PALGRAVE HISTORICAL STUDIES IN WITCHCRAFT AND MAGIC

# Witchcraft in Romania

Ioan Pop-Curşeu
Ștefana Pop-Curșeu

palgrave macmillan

# Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic

Series Editors
Jonathan Barry
Department of History
University of Exeter
Exeter, UK

Willem de Blécourt
Meertens Institute
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Owen Davies
School of Humanities
University of Hertfordshire
Hertfordshire, UK

The history of European witchcraft and magic continues to fascinate and challenge students and scholars. There is certainly no shortage of books on the subject. Several general surveys of the witch trials and numerous regional and micro studies have been published for an English-speaking readership. While the quality of publications on witchcraft has been high, some regions and topics have received less attention over the years. The aim of this series is to help illuminate these lesser known or little studied aspects of the history of witchcraft and magic. It will also encourage the development of a broader corpus of work in other related areas of magic and the supernatural, such as angels, devils, spirits, ghosts, folk healing and divination. To help further our understanding and interest in this wider history of beliefs and practices, the series will include research that looks beyond the usual focus on Western Europe and that also explores their relevance and influence from the medieval to the modern period.

'A valuable series.' - Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft

Ioan Pop-Curşeu • Ştefana Pop-Curşeu

# Witchcraft in Romania

palgrave
macmillan

Ioan Pop-Curşeu
Babeş-Bolyai University
Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Ștefana Pop-Curșeu
Babeș-Bolyai University
Cluj-Napoca, Romania

ISSN 2731-5630 ISSN 2731-5649 (electronic)
Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic
ISBN 978-3-031-15221-4 ISBN 978-3-031-15222-1 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-15222-1

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022
This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.
The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.
The publisher, the authors, and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: Hemis / Alamy Stock Photo

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

# Acknowledgements

A book is only to some extent the result of fortuitous circumstances. Beyond these circumstances, it often derives from projects that the authors have pursued with passion over several years, strongly believing in the necessity and relevance of the topic they favour. On the other hand, any book, even if it is signed by one or more authors, feeds deeply on their encounters with their peers. These meetings—be they direct, personal or simply livresque—have a fundamental role in the genesis of the book that ends up being published. Our book is no exception.

This book tries to bring the history of Romanian witchcraft to the attention of English-speaking researchers, because we are convinced that a synthetic perspective on this phenomenon is useful for a complete cartography of historical evolution of witchcraft and of beliefs in it throughout Europe. This kind of book is necessary because Romania is a shifting site of beliefs and practices in the history of European witchcraft, being situated at the crossroads between East and West, North and South, as is also the case in some other cultural domains (language, culinary fashions, artistic and religious traditions etc.).

This book could not have been conceived and written without the exchange of ideas and consistent communication with other researchers interested in the subject, or in related topics, who helped us to better understand the multiple dimensions of the history of witchcraft in Romanian culture. We thank our colleagues and friends with whom we were able to exchange ideas and information throughout our project: Ana Dumitran, Bogdan Neagota, Cristina Bogdan, Silvia Marin Barutcieff, Astrid Cambose, Ștefan Dumitraș, Camelia Burghele, Ciprian Firea, Theo

Mureșan, Andrei Oișteanu, Tünde Komáromi, Anca and Mihai Măniuțiu, Pr. Jan Nicolae, Petru L. Curșeu and many others. We would like to thank Gheorghe-Gavrilă Hognogi (Centre for Regional Geography, Faculty of Geography, Babeș-Bolyai University) for designing the map included in this volume: it is an indispensable tool for each reader of this book.

Willem de Blécourt deserves very special thanks for two reasons. First of all, his research on the history of witchcraft stimulated our own investigations, both from the point of view of focusing on certain thematic aspects and from a methodological standpoint. Logically rigorous analysis and Willem de Blécourt's interest in how witchcraft discourse is produced, structured and disseminated have always been models for our own analysis. Second, it must be said that Willem de Blécourt is the first to have discussed the project of a book in English about witchcraft in Romania with us: he was open to and even delighted with the idea and encouraged us to write a book proposal, which he was kind enough to go through. If this project materialises now, it is largely due to him.

We thank our colleague, Carmen Borbély, who gave this book its first form in English based on texts originally written in Romanian. Translation was not an easy task, because witchcraft terminology in Romanian is extremely complicated, and the texts on which we base our argument and from which we quote belong to different linguistic registers and historical epochs. It was not easy to reproduce the spirit of old and new legal texts (codes of laws and documents of witchcraft trials), the flavour of old religious books or the nuances of polemic writings. The proofreading and the language review were completed by Olivia McCarthy, who made the text sound natural in English. In the end, this enterprise was completed and English-speaking readers have at their disposal a synthetic, balanced and clear representation of witchcraft in Romania.

The biggest thanks go to our parents and children: Ileana and Ion Pop, Maria and Petru Curșeu (1949–2019) and Ecaterina and Teodor Pop-Curșeu. They endured the slow genesis of ideas and the difficult birth of the book, without being upset when we stole *their time* to devote ourselves to study. All six of them accompanied us, from time to time, on field research expedition, they listened to us talking about the book and they got impatient, asking us: "How much do you have left to write?" They also supported us, we must say, with all the logistical elements that each had at hand, so that we could finally give a structured and legible form to the heterogeneous materials with which we were forced to work.

In conclusion, we must also give institutional thanks. The Executive Unit for the Financing of Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation, subordinated to the Romanian Ministry of National Education, through the Uefiscdi Pn-III-P1-1.1-Te-2016-0067 research project, contract number 135/2018, entitled "Iconography of Witchcraft, an Anthropological Approach: Cinema, Theatre, Visual Arts," allowed us to carry out some of the field, library and archival researches which formed the basis of this book. Also, thanks to the same research project, it was possible to have this book translated into English and proofread.

