

# Christian Feasts dedicated to Saints – an Interdisciplinary Perspective

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## Abstract

*Our paper is an interdisciplinary approach, of linguistic and theological analysis of a few lexemes that define saints who became popular in the Romanian culture and spirituality.*

*Our ancient church, a fundamental part of our culture, has always been a coagulant factor for the unity of the Romanians worldwide. And this is also proven by the use of the religious vocabulary in all the anthropological, territorial, socio-professional and socio-cultural variants of the national Romanian language.*

**Keywords:** *feast, saint, Christian, interdisciplinary, Church, eve.*

## Introduction

Faith is situated among the individual's conceptions about the world, subordinated to the collective ones. With no intention to invoke and discuss here the numerous and diverse assumptions regarding the original magic of the words and their fetishism within different ethnocultural spaces as one of the generators of religions, then, with no intention to polemize – which is not one of the linguist's competences – with the Marxist and pseudomarxist criticism towards religion, in particular towards Christianity, which aimed to the demolition of one of the essential elements of human evolution, we must say that the process of human knowledge moves around some fundamental concepts and landmarks. The thesaurus-dictionaries of the ideographical type (also called analogical or systematical) have proved that a classification of the lexis and vocabularies that form it on conceptual basis is also possible. This type of dictionaries have proved that there are two fundamental ways of grouping the words, a logical one, as a reflex of man's knowledge about the world, and the second one, associative, based on the psychic connections between the objects based on the notions about them,

but also of the associations between the verbal signs as their substitutes. The result leads to the conclusion that the vocabulary is a system, for each word (each notion respectively) occupies in this endosystem a well defined place, emphasized by its relation with other lexemes and with other notions incorporated in them. Thus, human knowledge develops around some concepts as defining landmarks, among which we can also find the aprioristic categories.

### *Christian feasts dedicated to saints*

#### 1. SAINT BASIL (SÂNVĂSÂI)

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January we celebrate a double feast. The Circumcision of our Lord Jesus Christ and Saint Basil the Great. Today this feast is named with one of the three terms: **New Year**, **Sânvăsâi** and **Saint Basil**. The term composed of *Sân* (< *sanctus*) and *Văsâi* „Basil” (< sl. *Vasijo*) is used in two regions which are completely isolated one from another: one in Maramureş and the other in the South of Banat and Oltenia.<sup>1</sup>

There have been certain opinions according to which *Sânvăsâi* has been inherited directly from Latin. Continuity is not possible, says Christian Ionescu, both from linguistic reasons ([b] initially from *Basilius* it must have kept like in the case of *church* – *biserică* from *basilica*, etc.) and from cultural reasons (the old forms which probably existed in ancient times, have been replaced with the adoption of the byzantine rite in Slavonic form; besides, the very cult of *Saint Basil* is more recent than that of *John*, from which we have inherited the form Saint John’s day – *sânziene*).<sup>2</sup> In Slavonic, the name is very old and it has been taken over along with the adoption of Christianity: in Galicia, *Basil* (*Vasilii*) is attested even from the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, *Vasilko* has been the name of several princes. At the Hutsulian the New Year is named *Na Melanku* (“Saint Melania’s day”) by men and *sfjet večir Vasiliv* (“Basil’s eve”) by women.<sup>3</sup>

Sever Pop thinks that *Sânvăsâi* is no longer understood by the Romanians as a compound of *Sunt* and the Slavonic form *Văsâi*, because for *Sunt* the current doublet is *Saint*, and for *Văsâi* is Basil. Thus, the need for clarity lead to the compound *Saint Basil*. During the investigations for ARL. I other answers have

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<sup>1</sup> According to Simona Goicu, *Termeni creştini în onomastica românească* (Christian Terms in Romanian Namesday) (Timișoara: Amphora Publishing House, 1989), 116.

<sup>2</sup> According to Christian Ionescu, *Mică enciclopedie onomastică* (Little Namesday Encyclopedia) (Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House, 1975), 281.

<sup>3</sup> According to André de Vincenz, *Traité d’anthroponymie houtzoule* (München, 1970) *apud* Goicu, *Termeni creştini*, 117.

also been obtained: *Chiș – Christmas* (298, 337), *Basil the Great* (339), *Văsălie* (33), *Great Vasâle* (118), *Day of Saint Basil* (438), *Saint New Year* (438), *Saint Basil* (458).

In Macedonian Romanian, the feast is named *Sum Vasil’u* (besides *New Year*), but also *Ayu Vasili*, taken from Greek.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. SAINTS

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of March, the Church celebrates the memory of the 40 martyrs from Sebastia, who gave their lives to defend the Christian teaching.<sup>5</sup>

The word of Slavonic origin *Saints* has been preserved in almost the entire Daco-Roman territory and, according to Sever Pop, it penetrated the Romanian vocabulary more like a loan that through the Church.<sup>6</sup>

In the southern part of the country and in the South-East of Transilvania we may find the word *Mucenici* (*Martyrs*), with two variants *Măcenici* and *Mocenici* (< Bulgarian *mučenik*), introduced through the Church vocabulary.<sup>7</sup>

Today, this feast is also known as *The Fourty Saints* or *The Fourty Martyrs*. The celebration of the *Saints* has always been of great importance in the Eastern Church. It is not a feast with “celebration,”<sup>8</sup> officially, but more like a feast of the popular agrarian calendar. The 9<sup>th</sup> of March meant, for the peasants, the beginning of spring, the seeds of vegetables were sowed, the ploughing began, the flocks were urged on the fields “for the grass began to grow,”<sup>9</sup> and the Romanians celebrated this day because “they feared snakes and other insects.”<sup>10</sup> We may conclude that this Christian feast coincided with a pagan one.

