakia (east and south), Ukraine (Transcarpathia). In Moldavia, the Rudari are mentioned under the names of Albieri and Lingurari. The language they speak is Romanian—with personalized dialectal versions, explaining the dissipation and the relative isolation of their life, and the absence of a unitary ethnic consciousness.

Having said that, one must add that same is true for every oral society/human community in history, without

the explicit self-awareness which only those drawing the map of the known world would display. Written evidence is highly problematic when it is to be rendered in a diachronic *lingua franca*; but all the more are the traces left in the history by people with no conscience of a posterity. To document their passage through history, their trajectories and their cultural luggage, the objects of their cultural trade and the resulting modified identity-markers, requires one to dig as cautiously and as finely as archaeologists do: in this sense, our work as ethno-anthropologists doubled by historians of religions (masters or apprentices) is rightfully called cultural archaeology.

A considerable part of the Romanian ethno-anthropological investigations on the Rudari had been confined, for decades, to the historicist questioning concerning this population's ethnogenesis. The ideological intentionality of the research was obvious back then, just as it is now. During the socialist era, one would not write about the Rudari, just as one would not write about the Gypsies, in the context created by the national-communism of the '70-'80s. Later, in the post-socialist times, the research concerning the Rudari has been absorbed, due to political and financial reasons,<sup>1</sup> by the Rromani studies that are becoming hegemonic in the context of the unilateral development, with ideological intent, of ethnicity anthropology in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup>

The historians' older or newer predominant questions are the following: where do the Rudari come from (their historic/historical origin), which is their ethnic origin/which are their ethnic components, which were the possible migration routes of the Rudar/Băieș communities<sup>3</sup> etc.? Given the lack of historical documents that would reflect the previous studies of this population and its itinerating routes, and within the context of the exclusive inquiry into oral memory (which cannot overcome the limitations of a recent diachrony of approximately three or four generations),<sup>4</sup> this kind of recurring question presents the risk of trapping the investigation into a metaphysical kind of search for the origin of the Rudari. In this situation, approaching the oral documents and using a regressive method become sine qua non conditions of the research, in the direction of a functional methodology that is both historical and anthropological with literary-theoretical (the issue of fictionalization/mythification) and psychological ingredients (the issue of memory). Thus, it is possible to reconstruct a recent history of the Rudar communities by scanning the long-term memory of the elder ones (the life story-type interviews), and the archaeology of the middle-term diachrony by adequately reading the oral narrative traditions, bearing in mind, of course, the fictionalization processes that converted the experienced history into an exemplary story/modal story.<sup>5</sup> Etiological legends play a fundamental role in the periodical (re)generation of the community identity, by investing the mythical memory as a historical memory:<sup>6</sup> in the Rudar legends of Vâlcea County,

a series of socio-professional (woodworking), daily life (living in huts, *bordeie*, that are isolated in forest and meadow areas) and ceremonial (the Gurban) aspects are converted into mythical etiologies with identity value: the Dacian origin of the Rudari (after the Roman conquest marginalized Dacians retreated into the forests where they survived as woodworkers and shepherds) and their Biblical roots (the forefather/ancestor of the Rudari is Abraham whose founding sacrifice is continued in the Gurban; Noah whose descendants retreated into the forests; St. Joseph, Jesus' adoptive father, himself a carpenter).

From the classic monograph written by Ion Chelcea (1944), still representing the main anthropological and sociological reference point, to Ion Calotă's study written during the '70s (published in 1995), the Romanian research on the Rudari failed systematically when faced with the challenge of systematic field researches followed by case studies.

The theories on the ethnic origin of the Rudari and Băieși are, under these circumstances, polarized: some state their Gypsy origin (the Rudari and Băieși are regarded socio-professional groups within the larger category of the Gypsy/Roma),<sup>7</sup> while other theories support either their non-Gypsy origin (Khazar, Dacian, Romanian or unknown),<sup>8</sup> or their mixed ethnic character (Romanian-Gypsy).<sup>9</sup>

Within the south-Slavic area, the Rudari/Băieși selectively declare their ethnic identity, preferring to assume the Slavic majority's nationality<sup>10</sup> or the Vlach/Romanian nationality<sup>11</sup> precisely in order to avoid the Roma label that they perceive as a stigma. Moreover, the imagological stereotypes of the Romanians from the south of Romania and those of the southern Slavs (Bulgarians, Serbs, Bosnians, Croats) who consider the Rudari to be Romanian Gypsies, do not encourage at all systematic researches that would take into consideration both the synchrony (the present situation of the Rudar communities that are involved in the phenomenon of external economic migration), and the diachrony (reconstructing the previous stages of the Rudar societies and of the main migration directions within the context of "wood transhumance").<sup>12</sup>

The contemporary research concerning the Rudari/Băieși is, with few exceptions, belated and relatively superficial, and the ideological stance of the Roma elites in nowadays Romania, whether cultural or political, exerts a certain pressure and control over the scientific research on the Rudari.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, certain researchers, activists of the Roma national construction,<sup>14</sup> such as Gheorghe Sarău or Delia Grigore, claim the necessity of "re-Romanizing" the Rudari, by means of teaching them the Rromani language.<sup>15</sup> Yet, we believe, this Rromization of the Rudari in the context of the construction of the Roma national ideology should take into account the identity option of the Rudari themselves, independently of the theories of certain researchers and free from political pressure.

When defining the ethnic identity of the Rudari, whose ingredients are specific to ethnographic societies, one should use adequate explanatory categories and a dynamic perspective on the sense of ethnic belonging of the individual/individuals: ethnicity is a protean, imagined cultural reality, a historical by-product undergoing an endless dialectic process of reformulating its identity, and not a finite and unchangeable essence.<sup>16</sup> Ethnicity exists because of its bearers' existence—persons sharing a language, a history, a body of cultural practices, and having a common, repeatedly shared memory of these elements. The assimilation of the Rudar/Băieș cultural studies into the broader category of Rroma/Rromani studies leads to political and ideological manipulation of the identity components that are valued as preservers of the Rroma cultural authenticity, where the main role is played by the Rromani language:<sup>17</sup> this is where the necessity of the linguistic Rromanization of the Rudari stems from. The idea of generating a cross-border Rroma nation, by means of integrating the phenotypic, cultural and linguistic diversity of Rroma and para-Rroma communities in Europe in a unified identity formula, is not only a historically outdated fact, but a scientifically debatable enterprise. Finally, being Rroma represents, first of all, a claim and, sometimes, a label.<sup>18</sup> Being Rudar/Băieș means assuming a half-breed-type identity status,<sup>19</sup> between two ethnically different corpuses (Rroma and Romanian), between already and not yet. An adequate ethnographical description requires us to redefine the epistemic boundaries of the anthropology of ethnicity itself<sup>20</sup> and, finally, the acceptance by the researchers of the Romanian/Vlach linguistic identity assumed by their Rudar interlocutors.<sup>21</sup>