# Contents

1 Introduction: Who Are the Romanians and How to Study Witchcraft in Romania? 1

Part I Trials in Earthly Life 25

2 Witchcraft Acts: Condemnation of Sorcery in the Codes of Law 27

3 Trials, Persecutions, Executions (the Sixteenth–Nineteenth Centuries) 65

4 New Elites, New Paradigms of Rationality (Eighteenth–Nineteenth Centuries): Against the Superstitions of the Romanians 153

Part II Trials in the Afterlife 171

5 Canonical Versus Apocryphal: Religious Texts Condemning Witchcraft 173

6 Doomsday and Hellfire: Iconographic Representations of Witchcraft in Last Judgment Compositions 219

7 Conclusions 305

General Bibliography 313

Index of Persons and Places 321

Subject Index 329

# List of Figures


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Fig. 1.1 | Map of historical Romanian regions, with the most important places that are referred to in this book. Realised by Gheorghe-Gavrilă Hognogi (Centre for Regional Geography, Faculty of Geography, Babeş-Bolyai University) | 10 |
| Fig. 6.1 | Mural painting from the Church of St. Nicholas, Bâscenii de Jos, Buzău County (1797) | 231 |
| Fig. 6.2 | Mural painting from Valea Mănăstirii Monastery, Argeş County (1797) | 232 |
| Fig. 6.3 | Mural painting from the Church of the St. Archangels, Almaș-Săliște, Hunedora County (1819) | 236 |
| Fig. 6.4 | Mural painting from the Church of the Annunciation, Streza-Cârţişoara, Sibiu County (1823–1824) | 238 |
| Fig. 6.5 | Mural painting from the Church of the St. Archangels and of St. Nicholas, Ionești, Vâlcea County (1842) | 240 |
| Fig. 6.6 | Mural painting from the Church of St. Nicholas, Cleșnești, Gorj County (1865) | 241 |
| Fig. 6.7 | Mural painting from Păuşeşti-Măglaşi/Coasta, Vâlcea County (1829–1833) | 242 |
| Fig. 6.8 | Mural painting from the Church of the Presentation of Mary, Ciuta-Măgura, Buzău County (1762) | 246 |
| Fig. 6.9 | Mural painting from the Church of the St. Archangels and of St. George, Fârtățești, Vâlcea County (1839) | 247 |
| Fig. 6.10 | Mural painting from the wooden church of Cehei, Sălaj County (second half of the eighteenth century) | 264 |
| Fig. 6.11 | Detail of an icon, oil on canvas, from the Church of Valea Sării, Vrancea County (nineteenth century) | 265 |

Fig. 6.12 Mural painting from the wooden Church of Corund, Satu Mare County (1798) 268

Fig. 6.13 Mural painting from the Church of the St. Archangels, Ocolișel, Cluj County (1878) 272

Fig. 6.14 Mural painting from the Church of St. Demetrius, Dubești, Timiș County (transition between eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) 277

Fig. 6.15 Mural painting from the Church of the Holy Trinity, Agârbiciu, Cluj County (1818) 278

Fig. 6.16 Mural painting showing groups of sinners, from the Church of the St. Archangels, Almaș-Săliște, Hunedora County (1819) 282

Fig. 6.17 "The Enchantresses and the Witches," mural painting from Păuşeşti-Măglaşi/Coasta, Vâlcea County (1829–1833) 283

Fig. 6.18 Mural painting from Viforâta Monastery, Dâmbovița County (second half of the twentieth century) 286

Fig. 6.19 Mural painting by Paul Bătăiosu, in the Church of the Holy Doctors without Money Stephen and Panteleimon, Cluj-Napoca (twentieth–twenty-first centuries) 293

Fig. 6.20 Mural painting from the Church of the Assumption and of St. Nicholas, Tetoiu-Vijoieşti, Vâlcea County (1823–24) 298

Fig. 6.21 Mural painting from Țigănești-Ciolpani Monastery, Ilfov County (1853) 299

# List of Tables


Table 3.1 Institutional level of witchcraft accusations 138
Table 3.2 Community level of witchcraft accusations 140
Table 3.3 Intrapersonal level of the perception of witchcraft 141
Table 6.1 Gender aspects of magical actors found in Romanian religious painting 225

CHAPTER 1

# Introduction: Who Are the Romanians and How to Study Witchcraft in Romania?

This introductory chapter has a double question in its title. Providing some possible answers will help readers who are not very familiar with the Romanian context, even readers coming from a scholarly audience, to more easily comprehend the following chapters on the history of witchcraft in territories and provinces that build up contemporary Romania. We will identify some historical and typological landmarks which will provide a framework for the cultural history analyses in the subsequent chapters, the details of which should be understood as precisely as possible.

So, who are the Romanians beyond the clichés and historiographical debates about Dracula and Ceaușescu's dictatorship, with his sinister secret police called *Securitate* (Verdery 1991, 2014, 2018; Deletant 2016), about mass migration to Western Europe in the years after the Revolution of 1989, about the beauty of the country (still not very well-promoted on the tourist market), or about the cultural features that give them a certain exoticism when regarded from The United States, Great Britain, Germany or France (Kaplan 2016)? When we talk about the group identity of the Romanians, we do not adopt an essentialist point of view, but rather a relativistic, functional one, which approaches ethnicity as a cultural construct, but one that is also based on a series of determinants that can be objectively circumscribed, such as language, citizenship, shared cultural practices (Fowkes 2002: 6–7). Who are these Romanians whose magical and witchcraft beliefs will be analysed in this book?