## 3. SAINT GEORGE (SÂNGEORZ)

The Christian feast of Saint George, *Sân-Gior(d)z*, *Sâm-Gior(d)z* < Latin *Sanctus Georgius*,<sup>11</sup> celebrated on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April, is considered by Nicolae Iorga

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<sup>4</sup> According to Goicu, *Termeni creștini*, 117.

<sup>5</sup> According to Ene Braniște, *Liturgica generală* (General Liturgics) (Bucharest: Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române Publishing House, 1993), 226.

<sup>6</sup> According to Sever Pop, *Le pîu importanti feste presso i romeni*, Estratto dalla *Revue des Etudes indoeuropéennes*, tom I, 1938, fasc. 2-4, Bucarest – Parigi (1939):18.

<sup>7</sup> Goicu, *Termeni creștini*, 118.

<sup>8</sup> Braniște, *Liturgica generală*, 225.

<sup>9</sup> Simion Florea Marian, *Sărbătorile la români* (Feasts at the Romanians), vol. II, published under the supervision and with the introduction by Iordan Datcu (Bucharest: Fundației Culturale Române Publishing House, 1994), 7-12.

<sup>10</sup> I.-A. Candrea, *Iarba fiarelor. Studii de folclor* (The Beasts’ Grass. A Floklöre Study) (Bucharest: Cultura Națională, 1928), 126.

<sup>11</sup> According to H. Mihăescu, *Romanitatea în sud-estul Europei* (La romanité dans le sud-est de l’Europe) (Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House, 1993), 299.

to be a feast that superposed the pagan celebration of a Thracian hero.<sup>12</sup> The cult of this saint began to spread especially starting with the 10<sup>th</sup> century in Constantinople, “from where it radiated towards the north, through Bulgaria to the mouth of the Danube.”<sup>13</sup> The name of the city *Giurgiu* and of the southern arm of the Danube Delta reminds us of this saint. The *Saint George* arm, named during ancient times, *Ἰέρὸν στόμα* “The Saint Arm”, was mentioned on Pietro Vesconte’s map in 1311-1318 as *s(an)c(t) Georgi* or *Georgy*.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the first Romanian medieval monument, the church from Streisângeorz (Călan city, Hunedoara county), dated 1313-1314, has Saint George as its patron.<sup>15</sup> The common name for this feast, *Sângeorz*, is spread throughout all Transilvania, Maramureș, Crișana and Banat. In the rest of the Daco-Roman territory the new form occurs, *Saint George*, which penetrated through the church vocabulary. In Macedonian Romanian it occurs with the forms *Sâm-Giorgiul*<sup>16</sup> and *Ayu Yoryi*, a loan from Greek, and in Megleno-Romanian with the forms *Sâmgorđu* and *Sfeti D’ord’* taken from the Bulgarians. The feast of Saint George, as well as that of Saint Demetrius, is very important because “these saints are the most respected and loved by the Romanians.”<sup>17</sup> On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April, the feast of Saint George, the rebirth of nature begins: the leasing contracts for the lands were sealed in this day and ended on the feast of Saint Demetrius, and also at the feast of Saint George the shepherds and cowherds were engaged, etc.

On Saint George Eve there was a tradition to light a vivid fire “two very dry pieces of wood are rubbed together until they become very heated, they kindle and start burning... with these, they set fire to the bunch of woods that they have already prepared; and when the wood burns vividly and the flames go up high, they start to dance around the fire and to jump over it. When they have had enough dancing and jumping they wait for the fire to burn out, and then they each take

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<sup>12</sup> According to Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria românilor și a romanității orientale* (Histoire des Roumains et de la romanité orientale), vol. II, (Bucharest, 1937), 103.

<sup>13</sup> Goicu, *Termeni creștini*, 118.

<sup>14</sup> According to H. Mihăescu, *Influența grecească asupra limbii române pînă în secolul al XV-lea* (The Greek Influence upon the Romanian Language until the 15<sup>th</sup> Century) (Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House, 1966), 109.

<sup>15</sup> Radu Popa, “Streisângeorgiu. Mărturii de istorie românească din secolele IX-XIV în sudul Transilvaniei” (Streisângeorgiu. Testimonies of Romanian History from the 9<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries in the South of Transilvania), *Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor* (The Magazine of Museums and Historical Monuments), XLVII (1978): 9-32.

<sup>16</sup> According to Tache Papahagi, *Dicționarul dialectului aromân – general și etimologic* (The General and Etymological Dictionary of the Macedonian-Romanian Dialect), second edition improved (Bucharest: The Academy’s Publishing House, 1974).

