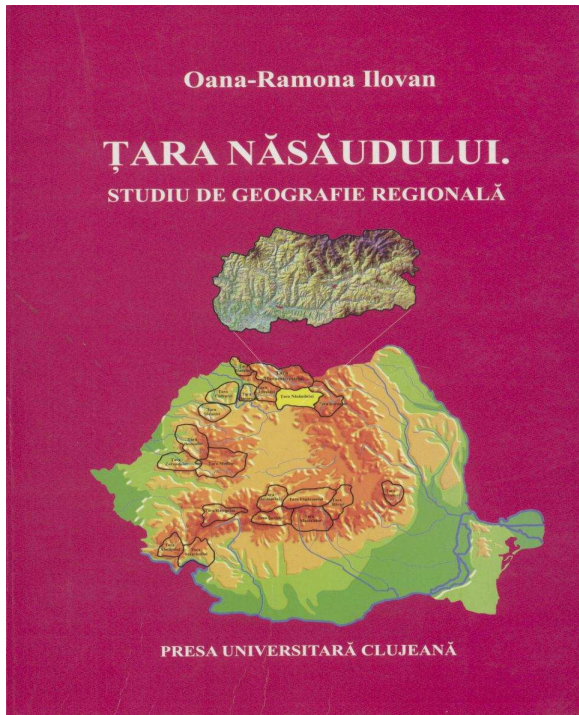


OANA-RAMONA ILOVAN - ȚARA NĂSĂUDULUI. STUDIU DE GEOGRAFIE REGIONALĂ [The Land of Năsăud. Study of Regional Geography], Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, 515 pp.



The Land of Năsăud inherited its characteristic features from a series of natural and human elements. Their spatial and organic functional association revealed the “land” as a real original construction. We took into account the fact that this “land” did not have the favourable morphological element, the classical in the mountains or nearby the mountains depression at the basis of its own architecture, but the winding alternation of hills coming down from the Rodna and the Țibleș Mountains and oriented as a fan towards a major valley corridor: that of the Someșul Mare. Secondly, this “land” did not appear, like the Land of the Moți, as a result of the dominant substratum hosting two main resources: the gold and the woods, but as a result of a mosaic of opportunities given by a natural environment that was not an abundant one, but more than hospitable in all its details. Finally, the Land of Năsăud received its personality from its people, as the spiritual production of this system was a remarkable one at least.

The author insisted on a certain issue when writing her book and that was the borders of the

“land”. While the mountains were clear borderlines to the north and to the east, and the Someșul Mare Corridor to the south, the borderline to the west was rather unclear for most of those who approached the Land of Năsăud. Giving up the cliché that the Land of Năsăud and the area of the old Border District were the same, the author extended, after minute and inspired introspection, the territory of the “land” to the interfluvium between the valleys of Ilișua and Valea Mare, thus including in the researched regional system the communes in the upper and middle basin of the Ilișua Valley (Târlișua, Spermezeu, and Căianu Mic). Both the ethnographic features of that borderline and people’s self-identifying as people of the “land” were the main arguments that any future pertinent research should take into account. One should also consider the author’s contributions to the concept of “limit” as interesting and useful for further research.

Another original element was the asymmetry of the regional system that transformed it into a real *slope “land”*. One could notice that the Someșul Mare Valley was a clear border as the left steepest slope, with northern display, rejected the population as compared to the right one, oriented southwards. Therefore, the “land” extended, through its settlements, on the sunny valleys and slopes linked to the mountainous area. That was why the habitat cellules were really scattered and were very diverse in structure and texture, too (valley and slope villages; elongated and grouped villages; scattered and compact villages). The chain of depressions generated a series of settlements on the main valleys (the Ilișua, the Țibleș, the Sălăuța, the Rebra, and the Someșul Mare). Another effect was represented by successive inhabiting rhythms, with population swarming from downstream towards upstream, a phenomenon also determined by the pressure of Hungarian ethnics colonised and inhabiting the Someșul Mare Corridor (e.g. in the villages of Uriu and Ilișua in the inferior basin of the Ilișua Valley; Nimigea de Jos at the confluence of the Țibleș with the Someșul Mare, etc.).

