

***THE ADAPTATION OF ROMANIANS FROM THE NĂSĂUD BORDER DISTRICT TO
THE CENTRAL-EUROPEAN VALUE SYSTEM BY MEANS OF CHANGING THE
OUTLOOK AND BEHAVIOR PARADIGM DURING THE MILITARY
FRONTIER REGIME IN 1762-1851***

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Abstract: The subject of the Năsăud military border belongs to quite a complicated geographical context - in which, after the official recognition of the Austrian domination in Transylvania, as a result of the Karlowitz Peace Treaty (1699), the Imperial authorities had to conceive and achieve a new geography - the Geography of Emancipation - which was meant to benefit both the compact masses of people belonging to different nationalities, in general, and especially, the Romanians. For such a desideratum to be achieved, the Court of Vienna had to offer the Romanian native people of Năsăud the chance of being educated in their mother tongue, alongside with the chance of being provided with civilized living conditions, close to the average standard of the empire. Therefore, the authorities decided to militarize the geographical area. It was under these circumstances that the Second Border Transylvanian Regiment appeared on the map of the Romanian geodemographic and ethnocultural map and functioned between 1762 and 1851 simultaneously as a military and administrative entity. The fundamental coordinates of the geography of outlooks and behavior could be found in the attitude of the border people towards certain elements of progress and civilization, which the new authorities endeavored to promote in the district. Extremely advantageous for the Vienna Court, the institution of Năsăud Border functioned, paradoxically, as a geopolitical boomerang, bringing about tremendous advantages and benefits to the native Romanians as far as their general emancipation was concerned.

Keywords: *Năsăud District Border Guards, Habsburg interests, geopolitical boomerang, emancipation of Romanians from Năsăud, change of outlook and behaviors.*

Documentary prerequisites and possibility of the achievement

The interest in elaborating a study meant to analyze and interpret characteristic geographical phenomena and data of the Năsăud Border District has been but natural, not only because of the lack of such an approach, but also because of the chronological framing of the theme within one of the most challenged periods of the national history.

The research work and the methodological instruments have been considered in relation to the fact that, almost entirely, the sources of written information have had either a purely historical, or historic-juridical, or statistical character, with relatively few elements concerning certain geographical aspects (population, habitats, economy, etc.) The papers which have been published so far present the geographical aspects, fragmentarily and sporadically, without conferring them the character of a unitary approach and vision, without processing, analyzing and interpreting the information capable to reconstruct the fundamental elements of the geographical framework of the historical development of the Năsăud Border District.

In order to bring out into bold relief several of the various aspects of such a complex subject, it was necessary to appeal to certain novel sources, to be found in archives, museums

or private collections. In this respect, I feel indebted to the State Archives (its subsidiaries in Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj-Napoca, Sibiu, Târgu-Mureș), the Academic Library (the Năsăud subsidiary), The County Museum in Bistrița, the Năsăud Museum etc. I also very profitably cooperated with the zealous researcher Pompei Boca, who owned a very valuable collection of materials of the Năsăud Border.

Results and discussions

In order to briefly analyze the mutations determined by the militarization of the Năsăud county in the geography of the outlook and behaviour of Romanians in the area we consider we should make reference to a sequence in an essay written by Liviu Rebreanu and published in the paper „România”, on April 19th 1925, on the first page: “Our life was made of suffering and pain for nearly two thousand years. The very birth of the Romanian people was completed in a stern embrace between two peoples, which later fraternized in the new belief in Christ. The childhood of the new country soon faced all sufferings. Left alone and without defense in front of the barbarian hordes, the offspring of the famous Roman civilization had to seek refuge in the heart of the woods, to remain hidden and separated from the rest of the world for centuries. Excruciating darkness fell over a people that were full of lust for life.