Concerning the traditional occupational structures of the Rudari/Băieși, two levels are to be considered: *băieșia* (mining)/*aurăritul* (panning for gold in river valleys) and *rudăritul* (woodworking, especially in soft wood).<sup>22</sup>

In this context, in an ethnographical study published in the early '90s, Silvia Puia Iosipescu launches the hypothesis of an overlap, because of the confusion made by researchers, between Rudari (mushroom and wild berry pickers and woodworkers), Băieși (who looked for gold in mines, *băi*, and auriferous rivers) and *Țigani cãldăravari* (metal craftsmen working on their landlords' estates).<sup>23</sup> This confusion stems from the absence of systematic interdisciplinary research (historical, linguistic, sociological, ethnographic, folkloric). The author asks herself to what extent the Rudar and Băieș groups maintained their "ethnic purity," by virtue of the endogamy practiced inside isolated communities, or whether they interacted through marriages with the Gypsy groups, because of their similar marginal social-economic status.<sup>24</sup>

Drawing on his dialectological research of the early '60s, Ion Calotă considers that the varied ethnographic-linguistic stratification of the Rudar communities is the consequence of their migration from the Western Carpathians, in suc-

cessive waves, sometimes at considerable chronological intervals (between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries) and following distinctive routes. They used to live in the auriferous regions of the Western Carpathians, having a servile status (that of Gypsy slaves, *Țigani robi*), and worked as gold miners or panners, next to the Romanian miners from the region (the so-called *Băieși moți*), “from whom they learnt both the goldmining craft and the Romanian language, the way it was spoken back then in this part of the country.”<sup>25</sup> The depletion of the gold deposits and of the auriferous sand in the rivers obliged the Rudari to abandon their traditional profession and make a living from woodworking, working especially in soft wood (willow and poplar), found mostly in meadows.<sup>26</sup> The memory of the old goldmining occupation was only maintained in the Băieși and Rudari ethnonyms now covering a new reality, socially and economically different.<sup>27</sup>

After leaving southwestern Transylvania, the Rudari went down the river valleys, to Wallachia (Muntenia), later reaching the Danube. Living next to Romanians in these areas led to the dialectal mix of the Rudari language, influenced by idioms from the regions of Muntenia and Oltenia. Some of the Rudari continued the migration, crossing the Danube into Bulgaria and Serbia, where they either settled or came back to Wallachia: “A considerable part of the Rudari, Albieri and Rotari crossed the Danube into Bulgaria. They split into three groups: a part continued west, reaching Yugoslavia (Caravlahs, some of which preserved the Albieri occupation, being called there Coritari by the Serbians, and who could not continue calling themselves Rudari, since in Serbian the Slavic term *ruda* preserved its old meaning, that of mine, and thus Rudari means miners), another group settled in Bulgaria, and the third group, the largest one, came back to Oltenia and Muntenia after a while.”<sup>28</sup>

Ion Chelcea, the author of some systematic research on Rudari and Băieși during the 1930s, considered *rudăritul* to be the fundamental motivation of the cross-border social-economic dynamics of the traditional Rudar groups, a situation leading to a true “wood transhumance.”<sup>29</sup> Under these circumstances, the Rudari arrived from Bulgaria were called Turcani or Vlăhuți, depending on the region they had lived in (Bulgaria or northern Greece).<sup>30</sup>

Ion Calotă completes Chelcea’s socio-anthropological considerations with linguistic arguments: the Rudari Albieri and Rotari, when returning to the Romanian Plain, brought lexical acquisitions that were mainly Bulgarian<sup>31</sup> and Turkish (the name *Turșitu*, frequent within the Albieri community)<sup>32</sup> and the Gurban tradition (the Rudar phonetical version of the Turkish *Kurban*), which became an identity marker of the *Turcani* Rudari whose predecessors came back from the south-Danube migration.<sup>33</sup>

## 2. The Rudar Gurban: Identity and Ritual Status of the Custom

**T**HE GURBAN is a magical-religious ceremonial complex found with the south-Carpathian Rudar communities (Mehedinți, Dolj, Olt, Teleorman, Giurgiu, Gorj, Vâlcea and Argeș)<sup>34</sup> and the south-Danube ones (the Bulgarian and Serbian Timok and the Morava Valley),<sup>35</sup> where wood-working is the traditional handicraft: Albieri/Rotari (wheelwrights) and, sometimes, Corfari (basket-weavers). Within the cross-border communities of Băieși (miners) from Transylvania and with the Lingurari (spoon-makers) from Moldavia/Bukovina who did not participate in the Balkan migration that brought them into contact with Muslims, this ritual does not exist. Therefore, the Băieși from Croatia and Hungary, of Transylvanian descent, do not know the Gurban. In Serbia, north of the Danube, the ritual is scarcely attested: in Grebenac, Vojvodina, it is celebrated during a certain feast (Ascension, Whitsun or St. Peter's), for the recovery of sick children.<sup>36</sup> South of the Danube, the ritual is attested more often, during the Old St. George (celebrated in 6 May), but with de-ritualized local versions—*praznik*, *gurban*, *gropan*.<sup>37</sup> In the mining community of Urovica (Timok), during the 2000s, the Gurban for Health (*praznic da nujdă*: feast for the need) still used to be held on St. George's Day, for the recovery of the children sickened by the *șoimane*.<sup>38</sup>

Analogically, the north-Danube Gypsies, those self-defining with this ethnonym, do not know the Gurban. This is another reason why we have chosen to describe the case study of a relevant field research we conducted in 2012, in Bistreț (Dolj County), a community with a history of massive Rudar external migration, where a single destitute Rudar family celebrated the Gurban for Health for the woman in the house. Their elder daughter, recently married to a Costorar Gypsy (copper painter) from a nearby village, had left with her husband for seasonal work in Greece. The parents of her husband were invited to participate in that Gurban. During the interview we took while the ritual was unfolding, they shared their amazement, albeit somewhat feigned, with the ritual casuistry of the Gurban, confessing that, in their community, “among the Gypsies, this ritual does not exist.”<sup>39</sup> We gathered similar statements from other field investigations conducted in Rudar communities from Olt and Vâlcea.