<sup>17</sup> Marian, *Sărbătorile la români*, vol. II, 254.

some live coals and a brand, they return home and they fumigate their cattle, especially the lambs, with the embers...in the mountainous parts of Bucovina this fire is usually light when they take their sheep out on the mountain for the first time... they light a big fire, through the smoke of which they urge on all the sheep... to keep them safe from all evil during the evening...”<sup>18</sup>

What is extraordinary, says I.-A. Candrea, “is the fact that only the Romanians have kept the memory of this traditions – the light of the vivid fire, the jumping over it and the urging of the cattle through it – in the same manner as it was practiced in the day of *Palilia*, exactly in the same epoch (the difference is of only one day) by the Roman shepherds two thousand years ago.”<sup>19</sup>

Ovid, the poet, speaks in detail about this custom of the Romans, who were at first a nation of shepherds and who chose as a date for the foundation of Rome the 21<sup>st</sup> of April, which they named *Palilia*, after the name of the goddess *Pales*, the one that protected their flocks (The Festivals IV):<sup>20</sup>

“Protect the cattle and masters alike;  
And drive everything harmful from my stalls...  
Drive off disease: let men and beasts be healthy,  
and healthy the vigilant pack of wakeful dogs...”

Consequently, the use of the old form *Sângeor(d)zi*, along with the new form *Saint George*, is determined both by the social-religious importance of this feast and by the fact that, in the beginning, this was a pagan feast of which many beliefs were bound. He is the most venerated saint by the shepherds from the Balkans and from the Carpathians. In Bulgarian the name of the saint generated 70 hypocoristics,<sup>21</sup> in Transilvania around 20<sup>22</sup> such words were created and at the Hutsulians the common name for May is *na Jurija*, from the Ukranian *Jurij* „George”.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Idem, Sărbătorile la români (Feasts at the Romanians)*, volume III, *Cincizecimea (The Pentecost)* (Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House, 1901), 226-228.

<sup>19</sup> Candrea, *Iarba fiarelor*, 107.

<sup>20</sup> According to Ovid, *The Festivals, apud Goicu, Termeni creștini*, 120.

<sup>21</sup> According to G. Weigand, *Die bulgarischen Rufnamen, ihre Herkunft, Kürzungen und Neubildungen „Jahresbericht”*, XXVI-XXIX, Leipzig (1921): 122-123, *apud Goicu, Termeni creștini*, 120.

<sup>22</sup> According to Ștefan Pașca, *Nume de persoane și nume de animale în Țara Oltului* (Names of Persons and Animals in Olt's Country) (Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House, 1936), 242.

<sup>23</sup> André de Vincenz, *Traité d'anthroponymie houtzoule* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1970), 176.

We must emphasize the fact that all the settlements from Transilvania which formed their names from the compound mentioned in the documents as *Sanctus Georgius*, from Hungarian *Szent – György* or from German *Sankt – Georgen*, have been adapted to Romanian after the old name of the feast of *Sângeorzului*.<sup>24</sup>

Nicolae Drăganu, in his work *Toponymy and History*,<sup>25</sup> a study dedicated to the origins and age of the names of villages from the Upper Someș Valey, makes the following statement “the Catholic church no matter where it ruled and especially where it colonized, even in the Balkans, it gave names of saints”.

#### 4. SÂNZÂIENE

The 24<sup>th</sup> of June is dedicated to the birth of Saint John the Baptist and it is celebrated both by the Eastern and Western Church,<sup>26</sup> known to the Romanians under the name of *Sânzâiene*. The map of the territorial distribution shows us that *Sânzâiene* (with the phonetic variant *Sâmzâiene* and even *Sunzuiene*, occasionally) dominates the whole Daco-Roman territory, excepting Muntenia, Dobrogea and a small part in the west of Oltenia, where the word of Slavonic origin *Drăgaică* is used (*Drădaică* in the points. 764, 768 in the north of Muntenia). In this case also the meridional regions of Romania are innovating regarding the religious vocabulary. In Macedonian-Romanian we have the form *Sândzeană*, (plural) *Sândzeni*,<sup>27</sup> together with the Greek forms *yanólu*, *ayánu*, *aj-yanulo*.

Most of the linguists state that this term has its origins in the Latin term *Sanctus Johannes*. Thus we now have two opinions:

1. I.-A. Candrea thinks that the name of this feast, which is of a great importance for the beliefs of all the European nations, placed by the Fathers of the Church around the same date as the summer solstice, to replace “a few old pagan feasts, with agricultural or natural character,”<sup>28</sup> was preserved “in its primitive form, while *sanctus dies Johannis* became, with no phonetic difficulty, *sim(pt)-dzi-iŷane* > *sânziane* > *sânzâiene*.”<sup>29</sup>

I.-A. Candrea’s opinion is also supported by Christian Ionescu, who, on his turn, states that the names *Sâmziana*, *Sâmzeana* *Sânzâiana* are Romanian

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<sup>24</sup> According to Goicu, *Termeni creștini*, 120.

<sup>25</sup> Nicolae Drăganu, *Toponimie și istorie* (Toponymy and History) (Cluj, 1928), 118.

<sup>26</sup> According to Braniște, *Liturgica generală*, 224.

<sup>27</sup> According to Papahagi, *Dicționarul dialectului aromân*, 1095.

<sup>28</sup> Braniște, *Liturgica generală*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> I.-A. Candrea, “Românescul Sânziene” (The Romanian Sânziene), *Grai și suflet* (Word and Soul), III, fascicle 2 (1927): 428.

creations, “based on the word *sânzâiene*, which continues in Romanian from the Latin *Sanctus Dies Johannis*.”<sup>30</sup>

2. Ovid Densusianu pleads for the etymon *Sanctus Joannes* and thinks that the presence of the word *dies* in the compound’s structure is not justified phonetically or structurally, for “it is not present in the other two names of feasts that we have derived from Latin: *Sânjorz* (< *Sanctus Giorgius*), *Sâm(n)icoară* (< *Sanctus Nicolaus*).”<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand the very joining of the three words proposed by Candrea is, in the same author’s opinion, unnatural, because *sanctus* should have been used with *Johannis* (thus *dies S. Johannis*).