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022



I. Pop-Curşeu, Ş. Pop-Curşeu, *Witchcraft in Romania*, Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-15222-1_1

The first possible answer to this question is of a political and institutional nature: Romanians are the citizens of a state in Eastern Europe, a member of the European Union since 2007, whose name is Romania. Although this short description has the merit of being correct from a functional point of view, it deserves to be nuanced. Many people live in contemporary Romania who, although they are Romanian citizens and well-integrated into the corpus of Romanian society, are recognised by the state and define themselves freely as members of a minority ethnic group. These can include Hungarians, Roma, Germans, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Serbians, Turks, Tatars and Jews.

The second possible answer is of a cultural and ethnological nature. According to this definition, Romanians are those who, on the basis of specific linguistic and cultural features, define themselves as such and/or are recognised as a distinct ethnic group in several European countries. In the light of this definition that tries to connect ethnicity with language and cultural practices, one could identify a majority of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova as Romanians, as they speak the Romanian language as a native tongue and have many common cultural traits with people living in the eastern part of contemporary Romania (Ciscel 2007: xii, 4–5; Knott 2015: 846–850). This linguistic/cultural identification of Moldovans with Romanians does not exclude the fact that the institutional and state traditions of the two countries are different, as well as the fact that political identities and options may diverge in respect to language and culture (Hegarty 2001; Ciscel 2007: 6–15; Roper 2008: 80–84; Knott 2015: 851–853). The groups of Romanian speakers from Ukraine, Serbia, Bulgaria, Albania and other states of South-East Europe, as well as those in new communities of immigrants in Western European states such as Italy and Spain, can be considered Romanians from a cultural and ethnological standpoint. Together with language, folk traditions and customs play a fundamental role in establishing a feeling of belonging to a particular ethnic group, including social rites and interactions, culinary habits, religious and magical practices, and music and dances.

The third potential answer may be of a historical nature and should be read with some caution: Romanians are the contemporary descendants of populations who, across vast territories of South-Eastern Europe and especially in the former Roman province of Dacia and the region south of the Danube, continued to speak in Latin idioms after the fall of the Western Roman Empire (476 A.D.), in parallel with the survival and development of the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium). These

populations, who called themselves *români* or *rumâni* (ethnonyms derived from the Latin word *romanus*), were often called Vlachs by foreign observers (a generic term used primarily by Germanic peoples for the designation of Latin-speaking populations).

A short review of the key milestones in Romanian history will help readers to situate the events described in this book in the wider historical context. We will focus on some specific phenomena, on language aspects, religious issues or mental traits that will help explain how Romanians have related, over time, to the issue of witchcraft. Because we intend to offer readers of the book a long story of witchcraft in the historical territories that compose contemporary Romania, this preliminary survey is bound to start from medieval times and reach to the present day.

The medieval populations of Romanians or Vlachs, whose main economic occupations were animal husbandry, shepherding and plant cultivation, were distributed across a vast geographical area between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. This was mainly mountainous and stretched from present-day northern Greece to the kingdoms of Hungary and Poland. During this historical period, the foundations of two feudal states were established which were to form the core of modern Romania in the nineteenth century: Wallachia, or Țara Românească [The Romanian Land], formed around 1290 and ruled for centuries by princes from the Basarab dynasty, and Moldova or Moldavia, founded in 1359 and ruled by the Mușat dynasty until the sixteenth century. Princes in Wallachia and Moldavia were called *voivodes*, a term deeply rooted in the political traditions of Eastern Europe.

In Transylvania, Romanians have consistently been present in extremely high numbers throughout the period discussed here. This region was a sovereign province of the Kingdom of Hungary, becoming an autonomous Principality (1526–1688) after the defeat of the Hungarian armies by the Turks at Mohács. Within the scope of this summary, we do not intend to discuss the strongly political controversies regarding the origin, the number or the role of Romanians or Oláhs in the history of Transylvania that for centuries have agitated the Romanian and Hungarian historiographies. Whilst Romanian historians consider ancient Dacia and modern Transylvania a place of origin for the Romanian people, from which groups of ordinary people and their leaders went out to search for new lands and to found Wallachia and Moldavia (Georgescu 1991: 10–16, 40–43; Brătianu 1996; Djuvara 2016; Pop and Nägler 2016), their Hungarian colleagues state that Romanians gradually entered Transylvania, from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries onwards, as

migrating shepherds who crossed the Danube from south to north, growing progressively in numbers and overwhelming all pre-existing ethnic groups in the province (Haraszti 1971; Köpeczi 1994: 183–193). Foreign historians, less animated by political passions, tend to adopt a conciliatory position, as for example in the case of Keith Hitchins, who wrote one of the best English language syntheses on the history of the Romanian people (Hitchins 2014: 17–21). It must be noted that the available medieval documents mention Romanians all across Transylvania, without exception. They were massively populating regions such as Făgăraș in the south, the Apuseni [Western Carpathians] in the centre and Maramureș on the northern border of Transylvania. All the population censuses that are complete and rigorous give the Romanians the absolute majority in Transylvania, long before the province freely joined the Kingdom of Romania in 1918: at the beginning of the eighteenth century the Romanians were counted at 50%, in 1794—61.5%, in 1846—60.53%, in 1900—56.40% (Haraszti 1971: 88, 125) in 1910—53.8%, in 1930—57.2% (Köpeczi 1994: 418–420), in 1966—67.9%, in 2011—74.8% (Kiss et al. 2018: 386). In medieval Transylvania, few Romanians were nobles or free people, the great majority of them being serfs on the lands of great aristocrats or of the Catholic Church. They acquired a modern "national identity" and a real political force, through self-construction and civic determination, during the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries (Mitu 2001; Verdery 1983: 181–229).