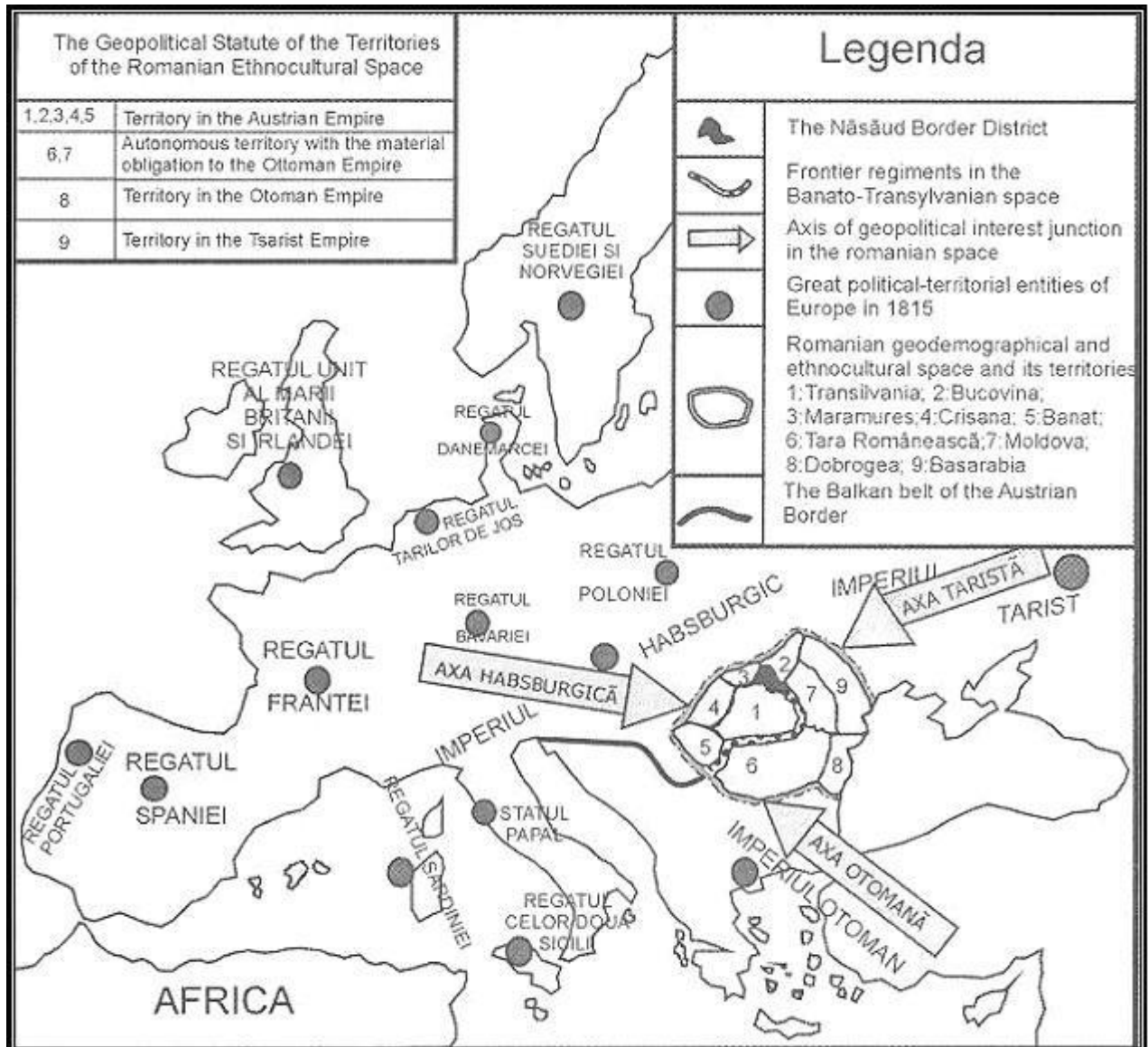


Fig. 1. The Geopolitical Statute of the Territories of the Romanian Ethnocultural Space

The pollen of culture dissipated. Rudimentary life became the only possible existence.” This quote is extremely relevant in order to understand some of the characteristics of the common people’s geography and history: the isolation of those who were subject to a considerable spatial-geographical dispersion, due to the historical-geographical challenges, illiteracy and the lack of civilization as a consequence of the former, altogether generating the state of primitivism, as a premise of our secular traditionalism and a complex and inherent empiricism. Then came conquests of all kinds, which generated a sense of submissiveness, along with material scarcity and spiritual poverty represented conditions for the occurrence and maintenance of ignorance.

While attempting to decipher the evolution of the outlook and behaviour of the military border guards in Năsăud, it is absolutely mandatory to take into account these specific conditions of the Romanian population prior to the Border regime in the Rodna Valley area, especially since only 45 years passed between the last tide of the Tatar Mongol

barbarians in the territory and its militarization. This was a period in which the generation that experienced this event didn't even have enough time to rally.

Over all these conditions, history has always been forged by conquests that were averse to the native people, leaving behind people with a mutilated and bent way of thinking, people permanently forgotten at the periphery of civilizing interests of authorities convinced that poverty and distress may be easier controlled and exploited.