The etymon supported by Ovid Densusianu has also been adopted by Sever Pop,<sup>32</sup> G. Ivănescu<sup>33</sup> and Al. Rosetti.<sup>34</sup>

3. Another opinion promoted especially by M. Eliade,<sup>35</sup> V. Pârvan,<sup>36</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu,<sup>37</sup> Sorin Paliga,<sup>38</sup> brings the name of the feast closer to the Latin expression *Sancta Diana*. By accepting the etymon *Diana* for *fairy*, the authors have linked the fairy with *Sânzâiene* (gold-haired fairy), considered to be a compound from the popular form *sân(t)* (< Lat. *sanctus*) and *fairy*, in a dialectal form “*ziene* (plural) which occurs also in *Sân-ziana*, *Sim-ziana*”.<sup>39</sup>

In Romania, the Christian feast of the Birth of Saint John the Baptist coincides with ancient customs preserved until the present times and has interesting parallelisms in the mythology of some nations nearer or far from us in

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<sup>30</sup> Ionescu, *Mică enciclopedie onomastică*, 174.

<sup>31</sup> Ovid Densusianu, “Cu privire la *sânziene*” (Regarding the *sânziene*), *Grai și suflet* (Word and Soul), III, fascicle 2 (1927): 433.

<sup>32</sup> According to Sever Pop, *Le più importanti*, 15.

<sup>33</sup> According to G. Ivănescu, *Istoria limbii române* (The History of the Romanian Language) (Iași: Junimea Publishing House, 1980), 242.

<sup>34</sup> According to Al. Rosetti, *Istoria limbii române de la origini pâna în secolul al XVII-lea* (The History of the Romanian Language, I. From the Beginning until the 17<sup>th</sup> Century), final edition (Bucharest: Stiințifică și Enciclopedică Publishing House, 1986), 129.

<sup>35</sup> According to M. Eliade, *De La Zalmoxis La Genghis Han: studii comparative despre religiile și folclorul Daciei și Europei Orientale* (From Zalmoxis to Genghis-Khan. Comparative Studies on the Religions and Folklore of Dacia and the Oriental Europe), translation by M. Ivănescu and C. Ivănescu, (Bucharest: Stiințifică și Enciclopedică Publishing House, 1980), 73.

<sup>36</sup> According to V. Pârvan, *Getica* (Bucharest: The National Culture, 1926), 163.

<sup>37</sup> According to Romulus Vulcănescu, *Mitologie română* (Romanian Mythology) (Bucharest: The Romanian Academy Publishing House, 1985), 439.

<sup>38</sup> According to Sorin Paliga, “Zeități feminine ale basmelor românești: zânele și sânzâienele. Originea cuvintelor și a cultului profan” (Goddesses of the Romanian Fairytales: Fairies and Gold-haired Fairies. The Origins of Words and of the Profane Cult), *Limba Română* (Romanian Language), XXXVIII, No. 2 (1989): 141-149.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, 45.

space and time. For the night of Sânzâiene it is well known the practice of gathering medicinal herbs, and especially “the beasts’ grass”, or the decoration of gates and windows with flowers. “The wreath of sweet woodruff” is used as a magical means for “predicting one’s foreordained wife”. In Transilvania, on the eve of this feast, the villagers gather the flowers named “*sânzuene*” which they use to make wreaths. These wreaths they “put on the doors of their houses, on the crosses in between boundaries and cornfields, on their plots, on the beehives”.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, one may observe that “the name of the feast also became the name of a plant and it was used with this form (with the plural *sânzănii, sânziene*) “very often in plural, determining the transformation of *á* in *ă* (according to *ladă, lăzi, scară, scări – box, boxes, ladder, ladders*)”.<sup>41</sup> The cosmogonical legends are very interesting also, because according to them “*Iana Sânzâiana* is identified with the *Moon*, a link probably made with the help of *fairy*, a linguistic argument for the cult of *Diana* in Romania.”<sup>42</sup>

Of what we presented until now, we may conclude that *Sânzâiana* with the meaning of “day of Saint John” has, through its name, a certain connection with the Christianity, but the importance of the day lies in the pagan traditions, ancient for the Romanians and very well preserved.

As a personal name it is attested in 1555 in Modavia, with the form *Sâmziană*.<sup>43</sup>

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of January we also celebrate the day of Saint John the Baptist, with the older name of *Suntion*, which according to ALR II, map 200, is preserved only in Crișana, Oaș and Maramureș with the phonetic variants *Sâmt’ionu, Sâmc’iuonu, Suntuănu, Suntionu*. In the rest of the Daco-Roman territory, the newer form Saint John is used.

## 5. SAINT PETER (SÂMPETRU)

The feast of the Saint Disciples Peter and Paul, who became martyrs in Rome in the year 67, is celebrated on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, which is “the date when the relics of the two Saint Disciples were transferred to the place named *ad*

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<sup>40</sup> Tudor Pamfile, *Sărbătorile de vară la români: Studiu etnografic* (Summer Feasts at the Romanians. Ethnographic Study) (Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House, 1910), 93.

<sup>41</sup> Ivănescu, *Istoria limbii române*, 242.

