



# Traditions and Modernity in the Rural Area of the Şieu River Valley

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## ABSTRACT

Habits are included in the tradition of a nation and appear to us as complex cultural facts, meant to organize people's lives, to mark the important moments of passage through time, to shape behaviour. They give a meaning to some of the moments of collective emotion, having a syncretic structure, a moral meaning and aesthetic events, representing rural life and the genesis of all forms of folklore. Over time, habits acquire authority, often deciding what is good, true, beautiful and useful, highlighting those deeds and actions which, through their maintenance and repetition, are desired by the individual and its community. The repetition and use of ceremonial forms strengthen values, rules and prescriptions. Due to their pure aesthetic qualities, some of the ceremonial habits have become part of the artistic domain, some remaining in their original form, others changing their characteristics, determined by many factors of which prevailing are the economic ones. Nowadays, when the Romanian village, which is also the case of the villages of the Şieu River Valley, goes through profound transition, the nostalgia for pure traditions and habits of the interwar period are not productive. Meanwhile, a number of concepts have appeared in order to serve to the achievement of a new cultural model, that of improving the reality in which the villager lives through multiple ways, a peasant – based society, relying mostly on unwritten rules, on customs and traditions incompatible with a modern rural society. In this micro-rural universe, increasingly fewer individuals live, in whose behaviour the element of traditional folk culture with its implications in the everyday life is recognizable. Having in front of us the image of the rural population as a heterogeneous structure, its continuous decrease, it is hard to believe that folklore, the traditional culture, may find itself in a state that would allow its functionality, as a way of life.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

From a broad perspective, people's tradition includes social and cultural values, created by it in important historical moments, values that are creeping into the present reality of the individual. Tradition is therefore a constant that is included in the production of culture and civilization, containing elements understood themselves as permanent values.

The reason for choosing a territory of not a very large size (417 sq km) is mainly due to its evolutionary complexity, both overall and at its subunits' level. Establishing the evolutionary trend of a territory in a traditional way can be achieved through different ways, depending on the available methods.

Among these, the one that sets the correlation between the traditional rural culture and today's modernity, stands out.

Something has changed, and it is difficult to say whether for the best, and this "something" is the very peasant's mentality, subject to multiple influences, who has changed and no longer conceives living by the canons of ritualised tradition and folklore specific to his ancestors. Therefore, the Romanian rural traditional culture entered a period of gradual decay.

Under the pressure of renewals of scientific, industrial and informational structures, the homogeneous traditional rural culture is being gradually replaced, at first by surrogates, and then by influences from the urban area, which probably meet

better the expectations of those who adopt new pragmatic values of not very clearly defined interests. Consequently, the remnants of traditional folklore culture no longer have the impact and educational influence that traditions and customs used to have in the period prior to the Second World War.

Consequently, in terms of today's Romanian village, we can no longer talk about stabilizing the congruence characteristic to the traditional – ritual – ceremony type of culture, which was based on a homogeneous world with totally different ideals of those that guide today's increasingly fragmented Romanian rural space.