On the other hand, descendants of the Gypsy slaves from the “One Wood” Monastery of Frâncești (Vâlcea), the ones that had built the village of Dezrobiți, Romanian-speaking only, have a group of Călușari renowned all over Oltenia, but do not know the Gurban. Their traditional occupation, nowadays vanished, was brickmaking. The Căluș nowadays appears in various Romanian-speaking communities of Oltenia (Romanians, Rudari, Gypsies), functioning as a trans-

ethnic ceremonial marker. Yet, the Gurban represents the exclusive identity marker of the Rudar communities.

The ceremonial has two active versions that are structurally isomorphic, but remain profoundly different functionally, although they can be celebrated on the same date (old-style St. George and Ascension) and, sometimes, within the same perimeter: the ritual version, *Gurbanul de sănătate* (the Healing Gurban/Gurban for Health) and the de-ritualized version, *Gurbanul de drag* (the Love/Affection Gurban). The goal of this iatrical sacrificial ritual, having exceptionally small local and regional variability, is the healing of the ones struck by the Gurban/crippled by the Saintly Ones (*Sfintele*, i.e. the Fairies). The Gurban consists of a narrative-ritual complex with a sophisticated casuistry that is finally reduced to the sacrificial meal (of lamb or fish) offered to the Saintly Ones (ritual level) by those having disturbed them, one way or another, by unwillingly stepping on the Meal of the Saintly Ones (the old narrative level) or by committing other involuntary errors (participating in the Gurban without observing cleanliness rules, stepping on old Gurban hearths or in Gurban pits, etc.).

The *Gurban* is a ritual with at least two cultural strata: “the ecstatic experiences” circumscribing a “folkloric daemonic complex” (*Sfintele*, *Șoimanele*, *Ielele*), attested in the Romanian rural world until recently, and the Kurban ritual, from the Islamic Turkish-speaking cultural area (*Kurban Bayram*), “that has nevertheless changed its divine recipient from Allah to the Saintly Ones (both pathogenic and iatrical daemons).<sup>40</sup> The Gurban for Health (sacrificing the lamb and the fish for the recovery of somebody’s state of health affected by the Saintly Ones), expressing the religious creativity of the Rudari, is “the result of a permutation in the heterogeneous cultural forms and practices, by a personal syntax and semantics.”<sup>41</sup> In historical reading, the Gurban is the concrete proof of the south-Danube migration of the Romanian-speaking Rudari and of their cohabitation with the Balkan Muslims.

The Gurban represents a magical-religious system structured on a few sets of rules that help the ritual “dramaturgy”<sup>42</sup> function well and distribute the roles of each actant, patient or witness. The sick of the Gurban represent the nodes of this ceremonial network, those who must scrupulously follow the rites and respect the preliminary rules: general cleaning of the house and courtyard; body cleaning and sexual abstinence for up to six weeks prior to the celebration and a couple of weeks afterwards; moral purity—it is prohibited to revile or to act maliciously; abstinence and asceticism; bodily and clothing cleanliness. A particular status is that of the ceremonial personnel having a precise function within the Gurban syntax: the priests (those orating the lamb), the priestesses (those orating the fish and the small loaves of bread), the church singers (*dieci*, those who answer the oration/prayer) and, of course, the sacrificial technicians (the

sacrifiers, those slaughtering the lamb and cutting the meat). Finally, the participants in the Gurban, without being main actants, are an integral part of a sine qua non ceremonial distribution. They also have to obey the adjacent rules that constitute the Gurban therapeutic system: bodily cleanliness and sexual abstinence, between one and four weeks; in the ‘modal’ variant of the ritual, any commensal must actively partake of three Gurban meals during the same festive day, while the clothes worn during the Gurban have to be changed and washed at home afterwards.

There’s also a strict distribution of the ritual roles, based on gender, transgressable only in case the male figure is missing. The men cut the wood for the fire, dig the Gurban pit (*groapa Gurbanului*), prepare the spit for roasting/a pole used also in the treatment of the sacrificial meat, and the supporting structure made of wooden legs for the spit; they sacrifice the lamb and eviscerate it, flay it, sew the belly back, with the totality of the internal organs, well washed, boiled and chopped (in the case of roasted lamb) or slice it with a knife (in the case of boiled lamb); prepare the fire, orate the lamb, break its skull and give part of its tongue and brain to the patient of the Gurban, carve the roasted lamb into pieces and share the pieces with the commensals at the sacrificial feast; they then cover the Gurban pit with earth, stick the spit for roasting and its supporting structure made of wooden legs into the ground of the covered pit, if they do not toss them into a flowing water. The women pray (*se roagă*) by the tree (pear tree or wild apple tree) or by the willow; orate (*urează*) the small meals (*mescioarele*), where available; prepare the fire, prepare the small loaves of bread (*păinici*), clean the bowels of the lamb in water which is then carefully disposed of, either in a river or in the Gurban pit itself, the bowels being then boiled together with the rest of the internal organs of the lamb; boil the entrails, that is, all the internal organs of the lamb, cleaned and chopped (locally called *bureți*, sponges); prepare the fish for the small meals or directly for the Gurban (where fish is involved), prepare the ritual polenta (*mămăliga*); prepare the Gurban table, filling it with beech twigs and leaves, for cleaning the hands and for separating the kneeling commensals from the profane ground; dispose of the remains of the ritual dinner into the pit, then wash the clay or wooden pots and the tables themselves carefully over the Gurban pit, so that no elements of the accomplished ritual remain above ground.

Most of the details of this extremely minute ritual casuistry are analyzable due to the presence of the researcher as a witness to Gurbans (the so-called “participating observation”), for at least two or three years. It is impossible to minutely identify the individuality of each Gurban within a community, during the same festive day, especially when their number is high (ten to fifteen hearths), and where new patients appear every year. The interviews, essential for accessing



the deep cognitive structures, circumscribe more the Gurban stories (the narrative level of the stories about contacting or being struck by the disease, and about the healing) and only offer general, more or less schematic descriptions of the ceremonial syntax. The ethno-anthropological reconstruction of the Gurban ceremonial system and the historical-religious reconstruction of its recessive structures involve both the synchronic and the diachronic dimensions, demanding a great deal from the researcher, both extensively and intensively, due to a complex cognitive polyphony. The need to understand the field of the Gurban forces the ethnographers to transgress the limits of their discipline, and to continuously rebuild their own epistemic position.