<sup>42</sup> Goicu, *Termeni creștini*, 123

<sup>43</sup> According to Gheorghe Bolocan (chief editor), *Dictionarul elementelor românești din documentele slavo-române 1374-1600* (*The Dictionary of the Romanian Elements from the Slavonic-Romanian Documents, 1374-1600*) (Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House, 1981), 215.

*catacumbas*, on Via Appia in Rome, in 258.<sup>44</sup> In Rome, this feast “was celebrated from the reign of Constantine the Great; from here it soon (even in the 4<sup>th</sup> century) spread to the East, where it was celebrated with great solemnity from the 6<sup>th</sup> century onwards.”<sup>45</sup> In Romania, this feast is known with the name of *Sâmpetru*. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of January, in some regions of the country there is yet another feast for *Sâmpetru*, also called *winter Sâmpetru* (ALR II, map 215), when the Eastern Church commemorates the chains with which Saint Peter was chained while in prison, at the command of king Herod.

The compound term of *Sâmpetru* (< Lat. *Sanctus Petrus*) is widely spread for both feasts throughout the entire Daco-Roman territory. As it results from the map analysis, one may observe that only in a few areas of the country the form *Saint Peter* has been marked. To preserve the archaic form on such a large area the phenomenon of palatalizing the lip consonant *p* (in *pt*, *t*, *ć*, *k*), “with the specific pronunciation for each dialect”<sup>46</sup> contributed a great deal. Thus, the compound forms *Sâmpetru*, *Sâmăetru*, *Sâmk’etru*, etc. have lost their transparency and the speakers have no longer recognized the compound elements. In Macedonian Romanian, besides the new compound *Ayu-postol*, the older form *Sum-k’etru* also preserved.<sup>47</sup>

The elements of this Christian feast were grafted on several pagan elements, thus enhancing the popularity of this name in Romania. Considered to be patron of the fishermen, in the memory of the trade he practiced before meeting Jesus, Saint Peter is also patron of the wolves and to this respect a lot of beliefs and magical practices have been preserved. “The wolf’s calendar” starts with the winter *Sâmpetru*, considered to be a master and a protector spirit of the wolves, who unleashes them, divides them and who allows the wolves to eat from the people’s cattle and flocks. On the day of the summer *Sâmpetru* it is said that the wolves gather in one place, at the waterfall, at a crossroads; their howl means that they pray or ask for food to their master (Saint Peter). Without his command, the wolves never dare to damage anything in the world.

The appearance of a patron of the wolves, also called in some regions the wolves’ shepherd, is an ancient element, dating from the times of anthropomorphization of the powers and wilderness of nature. The ancient local divinity, mistress of the wolves, has been assimilated, during the spread of the Christian faith, into the image of a canonical saint. But “this prerogative of Saint

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<sup>44</sup> According to Braniște, *Liturgica generală*, 224.

<sup>45</sup> Braniște, *Liturgica generală*, 224.

<sup>46</sup> Goicu, *Termeni creștini*, 124.

<sup>47</sup> According to Papahagi, *Dicționarul dialectului aromân*, 1094.

Peter is anterior to Christianity, because he is the continuer of a local deity, probably a Thracian-Dacian one.”<sup>48</sup> “The fact that in Ukraine the head of the wolves is the Forest-Man, in Belorussia, Saint George and in Serbia, Saint Theodore or Saint Sava indicates the central place of Saint Peter within the Romanian tradition.”<sup>49</sup>

The legends from Bucovina “credit Saint Peter with the role of patron of the hail and organizer of storms, as it occurs in the Belarusian legends: «The hail-storm is carried by Saint Peter and the dragons from the sky, they boil it to be little and Saint Peter gives it on earth».”<sup>50</sup> The origins “of this assigning must be looked for also in the name of the saint, which determined the analogy with the *hail stone*, making him the deliverer, instead of Saint Elias who usually delivers hail-stone.”<sup>51</sup>

*The fast of Saint Peter* is carefully respected “in order for the Beautiful [=wicked fairies] not to distort the body; it is also respected for illnesses, starvation and hail-stone.”<sup>52</sup> This period of fasting is called by the Hutsulian *Petrivka*, from which the name of July has derived, *na Petrivku*,<sup>53</sup> but with the same traditions.

The popular name for this feast is also preserved in the last name *Sâmpetru*, especially in the northern part of Moldavia, in the north-east of Muntenia and in Dobrogea. This denomination also occurs in the names of some settlements in Tarnsilvania and Banat: *Sâmpetru Almaşului*, *Sâmpetru de Câmpie*, *Sâmpetru Mic*, *Sâmpetru Nou*.<sup>54</sup>

## 6. SAINT MARY (SUNTĂ MĂRIE)

The Virgin Mary is venerated both in the Eastern and Western cult as the first and greatest of all the saints. Both the Eastern and Western church celebrate on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August the Dormition of the Mother of God, and on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, her birth.

The Holy Virgin is called: Mary in Banat, Transilvania, in the central and western part; *Holy Mother* (*Maica Precistă* (from Slavonic *maika* and *prečista*) in the south of Crişana, in Transilvania and in isolated parts in the rest of the Daco-

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<sup>48</sup> Mihai Coman, *Bestiarul mitologic românesc* (The Romanian Mythological Bestiary) (Bucharest: Fundaţiei Culturale Române Publishing House, 1996), 184.

<sup>49</sup> Ovidiu Bârlea, *Folclorul românesc* (The Romanian Folklore), volume I (Bucharest: Minerva Publishing House, 1981), 124.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>52</sup> Candrea, *Iarba fiarelor*, 127.