In the tense and complicated political context of medieval South-Eastern Europe, the two Romanian states, Wallachia and Moldavia, had to confront neighbours that were more powerful from a military and economic point of view, starting with the Kingdoms of Hungary and Poland. Beginning in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a new menace appeared in the Balkans in the form of the Turks, whose conquest of Constantinople in 1453 marked a new era in the history of the region. Alongside neighbouring states, Wallachia and Moldavia fought numerous wars with the Turks, sometimes based on the idea of Christian alliance or crusade. There were some victories against the Ottomans during the reigns of princes such as Mircea the Old (1386–1418), Stephen the Great (1457–1504) (Artimon 2015) and Vlad Țepeș (1456–1462). Țepeș [the Impaler], due to his sanguinary character and to the subtle propaganda that surrounded his military and civic acts, entered both history and mythology books under the name of Dracula (Florescu and MacNally 1994; Florescu and MacNally 1989). Ioan de Hunedoara or Hunyadi

János (1406–1456), son of a Romanian nobleman, governor of Transylvania (1441–1446) and regent of the Kingdom of Hungary (1446–1453), also fought against the Ottomans (Mureșanu 2021). The victories in the long war against the Turks were not enough to prevent the obligation to pay a tribute, in money, in agricultural products (cereals, horses, cows, sheep) or in men, requisitioned each year for the armies of the sultans in Istanbul. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the tribute grew larger and larger, causing periods of famine and outbreaks of revolt and social unrest.

The relations of the Romanians with the Ottoman Empire are widely debated in Romanian and Western historiography. Unlike Hungary, Serbia and Bulgaria, which were transformed into *pashaliks*, regions such as Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania, although they were included after a fashion in the Dar-al-Islam ("The House of Peace"), were granted a small degree of autonomy in exchange for payment of the tribute. This autonomy had two fundamental dimensions: first, the right of electing the country's princes, which continued to be limited by the frequent interventions of the Turks who often imposed their own faithful candidates; and second, complete religious freedom. This latter freedom also meant that the Turks had no right to erect mosques or to disseminate religious propaganda in these territories. In the cultural context of the early modern world, where identity was strongly marked by religion, this second aspect of the autonomy granted by the Turks was of great importance.

As we have mentioned the problem of religion, some details about the religious faith of the Romanians should be included, because this plays an important part in the history and characteristics of Romanian witchcraft. For a period of several centuries, whether they lived in Wallachia, Moldavia or Transylvania, a significant majority of the Romanians belonged to the Orthodox Church, thereby remaining close to the Slavic world from a ritual and theological point of view without losing contacts and exchanges with Greek Orthodoxy. Until the seventeenth century the language of the liturgy was Old Church Slavonic, which consolidated an ancient influence of the Slavs on the Romanian people and language. Indeed, if one compares the process of formation of the Romanian people with that of the Western Romanesque peoples, one finds that between the sixth and seventh centuries the Slavs played the same catalytic role that the Germanic peoples played in Western Europe. The affiliation of the Romanian churches to Slavonic culture had a strange consequence: Romanian—although it is a Romance language closely related to Italian (Maiden 2010:

29–43), French, Spanish and Portuguese (Alkire and Rosen 2010: 252–286)—was written in Cyrillic characters until the nineteenth century, adapted in order to reflect some phonetic and grammatical peculiarities. A second consequence of this affiliation is that, from a religious and even a widely cultural point of view, there were numerous exchanges with Bulgarian, Serbian, Ukrainian and Russian influences, enriching Romanian Orthodoxy. The fact that witches and wizards were often judged by Orthodox priests, archpriests and bishops in Romanian cultural regions has also a significance that will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Of course, the Orthodox monolith was not unshakeable. Some influences of Protestantism were felt and, thanks to these, the sacred books began to be translated into the language of the people during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the religious services gave up Old Slavonic in favour of Romanian. In Transylvania, which was an autonomous principality ruled by Hungarian princes between 1526 and 1688, there were a series of transformations in the religious life of the Romanians with the emergence of Austrian domination after 1700. Indeed, the House of Habsburg sought allies amongst the Romanian population who would support the spread of Catholicism, which had almost disappeared from Transylvania, a state ruled by Protestant elites and inhabited by an Orthodox majority. This led to the so-called religious "union," which in turn resulted in the emergence of Greek Catholicism, in 1698–1701. Romanians accepted the Pope's sovereignty and some points of Catholic doctrine, including the existence of Purgatory, the use of unleavened bread for the Eucharist, and the *Filioque*, in exchange for recognition of certain social and political rights, first for the clergy, and then for ordinary people (Verdery 1983: 106–113). Having gained access to schools in Western Europe, the Greek-Catholic Romanians in Transylvania, soon followed by the Orthodox elite, started to push Romanian culture towards modernity.

In Wallachia and Moldavia at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when some Romanians from Transylvania converted to Greek Catholicism, a phenomenon occurred with multiple consequences in the genesis of Romanian modernity: the establishment of the Phanariot rulers, who were originally rich merchants and diplomats from a series of families from the mainly Greek quarter of Phanar in Istanbul. This phenomenon is related to the attempted rebellion against the Ottomans by the Moldavian ruler Dimitrie [Demetrius] Cantemir, through an alliance with the Russians under Tsar Peter the Great. Dimitrie Cantemir was one of the most

cultivated Romanians of his time (Creţu 2018). Educated at the School of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, he spoke several ancient and modern languages. He wrote works with echoes of wider European culture, in Latin, Romanian and Russian. The author of a history of the Ottoman Empire *Incrementa atque decrementa aulae othomanicae* [*History of the Growth and Decay of the Ottoman Empire*], Prince Cantemir was convinced of the inevitable decline of Turkish power and based his political calculations on a Christian reconquest of Constantinople (Cantemir 2010). The alliance with Peter the Great ended with the defeat of the Christian allied armies at the battle of Stănilești (1711) and with Cantemir's exile to Russia, where he highly contributed to the development of cultural life at the court of the tsar. A contemporary and sometime enemy of Dimitrie Cantemir, Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688–1714) ruled in Wallachia. Suspected of treason and conspiracy with the Austrians against the sultan, Brâncoveanu, the last descendant of the old dynasty of the Basarabs (although in the female line), was taken to Istanbul with his four boys and executed without trial in 1714. Following these attempts at independence, the Turks felt the need to exercise stricter control over Moldavia and Wallachia, appointing loyal rulers recruited from the Greek elite of Phanar. These Phanariots paid substantial sums to be named princes, which they tried to recover later by the ruthless extortion of the local population.