### **3. A Morphological Description. The Gurban at Bistreț, Dolj, Romania, 25 May 2012, Ascension Day**

**O**UR TEAM, led by author Bogdan Neagota, set out to fill some of the many white spots on the Rudar Gurban map in the counties of Olt, Vâlcea, Dolj and Giurgiu in Romania, on a yearly basis between 2011 and 2014—on the two ritual occasions: St. George’s Day according to the old-style calendar (6 May) and Ascension Thursday (ten days prior to Whitsunday). We opted for participant observation in the Gurban festivities, a difficult task so far fully accomplished, year after year. The historian of religions expertise highlighted for the ethnographer the complexities to be dealt with when comprehensively documenting such exemplary a custom as the Gurban.

We henceforth use for reference the Neagota scale of morphological episodes to be woven in the ritual syntax of the Gurban, trustful that its modal scheme<sup>43</sup> helps both the successive endeavors of ethnographic description, as well as the identification of the probable links with related customs and bodies of belief. The scale, derived from the field, is made of nine mandatory episodes which allow us to identify the living Gurban in the nowadays field research: 1. the symptoms; 2. the diagnosis; 3. the pact with the Saintly Ones (*Sfintele*): promising the sacrifice; 4. the Small Meals (in the case of the wheelwright and basket-weaver Gypsies); 5. the place chosen for the Gurbans; 6. the sacrificial structure of the Gurbanic rite; 7. the lamb’s oration/prayer/unbiding; 8. the Gurban Agape/the sacrificial dinner; 9. music and dance. From the original encompassing definitions given to each, we retain here the categorial units and aim to demonstrate that the Gurban at Bistreț, Dolj, which we researched and recorded in 2012, follows the lore.

As to why we chose this Gurban variant out of the corpus we compiled from our field researches, the answer is threefold: first, it was a courtyard Gurban made solely in a village presumably full of such courtyard Gurbans, nowadays devastated by economic migration to the West; as a courtyard Gurban, fully jointly researched, it was our first, initiating experience; second, it represents the Ascension Day variant, presumably more flexible with regard to the modal tradition-bound coercion (of St. George's, interestingly celebrated according to the old, Julian style for the Gurban, and according to the new, Gregorian style for the Gypsy Easter);<sup>44</sup> and third, the distribution of performers in this Bistreṭ case, the A. family, allows for emic perspectives claiming interesting and vocal differentiations between Rudar and Gypsy,<sup>45</sup> as well as customs and rituals associated to Gurban lore and the rituality of yore, as compared to now. It thus means we abide by the self-imposed anthropological commandment of giving ever more space and weight to the say of the bespoken,<sup>46</sup> with the true conviction that their statements will document the processes that we, anthropologists, have witnessed, far beyond our actually keeping pace with them.

1. *The Symptoms.* They are recurrently recollected during the performance of the ritual in Bistreṭ. All recollections are forced or fostered by the interview. The local audience—comprising the parents of the son-in-law (Gypsy), the brother-in-law (formerly Neo-Protestant), G. A., 34, with wife M. A., 25, and the many small children of them all—reinforces what seems to be the common recollections of serious afflictions at the dermatological level. The sick person is a woman, A. A., 34, mother of six, two of whom—girls—are faraway, married, working abroad (Spain and Greece). She misses them to tears. The father of the family is Z. A., 39, performing here all hieratical duties: the slaughter and flaying of the lamb, the fire, roasting, organizing the meal and uttering the oration. He himself is a carrier of the ritual, as a former (and unfortunately relapsing, it seems) victim of the Gurban affliction (also at the level of the skin, actually, but a more dangerous condition, a skin tumor), but also as an attentive observer of the ritual since the times when his own father would perform it. This is the source of his ritual authority, he claims, and no one opposes the stated claim; on the contrary, his brother confirms it with his own recollections on the Gurbans of yore, that is, from about two decades ago. Both men come from a numerous family, worked as shepherds in their childhood, and recall the Rudar Gurban from when it used to be performed out of the village, in a pristine meadow, closest to the 'original' Gurban.

The sick woman is the landlady of the house, and, while preparing all instruments for the correct performance of the ritual and while carefully observing that every gesture and every item is handled according to the strict ritual requirements of the occasions (further detailed in subchapter 6), she must also

keep a matron's hawk eye on the household: this is the clear difference between the courtyard Gurban and the glade Gurban, where a woman's duties, albeit sick (that is, the central figure of the ritual), are less stringent and stressful—a fact which no doubt makes us researchers consider the glade version to be the more 'traditionally' genuine; yet, for research purposes, access to such a courtyard variant sheds light on important additional ordinary life events, otherwise ascribed less relevance during ethnographic documentation.

This is her fourth year of doing the Gurban; all four took place in the same courtyard, but the prior three on different hearths—the hearth apparently needing to be new each time—and closer to the entrance to her property: that is, the ritual pit dug in virgin earth has been each time under a wax cherry tree (one of the two in their courtyard). Out of poverty, additionally burdened by the collapse of their house earlier that year, during the January frost (preceded with one day by the death of their horse—essential help for the household: a series of misfortunes connected, in their discourse, to the compulsion of performing the promised Gurban), she confesses to having considered to do without the costly sacrifice of the lamb; immediately after, however, her skin began burning again (the expression she uses is: “I was roasted like this lamb on the spit, everywhere: there on the shins, on the hands, on the face, on the head, in the ears . . . everywhere”) so she had no choice but to “set her mind again on the lamb,” the known Gurban formula, which brought immediate relief, just as in the case of every other successful Gurban story we heard during our researches.

The story told to us is further dramatized by how, the prior evening, the shepherd with whom the family—the sick woman and her husband—had made the deal of buying the lamb, refused to make the sale, given their poverty, unwilling to have to wait for the pay; for them all, and in the story they retell for us, it is a true miracle that another lamb merchant is found at the last minute, agreeing to receive the due payment from the somewhat richer brother of the husband. That is, the Gurban for that year, the fourth in the promised succession of the sick person, had twice been jeopardized, once by her own reluctance and need to save every penny for the five small children at home (an obstacle punished with the relapse of her disease), and second, by the lack of a sacrificial object. At the moment of the interview, both obstacles had been overcome.

2. *The Diagnosis.* The disease began to trouble her six years beforehand. Asked how she knew to resort to the Gurban ritual, she points at the firm tradition she had grown up with, as part of a community where every elder was, one way or another, associated with the ritual performance. Then she invokes the oneiric anamnesis, telling of a dream of a green grass-covered table, with hot polenta, where they would all eat roasted meat. Deciphering the dream is entrusted to the husband—whom we shall see as a main character in every stage of the Gur-

ban ritual. In conformity with the ritual requirements, “setting the mind on the Gurban” immediately resulted in relief from the painful skin condition. At a later point, while washing the entrails of the sacrificed lamb, she indicates that it had been an elder from her childhood village—Ghidici—to have identified the potential Gurban disease for her, futilely taken her to the doctor, more for a confirmation of his guesses, then went to summon her mother to “set her mind on the Gurban” and wait for the expected solution, which came without delay. We may add that this detail—how she is her mother’s child once more when afflicted, even though a mother herself—can shed light on how the diagnosis, the anamnesis and the ritual prescriptions have not migrated to Bistreț, the village of the courtyard Gurbans, together with the custom, its respective authority being still supposedly derived from the original kernel of the disseminated ritual: the parental village of Ghidici, home to glade Gurbans.

