

Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca
Faculty of History and Philosophy
Population Studies and the History of the Minorities Doctoral School

Roma Tre University
Department of Political Sciences
Ph.D. in Political Sciences

The influence exerted by the “Maidens’ Fair” on the Găina Mountain upon the marital behavior of the inhabitants of the Apuseni Mountains: the area Alba-Hunedoara-Bihor-Arad, during 1850-1914. A historical-demographic analysis

Ph.D. Thesis
– Abstract –

Scientific coordinator:
Prof. univ. dr. Ioan Bolovan

Joint scientific coordinator:
Prof. Annunziata Nobile

Ph.D. student:
Iulia-Dorina Stanciu

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Introduction

The research topic *The influence exerted by the “Maidens’ Fair” on the Găina Mountain upon the marital behavior of the inhabitants of the Apuseni Mountains: the area Alba-Hunedoara-Bihor-Arad, during 1850-1914. A historical-demographic analysis* focuses on the Maidens’ Fair on the Găina Mountain, a traditional celebration from the Apuseni Mountains, which, over the years, has generated various hypotheses regarding the marital strategies used by the inhabitants of the adjacent areas (Alba, Hunedoara, Bihor, Arad). A number of legends have been launched with respect to this aspect, describing an ancient practice of selling girls (*maidens*¹) on the Găina Mountain for the purpose of concluding marriages, on the occasion of the fair. Therefore, we notice the existence of a practice that has never been demonstrated by researchers, through a scientific approach, but which has been maintained and reinvented in the oral tradition until today, when its touristic potential is strictly exploited.

The difficulty of our approach was determined by the fact that this social phenomenon, of the Maidens’ Fair on the Găina Mountain, continues to exist today, enjoying an always updated image. As long as this fair is a continuous phenomenon that is being reconfigured from year to year, a higher degree of attention was needed, so as not to distort the previous functions of the fair – that we were trying to identify –, by confusing them with the current functions.

If the Maidens’ Fair can be qualified as a rural traditional celebration that includes a series of functions, whose evolution went simultaneously with different historical periods, from an *economic function* (exchange of products) and a *socio-cultural* one (socialization inside the isolated villages of the Apuseni Mountains), to the functions imposed by the modern and contemporary eras – *the identitary function* and *the touristical function*, this paper focused on the *(pre)marital function* of the fair, derived from the socio-

² The term refers to unmarried, virgin women.

cultural one and responsible for the imaginary created around the Maidens' Fair on the Găina Mountain².

With respect to the publicity of the fair, the marital function seems to have always had predominance, but it should not be analyzed independently of the social function, nor of the economic one. The marital selection process cannot be separated from the social context and we must not lose sight of the specific geographical environment of these areas (mountainous regions, with settlements at altitude), determining extremely limited possibilities of the inhabitants to interact in a common frame. At the same time, it is relevant to emphasize that some of the authors who published articles on similar topics, tried to combat the *marital function* of the fair by explaining its name as an attempt of the foreign authors, especially Hungarians, to slander the Romanian factor, by emphasizing the wrong practices of the inhabitants of the Apuseni Mountains, of selling their daughters for the purpose of concluding marriages.

Through our study, we attempted to approach the research topic from a double perspective – a demographic one, centered around data analysis, and an ethnological one – focused on analyzing the social impact of the fair within the community (by observing the image of the fair as reflected in the specialized literature and the press). Our purpose was to build an analysis that could help us identify whether, in fact, the fair on the Găina Mountain could have had an influence on the marital behavior of the inhabitants of the described research area or not. A possible way to prove the veracity of such a hypothesis was to use the method of stripping the parish registers of civil status, in order to determine the number of marriages concluded in the months following the event on the Găina Mountain, and, consequently, to compare the total number of marriages registered in that period of the year with the number of those contracted in some other periods. If the influence exerted by the fair would have been decisive, we assumed that the number of those marriages concluded right after the event would have been higher than the number of marriages concluded in other periods of the year. Thus, we wanted to verify if, in those specific communities from the Apuseni Mountains, the seasonal fluctuation of

² Regarding the *identitary function* of the fair, refer to: Iulia-Dorina Stanciu, “Abordarea Târgului de fete de pe Muntele Găina din perspectivă istorico-evolutivă”, in *Cibinium*, ASTRA National Museum Complex, „ASTRA Museum” Publishing House, Sibiu, 2015, p. 182.

marriages, which involves, on one hand, a non-deviation from the norms imposed by the church regarding the religious fasting and, on the other hand, following the rhythm of agricultural work, is seconded by this local custom of choosing partners for marriage in the context of the Maidens' Fair.