The Phanariot period lasted for more than a century, until 1821. It is depicted by Romanian historiography in a gloomy light, because it was marked by instability and corruption. However, during this period a long, slow process of modernisation began in Wallachia and Moldavia that continued more intensively throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. It is during the Phanariot period that historians could place the end of the Middle Ages, as serfdom was abolished in Wallachia in 1746 and in Moldavia in 1749. Under Phanariot rule the first significant Western influences, especially French, entered the Romanian principalities. Attempts were made to modernise the old religious legislation and the foundations of modern institutions were laid, for instance in the domain of public health (Livadă-Cadeschi 2013).

The nineteenth century belonged, as it did everywhere in Europe, to the discovery of national consciousness by intellectuals, who tried to involve the masses as widely as possible in the project of establishing nation states. The Romanian intellectuals of the 1848 generation, educated

mostly in the West (again, particularly in France), founded their national project on the grounds of language unity. Indeed, the Romanian language spoken throughout Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania was surprisingly unitary, despite multiple light dialectal variations. This has facilitated the spread of the idea that Romanians are a unitary people, despite the temporary political boundaries that separate them. To this idea was added the observation that Romanian groups remained unitary from a religious point of view, and that they shared a series of folk traditions, which were not necessarily limited by political boundaries. Language, religion and popular traditions, even if they are solid foundations on which a national consciousness and a nation state can be built, have sometimes been a pretext for nationalist discourses and undemocratic ideologies, throughout history and especially in the interwar period.

The process of national modernisation of the Romanians accelerated with the revolution of 1848 and with the unification of Wallachia and Moldavia into a single state, with the capital in Bucharest (1859). The first ruler of the new country, which assumed the name of Romania in 1861, the liberal Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1859–1866), was a promoter of reforms on a scale never seen before in the history of the Romanians. Schools and universities were established (Iași-Jassy 1860, Bucharest 1864), the peasants were granted land ownership, monastic fortunes were secularised, a system of postal and railway communications was created, fiscal reform was undertaken, the foundations of a national army were laid and the political system was constituted on a rather democratic basis, amongst others. These reforms continued under the reigns of the members of Hohenzollern-Siegmaringen house (Carol I, Ferdinand) and culminated in complete independence from the Ottoman Empire (1877–1878) and the Great Union of 1918, when provinces such as Bukovina, Bessarabia and Transylvania voluntarily joined the Kingdom of Romania.

The twentieth century, as for all European peoples, was a turbulent century for Romanians, marked by two world wars, nationalism and fascism (Nagy-Talavera 1970) and by more than 40 years of communism imposed by the Soviet Union on a purely Stalinist pattern (1947–1989). After 1989, in a continuous and sinuous "transition" to a democratic regime, Romania tended towards stability as a country and developed a series of tolerant and inclusive policies, in accordance with the values of the European Union, to which it belongs. It must be said that, unlike states where Euroscepticism is very fashionable, in Romania this phenomenon is quite rare.

This short overview of the history of the Romanians is meant, as we suggested above, to provide readers who are unfamiliar with these issues a framework in which they can easily place the aspects of the history of witchcraft discussed in this book. The history of witchcraft, as a cultural and social history, is linked by thousands of threads to other historical events and turning points in the existence of society. Those who want to look more deeply into the whole history of the Romanians or into particular details have at their disposal numerous sources in English. A synthesis published by Nicolae Iorga is available. Although written in the nationalist tone specific to the interwar period, this solid work can be read even today for its factual richness, without the need to adopt the author's mindset (Iorga 1925). A work by Radu Florescu, put together according to the puzzle principle, masterfully combines both the chronological principle of historical writing and the highlighting of major themes in Romanian history and historiography in an often seductive narrative style (Florescu 1999). Those who want to get acquainted with a critical reading of Romanian history and national mythology can start with Lucian Boia's successful book, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Boia 2001). For a history of ethnic minorities, with which Romanians had a coexistence marked both by tolerance and by harsh persecution and violence, the works of Andrei Oișteanu, on the image of the Jew in Romanian culture (Oișteanu 2009) and of Viorel Achim on Roma communities (Achim 2004) are recommended. Large fragments of social history are present in the studies by H. H. Stahl on the transition to the capitalist mode of production in the Romanian villages of the Danube region (Stahl 1980), in Laurențiu Rădvan's book about medieval towns in Romania (Rădvan 2010), in the excellent book by Constantin C. Giurescu about the history of man-forest relations in the Romanian regions (Giurescu 1980), and in the work of a group of researchers on the climate of the Carpathian Mountains (Micu et al. 2015). Katherine Verdery's writings are a must-read for anyone who wants to delve into the history of Romanians and Romanian culture, seen in a broad comparative anthropological horizon (Verdery 1983, 1991, 2003, 2014, 2018; Verdery and Kligman 2011) (Fig. 1.1).

The second big question that needs to be partially answered in this introduction is: How to study witchcraft in Romania?