<sup>53</sup> According to Vincenz, *Traité*, 203.

<sup>54</sup> According to Goicu, *Termeni creştini*, 125.

Roman territory<sup>55</sup>; *Mother of God*, in Oltenia, Muntenia, Dobrogea and Moldavia. Other names for the Holy Virgin: *Holy Mother Mary*, *Holy Mother*, *Virgin Mary* (*Vergura Maria*), *Holy Virgin Mary*, *Mother of God*, *Mother of our Lord Jesus*, *Holy Ever Virgin Mary*, etc.

Although terms of Slavonic origin occur (Mother and Holy Virgin - *Maica* and *Precista*) for the name of “The Virgin Mary”, when it comes to the name of the feasts on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August (*Sfântă Mărie Mare*) and 8<sup>th</sup> of Spetember (*Sfântă Mărie Mică*),<sup>56</sup> the latin term *sancta* has been preserved: *Sunta Marie* (Saint Mary) is used throughout the entire Daco-Roman territory, *Sâmta Marie*, in banat and the saouth-east of Crișana, and *Stă Mărie* in isolated points in Oltenia and Muntenia.<sup>57</sup>

In Macedonian Romanian the form *Sî-Mărie* (*Stă-Mărie*) has been prserved and the Megleno-Romanian *Stă-Măria* is the term used both for “The Virgin Mary” and for the name of the two Christian feasts.<sup>58</sup>

The toponymics derived from *Suntă Mărie* (*Suntămăria de Piatră*, *Sântămăria-Orlea* (Hunedoara county) and others) generated, where they occurred (especially in Transilvania), last names: *Sântămărian* și *Sântămărean(u)*.

#### 7. SAINT DEMTRIUS (SÂMEDRU)

The Holy Great Martyr Demetrius, also called the Myrrh-streamer, was martyrized on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April 304, giving his name to his birth city (Mitroviça, in Serbia today), from where his relics have been later on transported to Tessaloniki, where they have been placed on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October 413 “in a church especially built for them.”<sup>59</sup> This day has remained in the Orthodox calendar as his annual celebration day. The Greek synaxary “translated into Romanian, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October, makes Saint Demetrius a military saint of Greek origin.”<sup>60</sup>

Similar to Saint George, Saint Demetrius has a special role in the popular life of the Romanians. On the day of Saint Demetrius the shepherds return with their sheep to the village, lighting fires on the crossroads as a sign that another cycle of the pastoral life has come to an end. This is the way one should understand the aswers obtained by Sever Pop for this feast: *Saint Demetrius of the sheeps*

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>56</sup> According to Mihăescu, *Romanitatea*, 299.

<sup>57</sup> According to Goicu, *Termeni creștini*, 126.

<sup>58</sup> According to Mihăescu, *Romanitatea*, 299.

<sup>59</sup> Braniște, *Liturgica generală*, 222.

<sup>60</sup> Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române* (The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church), volume I (Bucharest: Institutului biblic și de misiune al bisericii ortodoxe române Publishing House, 1992), 76.

(*Sâmedru oilor*) (point 900 at the Danube) and *Saint Demetrius' Fire (Focu lu Sâmedru)* (point 776 in the north of Muntenia).

In Oltenia, Muntenia and the southern part of Moldavia, on the eve of the 26<sup>th</sup> of October, fires were light on hills, on crossroads, in the middle of the village or near the waters, also called *Saint Demetrius' Fire (Focul lui Sâmedru)*. Children and young men would jump over the fires, for their purification and recovery, then, on their way back home, they would take embers in order to throw them into the orchards to increase the fruits for the next year.

On the say of Saint Demetrius the old engagements sealed on the day of Saint George expired and new ones were sealed for jobs, agreements, rents, which meant a reason to wet the bargains joyfully.<sup>61</sup>

The popular name of the feast is *Sâmedru*, *Sumedru* and *Simedru* and it is spread throughout a very generous area. In Macedonian-Romanian it occurs under the forms *Sân-Medru* and *Su-Medru*,<sup>62</sup> and in Megleno-Romanian the names *Sănămedru* and *Sănămjădru*<sup>63</sup> are used.

Most of the linguists think that *Sâmedru* continues the Latin form *Sanctus Demetrius* with a sonorous consonant [t], followed by the abbreviation of the name, through the apheresis of the initial syllable. The answer obtained in point 289, in the west of Transilvania, *Simetru de iarnă*, is an argument in favour of this origin<sup>64</sup>. In Oltenia, Muntenia, Dobrogea and the south of Transilvania, the compound *Saint Demetrius*, introduced by the Church, prevails. At the beginning *Sâmedru* was used as a first name, but became lateron last name and it is most common in Transilvania (*Simedru*, *Simedrea*, *Simedre*, *Medre*, *Medrea*).

Ovid Densușianu registers it as both first and last name, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in Hunedoara county, with the forms *Sâmedru*, *Simedru* (as first name) and *Sâmedro* and *Sumedro* (as last name).<sup>65</sup> And this thanks to an ancient custom of the inhabitants of Țara Hațegului: “A pagan reminiscence – a sort of cult of the Penates adapted to Christianity seems to have also been preserved in the custom of choosing a protector Saint for each house;

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<sup>61</sup> According to Tudor Pamfile, *Sărbătorile la români. Sărbătorile de toamnă și postul Crăciunului (Feasts at the Romanians. Autumn Holidays and the Christmas Fast)*, volume I (Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House, 1913), 71-72.