The territorial system of the “land” had the following features in what its organising was concerned: *shelter features* offered by the valleys flowing from the north and north-east, sometime in the past hosting virgin woods and a *varied sustenance basis* (middle fertility soils for diverse agricultural use, large woods for timber, stone for construction, and wild animals and fish) and

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hospitable as much as its environmental features were concerned (moderate climate with western influence and southern display). The author also took into account its *relative isolation* in comparison with the main corridor, of the Someșul Mare, continuing towards the mountains with the one of the Șieu and of the Bistrița, which attracted during the Middle Ages colonisation most of the Hungarian and German immigrant waves.

Population ensured the viability of the system as it had the roles both of dynamic principle and of resource. People had inhabited the area since prehistoric periods and the present features consisted of a relatively homogenous population, mostly Romanian ethnics of Orthodox religion. One could characterise the people's present territorial dynamics as interesting as massive migration for work took place (up to 25-30% of the inhabitants of some settlements) towards European countries such as Spain and Italy.

The historical dimension of the researched spatial entity appeared as a result of political and administrative conditions that revealed as landmarks the Roman settlement in Ilișua and the fortresses built during the same period in Zagra and Runcu Salvei, as proof of early inhabiting of the region and of the role of those settlements in the ethnogenesis of the Romanian people. During the period of the Border District that the Habsburgs created, when the settlement of Năsăud had an important role as the main administrative centre (1762-1851), the region received its internal organising and important economic and social attributes for its emancipation (We underline that the district included also settlements outside the Land of Năsăud, such as the ones in the Bârgău area and even in the one of the Mureș, but not including the ones in the northwestern part of the "land": the settlements in the Ilișua basin).

The cultural dimension of the Land of Năsăud remained emblematic and made the difference between the researched region and other similar ones. One should have looked for its origin in the opportunities that the statute of border district offered to the people in the area as a high school with Romanian teaching language appeared (the present day "George Coșbuc" National College) and the entire economic and social development. The 19 academicians of the region, such as the creator of the Romanian modern novel, Liviu Rebreanu, and the poet George Coșbuc ensured the region with the role of a spiritual diffusion pole recognised by the golden book of Romanian national culture as such.

Within that dimension, the reader could identify the spiritual component of the rural civilisation in the region, with its original features of customs, tradition, and folklore. The traditional clothes, especially those that young men wore, revealed unique elements such as the hat with peacock feathers and the breastplate, while their lively colours underlined people's love for their life and the optimism that characterised their community. The author's analysis was thorough, a real ethnographic radiography of the essence of the Land of Năsăud as it had been and still was.

Considering a detailed analysis, the author uncovered the intimated structure of the mental space of the Land of Năsăud, underlining its main features: people's adherence to reality; people's open-mindedness for their progress; people's capacity of linking the real to the imaginary through the fabulous and through myths; people's capacity of making reality more pleasant through humour; people's awareness of the uniqueness of their "land" and their uncommon material and spiritual assets. The author identified in that context a series of new features, derived from people's perception of their identity that one could easily apply and generalise as a research method for similar regions.

The choreme had the form of a trident where the main support was the Năsăud-Bistrița axis, through which, because of political and administrative conditions, the entire system oriented its fluxes towards the main command centre represented by Bistrița municipium, the administrative centre of the county. A horizontal branch overlapping the Someșul Mare corridor, with fluxes oriented towards both the east and the west represented the most significant area for the regional system, as well as a real adjuster of the economic and social processes within this spatial organism. Finally, the three secondary branches coincided with an equal number of lateral loading and downloading lines towards the neighbouring "lands" (the Land of Lăpuș, the Land of Maramureș, and the Land of the Dorne).

The author's thorough knowledge about the realities of the researched region in a temporal succession, as well as her awareness of the newest paradigms in regional studies, linked with her permanent capacity of revealing the essential were only some of the researcher's strengths that we could identify in this book on the Land of Năsăud.

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