When we asked her how she thinks she might have contracted the disease in the first place, she indicates: “I just found myself in this condition, just like that, from the Saintly Ones. God only knows how. I may have stepped on something ... I know not; God only knows.” The rather faint echo of the ancient prohibition, regarding the Saintly Ones as impersonated eudaemonic agents, combines with a rather firm belief in the Gurban etiology of her disease and, therefore, in the tradition-fostered solution. We may also compare the two tales, of the patient and of her husband, who explain that their family had had Gurbans since 2006, for six years in a row, the first three for himself and then for his wife, years defined by recurrent dreams of grassy meadows with tables laid upon them, he officiating the ritual but at one point beginning to hand the head of the lamb to his wife—meaning it was her turn to undergo the ritual of the Gurban.

3. and 4. *The Pact with the Saintly Ones, the Promise of the Sacrifice and the “Small Meals.”* The supplementary divinatory ritual of the “small meals” is absent in our case study. Questions deliberately asked in this respect revealed nothing. Still, the interview revealed that old Gurbans would have also used fish and poultry, besides lambs (plus the peculiar information, going all the way to the present day, of the sacrifice of a black kid goat in the case of epilepsy, commonly called children’s disease/*boala copiilor* in the rural milieu, even when referring to adults). Or fish is the object of sacrifice for the “small meals.” Also, if the ethnographic material does not feature this element, it does however feature the “prayer in the wheat”: a field of new wheat, rather tall and full-bodied by this time of the year. When enacting it, our patient reversed the episodes in the ceremonial syntax, thus indicating the true significance that the active bearers of the complex Gurban tradition give to this episode of prayer. The text she utters, while kneeling and gently sobbing, featuring long blank verses about her various misfortunes, is rather spontaneous, in contrast to the fixed-formula of the ora-

tion by the lamb.<sup>47</sup> She indulges in maintaining this episode within the ritual of the Gurban day, while all other chores can be momentarily suspended, and while the lamb (entrails—cleaned, chopped and boiled—within) is roasting on the fire. The pact with the Saintly Ones only comes back in the scenario at the end of the preparations, when the oration of the lamb is uttered; and of course, after each of the ritual acts has been fulfilled (throwing away in the pit the remains of the dinner, then carefully covering the pit).

5. and 6. *The Place and the Sacrificial Structure of the Gurban Rite.* We have discussed the places of the pit, the hearth and the Gurban dinner table. It is worth adding that in every such ritual spot and setting for the ritual activity, the area designed for the ritual purpose is strictly determined and observed. Thus, the slaughter must be confined to the pit, so does the flaying of the animal, and the disposal of the fur; the washing of the entrails is tedious yet minute, water—in the respective household—is used with parsimony; the head and body of the sacrificial victim are carefully taken care of, since their integrity is crucial to the ritual consumption by the patient of the Gurban; others are prevented from manipulating or eating the precious meal before her, and the children are taught at every step the Gurban dos and don'ts; the precious meat, polenta and ritual bread can only be eaten at the laid table, while the washing of the hands, marking the end of the serving, can only take place over the pit, and the hands are dried solely on willow (and poplar, but the latter only narratively) leaves. In other words, if anyone needed to 'apply the anthropology' of the material passage in Van Gennep's *Rites of Passage*, the Gurban and its settings are the place to do it!

The toolkit, however, differs from the archaic version we witnessed *exempli gratia* in Roșiile, Vâlcea County, with eight pits and hearths set up for St. George's Day, 6 May 2014: there, the pit would be dug with the bare hands, assisted only by a wooden pole; the only knife would be the slaughter instrument, the only other ingredient—salt, and the only handkerchief, the beech leaves. Here in Bistreț the tools are a bit less strict, as the footage shows, yet frugality abides in the essentials. Moreover, interestingly enough, for such a poor household, the leftovers of the ritual dinner are immediately confined to the pit, but the good parts not yet eaten are carefully put up in the guardian wax tree, over the (still) open pit, in a plastic dish, wherefrom they may be consumed before nightfall; by nightfall everything must be buried deep, and the last liminary realm, in Van Gennep's terms, of the reintegration into a new state, locked from the outside.

7. 8. and 9. *The Oration, the Dinner, and the Feast.* By the time the table was laid, the lamb torn apart, the respective parts laid on the table within reach of everyone, the entrails—considered a delicacy—distributed across the table and

polenta and bread brought in, rain started to fall, which somewhat impeded the oration, creating a small dispute between the husband-Gurban priest and his brother over the exact word sequence. Yet, the verbal ritual captured in the footage shows extreme observance of all ritual commandments over the Gurban dinner. The text, repeated thrice, goes like this: “You, Saintly Ones, Merciful Ones, Lady Ones, Come, sweet as honey and sweet as power; Remember A., Remove from her body all pain, from the head, from the feet, from the teeth, from everywhere, All evil and all difficulty, From her tent,<sup>48</sup> from her body, from her mind; God, for she only has power once a year, which is for you, God, to lend to her; You, Saintly Ones, remember A. my wife, For she is wishing and orating to you every year, with a fat ram, with a wine barrel: And what the Old Man wished and orated, may it be fulfilled! Amen.” After which everybody, big or small, starts eating, all with their hands, washing afterwards with water over the sacrificial pit and drying their hands only on the willow leaves hanging from the branches set for the occasion on the wax cherry tree.

The consumption itself gives rise to the most salient local dimension of the ritual cleanliness compulsion: as the meal advances, more and more stories and details come to outline the crucial importance, in connection with the ritual purity on which the Rudari are genuinely and profoundly depending, of the absolute requirement of sexual abstinence, translating, in the ritual syntax, in the mandatory absence of any sexual feature in the ritual actors. Obliterating sexuality seems the only way to successfully get in touch with the Saintly Ones, be they persons or powers.

It must also be said that patient A. does not start with the brains or the tongue of the lamb, as patients would in Olt and Vâlcea; she waits, later in the meal, for her husband to break the skull of the lamb, which he manages to do only with the help of an axe. Then she eats first, after which everybody partakes of the brains, eyes, and tongue—vividly marking a fully-fledged sacrifice.