Sources

For writing this thesis, we used a series of complementary sources: unpublished sources – the parish registers of civil status, published sources – press, censuses, as well as specialized literature. The researched parish registers of civil status originate from the Alba, Hunedoara, Bihor, and Arad County Directorates of the National Archives of Romania. These represent an extremely important source, if not the only one or among the few preserved so far, that can help us delve into the history of these small territories, which have remained unexploited over time. As Pierre Chaunu also noted, the parish registers remain the best and almost the only source of documentation for the history of the humble³. Our analysis started around the year 1850, a post-revolutionary period marked by essential changes on the social, political, and economic levels, and stopped around the First World War.

Thus, by analyzing the parish registers of civil status, we were able to observe if there was a direct connection between the traditional celebration on the Găina Mountain and the numerical increase of the registered marriages, by correlating the date of the fair with the frequency of marriages in that time period. Also, the registers indicated the age of the individuals at the moment of concluding the marriage, as well as their status – young person, concubine, widow, etc. All these elements allowed us to build an overall analysis of the marital phenomenon in the studied region.

The already concluded researches focused on the institution of marriage showed that it had stayed at the core of the previous demographic systems⁴. At the same time, it was specified that, with respect to the studied period, the founding of the family happened as a result of the marriage act (mostly a legal marriage, the concubinage not being largely

³ Pierre Chaunu, *Civilizația Europei Clasice*, 1st vol., Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1989, p. 213.

⁴ Massimo Livi Bacci, *Populația în istoria Europei*, transl. Alina Vamanu, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2003, p. 119.

widespread)⁵. This perspective reinforces the relevance of analyzing the parish registers of civil status, in relation to the intention of this study. On the other hand, the specialized literature has largely debated the contradictory nature of the parish registers of civil status. The contrariety of the ecclesiastical documents was also mentioned in the volume coordinated by Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, being emphasized that these are superabundant and deficient sources, voluble and mute, locking the secrets of the private life⁶.

Nevertheless, a research like the one we built would have been impossible to complete without the information provided by the ecclesiastical sources. This perspective is also shared by those researchers who have faced similar dilemmas much earlier, being concluded that the church registers are the only ones able to offer us an image of the rural family, at least with reference to the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century⁷. At the same time, the privilege of building such an analysis comes from the fact that indicated period of time overlaps, in part, with what Massimo Livi Bacci called the “great transformation”, characterized by the detachment from the old demographic system, which begins in the early nineteenth century, and the transition towards a stable system, which defines, essentially, the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century⁸. Thus, the chance to build a “well documented” analysis was precisely due to the fact that the national statistical systems appeared and were consolidated during the nineteenth century.⁹

Another significant category of sources is represented by the population censuses. In Transylvania, within the temporal limits of the research, we can identify seven censuses, starting with the lower limit of the reference range, the year 1850, and continuing with the

⁵ Ioan Bolovan, “Considerații istorice și statistice privind căsătoria în Transilvania între 1851-1918”, in Ionuț Costea, Valentin Orga (coord.), *Familie și societate. Studii de istoria Transilvaniei*, Clusium Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 1999, p. 45.

⁶ Philippe Ariès, Georges Duby (coord.), *Istoria vieții private*, 7th vol., Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997, p. 5.

⁷ Mircea Brie, *Căsătoria în nord-vestul Transilvaniei (a doua jumătate a secolului XIX- începutul secolului XX). Condiționări exterioare și strategii maritale*, The Publishing House of Oradea University, Oradea, 2009, p. 17.

⁸ Massimo Livi Bacci, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

years 1857, 1869, 1880, 1890, 1900, and 1910¹⁰. As Mircea Brie also emphasized, these censuses provide the means to place the entire population belonging to certain localities in the general demographic context¹¹. Specifically, for this study, we used the information provided by these sources to calculate the marriage rate for certain communities from Alba and Hunedoara.

A part of our study was focused on certain press articles that were published in *Cultura poporului*, *Unirea Poporului*, *Tribuna*, *Familia* etc., between 1860 and 1925, as the impact of the fair and the way it was perceived by the community was also reflected in media. We also took into consideration the specialized literature, and, in addition to the articles and volumes published in Romania, the opportunity to have access to the ethno-anthropological literature from Italy and Spain allowed us to understand the general trends manifested in the study of the rural festive phenomenon.