Upon taking a close look at the Romanian cultural area, one easily discovers that magic and witchcraft are living presences throughout history and to this day, in folk and popular culture, and with thousands of fascinating materialisations. Forms of magic and witchcraft, once linked to

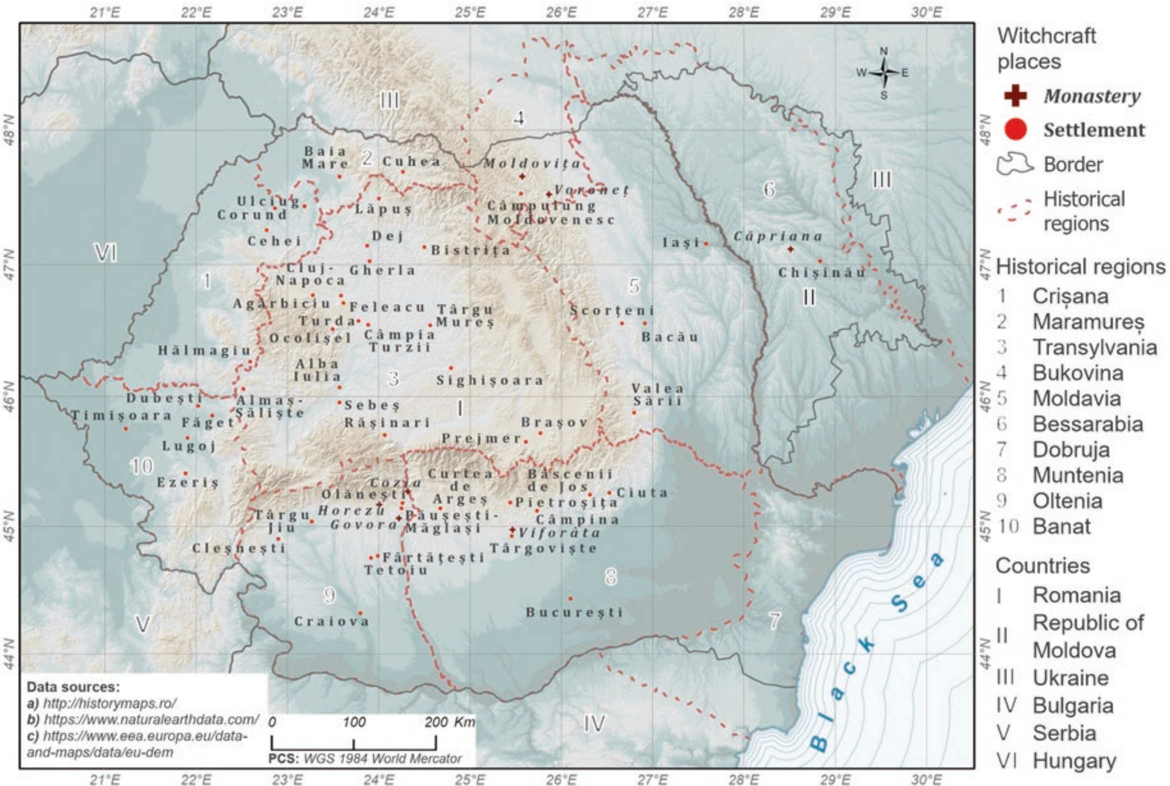


**Fig. 1.1** Map of historical Romanian regions, with the most important places that are referred to in this book. Realised by Gheorghe-Gavrilă Hognogi (Centre for Regional Geography, Faculty of Geography, Babeș-Bolyai University)

manifestations of orality and to the rural world, have adapted extremely well to the digital world and the online environment. In the past, especially from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, there has been no persecution on a large scale against wizards and witches in the Romanian regions, at least as far as we can see in the documents that have survived (codes of laws, trial documents, paintings and religious writings). Capital sentences are also extremely rare, which could lead us to talk of a relative tolerance for the manifestations of magic and for the superstitions of vernacular religion. However, the existence of summary executions, perhaps numerous, but not recorded, such as the one that happened a few years ago in southern Romania, in Dolj County, Oltenia (Zay 2019), is not disproved. The lack of extreme punitive measures and the low number of death sentences for witchcraft in the old Romanian culture must be interpreted as accurately as possible, assuming the necessary methodological caution. Why were witch persecutions quite mild in the old Romanian world? Did the institution-creating elites have a different definition of the risks and dangers that threatened the Christian "City of God?" Were Romanian communities more sensitive to a different kind of fear and a different set of risk factors? Is the "witchcraft discourse" (de Blécourt 2013; de Blécourt 2018) that we can decipher in Romanian sources different from what can be found in Western Europe, or rather similar?

These four questions, centred around the ideas of fear, threat, danger and discourse, seem to suggest that a pattern partially inspired by risk-management theories and partially by narrative and linguistic analysis will be an appropriate theoretical framework for our research. The theory of risk management, developed in the field of economics (Schönhärl 2017; Borghesi and Gaudenzi 2013), but with impressive applications in the fields of sociology, organisational psychology (Bischoff 2008; Johnson and Covello 1987) and the humanities, could provide a model for interpreting the phenomenon of witchcraft. Concepts such as risk, uncertainty, power and fear have been used consonantally in the analysis of witchcraft and magic, by various researchers such as Mary Douglas, Jean Delumeau (Delumeau 1978), William C. Clark, Esther Eidinow (Eidinow 2007) and Ronald Hutton (Hutton 2017).

Even if some of the views he expresses can be nuanced in accordance to some recent witchcraft research (Kounine and Ostling 2016; Elmer 2016; Bever 2008; Barry and Davies 2007), William C. Clark points out that "at the center of the risk problem are people and their fears," fears of loss, injury and the unknown (Clark 1980: 288). According to Clark, "socially

relevant risk" is in fact nothing more than a "perceived inability to cope satisfactorily with the world around us" (Clark 1980: 287), which leads, for example, to the use of witchcraft, at least as it occurred in the era of the Renaissance and the Reformation. For a long time, the witch was only perceived as a symbol of individual risk, until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when the phenomenon experienced a symptomatic socialisation and required a response from the authorities, in particular the Church and the Inquisition but also the secular courts. William C. Clark observes a paradox, namely that "The institutionalized efforts of the Church to control witches can be seen, in retrospect, to have led to witch proliferation" (Clark 1980: 290), but he does not explain it satisfactorily.