Loud Gypsy music was played all day, turned down only during the oration of the lamb; few moments of dancing emerged, in the Gypsy style; we have reasons to believe they waited for us to be gone in order to start the party component of the Gurban celebration day.

#### 4. Conclusions

**F**OR THE anthropologist, there is no conclusion to a research, even a field research, other than the farewell to one’s hosts and/or performers of a custom; this brief outline of the Rudar Gurban, although available on a more elaborate scale,<sup>49</sup> serves the goal of raising the correct questions and indi-

cates to the scientific community the paths our researches have outlined towards a correct understanding of the presence of the Rudari and their cultural creativity. Our concrete contribution to the issue resides in applying the historical-religious method to the cultural archaeological investigation.

We conclude these notes with a series of interrogative observations, to be dealt with at a later stage. Read in parallel with other ecstatic experiences—the Fall unto the Saintly Ones (*căderea în Sfinte*), the Taking from the Căluș (*luatul din căluș*), the Fall of the Rusalii (*căderea Rusaliilor*), with transparent initiating structures<sup>50</sup>—, the Gurban displays such archaic structures also in its recessive elements: certain disenchantresses tell about the initiation conducted by the Saintly Ones in a state of dream. We ask ourselves whether or not some of the women that had been sick from the Gurban could become iatromancers,<sup>51</sup> just as some former patients, chosen by the Saintly Ones in a state of dream, could become Gurban priestesses or priests.

The quasi-religious value of the disease from the Gurban is obvious due to its eudaimonic source. The trance and the ecstatic visions are rare, but the oneiric symptoms abound: the patient dreams of the pathogenic daemons—the three Saintly Ones (*Sfinte*), the old Saintly Woman (*Sfânta cea bătrână*), the Old Man (*Moșu*)—or the remedy (the Gurban lamb/fish). There are no strong intervals and weak intervals for becoming sick from the Gurban, unlike in the Whitsunday (the ones taken from the Căluș, the Falling Women in Timok, the Rusalii) and the magical-necromantic ecstatic complexes (women fallen unto the Saintly Ones),<sup>52</sup> circumscribed by certain festive intervals.

Finally, the endurance of the magical-religious performers: the Gurban Priestesses, the Gurban Priest/Foreman, the *Dieci* presiding over the Gurban rituality, plead for treating this iatric-sacrificial complex as a coherent magical-religious system, underpinned by a genuine theology (that of the Saintly Ones), by the personal experiences of eu-daemonic sacredness (in a state of dream and in the losses) and by an entire sacrificial therapeutic technology. Thus, next to the Căluș and to the Falling Women, the Gurban can be considered one of the most complex and best preserved expressions of archaic folkloric religiosity.

□

## Notes

1. The ideological motivations belong particularly to the Rroma national construction (sometimes with Ottocentese nationalist overtones), and the financial ones derive

- from the generous financing of the socio-anthropological researches on Roma and of the policies for the integration of this population.
2. Symptomatically, the Rudari/Băieși file in South-Eastern Europe presents a striking parallel with a situation in the far west of the continent: the nomadic Communities of Irish Travelers (*Lucht Siúil*), also called Pavee, Tinkers or Gypsies (by extending the ethnonym “Gypsy” to all nomadic communities, beyond their particular ethnicity), are a cross-border population (found in Ireland, Great Britain and the United States) with linguistic (*shelta/gammon* language), cultural (oral and ceremonial narrative system) and socio-economic (nomadism and cattle breeding) peculiarities that has undergone, just as in the case of other itinerant groups, a deprecating imagology marginalizing and discriminating them. For the identity file of the Travelers, see Ciara Bhreatnach and Aoife Bhreatnach, eds., *Portraying Irish Travellers: Histories and Representations* (Bristol: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2006); Aoife Bhreatnach, “Confusing origins and histories: the case of Irish Travellers,” *Irish Journal of Anthropology* 10 (2007): 30–35; Jennifer Hough, *DNA study: Travellers a distinct ethnicity* (2011). Accessed 25.11.2014. <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/dna-study-travellers-a-distinct-ethnicity-156324.html>.
  3. Transylvania → Banat → Serbia → Bosnia → Croatia, Transylvania → Hungary, Transylvania → Slovakia, Transylvania → Moldavia, Transylvania → Wallachia → Bulgaria → Serbia → Albania → Greece etc.
  4. After that, the autofictional trends of the historical memory accelerate, and this one, following the laws of the imaginary, becomes a fictional/mythical memory: the historical events are converted in paradigmatic situations, and the historical characters transformed into archetypal heroes. On this topic, see Mircea Eliade, *Comentarii la Legenda Meșterului Manole* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2004 [1943]), 22–25.
  5. On the fictionalization of (auto)biographical structures see Toma Pavel, *Lumi ficționale* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1992 [1989]), 125–132; cf. Bogdan Neagota, “Cultural Transmission and Mechanisms of Fictionalisation and Mythification in Oral Narratives,” *Journal of Ethnography and Folklore* (Bucharest) 1–2 (2013): 63–88. Ileana Benga, “Tales we tell are tales we dwell: The tale between belief-tale and fairytale,” *Journal of Ethnography and Folklore* 1–2 (2013): 89–100.
  6. For the analysis of the mythical-fictional mechanisms of producing identity with the Rudari from the south-Slavic area, see Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, “«Nous venons des Carpates, des Carpates indiennes, de Russie»: Gérer une identité traumatisée—le cas des Bayaches de Serbie,” in *Mémoire et histoire en Europe centrale et orientale*, eds. Daniel Baric, Jacques Le Rider, and Drago Roksandic (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010), 217–226; id., “Imagining the Past, Creating Identity: the Case of the Bayash,” *Glasnik etnografskog Instituta SANU* (Belgrade) 59 (2011): 45–59.
  7. Those who consider them as Gypsies/Rroma start from social-economic and anthropological arguments: the isolation of the traditional communities, autoidentification (in some cases), heteroidentification (in many cases), typical social and family structures, social exclusion, the status of slaves (until the 19<sup>th</sup> century), the occurrence of the Roma anthropological type.