Methodology

Especially through the methodology used in the *Fifth Chapter* of the thesis, we intended to develop a research focused on a historical-demographic approach¹². Developed in the early second half of the twentieth century, with the publication of *Des registres paroissiaux à l'histoire de la population: manuel de dépouillement et d'exploitation de l'Etat-civil ancien*¹³, written by the demographer Louis Henry and the historian-archivist Michel Fleury, the historical demography was established on the method of stripping the parish registers of civil status¹⁴.

We started with a quantitative analysis, examining data by using statistical means, but the research often included a qualitative approach. Following the specific methodology, through data analysis, we could observe a series of aspects, such as: the date of concluding the marriage, the age of the groom and the bride, their marital statuses, their origin (places

¹⁰ Starting with 1850, there is a new column, regarding the bride's/groom's statuses at the moment of concluding the marriage: "young person" or "widow". See Mircea Brie, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

¹² The fifth chapter is focused on: *The analysis of the parish registers of civil status in Alba-Hunedoara-Bihar- Arad*.

¹³ See Michel Fleury, Louis Henry, *Des registres paroissiaux à l'histoire de la populations. Manuel de dépouillement et d'exploitation de l'état civil ancien*, Editions de l'Institut national d'études démographiques, Paris, 1956.

¹⁴ Sorina Bolovan, Ioan Bolovan, "Ștefan Pascu și demografia istorică în România", in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie «George Barițiu» din Cluj-Napoca*, Seria Historia, 2003, vol. XLII, p. 145.

of birth) etc. In direct relationship with the date of the marriage conclusion, we were able to analyze the seasonality of marriages – the aspect that remained at the core of our research process and which helped us answer the following key question raised in the early stage of our project: *Can we qualify the participation of the young people to this annual fair as being a prevalent reason for concluding marriages within the villages adjacent to the Găina Mountain?* When trying to answer this question, we did not exclude from our analysis the fact that the seasonality of marriages was generally influenced by the agricultural work or the fasting periods imposed by the Church, which had a normative value for the traditional society, regulating people’s behavior.

For the period 1850-1914, the parish registers maintained by the National Archives of Romania tend to be quite complete, allowing us to develop a research site that was intended to be as complex as possible. Still, we had to adjust the research sphere along the way, as for certain villages that we initially considered part of the delimited area, we did not find documents in the archives, which led us to exclude them from our list. With respect to other villages, even though we found the appropriate registers in the archives, we had to exclude them from our study because they did not present sufficient and relevant data so to be included in the research process. By comparing the available data, we decided to structure the analysis on intervals of five years, within the wider period 1850-1914, as it follows: an interval at the beginning of the reference period (1859-1863), an intermediate interval (1888-1892), and an interval covering the end of the researched period (1908-1912).

For fixing the general timeframe, we also took into consideration the particularity that the history of Transylvania shows between the Revolution of 1848 and the First World War, from an economic, demographic, or social perspective. During this period, Transylvania crossed two different demographic regimes, *l’ancien régime*, between 1850 and 1880, and the demographic transition or revolution, between 1880 and 1910¹⁵. This was a stage in which the rural communities in Transylvania faced a series of modernization measures, which could not have had an echo on local community events, such as the

¹⁵ Ioan Bolovan, “Aspecte privind populația Transilvaniei între 1850 și 1910 : schimbare, progres și/sau modernizare”, in *Schimbare și devenire în istoria României: lucrările Conferinței Internaționale Modernizarea în România în secolele XIX-XXI*, Cluj-Napoca, 21th-24th of May 2007, p. 606.

Maidens' Fair. As a result, we consider the period 1850-1914 as being the last reference interval that we could have taken into consideration in relation to our aspiration to prove the effect of the Maidens' Fair on the researched community. After this period, the rural community suffered a series of changes and the functions of the fair got to be altered as a result of the modernization and the intrusion of the tourist (which gave rise to the *touristical function* of the fair).