<sup>62</sup> According to Papahagi, *Dicționarul dialectului aromân*, 1095, 1134.

<sup>63</sup> According to Th. Capidan, *Meglenoromânii (The Megleno-Romanians)* (3 volumes: 1925-1935), volume III: *Dicționar meglenoromân (Megleno-Romanian Dictionary)* (Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House, 1935), 270.

<sup>64</sup> According to Goicu, *Termeni creștini*, 127.

<sup>65</sup> According to Ovid Densușianu, *Graiul din Țara Hațegului (The Language in Țara Hațegului)* (Bucharest: Socec & Co., 1915), 79.

many such houses have Saint Demetrius, Saint Nicholas etc as their protector and each of them celebrates the day of their protector saint; the priest comes at home and performs a service and then a wake is prepared.”<sup>66</sup>

Sextil Pușcariu, comparing a series of maps of the *Romanian Linguistic Atlas*, among which those for “Saint Demetrius” and “Saint Nicholas”, with the map of Roman Dacia, drawn after the latest researches and published by C. C. Giurescu,<sup>67</sup> finds that apart from Oltenia, in Banat and in the west of Transilvania – areas with Roman settlements – we find Latin words which are better preserved, among which *Sâmedru* (< Sanctus Demetrius) and *Sânicoară* (< Sanctus Nicolaus).<sup>68</sup> Relying on the method of linguistic geography, the author shows that these “registering” may be explained by the outlying and relatively isolated situation in which the Daco-Romans found themselves after the official withdrawal of the troops under the reign of Aurelian. In the south of the Danube, where the Roman civilisation penetrated earlier, some linguistic centres have been formed from which the innovations spread towards the north. We are talking about the words *varză* (cabbage), *gresie* (grit stone), *zeamă* (gravy), and later on *Saint Nicholas*, *Saint Demetrius*, *grijanie* (Communion). All these innovations stopped in front of a strong wall, behind which the Latin words resisted: *curechi* (cabbage), *cute* (whetsotne), *moare* (sauerkraut brine), *Sânicoară* (Saint Nicholas), *Sâmedru* (Saint Demetrius), *cuminicătură* (Communion), etc.<sup>69</sup>

#### 8. SAINT NICOLAS (SÂNNICOARĂ)

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of December, both the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church celebrate Saint Nicholas. In Romania, the name *Nicholas* brings along many beliefs, legends and traditions which are mostly pagan, which enhanced the popularity of the cult and of the name. In the popular calendar, the feast of Saint Nicholas is celebrated “for illnesses, chicken pox and strikes,”<sup>70</sup> he guides the sun in the sky, guarding the northern part for it not to diverse its course, since in the southern part the guardian is Saint Theodore. Saint Nicholas “has taken the prerogatives of a nautical god prior to Christianity, probably those of Poseidon – Neptune. By extension, he also became the patron of the army [...] and of the

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<sup>66</sup> Densușianu, *Graiul din Țara Hațegului*, 79.

<sup>67</sup> C. C. Giurescu, *Istoria românilor* (The History of the Romanians) (Bucharest, 1935).

<sup>68</sup> According to Sextil Pușcariu, “*Les enseignements de l’Atlas linguistiques de Roumanie*,” *Revue de Transilvanie*, III, No. 1 (1936) :13-22 + 15 maps, *apud* Goicu, *Termeni creștini*, 128.

<sup>69</sup> According to Goicu, *Termeni creștini*, 128.

<sup>70</sup> Candrea, *Iarba fiarelor*, 129.

merchants, a sort of Christian Hermes [...] but the legends emphasize the protection of the poor girls, which he marries, dowering them like a parent.”<sup>71</sup>

Canonized by the church with the name *Nikólaos* (Lat. *Nicolaus*) in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the Bishop of Myra in Lycia became, through his deeds, one of the most popular saints in the Balkans. In Romania, the popular name for this saint is *Sânnicoară* which preserved, according to the map, in Banat, in Țara Hațegului (*Sâmicori*), in northern Crișana and Transilvania, as well as in Maramureș. *Sânnicoară* has been replaced in the other regions of the country with *Saint Nicholas*, spread with the help of the Church. To this added the fact that *Sânnicoară* was no longer understood, because of the obvious difference of form between the old term and the new one.

*Sânnicoară* is spread as last name on the entire Daco-Roman territory with its variant *Nicoară*. This confirms, beyond any doubt, the fact that both as a first name and as a Christian feast (*Sân*) *Nicoară* continues *Sanctus (Nicolaus)*: the transformation of simple intervocalic [l] in [r] and diphthongization of [o] into [òa] supports the Latin origin.<sup>72</sup>

In the Romanian dialects in the south of the Danube only the terms borrowed from the neighbouring countries are signaled.

At the Hutsulians, *Nicoară* determined the formation of the patronymic derivatives: *Nikorak*, *Nikorik*, *Nikorakiv*, *Nikorin*, as well as the diminutives *Nikorej*, *Nikorejko*.<sup>73</sup>

At the same ethnographic group, Saint Nicholas is one of the most important Saints; the popular name for December is *na Mikolí*, “where [m] initially occurred under the influence of *Mihailo*.”<sup>74</sup>

#### 9. KNITTING NEEDLE (ÎNDREA)

On the last day of November, the 30<sup>th</sup>, both the Eastern Church and the Western Church celebrate Saint Andrew. The name of the Saint usually designates the following month, December: in meridional Albanian (Tosk) *Shëndre* or *Shënëndre*, in Slovene *Andrejščak*, in the German dialects of Rhenania *Sont Andreismaint* and in Romanian *îndrea*, *Undrea*. Yet, in the Sardinian dialects *su mese de Sant Andria*, or much more simple, *Santandria* and in some regions of Spain *Sanandrés* the names designate November and not December.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Bârlea, *Folclorul românesc*, volume I, 127-128.

