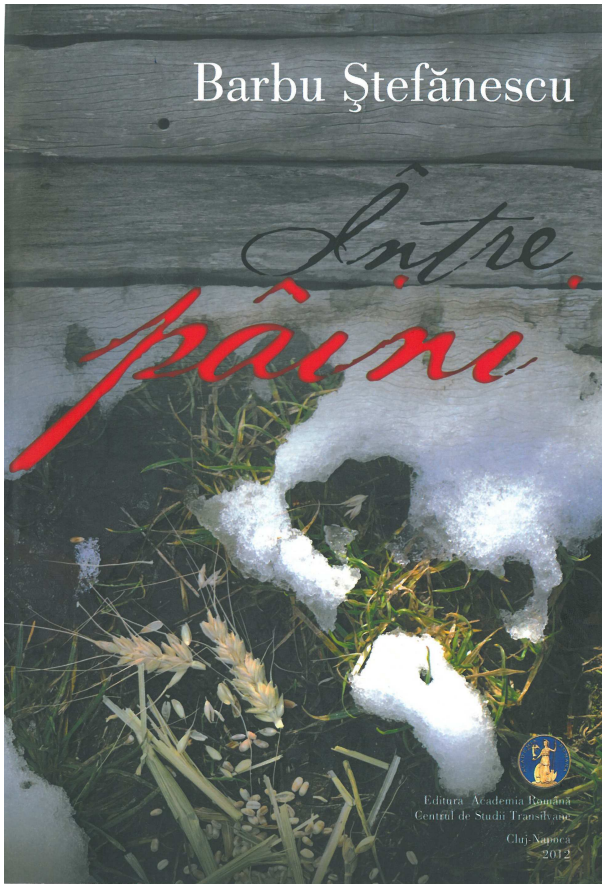


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INTRE PAINI



Editura Academiei Române, Central de Studii Transilvane, Cluj Napoca, 2012, ISBN 978-973-7784-80-3, 645 pages, foreword (Argument), references, proper names index, English language abstract

There are people who devote their entire life to one cause, to one goal. When someone tries to find the essence of this book it is absolutely clear that this book *is a bow* of the author in front of the social category he loved and respected close to devotion, **THE ROMANIAN PEASANT** and in front of the place he did not ever forget, **THE ROMANIAN VILLAGE**.

This book is about behavior and attitude of the rural world from Transylvania within an annual time segment when took place the link between two consecutive harvests, time period which is called by the French historiography „*la sudure*”, which is perceived as a period of potential or real crisis, period of time which was associated by the peasants of Beiuș Depression by a term which involves the sense of uncertainty, struggle, dramatism, namely „*to die between breads*”. To „*die between*

breads” means a period of uncertainty, struggle, caused by the danger to remain without provisions, mainly food, from the last harvest and before the next harvest, with lack of reserves which the peasant households cannot afford mainly because of a subsistence agricultural type (pag. 8).

The term „*to die between breads*” has also a humorous and self-ironic sense, specific to the rural world, namely to mock even the death. Only the peasant, the bread producer is able to die while he is imaginary flanked by two piles of bread, one being almost finished and the second one being an imaginary one, because it represent the next harvest, which is still untouchable, because its virtual. The lack of bread leads to famine but also deprive the group from the most important mean of Christian ritual. The book is *the story of the units* at the hand of the society which, despite the modern society, was a cohesive society which use traditional way of actions for its living (pag. 20).

The rural world is perceived as a world situated between history and cultural anthropology, (chapter 1) the place of the man within the history is a right won a long time ago. Although in the title of the chapter is used the term *cultural anthropology*, the author suggests that the proper term is historical anthropology (pag. 25) because the need of continuity suggested by the historians who deal the problems of the rural world. Despite these two observation points, the author outlines the necessity of cooperation between these two fields in order to create an „*elastic balance*” (pag. 25) in order to observe the continuous changes of a society with slow evolution patterns but subject to strong outside modernization pressures. The village is perceived as a very *sensitive territorial entity continuously subjected to pressure* (the second chapter is dedicated to this idea) from the outside world and the consequence of this pressure is the continuous weakening of rural communities. But the rural world tries very hard to face the outside pressure and... *resists changes* (chapter three). Have often said that the peasant's first word is „*no*” but this answer is the result of his attempt to save his ancient world, to prevent the change of his cultural environment because he feels secure within the tradition in which he lives. But in some cases these resistance was broken and through created breaches the elements of modernization penetrated this rural world. These penetrations gradually, throughout generations were integrated in the rural world, being classified and retrieved and finally were no longer perceived as a betrayals (pag. 76).