It is at this moment that the military border in Năsăud begins its itinerary lasting nearly a century, a regime that, despite all restrictions and feudal obstructions opened the way towards the emancipation of Romanians in this part of Transylvania.

It is interesting to notice some relevant moments that betray the actual mentality shared by the border population at the beginning and during the regime, precisely as a consequence of the burdening inheritance coming from centuries of primitivism.

The fundamental coordinates of the behavioral geography and the outlook geography must be sought within the attitude the border guard in Năsăud had towards some elements of progress and civilization that the new authorities aimed to promote in the region.

Outlooking the act of militarizing the land, one may observe an outlook and a specific attitude of numerous peasants, who, oppressed for centuries by submissiveness and material and spiritual scarcity, trusted that the great promises of the authorities would be feasible within a year or two since the occurrence of the border. In this respect, the position of the centenarian Tănase Todoran in Bichigiu is a very relevant one. On May 10th 1763, on the "Mocirlă" wold near Salva, he showed himself in front of the border guards on the occasion of the banner consecration and said: "For two years we have been rookies, border guards, but the Empress hasn't given us documentation to attest this. They registered us as serfs, we pay duties and perform military tasks; our sons shall travel the end of the earth to spill their blood, and for what? To be slaves, to have no rights, for our children to be ignorant, either they learn something or not! Lay down your guns!" (V. Șotropa, 1938, p. 70) Old Todoran undoubtedly spoke the truth, but there is something of the outlook of the Romanian taught to think and plan on a short-term in his words. The border was in full process of structuring and organizing and, as an institution that aimed to promote a climate based on social order and discipline among the people dissipated in the geographical area, a few years were required to impose these regulations.

The reaction to the act of militarization was manifested, as seen, through the exodus phenomenon, but its diminishing after two decades of border regime is proof of the coming to terms with fate outlook, typical of the Romanian villager.

Also rooted in the past and in superstitions was the outlook of the border villagers on the **health condition** or towards the need for sanitary rules.

The positioning of the population towards the qualified medical staff was manifested according to local customs and the level of education. There are numerous suggestive examples, but we will mention one from a letter dating back to 1843: "But her father Ion is always ill and has sore throat and now we must treat him to get him better, we showed him to the doctor's assistants who were her, and they told me to take him to Năsăud for a fortnight,

but I'm afraid to let him in the hands of the doctor, 'cause it would be in vain, we would only throw away some money." (A. Coşbuc, 1937, p. 438)

The outlook on the systematization of border establishments is also highly reserved at the beginning, but later the guards recognized the advantages and superiority of living within the habitat that is well grouped. The citizens' rate of sociability and civism increases and. Beyond the duties towards the state, there is also an increase in the access possibilities of these people to the cultural-social and economic prospects of the new social structure. In Bistrița-Bârgăului, the priest Vasile Pavel, contemporary with the last generation of the border regime, presents a monographic study that renders the attitude of the old people who had told him that "before militarization the village Borgo-Bistrița was very scattered, people lived in their houses, wherever they were, each having their own place and then, said the old people, they lived much better than today. And when military service came to Bârgău in 1783, they immediately gathered all the villagers, made paths along and across the village, gave land to everybody and set the village into place" (T. Ghițan, 1938, p. 470)

From the outlook of "man of the woods,, or" brother of the woods", the military institution managed to cultivate the sense of solidarity and discipline, a fact indicated by Andrei Mare's attitude, also coming from Bistrița-Bârgăului, who, after having eventually come to terms with the renunciation to the „hillside life" claims that he wouldn't return there by himself and „without neighbors" even if he were given the entire Bârgău. (T. Ghițan, 1938, p. 32) Likewise, Ion Mihârște from Rodna, whom the border forced to move along with his household from „Blăgi", stated after having come into conflict with the local military authorities on this subject and after a few years of living in the hearth of the village: "Had I known how good it is to be down here, I would have come earlier." (P. Boca, 1960, p. 18)

The period of this regime marks, in the outlook of each individual, the completion of the process of integrating in the rural collectivity to which they belonged. Among the members of the community that occurred as a result of systematizing the border villages, there are complementarity connections, the aspect of cooperation being shaped for the first time. An example in this sense is provided by the case of the bee (voluntary labor that villagers did in order to offer reciprocal help, often accompanied by a small reunion) which seems to have its origin in this border area.

The outlook on school also had an interesting evolution, from the level of initial restraint on behalf of several border villagers, to the acceptance of the idea of schooling children on short-term and eventually to the stage of acknowledging the role of schools in breaking from an enslaving past.