<sup>72</sup> According to Mihăescu, *Romanitatea*, 162, 299.

<sup>73</sup> According to Vincenz, *Traité*, 229.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*, 193.

<sup>75</sup> Carlo Tagliavini, *Storia di parole pagane e cristiane attraverso i tempi* (Brescia, 1963), 171.

Some Greek words have penetrated the Daco-Roman territory through Christianity and have spread throughout the territory through Latin. Such is the name of Greek origin  $\text{Ανδρεας}$  Lat. *Andréas*. From what we know we may conclude that the spread of names has been realised orally and it had a mass character: their presence in the north of Danube stands for an uninterrupted relation between the north and the south of Danube, during the 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>76</sup>

In Romania the Christian cult has been engrafted on a series of ancient pagan elements, beliefs and magical rites also known to other European nations. Saint Andrew is considered in our country the master of wolves and wild beasts and thus the night of the 30<sup>th</sup> of November is some sort of a jubilee of the wolves and wraiths.<sup>77</sup> In this night the girls try to find out their “predestined husband”: they determine the young man through magic to marry them. The same magical ceremonies are popular with the Hutsulians, where the young girls perform spells in order to find their “predestined husband”, and the peasants do the same in order to have good crops; here December is called *andrijiv*.<sup>78</sup>

The use of the popular term *îndrea* with the variant *undrea* for December (“Saint Andrew’s month”) is a certain proof that the personal names *îndrea* and *Undrea* represent Romanian correspondances of the Latin name *Andréa*.<sup>79</sup>

Sextil Pușcariu in his article in *Dacoromania*,<sup>80</sup> thinks that the transformation of [*án*] and [*an-*] into [*în*] can not be older than the spread of Christianity to our Romanian ancestors, as it is proved by the terms *sân* < *sanctus*, *păgân* (*pagan*) < *paganus*, *creștin* (*Christian*) < *creștian* < *christianus* and the name of the disciple Andreas, preserved in the form *îndrea* (*Undrea*), both with the meaning of “December” and as a first name.

*Îndrea*, with its graphic variant *Îndre* is known as a last name in Maramureș (where it is mostly spread), in Bihor county. The form *îndre* may be a vocative form which generated a nominative form, but also a graphic form due to the Hungarian administration.<sup>81</sup> From *îndre(a)* some last names have been formed, but they occur rarely: *Indreucă*, *Indreuca* (Maramureș), *Indri*, *Indrie*, *Indriaș*, *Indricău*, *Indricuț*, *Indreș*, *Indru*.

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<sup>76</sup> According to Mihăescu, *The Influence*, 129.

<sup>77</sup> According to Goicu, *Termeni creștini*, 131.

<sup>78</sup> According to Vincenz, *Traité*, 149.

<sup>79</sup> According to Goicu, *Termeni creștini*, 131.

<sup>80</sup> Sextil Pușcariu, *Dacoromania*, Cluj, III, (1920-1921): 386-387.

<sup>81</sup> Goicu, *Termeni creștini*, 133.

We will try furthermore to develop a semasiological-linguistic analysis of the greatest Christian feasts, named, because of their importance, Great Feasts (*festa dominica, gospodskie pazdniki*).<sup>82</sup> We will present them chronologically.

### *Conclusions*

The Romanian people, synthesis of two fundamental elements, the local *Daco-Thracians* and the *Roman colonists*, to which the slaves and other migrating peoples that came into contact with them form a secondary element, is “born” in the 1<sup>st</sup> millenium of our era on a territory formed of the Roman provinces in the south and north of Danube (the Roman Dacia and the areas occupied by the free Dacians, Schytia Minor, Moesia Superior and Moesia Inferior, Dardania and Pannonia Inferior).

The analysis of the religious life in the Carpathian-Balkan space, starting from classic Antiquity and until the Middle Ages, leads us to conclude that there have been favourable conditions for the formation of a Christianity with numerous foreign elements.<sup>83</sup> We have tried to emphasize the pagan connotations of the feasts we analysed. The gradual integration in the Roman culture and the Christian cult of the Daco-Thracian and barbarian (migratory) population, the persistence of the substratum, the cohabitation of spiritual values of different origins, the frail and late ethos of the dogmatic evolutions, exercising the influence of more than one ecclesiastical centre, the “popular,” intern, “cellular” missions, the lack of churches and cult objects, the orality of the religious culture constitute specific factors of one historical period or the other which alternated until the formation “of the Romanian ethnos and of its first political structures; as we have already seen, they acted intensively in the north of Danube and blurry between the river and the sea.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> According to Braniște, *Liturgica generală*, 155.

<sup>83</sup> According to Nelu Zugravu, *Geneza creștinismului popular al românilor* (The Genesis of the Popular Christianity of the Romanians) (The Romanian Institute of Thracology, Bucharest: Vavila Edinf SRL, 1997), 543.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*, 543.

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