The structure of the thesis

Through the *First chapter*, we explained the methodology we had used and the sources we had consulted, drafting the structure of the entire research process and outlining the temporal and spatial coordinates that we had taken into consideration. Within the limits of the *Second chapter*, we aimed to provide an introduction into the anthropology of celebration, by referring to several volumes and articles published within the Italian and Spanish research spaces, which had served us as models for our own research process, by outlining some possible ways of analyzing similar rural celebrations from the European space. In the *Third chapter* of the thesis, we synthesized the previous research conclusions regarding the Maidens' Fair on the Găina Mountain, by structuring the relevant information in relation to the date of the fair, its origin, name, and functions. Through the *Fourth chapter*, we presented the way in which the fair had been described in various press articles, trying to observe the imaginary created around the Maidens' Fair on the Găina Mountain. In the *Fifth chapter* of the thesis, which was also the point of maximum interest of our approach, we focused on analyzing data from the parish registers, disclosing the effective influence of the fair in the researched area.

The geographical delimitation of the research area

The research area, mainly composed of rural communities, extends within a radius of up to approximately 50-60 kilometers around the Găina Peak (1486 meters), part of the mountain range of the Apuseni Mountains. A significant part of the studied settlements, located in the Apuseni Mountains, consist of villages with scattered houses, characteristic

to the mountainous regions¹⁶. The scattered village is a specific ethnographic feature, being particularly known for the fact that it appears in the form of scattered groups called “groves”¹⁷.

Based on the number of localities included in the research site, the Alba (29 localities) and Hunedoara (43 localities) regions had a fundamental contribution to the thesis, being the territories that cover the majority of the area delimited by us. Regarding the Bihor and Arad regions, the number of localities included in the research was considerably lower: Bihor (5 localities) and Arad (10 localities).

The analysis of the parish registers of civil status from the area of Alba, with a focus on the seasonality of marriages

Before analyzing the seasonality of marriages, it was relevant to identify the period of the year when the Maidens’ Fair was being organized. The event initially happened on the first or second Sunday after the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, according to the Old Style calendar, or Julian calendar, and according to the New Style Calendar, or Gregorian calendar, the fair was organized on the closest Sunday to the Feast of the Holy Prophet Elijah, as per the Orthodox and Greek Catholic traditions. The two calendars contain a difference of 13 days, and, given that fact that the period of time that we studied had been incorporated into the old calendar, we sought to observe a possible influence of the Maidens’ Fair during the month of June, possibly with an extension on the month of July.

Moreover, the parish registers of civil status contain a column that describes the date of the *entrustment* (the consignment), which was also relevant in relation to the intentions of our research, helping us to determine a general rule regarding the time that could have passed between the possibility of finding a partner on the Găina Mountain and the wedding itself. The analysis performed on certain parish registers showed that the effects of the fair could have been visible in the period between June and July, with a possible extension on the month of August.

A previous research in the field of historical demography showed that, within the traditional societies, most of the marriages were concluded in November, at the end of the

¹⁶ Lucia Apolzan, *Sate-crânguri din Munții Apuseni- observații asupra așezării lor sociale*, Ramuri Publishing House, Craiova, 1944, p. 4.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

agricultural season, as well as in the winter months (January and February), when the peasant was not restrained by the church and did not have a significant number of household responsibilities¹⁸. This paradigm is strengthened by the international bibliography of the field, which shows that the European family was regulated by two major and partially conflicting factors – the first one was represented by the majority agrarian and relatively advanced economy, associated with the plow-based agriculture, while the second was represented by the regulations of the Christian Church and its efforts to impose itself as a “great organization”¹⁹. The seasonal distribution of marriages must be therefore interpreted by referring to the above-mentioned coordinates.

The model of a pronounced seasonal fluctuation of marriages was also visible in Alba, with respect to the researched period. Between 1859 and 1863, most of the marriages registered in Alba were concluded in November (190 marriages), then a significant number of marriages was recorded in February (162 marriages), followed by May (143 marriages), January (126 marriages), and July (105 marriages). The analysis showed that during the rest of the year, there were less than 100 marriages per month.

This model of the seasonal distribution of marriages – with two significant increases in November and February –, was, in fact, identified within all the studied areas, without exception. Regarding the months of June-August, when the Maidens’ Fair could have had an influence upon the studied area, we noticed that the values reached in June were below those recorded in January, February, May, July, and November. Also, the values attached to the month of July, although showing a slight increase in the number of marriages as compared to June, were below those registered in January, February, May, and November. With respect to August, the decrease in the number of marriages was extremely visible, at almost half of the number of marriages registered in July. Right after August, the number of marriages began to follow an upward trend, until December, when there was, again, a significant decrease.

¹⁸ Mircea Bric, *Familie și societate în nord-vestul Transilvaniei: a doua jumătate a secolului XIX- începutul secolului XX*, The Publishing House of Oradea University, Oradea, 2008, p. 119.