"He doesn't need education to herd the sheep" answered Cifor Strugar from Ilva Mare when the authorities asked him why he hadn't sent his child to school (P. Boca, 1960, p. 17) Unfortunately, such harmful outlook may still be found today in some of our villages. From ignorance and indifference, in 1770, the border inhabitants in Năsăud, homeowners, declared they would gladly contribute with 5 pence for "their school, especially after everybody sees that they are working for the increase of their social class" (V. Șotropa, 1929, p. 34) Besides these financial contributions, the wealthier border inhabitants would also help lodger children

with „cheese and whey barrels”. Towards the end of the border regime, there was a beautiful social solidarity focused on education, between 1836 and 1837 the school activity being materially supported by means of selling hay and renting mountain pastures (V. Şotropa, 1929, p. 6)

The outlook on the Romanian Church United with Rome (Greek-Catholic) was a hostile one on behalf of the Năsăud peasants (during the pre-border regime and in the first two decades of the military regiment), not for reasons of rejecting the imperial policy, by which Catholicism was planted in the Transylvanian ground, but purely out of an excess of traditionalism and loyalty to a way of thinking that had little changed along centuries, and last but not least, out of ignorance.

The Romanian peasantry in the border area governed itself based on traditional premises that used to chaperone a society characterized by very slow changes. It was a patriarchal world in which traditional practices were mixed with folk myths and superstitions, thus offering them a pleasing explanation about the world and man’s place in it. The intelligentsia conceived in light of the civilizing force of Catholicism was barely shaping itself and so, six decades after the unification to Rome, in many villages near Năsăud people knew very little about the new confessional alternative.

It is relevant to mention in this respect a type of referendum or survey-censes, conducted in May 1761 by the authorities in Bistriţa among the inhabitants of the district in order to enlighten the educated regarding “the issue of the Walachia unification.” (V. Şotropa, 1937, p. 453-478). According to the assessment records, on June 1st the „entire operation was ready” and the majority of villagers in the future border villages had stated that nothing much had been heard of the unification and that they hadn’t intended to learn more about that issue. At Rodna, the villagers’ representative, Petru Croitor, claimed in front of the authorities that the „peasants wanted to remain as their ancestors, that they wish to maintain the traditional Romanian belief, to obey her Majesty and keep the priests they were content with” (V. Şotropa, 1937, p. 467) Such an outlook, moored in a strong loyalty to the traditional religious forms, was encountered in the majority of the inhabitants in the Năsăud area during the pre-military regime.

The military border consolidates the United Church and through the activity of its cultural-confessional institutions, the common people change their outlook and behaviour towards the church. Through the sermons held in front of the district’s guards, the ministers Ion Marian, Grigore Moisil or Macedon Pop brought immense service to the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church, greatly contributing to the change of people’s outlook. The end of this period finds a population that is attached to the values of the United Church, whose enlightened, culturalising and civilizing valences are now respected and acknowledged by everybody.

Catholicism with its cvasi-orthodox variant triumphed, but, paradoxically, not in favor of the imperial authorities, but in favor of Romanian masses.

The outlook on time in the rural world of the village was also interesting. Undoubtedly, the preborder rural society, being traditional and mainly sedentary, with

agricultural and pastoral interests, manifested a certain lack of interest towards time, not because the peasant would have lacked the means necessary for precise evaluation of time, but rather because his activities and life in general did not require such discipline. The markers used in the preborder rural world in order to master time were mainly the natural ones, related to astronomical phenomena. The natural phenomena, as apparent movement of the sun on the sky, the day-night succession, seasonal cycles were sufficient to the peasant in order to mark the rhythms of his own activity, which were also repetitive, while the administrative structures were responsible for governing and handling the time dedicated to the completion of state-related duties, and the church was granted the mission of marking the sacred time, on Sundays and holy days, and that of time for rest.

Numerous imperial administrative clerks observed, on the occasion of visiting the area of Năsăud, that many native people could not indicate their age and that, upon establishing such birth date, they take into account guide marks referring to the Empress Maria Theresa or Emperor Joseph II's visits, or the year when a battle took place, etc. (T. Nicoară, 1994, p. 117)

A difference nuance was nonetheless noticed within the outlook on time in the rural society of Năsăud after the military border was established. In this area, the peasant, now become border guard, no longer remains the absolute master of his time, even though he regains his condition as a free man. The military- service discipline and the border obligations determined a rationalization of time and the Imperials' proverbial military discipline meant a new experience for Romanians in this area, leading to the shaping of another outlook and attitude to time. During the border period, we are dealing with a more rigorously marked time and reasonably divided sequences between border service time, campaign time and time at the disposal of the border peasant. The new outlook and the new attitudes to time will accelerate the rhythms of linking the Năsăud border guard district to modernity.