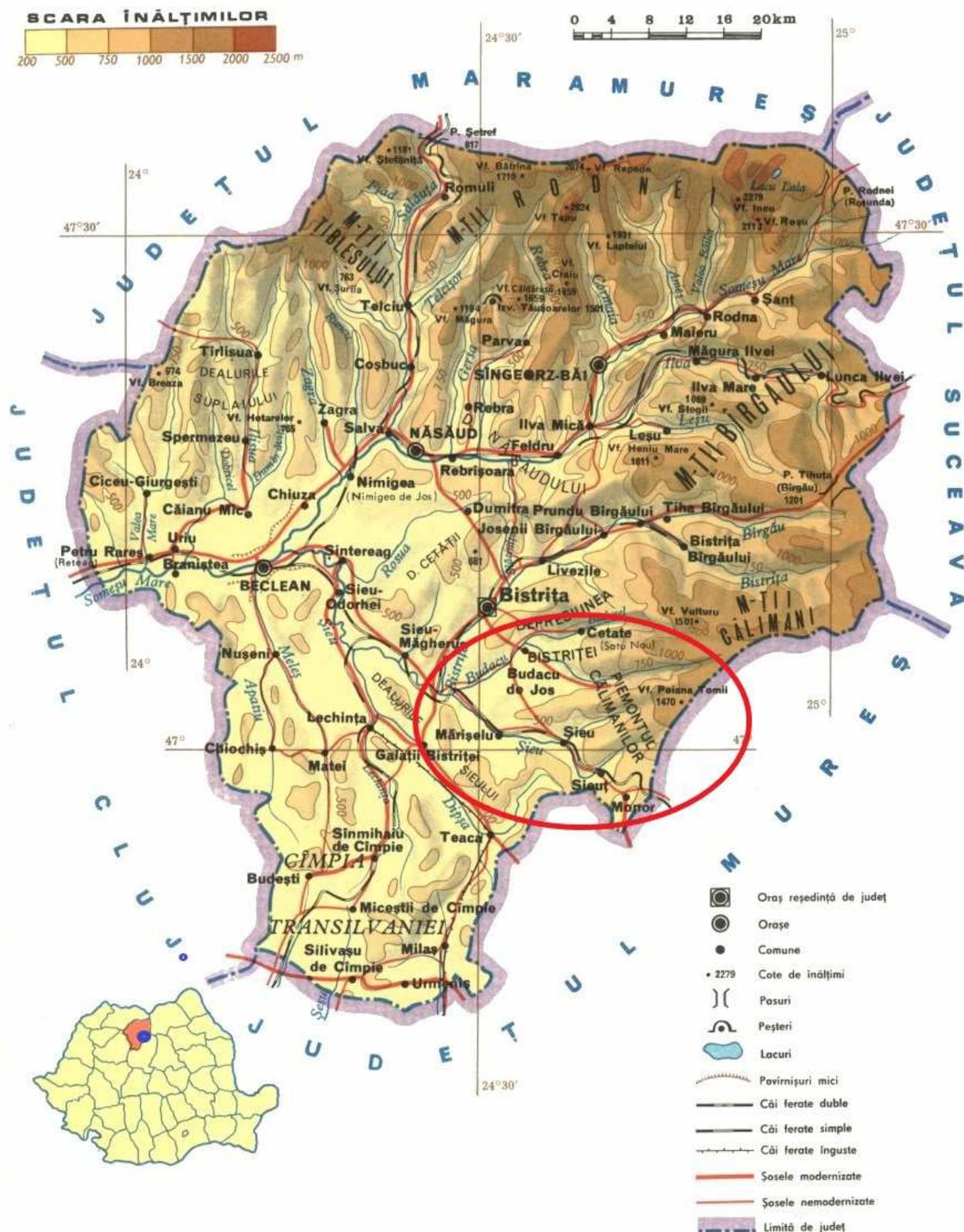


Fig. 1. The Șieu location in the Bistrița Năsăud County.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The methodology used in preparing the article has sought, in its first phase, a comprehensive bibliographical analysis specific to the studied area, followed by the analysis of the artistic landscape, especially the traditional folk culture, meaning an analysis between old customs and traditions, correlated to the new, modern ones.

The last stage of the study, aimed to highlight the effects of the traditional folk architectural system of the Şieu Valley. Thus, ethnographic items, widespread local folk events, complete the area's artistic value, that can be successfully exploited by promoting them.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Bistrița-Năsăud traditions

Traditions size the experience of certain collective moments of emotion, moral functions and aesthetic manifestations representing the way of the genesis and life of all forms of folklore.

Ethnographic elements, local folk events, which are widespread, complete the area's touristic value, so they can be successfully exploited through their promotion. Rural areas in Bistrița-Năsăud have a great tourism potential. The scent of ancient traditions of Transylvanian mountain villages gives the whole area special atmosphere and poetry. In unique folklore areas such as the Bârgaielor Valley, Someșului Valley, Şieului Valley, the inhabitants keep up exclusive attractions such as the ancient traditions and customs to nowadays. Both the Şieu Valley and the Budacului Valley are true centres of popular fabrics and seams.

The Şieu village is a special symbol of folk and managed to keep the beauty of folklore intact, folk architecture and artistic woodwork to traditional folk customs. The Budacu de Jos village is another place where time seems to stand still, where tradition has a privileged place. Even today there can be seen houses with porch, rooms with traditional interiors, woven towels, and flowery pillows.

Pastoralism is an ancient Romanian occupation which is still practised in the county, giving the landscape a unique aspect.