¹⁹ Jack Goody, *Familia europeană. O încercare de antropologie istorică*, transl. Silvana Doboș, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2003, p. 145.

Essentially, the summer months (June-August), which generated the need for this analysis, were identified as the period of the year with the smallest variations in the number of marriages. Thus, we could not refer to a significant increase of the number of marriages, that could have been absolutely associated with the Maidens' Fair on the Găina Mountain. However, we noticed that between June and July there was a slight increase, and then August showed a visible decrease, which was partially recovered in September, when the marital activity was restarted, as people stopped performing agricultural activities. Thus, for the first sequence, 1859-1863, our working hypothesis was not absolutely verified, but we continued the analysis by trying to identify if there were some similar trends for the sequences 1888-1892 and 1908-1912, respectively.

Extending the analysis to the level of the second sequence, 1888-1892, we could see that there were no significant differences as compared to the previous interval. Thus, most marriages are concluded in February (370 marriages), November (293 marriages), July (210 marriages), October (170 marriages), June (165 marriages), and January (100 marriages). Also, we noticed that November and February remained the favorite months for concluding marriages, but, for the second sequence, February was positioned at the top of the ranking.

In March, April, and May, the total number of the registered marriages was extremely low and there were no significant variations: March (34 marriages), April (32 marriages), May (28 marriages). We also noticed that the number of marriages recorded in February (370 marriages), during the sequence 1888-1892, was almost four times higher than the one registered in January (100 marriages), which was a remarkable and unique increase. In August, as in the previous sequence, we could identify a small number of the registered marriages, and regarding the period of June-July, which was of primary interest to us, the analysis showed, again, a slight increase in the number of marriages. The months of September and October, corresponding to this interval, described some slightly lower values than June and July.

Regarding the third interval, 1908-1912, an increased number of marriages was maintained in February (241 marriages) and November (230 marriages). The third place, based on the number of registered marriages, was occupied by the month of July (203 marriages), followed by May (160 marriages), and January (152 marriages). We also

noticed that the minimum points were maintained in March and December, and the increase in the number of marriages between June and July was even more visible than in the previous intervals.

If during the segment 1859-1863, there were 95 marriages registered in June and 105 marriages recorded in July, during the sequence 1888-1892, we referred to 165 marriages in June as compared to 210 marriages in July, so that the third interval brought an even more significant increase, from 121 marriages in June to 203 marriages in July. These values, although not strong enough so as to prove a standard marital behavior determined by the Maidens' Fair on the Găina Mountain, were still notable increases, if we were to take into consideration the fact that the agricultural season was in full swing in that period of the year.

Thus, the above highlighted structure of the seasonality of marriages could have been considered as being a local exception determined by the Maidens' Fair on the Găina Mountain, in this particular region of Alba. However, even though the marital function of the fair could not have been totally excluded, there was not absolute evidence of a connection between the Maidens' Fair and the number of the marriages concluded during the summer season.

But as long as in Hunedoara, Bihor, or Arad, a potential influence of the fair could have hardly been identified, this aspect led to the idea that, if we would have searched for some general trends in relation to the Maidens' Fair on the Găina Mountain, these could have been found in Alba, as there was a clear upward trend in the number of marriages recorded in July, as compared to June. We could not have reached this conclusion without having had the opportunity to compare the results obtained for the area of Alba with those regarding other regions (some of them studied by other researchers) and to observe that, in general, marriages were not concluded during the summer season, in Transylvania of the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. This is not a singular conclusion in the landscape of historical demography from Romania, some previous studies on similar research topics having suggested the same directions regarding the Transylvanian space, during the indicated period. Therefore, we can conclude that what we observed in Alba was rather an exception or an eminently local reality, not verified by

the marital behavior of the inhabitants of some other spaces (in this case, Hunedoara, Bihor, or Arad).

Conclusions

One of the possible conclusions that we could raise is that, except for the territory of Alba, where the number of marriages increased between the months of June and July – an unusual marital behavior for the studied period – the general trend, for some other spaces of Transylvania, was to have a lower number of marriages registered during the summer season. In Alba, the general values indicated a modified marital behavior, meaning that June and July were identified as secondary peaks of nuptiality, obviously lower than February or November – the favorite months for concluding marriages – but much higher than the values recorded in some other areas, covered by the research study or by similar contributions that we identified. Taking into consideration these observations, we could say that the marital function of the fair can be partially verified, this having a possible effect on the studied territory of Alba.