Time and temporality (chapter four) is one of the key element of the book and it is approached thorough Fernand Braudel's perspective, namely the non-linearity of the time in the historical approach. The pre-modern societies perceive the time in an integrative way „*including within the same vision and within an simultaneity report both past, present and future*” (p. 85). The time of the pre-modern men was an non-homogeneous and non-continuous time, the profane time, the time of everyday life, alternating with the sacred time, the ceremonial time, permanently updating the origins. The rural temporality belonged to some peoples who never mastered the nature but were submitted to its rhythm. It was a time of waiting and patience, associated to the alternance of light and dark, of seasons, religious feasts. Time was for the peasants and landowners an uneven time, as both being involved in the agriculture, split the time into two major categories: a „*hard*” time, in summer, associated with good weather, long days, proper for work, and a „*weak*” time, associated with winter, with cold, short days, improper for agriculture (pag. 95).

The period between the two harvests, known as „*la sudure*” is perceived as a time with a increased negative potential mainly if destabilizing factors affected the fragile balance of the rural world, reducing thus the advantages of the „*hard*” time. In case of the peasant, the time was closely linked to the seasonal works, the time of the landowners was a „*military and tax-pay*” time. Although in the XVIIIth century the landowners time was still closely linked to agricultural seasons and activities, this type of time gradually turn to be a „*commercial*” time, for an efficient use of the free peasant work. The major dispute between the peasants and the landowners was for the control of work time, both in its quantitative and qualitative dimension. This battle for the time is closely related to the period „*between breads*” because if the peasant is the winner (being helped mainly by the weather) he is able to secure this hard time between harvests with a minimum of food sufficient for passing this period. This material insecurity, mainly food, was directly related to mental fear, the peasant world being a world plagued by fear to starve. The preindustrial societies were situated close to the natural, to the cosmic, to the biological non human, the people being very fragile in front of the colossal forces of nature, the concern of people came from the fear that the life is close to the death: from hunger, from exhaustion, diseases. The weather was the main factor which directly influenced the annual harvest, including „*la sudure*” period, but were also other factors which, periodically, had important negative impact upon quality of peasants life: plagues (pag.150), demographic „*explosion*” caused by a high increase of birth rate, technical hindrance (pag. 178), social factors as a consequence of late middle-age mentality, spiritual factors. These factors often darkened the period of „*la sudure*” causing sometimes „*infernal cycles*” with direct, catastrophic consequences upon rural world (pag. 218).

Within the period of „*la sudure*” the main concern was to ensure food necessities but this concern was doubled by other activities, the overall aim being to pass safely this critical period of time. The *works of „la sudure*” (chapter five) are linked to two agricultural seasons which partially overlap one another: the concern for the wheat which will be harvested in July-August but also the concern for the harvest of the next year, these activities being synchronous with the agricultural activities started in spring or activities related to perennial crops, mainly grapes (pag. 227). Within the annual agricultural calendar there were two peak moments: the plowing-sowing and harvesting, even if these moments were made during several time periods of the year there were parts of the so-called „*la sudure*” (pag. 235).

The combined action of the aggravating factors increased the feeling of insecurity felt permanently by the rural world. This fear might be real or illusory and lead to permanent search for dangers which might come from strangers, mainly beggars, who are responsible for thefts, spreading diseases (plagues), from witches, from wolf packs who attack villages during hard winters, from ghosts who agitate spirits mainly during the spring. In order to survive the action of these aggravating factors, the peasant tried to „*secure la sudure*” (chapter six). He was able to survive in front of the pressures which press him due to a mentality which was a mixture of wisdom and cunning, refuses and obstacles. The rural society had always a hidden reserve of surviving possibilities of technical, social, mental order which allow face the consequences of destructive forces (pag. 230).