#### 3.1.1. Folk Wear

Şieu village falls into an area in which folk traditions have been preserved and even enriched up to nowadays. With modern life conditions, the suit has become a necessity for the active participation in the amateur artistic movement. The village has famous dance teams, winners in various competitions. The Romanian folk costume of the Şieu ethnographic area, including the surrounding villages, contains several characteristic elements such as: the use of traditionally

long sheepskin coats inside – out or face, depending on the weather conditions and the long hair for men.

#### 3.1.2. The female costume

The women's costume is characterised by the shirt with "chep" or "ciupag" with a creased narrow front without having to remove the material by any "răscroire" over the edge of the creased part, a geometric patterned embroidery was done, red for the youth and black for the elderly women. The wide sleeves embroideries above the elbow, ending with "fodori". "Poalele" [laps] are attached to the shirt, which has an opening in the back.

From this piece the female costume has evolved to a comfortable to wear shirt, with a front opening, also referred to as the "elderly" shirt. It is wrinkled at the neck where it has geometric motifs sewed with black thread. This part of the shirt is called "pagmată cu flori". It ends in a black tasselled cord. The sewing continue downwards over the elbow, with pearls bought from the fair and "bumbșele", at the "fodori" ending in white lace. The sleeve is closed with "lânceți".

The polychrome of the seams increases more and more as we approach the present day. Black is still preserved but yellow appears and the seams are done from the shoulder to the "lânceți". "Poalele" made of hemp or cotton were cut from four or six "lați" and joints between them were stitched with black, red or brown "arnici". Even more, the "poale" [laps] were attached to the shirt and of almost ground length. Some had simple sewing and lace in the lower part. The loose shirt "poale" [laps] are worn even today, decorated with floral motifs in the same colours as those on the shirts.

"Zadilii", decorated with the geometric motifs of the age, have been replaced with multicoloured floral ornaments, old women wear such "zadii" only at the back of the skirt in the front they have been replaced with the "șurt". Leather dublets were decorated with floral motifs and "cănași" (fringes) in all colours. With ornamental purposes they sometimes sewed six glass buttons on either side. Doublets later began to be made of bought "barșon" of silk in several colours.

Traditional shoes were the leather "opinci" tied to the leg with belts crossed through "nojițe" or red boots with horseshoe, yellow targets and "flowers" at the heel, purchased at the fair.

The older women wore black wool headkerchiefs, and the young white or brown. Later they began buying cotton kerchiefs in different colours, decorated with wreaths and flowers.

#### 3.1.3. The male costume

Men wore and are still wearing black hats "cloape", wide brimmed and decorated with sewn "flowers" or beads. Young men wore natural or artificial

flowers on their hats. The old male shirt was generally black embroidered, in geometric motifs, made on the collar and sleeves. Over time, the floral motifs 's colours were more various, thus at the shirt worn by young men today the embroidery was made of large black, brown and yellow floral patterns. Furthermore, at the sleeves and hem there was a lace band which was about 1 cm width called "ciurel". Over the waist men wore a wide leather strap lined with leather or velvet, decorated with geometric or floral motifs.

In summer, men used to wear wide trousers made from hemp or cotton cloth, cut from three "lați", with a width of about 30 cm at the bottom, reaching down to their feet and ending with tassels; in winter they used to wear trousers of homespun "pănură".

Men's doublets were similar in cut with the female ones, but longer and distinguished by more sober colours and decorative patterns. Men also wore long, white sheepskin coats embroidered with flowers and colourful tassels.



Fig. 2. Images of local folk events.



Fig. 3. Male folk in the Șieu Valley.

### 3.2. Habits and culture

Șieu Valley is located in an area where the main concerns of the locals were and still are animal breeding, corn and straw culture.

#### 3.2.1. The group work

Peasants are joining forces to conduct agricultural work that requires more effort and should be completed well within a very short time. To overcome

these difficulties they gather to help the group work in field work especially in weeding, mowing and gathering hay and harvesting. Sometimes they organize group work also in order to conduct constructions. Group work has its own charm, work done in community is full of results, also a good opportunity for communication, they sing, and the meal offered by the host has a festive air. They cook traditional dishes, and after work, musicians are invited to celebrate. In the past, the group work

organized at harvest was one of the most beautiful and most expected. The host which had the most harvesting to do, called in the girls from the village to help harvest, the group work lasted for about 2 or 3 days, and when finished, the girls chose the most beautiful ears and made a crown. The crown was placed on the head of the host's daughter or was worn back to the village by the most beautiful and hardworking girl of the group.