8. The theory of the Romanian origin of the Rudari/Băieși is supported by the following arguments: autoidentification, the Romanian language and the folkloric traditions, the absence of the traditional occupations and of the Gypsy social-cultural and juridical structures, the rare occurrence of the Rroma anthropological type.
9. An intermediate position, which takes into account both ethnic autoidentification of the Rudari and the cultural, anthropological, social-economic arguments, asserts the composite, mixed character (Romanian and Gypsy one) of the Rudar communities.
10. Biljana Sikimić, “Băieși în contextul sud slav,” *Piramida* (Novi Sad), I/2 (2011): 3–122; Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, “«Noi iștem rumâni și nu ni-i žao»: Băieșii din Mehovine,” *Piramida* 2 (2011): 10–25.
11. The Romanians from Timok are called Vlachs by the Serbian authorities and the Romanians from Vojvodina and Central Serbia are called Romanians. For the Vlach/Romanian identity assumed by the Rudari/Băieși see Dorin Lozovanu, “Populația românească din Peninsula Balcanică: Studiu uman-geografic,” Ph.D. thesis, Abstract, Al. I. Cuza University (Iași, 2008), 23–32, 43.
12. Ion Chelcea, *Rudarii: Contribuție la o “enigmă” etnografică* (Bucharest: Casa Școalelor, 1944), 56.
13. In this context, it is symptomatic that often the Rroma councilors within rural local councils (from Romanian counties such as Argeș, Mehedinți etc.) advise/coerce the pauper Rudari to declare themselves to be Rroma, telling them that, otherwise, they will no longer be eligible for the minimum social aid granted by the city council. The blackmail works, and some of the Rudari from southern Romania, marked by poverty, have come to assume the Rroma identity compulsorily.
14. The epistemic ingredients of this national ideology are heterogeneous: a late Romantic nationalism (in which Gypsy folklore holds a fundamental component, and historiography is rewritten from a partisan perspective), protochronism, political correctness (reaching the ideological ostracism of the inconvenient thesis), a self-victimization tendency (the Rroma as victims of History and of the discriminatory majority population), overlooking the inconvenient socio-economic and mentality characteristics (crime, mendicity, the extreme stratification of the Rroma population—a minority enriched illegally and a majority that lives below the limits of what we call poverty).
15. For example, in Argeș County, in some communities of poor rural Rudari, a course of Rromani language for the Rudari pupils has officially been introduced, without any concrete consequences.
16. “Il fatto che le etnie risultino essere delle ‘realtà immaginate’ piuttosto che delle ‘realtà reali’ non impedisce che l’identità ethnica sia percepita, da coloro che vi si riconoscono, come un dato assolutamente ‘concreto.’” Ugo Fabietti, *L’identità ethnica: Storia e critica di un concetto equivoco* (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2013 [1995]), 177; cf. Philippe Poutignat and Jocelyne Streiff-Fenart, *Théories de l’ethnité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995).
17. Fabietti, 57–65.
18. Marcel Courthiade, “Les Rroms dans le contexte des peuples européens sans territoire compact,” *Bulletin de l’Association des Anciens Élèves de l’INALCO*, Oct. 2004.

19. Cf. Jean-Loup Amselle, *Logiques métisses* (Paris: Payot), 1999.
20. See Ugo Fabietti, *La costruzione dei confini in antropologia: Pratiche e rappresentazioni* (2004). Accessed 21.11.2014. [http://www.sissco.it/download/pubblicazioni/confini\\_fabietti.pdf](http://www.sissco.it/download/pubblicazioni/confini_fabietti.pdf).
21. First of all, we refer to the anthropological-linguistic studies produced by two researchers from the Institute for Balkan Studies in Belgrade, Biljana Sikimić and Annetta Sorescu-Marinković. For the linguistic identity construction of the Rudari/Băieși, see Sikimić, “Băieși în contextul sud slav”; id., “How to be Roma and speak Romanian in Serbia.” Paper at SACR 2011, Bucharest. Accessed 23.11.2014. <http://wikibit.net/video/OPDFDIVOKYO>; id., “Elemente românești în cultura tradițională a băieșilor din Grebenaș,” *Anuar 2011* (Zrenjanin: Institutul de Cultură al Românilor din Voivodina, 2012): 97–112; A. Sorescu-Marinković, “Comunități românofone din Serbia: Identitate lingvistică sau ceva mai mult?,” in *Români majoritari/Români minoritari: interferențe și coabitări lingvistice, literare și etnologice* (Iași: Academia Română, Institutul de Filologie Română A. Philippide, 2007), 863–876; id., “The Bayash in Croatia: Romanian vernaculars in Baranja and Medjimurje,” in *The Romance Balkans*, eds. B. Sikimić and T. Ašić (Belgrade: Balkanološki institut, 2008), 173–225; id., “Strategies for creating an explanatory Bayash dictionary in Serbia,” *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique* (Bucharest) 56 (2011): 17–34.
22. “The term *rudă*, source of the derivative *rudar*, today a lexical archaism, meant at the beginning a ‘metal mine’ . . . The three terms, *rudari*, *băieși* and especially *aurari*, reflect their old occupation as workers in gold mines, a profession which was abandoned later, after their emigration to the region of Oltenia, and gradually replaced with a new one, in woodworking, as *albiери*, *rotari* or *corfari*.” Ion Calotă, “Elemente sud-dunărene în graiul rudarilor din Oltenia,” *Dacoromania* (Cluj-Napoca) 2 (1996–1997): 47.
23. Silvia Puia Iosipescu, “Considerații privind studiul etnografic al populației din România (cu privire specială la rudari),” *Revista de etnografie și folclor* (Bucharest) 37 (1992): 302–303.
24. During some field research made in four rural communities of Rudari from Vâlcea (2011–2014), we noticed the low occurrence of mixed marriages between Rudari and Rroma. There is a similar situation in the Balkan Rudar communities (Lozovanu, 22).
25. Calotă, “Elemente sud-dunărene,” 47.
26. Constantin Șerban, “Contribuții la istoria meșteșugarilor din Țara Românească—țigarii rudari în sec. XVII–XVIII,” *Revista de istorie* (Bucharest) 12 (1959): 131–147.
27. This is the case of the Rudari from Alexandria and Roșiorii de Vede, who stopped panning for gold in the sand of the Olt river (*aurăria*) and turned to making bricks (*cămnidăria*), and it is also the case of the Sub-Carpathian Rudari, the Corfari (< Germ. *Korf*: basket plaited wicker), also called Băieși, because of their mining ascendancy. See Ion Calotă, *Rudarii din Oltenia: Studiu de dialectologie și de geografie lingvistică românească* (Craiova: Sibila, 1995 [1974]).
28. Calotă, “Elemente sud-dunărene,” 47–48.