Although Mary Douglas has approached magic from a similar perspective since *Purity and Danger* (1966), her most fertile work in this regard seems to be that of 1992, *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory* (Douglas 2003), in which the author constructs a "cultural theory of risk" (Douglas 2003: 46–48) to explain the various patterns of "blame" that anthropologists may identify. According to Mary Douglas, risk perception models should "take into account culturally distinct attitudes to authority and order" (Douglas 2003: 44), because risk perception issues are essentially political. Two interesting cases with which Mary Douglas argues this cultural theory of risk are medieval and African witchcraft, and leprosy, seen as "exclusion strategies," directed against people perceived as risks to civil order (Douglas 2003: 83–101). Different cultures use accusations of witchcraft or the spread of infectious diseases in order to control people who do not fit into the social system and to maintain the forms of authority and power enshrined in those societies. The exclusion model, as the British anthropologist points out, always involves accusations around blood, sex, food and religion: witches and wizards are often accused of shedding innocent blood, having multiple or illegal sexual activities, poisoning food and endangering the group in which they live or its established religious systems. Depending on the evolution and institutional structures of society, witchcraft accusations may be directed upwards, at the holders of power, downwards, at the majority or community to be controlled, or outwards, at outsiders who threaten the strength of community ties.

In the vast and complex network of risk perception, witchcraft has evolved over time as a discourse, involving not only words and notions but also attitudes and actions. Starting from the researches of Stuart Clark and Jeanne Favret-Saada, to which he sometimes refers polemically (de Blécourt 2018: 2–4, 8–9, 13–14, 21–22), Willem de Blécourt has developed the concept of "witchcraft discourse," which should not be confused

with a simple and banal "discourse on witchcraft." This concept has been defined in an extremely concise and striking way by Willem de Blécourt: "the most relevant way to deal with witchcraft is to treat it as a discourse, a coherent system of concepts, stories, and actions" (de Blécourt 2013: 363). The concept of "witchcraft discourse" seems relevant to the study of witchcraft and we used it ourselves as a working tool: every time readers will find it in the next chapters, they will have to keep in mind how Willem de Blécourt articulated its meanings.

It goes without saying that, given the historical perspective we assume on the phenomenon of witchcraft in Romanian culture, in this monographic survey we must include data from all historical provinces of present-day Romania, including Transylvania and the eastern part of the old Principality of Moldavia, which today forms the Republic of Moldova. Our analysis will endeavour to remain attentive to context and to the way in which the phenomena we are trying to describe and interpret were integrated in the cultural nexus of the epoch in which they occurred. We will try not to commit anachronisms or project clichés and perspectives that belong to contemporary people onto the facts and ideas of people who undoubtedly had a different mentality from our own.

A synthetic and rigorous presentation of witchcraft in Romania cannot be made without an integration of the bibliography of the topic, published, unfortunately, mostly in Romanian. The Romanian bibliography presents another paradox: most of the works are founded on rigorous ethnographic field researches, without a historical perspective, as if witchcraft had no history in Romanian cultural areas. In libraries and folklore archives all over the country, in Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara and Iași, there are numerous collections of incantations, descriptions of magical practices and of healing rituals, in most cases without a theoretical or historical framework. Nevertheless, if the researchers take a closer look at ancient texts, images and historical documents, they will discover the breadth of a field of study that is almost completely new and promises far-reaching discoveries.

Very few books and articles on Romanian witchcraft and folk traditions are published in international languages (English or French), so this topic is unfortunately quite absent in international academic debates and in intellectual cartographies. Some works, such as those published by Agnes Murgoci (Murgoci 2005), Mircea Eliade (Eliade 1972), Harry P. Senn (Senn 1982) and Ioan P. Couliano (Couliano 1987), even though they are readable and contain judicious perspectives, are methodologically outdated and fail to give a comprehensive perspective on the topic. These

researches can be used nowadays through a close critical reading, applied in order to discern what is still valid and stimulating from what can no longer withstand a careful analysis, based on a perfectly logical chain of arguments.

A paper by Mircea Eliade deserves a short discussion here, because it contains useful historical considerations on Romanian witchcraft and on some possible ways to approach it (Eliade 1976). Here are some recommendations for study directions and methodological perspectives found in Eliade's paper:

> I will turn now to another area of study, unfortunately neglected by Western scholarship, namely, the Romanian folkloric traditions. Here we are confronted with an archaic popular culture which developed under a less rigid ecclesiastical control than was common in central or western Europe. Furthermore, the Romanian church, like all other eastern European Greek Orthodox churches, did not possess an institution analogous to the Inquisition; consequently, though heresies were not unknown, there was no systematic and massive witch persecution. What is even more important, Romanian is a Romance language which, during the Middle Ages, was not influenced by ecclesiastical and Scholastic Latin. That is to say, Romanian represents a direct development of the vulgar Latin spoken in the province of Dacia in the first centuries of our era. This linguistic archaism is of great help in understanding European witchcraft. (Eliade 1976: 78)

As Eliade states, the study of witchcraft in Romanian cultural areas is important because it can confirm the reality of magical beliefs and practices, which were extremely active in folk culture. The main arguments in this regard are that historical information about Romanian witchcraft does not come from persecutors (which is only partially true, as we will try to show below) and that a number of archaic practices and terms have been particularly well-preserved over time. Eliade's sources are the extensive research of Romanian folklorists from the nineteenth century (B. P. Hasdeu, Nicolae Densusianu, Elena Niculiță-Voronca).