The girls came to the village led by the one wearing the crown, and the boys were waiting for them, spraying water on them as they approached so that the next year would be a rainy one and they would have a beautiful harvest. The host used to expect them with food and musicians ready to party after many days of hard work.

### 3.2.2. The Custom – sheep measurement

Livestock, especially sheep was the main source of income for the inhabitants of the Şieu valley. This job asks for a lot of work, has its own specificity, forcing men to leave their homes most of the year and live in specially built huts placed where they graze the animals.

The Romanian's creative spirit made that this hard work be 'sweetened' with moments of relaxation in which communities found the time to gather and party. Such moments are occasioned by taking the sheep to the mountain, when "sheep measuring" is organised, meaning, they measure the quantity of milk given to each householder from his flock, to know how much cheese to receive during the next year.



Fig. 4. At a sheepfold on the Şieu Valley.

Shepherds gather before taking the sheep out to pasture, in order to choose their grazing spots, they hire their shepherds and "baci", then they go to build their sheepfold a day or two before taking the flock. Then they take up their sheep and on the first Sunday they organise "the measuring". The women make bread and cakes in the oven, bring the necessary food and drink for the party, hire violin players and climb to the sheepfold (in the mountain or at communal pastures).

In the presence of everybody, every householder milks his sheep, then milk is measured by special measures (cups, "fele" etc.) made of wood. One of the present households carves on a stick the number of measures for each manager who has joined that flock of sheep. Everyone is told how much cheese is going to receive that year, and then the householder who had more milk is appointed as leader. Its role is to regulate the affairs of the sheepfold, to organise the taking of the food to the sheepfold (every household must take turns in taking food to the sheepfold for shepherds) and then receives a share of cheese and green cheese he is to get in that year. He collects money and deals with issues concerning drinking, grazing, etc. People sing and spend their time taking into account the specific games such as the cross game, the "ceaonului" game, the "Sârba" etc. In the evening the women return to the village and their husbands remain with the sheep until fall.

### 3.2.3. Marriage

It is the most important event in human life, involving a large number of community members. Celebrating wedding is very important, so preparations in order to supply the food necessary for the festive meal lasts up to two or three weeks, to carry out home beautification works etc. The Thursday before the wedding, the "callers" go from house to house to invite everyone, having bats encrusted and stuffed with flowers and colourful ribbons.



Fig. 5. Wedding in the village Şieut.

They don't lack in the bottles of drink (ginars). One enters the house, is served with drinks by the host, and then makes the specific invitation. Friday is the day the village women come to the couple's house to bring food (chicken, eggs, flour, sugar, etc.), thus helping to supply food for the preparation of meals. Saturday morning the bride and groom are expected to church to confess and share.

On the wedding day, relatives gather at the bride's house, then start the procession to the godparents' house, with folk music and shouting. Once the godparents have joined the procession the wedding guests go to groom's house, and then, together with the groom, to bride's house. The wedding parade is stopped by the "staroste" asking the groom to show that he is worthy for the bride, putting him to some tests such as: targeting the pot of ashes which is hanging on a pole, the recognition of the bride (he is first brought an older woman dressed as a bride). After being brought to the bride wedding guests off to the venue of the wedding the bride and groom both shout. The bride and groom are escorted to the wedding at city hall, then go to church for the religious ceremony. On the way to church the wedding guest still perform shouts.

### 3.2.4. Birth

The traditional patterns of life cycle includes the first class, birth customs, by which the baby is put in touch with the world he has come to and in which he has to live. In this context, patterns of birth have a significant share in rituals and ceremonies, with well defined and established roles and meanings. Habits are common to all villages located in the springs of the Șieului and Budacului valleys, but even if the range of some of these folk traditions include other areas, in this part, at the foothills of the Călimani mountains, their life is a little bit different, a specific Romanian tradition that deserves to be known. Christian faith imprinted human life with practices that have become habits. It is noted, the frequency function rites charm (first bath, the bath after baptism, child name change).