The peasant was forced to practice a multi-scale agriculture in order to be able to sustain the food needs: first of all cereals, mainly wheat, different type of fats (pork fat, butter) vegetal oil, proteins (milk, egg, meat). If this multi-scale agriculture is a necessity, it was also necessary to be established a reasonable proportion of different crops, the rotation of the crops in order to obtain a relatively stable ration among crops and necessities. The peasant also had a very elastic relationship between spring and fall crops. If in case of wheat, the trend was to use the autumn *wheat*, more productive, but the peasant always had the same area with spring wheat or with oat in order to ensure a „*secure harvest*” (pag. 239). The obsessive care for subsistence led to the permanence of other techniques such as the use of different species of „*walking*” wheat which could be sowed both in spring or autumn. The peasant was really obsessed by the wheat and he cultivated it even in areas more suitable for grass, grape or fruit trees or on the slopes of mountains such as Jura and Apuseni, where the harvest was in September, before the first snow, like in northern Europe (pag. 242). This dominance of the wheat was shaded in the XVIIIth century by the „*american contribution*” (pag. 256) given by the presence of corn and potato. The corn gained its place in the agricultural rural world but being still subordinated to wheat. Its place was in direct relationship with the possibility to be used as flour for bread, in relation to animals who produce manure which increase the fertility of soil, increase the quantity of production and subsequently the quality of the peasants life. In case of the potato „*an entire apprenticeship was necessary, both for the producer and for consumer*” (pag. 257) to be fully accepted in the rural agriculture. For many decades the peasant allowed the potato to occupy just areas surrounding his house, refusing to let it occupy areas traditionally designated for wheat. The food and cereal crises have paved the way for the acceptance, at the beginning of the XIXth century, mainly because of the severe hunger which took place during the second decade of the century. The presence of these two crops were meant to increase the food security in terms of two harvests, at different periods within one year, one harvest of cereals, one harvest of corn and potatoes; the corn was also able to shorten the period of „*la sudure*” because it could be used before maturity (boiled, roasted). Despite the resistance for the introduction of the potato, it is widely accepted after the food crisis from 1813-1817, although the presence of the potato as a field crop will appear just after few decades.

The Mediterranean and European civilizations gave place, from early times, to a crop which was in a direct competition to wheat, namely the grape. „*The grape is society, power, politics, exceptionally field of work.....*” said F. Braudel (pag. 268) in order to explain that bread is the body of Christ and the wine is the symbol of his precious blood. The surfaces occupied by grapes

constantly increased despite the filoxera attack from the last decades of the XIXth century but the cultivation of grapes in primary occupation just in few villages. The food balance of the wine is a very important one, the wine being considered as a food, entering the food ration of the workers. The side products of the wine were used to produce brandy or a soft drink highly appreciated during fasting. Of significant importance was the large scale trade with wine, the money being used for grain acquisition thus transforming the grapes and the wine an instrument of welfare both for masters and peasants. Beside these species, the pea, lentil, cabbage, bean, become more and more important in the food balance of the rural world securing the food sources.

But the relative food abundance of different periods never changed the ancient behavioral patterns of the peasant. Sometimes the townsmen accused him being mean as he eats raw poor quality foods, sometimes rotten food, also being skimpy, clothing poorly.....(pag. 288). The rural world is characterized by moderation even during time when the larder was filled with food, moderation which was necessary not to change this behavior practice so useful during harsh times. Even if sometimes the pork fat rancid in the larder or the wheat was full with insects, the peasant was not angry, he was satisfied that he was not forced to face the perspective of starvation.

The rural world was dominated by a complex system of help: peasants borrow from each other clothes, animals, food but it was also a complex system of work rotation among the members of the community. This complex system was useful at least from several reasons: the work is finished much quicker, is easier, the food is better in terms of quality as it was for the day laborer. During crisis, these types of rural solidarities were not enough for the communities to pass the harsh times and in this case the circle opens calling upon wider communities. These communities were other rural communities or the landowners, who usually had some reserve supplies. These types of subordination were not accepted easily by the communities and thus they continuously searched for other activities in order preserve their independence for resources. These non-agricultural, collateral activities were logging (pag. 314) smithery (pag. 319), weaving (pag. 321), pottery (pag. 326) which gave a certain degree of independence for the communities. In case of weaving it was very important activity mainly for women during winter and period, the hemp being compulsory for every house.