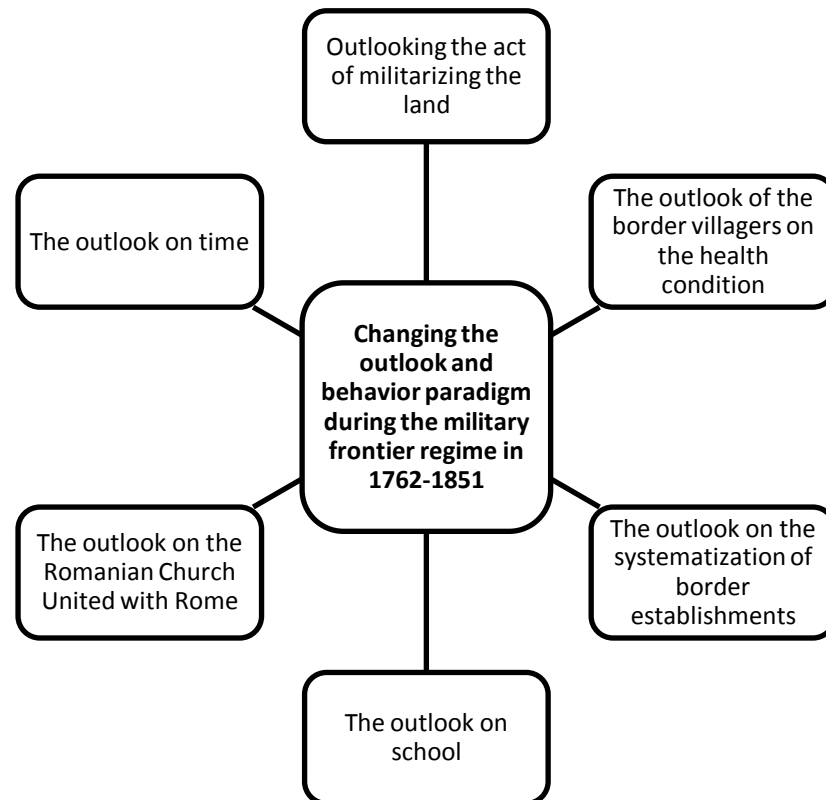


Fig. 2. The impact of the Năsăud border regime on the behavior of the Romanians in the Năsăud Border District

Conclusions

Under the name of the Rodna Valley or the Năsăud Land-after the old historical centers- the geographical region situated in the north-east of Transylvania, covering an extended fragment of the present Bistrița-Năsăud county, formed during the breaking off of the feudal epoch, the territorial basis of the Romanian Border Regiment II of the Transylvanian principality, then “named” **the Năsăud Border District** by the native intellectuals.

As a concomitantly military and administrative unit, included, after the Austrian occupation of Transylvania, into the Central-European geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic system, the Năsăud Border District registered certain phases of territorial evolution (expansion), reaching in 1783, and an area of 44 border habitats (communes).

The Năsăud Border District was characterized, as a Romanian militarized geodemographic and ethnocultural area-with all the drawbacks and conditions of a severe, even rude discipline, by a stimulation of the economic progress, certain profound changes in the field of cultural and confessional geography, and an active role in the historical process of national awareness and pride, symbolized by the motto “**Virtus Romana Rediviva**”, embroidered on its flag.

Extremely advantageous for the Vienne Court (a large number of soldiers-agricultors, promptly usable and kept with extremely scarce material efforts), the institution of Năsăud border worked, paradoxically, as a geopolitical boomerang, bringing about tremendous

advantages and benefits to the native Romanians as far as their general emancipation was concerned.

Conceived as a defending instrument of this part of the Habsburg Empire, both against internal and external dangers, the Năsăud Border District developed and asserted itself as a **many-sided status, simultaneously a political entity, an administrative entity, a military entity, a social entity, an economic entity, a cultural and confessional entity and a geobehavioural entity.**

The many-sided status of the Năsăud border and the great victories of the autochthonous population in the field of economic, social, cultural, confessional, political and above all-national emancipation, determined an impressive and extremely favorable spreading of the response of this institution through ages, from its beginning up to now; thus it has proven that the Năsăud Border District was, is and still remains not only a referential moment in the geography and history of these places, but also a state of mind, generating pride and hope.

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