29. Chelcea, *Rudarii: Contribuție*, 56.
30. I. Chelcea, “Rudarii de pe valea Dunării (între cursul inferior al Oltului și Mostiștei),” in *Comunicările Centrului din Craiova al Academiei*, ethnographic ser., 3 (Craiova, 1969), 11 (apud Calotă, “Elemente sud-dunărene,” 49).
31. Calotă, “Elemente sud-dunărene,” 48–49.
32. *Ibid.*, 49.
33. “The Gurban is the ethnographic element through which the Rudari Albieri and the Rudari Rotari differentiate both from all other categories of Gypsies—including the other category of Rudari, the Corfari—and especially from the Romanians” (*ibid.*). During our field researches in 2011–2014, we met the Gurban also in a Vâlcea community of Rudari Corfari (neighboring a large community of Rudari Rotari), attested in the region in the interwar period. Here, the elders talked to us about the Gurbans from the ’30s.
34. See C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor, “Gurbanele,” *Arhivele Olteniei* (Craiova) 1 (1922): 35–40. Ion Chelcea, “Les rudari de Muscel: Etude ethnographique,” *Extraits des Archives* 16/1–4 (1943): 3–52; Calotă, *Rudarii din Oltenia*.
35. Biljana Sikimić and Petko Hristov, eds, *Kurban in the Balkans* (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2007), 137–151, 153–180.
36. A. Sorescu-Marinkovic, “The gurban displaced: Bayash guest workers in Paris,” in *Kurban in the Balkans*, 140.
37. *Ibid.*, 140–141.
38. *Ibid.*, 142.
39. I. Benga, B. Neagota, “Note de teren asupra Gurbanului din Bistreț (Dolj), 2012” (Cluj-Napoca: Orma Ethnological Archive). As for the issue of the exogamic marriage Rudar-Gypsy, in this very case, where both families of parents of the married couple were present, one making and the other one actively taking part in the Gurban, the young couple itself being absent, let us quote the phrase of the uncle of the Rudar bride, always taking part in the same Gurban: “Nowadays, if the children like one another, you have no choice but become family/cuscru/‘allied’ with whom you never intended to.”
40. B. Neagota, “Căzătoare, necromante, vrăjitoare: Experiențe și tehnici arhaice ale extazului în regiunea Dunării de Mijloc,” *Orma: Journal of Ethnological and Historical-Religious Studies* (Cluj-Napoca) 17 (2012): 70.
41. *Ibid.*
42. I. Benga, “Dramaturgia aniversară—nod articular în transmiterea tradițională,” in *Călușul—emblemă identitară și factor de cunoaștere și armonizare cu alte culturi*, ed. Narcisa Știucă (Bucharest: Ed. Universității), 49–65.
43. B. Neagota, “Patologie magică și ritualitate iatrică în complexul ‘Gurbanului’ rudăresc: Morfologie și istorie,” in *Cultura populară la români: Context istoric și specific cultural*, eds. Cornel Bălosu and Nicolae Mihai (Cluj-Napoca–Craiova: Presa Universitară Clujeană/Ed. Universitaria), 245–251.
44. Information from Turnu-Măgurele, February 2015; this needs to be statistically developed in sunsequent analyses, since it may shed important light on diverging temporalities for Rudari, on the one hand, and Gypsies, on the other. A potential

chronology should bear in the mind the late date(s) of switching to the Gregorian-style calendar in Eastern Europe.

45. For example, the Gypsy family of the parents of the son-in-law of our Rudar host family in Bistreț, at some point, tell in detail of the ritual they perform at their Easter, i.e. St. George, in keeping with the new Gregorian style (we fathom), which also is about the sacrifice of a lamb for the well-being of their children, every year until their marriage; the latter is equaled to the absolute, successful outcome of their own Gypsy ritual of St. George. The yearly lamb sacrifice done by these Gypsies on the said occasion can also be done only for one year, or for a few years in succession, depending on the initial promise made presumably to the divine authority (the Saintly Ones, when invoked, meaning here any Godly entourage), when “setting their mind” on the health of their children. This kind of making a sacrificial gesture, on whatever scale, in the absence of a direct affliction to be cured by the modal tradition-transmitted solution—as with the the *Căluș* and the *Gurban*—can only send us to the value attached by ethnographic Romanian societies to the alms given for living people (*pomana de viu*), which is precisely a form of sacrifice, culturally shaped for a very long time, meant for the well-being of young children—or, respectively, for the appropriate afterlife of the elders doing it.
46. I. Benga, “Bonfires for not just any dead: alms for the aborted children: Remembrance rites at *Sâmedru* and feminine coping to the rigors of tradition in rural *Argeș*, Romania,” *Ethnologia Balkanica* 15 (2011): 200.
47. ‘Next of kin’ of this distinction is the differentiation between the fixed-form ceremonial songs of the funereal repertory (*cântecul bradului*, *cântecul zorilor*) and the more spontaneous ones uttered by mourners (*bocet*), which allow a flow of deep emotion by means of a fluent combination between motifs passed down by tradition and motifs and images specific to the respective death circumstances (place, condition, family members left behind etc.). See Ileana Benga, Oana Benga, “Il valore terapeutico del rito funebre,” in *La ricerca antropologica in Romania: Prospettive storiche ed etnografiche*, eds. Cristina Papa, Giovanni Pizza, and Filippo M. Zerilli (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2003), 161–182.
48. Sic! This mention of a tent for a house is unique in all the *Gurban* formulas we have recorded. If we met it somewhere else as well, we could speculate further on the nomadic inheritance in the Rudari’s way of life. Here it could be just an influence from the mass of Gypsy population present around the town of Bechet.
49. See Neagota, “Patologie magică și ritualitate iatrică,” 237–289.
50. For the ecstatic witches and the patients of the *Căluș* see B. Neagota, “Căzătoare, necromante, vrăjitoare,” 77–85; I. Benga and B. Neagota, “Căluș and Călușari: Ceremonial Syntax and Narrative Morphology in the Grammar of the Romanian Căluș,” *Archaeus: Études d’histoire des religions/Studies in the History of Religions* (Bucharest) 14 (2010): 197–227.
51. Neagota, “Patologie magică și ritualitate iatrică,” 263–265.
52. Neagota, “Căzătoare, necromante, vrăjitoare,” 51–96.

**Abstract**

The Healing Gurban: On the Traces of the Rudari from Southern Romania

The paper is an introduction to the complexities of the Rudar issues, which continue to be debated, after about a century of scientific work, in thematic clusters such as: historiography, linguistics, ethnicity, economy, and, intermingled with those, religion. Starting from field researches on the *Healing Gurban*, firmly a Rudar trademark, our team endeavors to approach by means of *cultural archaeology* their own emic cluster-categories, render them visible within excerpts of field material, and comprehensible for the idiom of the scientific *oicumene*.

**Keywords**

Rudari, Băieși (Bayash), identity, wood transhumance, Gurban, sacrifice, lamb, the Saintly Ones