### 3.2.5. Funerals

The gloomy scenario is kept more uniform than the wedding suite and its structure is more archaic than a ritual. The mystery of death and the fear of the unknown have facilitated the transmission of ancient concepts with related practices.

*"Death, the eternal curse of living, is a biological reality, sociological, cosmological and existential. Physical death of the human body - the body is the material manifestation of the destruction of "self" - threatens the very foundations of society. Death interrupts the "dynamic equilibrium of social life". Once there is no person who actively participates in social interactions, not physically contributing to the*

*production and reproduction of society. Thus, death is deeply vanishing, it requires a response"* [6, p. 108].

It may be noted that the customary burial rites of passage dominate, especially those aimed at separation of the dead who leaves that community, especially the family. However, more powerful rites of passage seem to be the post-linear ones, of integration in the great family of the dead. However, a the charms and rites have substantial effect, mainly those designed to protect the community from the evils that could cause the deceased's return, especially in the form of the undead.

Last wishes of the dead are met exactly, out of respect for the deceased, and the fear of adverse consequences that it may have if failed to fulfil them.

Each of these traditions, habits and rural customs, maintain their way of interfering with the local native elements, though at different rates, also making way for the modern ones that have been rapidly advancing in the last period. Many of the techniques and materials used today, have as foundation the ancient folk tradition, which, today appears in an improved form, more diversified, some even more sustainable. For example, given that at every main or decisive event of the rural life, the advice of the elderly is taken into account, elderly keep the tradition alive today.

## 4. TRADITIONS VERSUS MODERNITY IN RURAL AREA

If, today, from the traditional houses of wood only very few remained, and houses of brick or concrete blocks appeared in their place "voioagă", whose roof is not straw, but tile, metal or other modern materials, still the huts thrown through the meadows, smooth hills of the Șieu Valley continue their purpose.

Wood was the building material preferred by the traditional communities from the Șieu Valley. The walls, roof frame, even the roof were made entirely of wood. The stone was used as the foundation, in order to ensure the durability of the "home base" („tălpă casei"). The foundation consisted of a series of river stones, stones not modified by erosion.

Over stone, foundation beams were added. Little by little, from a row of stones they added more and between them, they ensured a better stability by placing clay, lime mixture and later sand. In time the technique of beam's placement diversified, new types of mixing have appeared such as the "straight" beams or "dovetail" beams technique.

The urban had inspired models that have given rise to two-storey houses, in contradiction to the regional architectural building designs with only one storey. Usually, only the ground floor was used, the floor was like a "crime body" ("corp delict"), possibly a guesthouse. By contamination, almost all new houses have two levels today.

Today, in the Şieu Valley roofs of tile, metal and other materials are preferred. Many traditional building techniques and materials have been abandoned in favour of cutting-edge techniques.



Fig. 6. Modern dwelling at Simioneşti.

Instead of traditional craftsmen, today have emerged bricklayers, painters, “sobari”, who sometimes retain elements of traditional architecture.



Fig. 7. Traditional house Monariu.



Fig. 8. Modern dwelling at Bârla.



Fig. 9. Traditional house at Şoimuş.



Fig. 10. Traditional versus modern dwelling: a. Ardăn; b. Şieuş.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Consequently, the remnants of traditional folk culture no longer have the impact and educational influence that traditions and customs used to have earlier, during the Second World War. From the ceremony, the facts of life or etiquette, habits are now turning to the show industry, towards the production stage, thus becoming useless in contemporary rural functionality. And, “the nostalgic”, peasants carrying the ceremonial habits to guide their lives, are too few, too old to be able to revive some elements of authentic traditional folk culture. Therefore, the researcher’s main task today is to record and preserve these

remnants of an inestimable value to Romanian history and culture. Habits, traditions and spirituality of the villages can be developed, preserved and transmitted to future generations.

The Şieu Valley is still a quiet location, a tiny proportion in the midst of capitalist economy and its own logic. Rising urban areas, the specific phenomenon of modern society, already manifested in various forms in the Romanian rural, especially in the urban centres located in close proximity, it is felt here mainly on the residential component, yet there are no foreign investors to conduct business area.

With each day, the Şieu Valley becomes a favourite retreat during retirement, both for those born

in the area, as well as for foreigners to these places, from the country or even from abroad.

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