An important way of using the „*widening circle*” was the participation of peasants from the hilly and mountain areas, in a process of economic complementarity, to seasonal agricultural activities in the plain areas (pag. 334). This type of seasonal agricultural „*migration*” was boosted by the turn of the agricultural activities towards a market oriented activity, by the deforestation, draining and sewerage works from Western Plain which increased the agricultural surfaces and the total ineffective and unprofitability of the unpaid labor of the peasants. The paid workers were recruited from peasants from mountain and hilly areas, who had insufficient agricultural areas to support their families and thus being forced to find ways to have access to wheat from plain areas – the cereals-fruits, cereals-handmade crafts exchanges and finally seasonal work-cereals being the way in which they were forced to act.

In some cases the will to secure the family from hunger forced the rural communities to try evasions, the peasant evasions being both material and spiritual. It is evident the try of the peasant to have something very personal, just for himself, something to be kept by all means in order to survive both he and his family. A way to survive is to permanently claim poverty, the lack of chance, the desperate situation, to play fool a.s.o (pag. 343). The peasant knows very well all the external threats he must face and he tried to minimize the links between him and the outside world, the authorities. One of the most used form of evasion is stealing from work, which had both a qualitative and quantitative aspect forcing the landowners to find more and more accurate ways to regulate it. In any case the peasant try to avoid the conflict with the landowner because he is aware that the chances to have the justice on his side are very slim. In some cases the most extreme form of evasion is the flee the master which led to uncontrolled growth of the obligations thus forcing the state to solve as clear as possible the arbitrary between the landowner and the peasant. The evasion had also a spiritual form mainly in the communities where the churches were closed or

ceded to other confessions – greek catholic, for instance – the orthodox were banned to enter the church even during Easter but this gesture has not prevented them to celebrate the most important christian event in a different way, making cross and eating as holly bread, buds, swallowed at first by parents and after the children; in this case the evasion was a magic, their christian belief not excluding ever the magic. The spiritual side was an important part within the mentality of the rural world. The peasant mentality strongly believed that it is not enough to plough, to harvest if the made effort is not enjoyed by good supernatural forces. One could said that there was no „*event*” without evoking the good spirits in order to save the crops. These effort to find communion with supernatural forces were especially intense during the period of „*la sudure*” in order to prevent any harmful influences upon crops thus securing both the hard period and the next year. The church is the vanguard of all these efforts trying to be the link between the communities and the divinity, the supernatural forces, which sometimes menace the crops and livestock (pag. 423).

The punishment of the God was a new occasion to resume an old theme, namely the confessional compulsoriness, at least once a year, during Easter, a new occasion for the Church to strengthen its position and influence. Although this period of the year („*la sudure*”) is a very busy and intense one, it is also very crowded with events of the family cycle. The balance between births and mortality is always very fragile but during this period of the year the balance is definitely tilted in favor of the last, the highest rates of deaths being in the first months of the spring (pag. 475). The periods of „*la sudure*”, conducted in periods of famine and disease, increases the dimension of mortality leading to severe demographic crises which counterbalancing thus the high birth rate consolidating what Fernand Braudel called the „*vicious circle*”.

The permanent dangers which depart on both individuals and communities increased the need of solidarity at the level of concentric circles of sociability. The two basic forms of primal solidarity, the family and the community, took measures during harsh times to prevent collapses, including food collapses (pag. 520). The family was the basic element of this solidarity although the form in which the family existed varied during centuries, from the single type family to the most common type of family, the multi-level family structure in which children usually remained in the parents house, the older brother was the head of the family, all the activities were made in common. The term „*family*” had an other meaning namely relatives or alliances, the proud to be part of one „*family*” being ritually expressed during different occasions such as weddings, fairs, celebrations. The rural world is fundamentally collective the need of protection, support and help is very strong, even tyrannical. The community is perceived by the members in different ways, as a multi-level meeting point interface of different solidarity forms, deaths and livings, deaths and God. The community was also responsible for the categories unable to support themselves, such as orphans, widows, mentally ill. A very common practice was to collect the unharvested ears and to give to those unable to work, this part being the „*share of God*” (p. 524).

This way of facing the world in which they lived is not common just for peasants from Transsylvania, is more an anthropological constant for people of agrarian civilizations. What is unique for the Transylvanian rural world is that it lasted more than in other regions of Europe, more closer to the archaic ancestral pattern.

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