From a linguistic point of view, Eliade is especially interested in two terminological complexes: *striga/strigoi* and *zâne*. The first two terms initially designated living actors, namely witches and wizards. *Strix*, *strigis*, **striga* (a term of Greek origin) meant something like "witch" in Latin. The Italian terms *strega-streghe*, *stregone-stregoni* can also be related to this etymology. The Romanesque domain also provides us with other convincing examples: in Naples, a witch is called a *strecca*, and in different parts of

Sardinia the terms *istria*, *isthrea*, *istriga*, *stria* and *istrione* are registered. With the passage of time, *strigoi* became the main Romanian term for describing a vampire, and this linguistic and cultural phenomenon is still quite obscure. The *zâne* [fairies] are imaginary feminine beings that fly through the sky at night, and who "display a rather ambivalent character" (Eliade 1976: 80), seducing those who see them, or striking humans who do not respect certain prohibitions with illness. Their name derives from that of the goddess Diana. *Striga-strigoi* and *zâne* were not completely replaced by Slavic or Hungarian words, which confirms the archaic nature and the possible Latin origin of the practices and beliefs they describe. These practices left many traces in Romanian folklore.

Mircea Eliade's hypotheses were picked up and somewhat developed by his disciple, Ioan P. Couliano, in an appendix to the book *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance. 1484*, "La réalité de la sorcellerie" [The Reality of Witchcraft] (Couliano 1984: 335–350). Couliano's volume caused quite a stir at the time of its publication in 1984, as the author tried to argue in favour of the so-called pharmacological hypothesis on witchcraft and the Sabbath. According to this highly contested hypothesis, the witches of the past, well versed in medicinal herbs, suffered from hallucinations caused mainly by the consumption of nightshades, during which they imagined that they were flying on the Sabbath, where they would have generally challenged the postulates of the Christian faith. As far as Romanian witchcraft is concerned, Couliano is interested in the popular traditions regarding the magical flight of witches during two specific saints' nights: Saint George (April 23) and St. Andrew (November 30). He is also interested in knowledge of popular pharmacopoeia and beliefs about the theft of fertility, as Romanian witches are thought to go naked at night about their neighbours' fields to store the fertility power for transfer to their own fields. The phenomenon of witchcraft in Western Europe and among the Romanians is probably of Roman origin, from Couliano's perspective, but the contamination with knowledge of popular pharmacopoeia among the conquered peoples (Dacians, Getae) is not disproved.

Integrating into a long and solid academic tradition of investigating Romanian witchcraft, contemporary researchers, who undertook a critical reading of Eliade and Culianu, published a series of contributions available in English and based on updated methodologies. Beyond the focus on folk culture, these contributions are increasingly open to historical realities and promise to help the inclusion of Romanian witchcraft in cartographic circuits and in extensive syntheses that cover the entire continent. Bogdan

Neagota, critically situated in a tradition marked by Carlo Ginzburg and I. P. Couliano, is very interested in ecstatic witchcraft, battles for fertility and ritual scenarios (Neagota 2019). Ileana Benga developed extensive field researches in the Roșia Montană area of Transylvania, providing valuable materials on witches' gatherings, the stealing of milk and beliefs in ritual battles (Benga 2015: 99–129). Mircea Păduraru, a specialist in Romanian folkloric and written demonology (Păduraru 2020), occasionally turned his attention to various forms of divination (Păduraru 2014). Emanuela Timotin devoted extensive researches to charms and charming and to their presence in old Romanian manuscripts, publishing numerous articles in Romanian and French but few in English (Timotin 2019; Timotin 2012; Timotin 2011; Timotin 2009). Ioan Pop-Curșeu has studied xenophobic stereotypes and realities relating to Roma witches in Romanian culture, in an article that uses both literary representations and factual, historical and sociological data (Pop-Curșeu 2014).

Transylvania demonstrates a number of interesting features from an ethnographic and historical point of view, but also from the point of view of bibliographic representation of these features. Being a multicultural province, the study of witchcraft has followed several directions, clearly marked from an ethnic point of view. German researchers have focused mainly on materials related to German-speaking populations (Göllner 1971), while Hungarian researchers have favoured the study of witchcraft among Hungarian-speaking populations (Klaniczay and Pócs 2017). In these solid and useful researches, the presence of Romanians in trials or in the social interactions related to witchcraft is not deeply analysed: at best, it is barely mentioned (Kis-Halas 2017: 172, 188, 200, 212). Only recently did Șarolta Solcan try to provide a synthesis, in Romanian, on the subject of witchcraft in Transylvania, making accessible for the Romanian audience a series of data that show how complex the interethnic relations were regarding witchcraft in this province. Her book is useful, without being extraordinary in any way (Solcan 2019). A close look at the written sources and other materials will be able to fill this gap and reinstate Romanians in the network of Transylvanian witchcraft cases.

What does our research add to all these previous investigations, some of them very rigorous, subtle and deep? Firstly, it is a historical study, which will try to link the history of Romanian witchcraft with general trends that manifested at a European level. This is also the first study that offers an extensive correlated investigation of witchcraft legislation and the trials that involved alleged witches. Secondly, it is a study that tries, based on

previous research, to understand the presence of Romanians in the history of witchcraft in Transylvania, as defendants, as discoverers of witches and, sometimes, as accusers. Thirdly, it includes the study of witchcraft iconography in Romanian culture and the presentation of impressive images. These three novel points are brought together in a dual architecture: in *Part I*, we will focus on real-world legislation and trials, using theoretical insights from the anthropology of risk, and in *Part II* we will investigate the punitive discourse against witchcraft, built by the Orthodox Church through texts and images related to the Last Judgment and to life in the underworld. Thus, the two complementary parts of the book will illuminate each other.

Before entering into the concrete subject of the book, a few linguistic clarifications are needed. Regarding proper names, we have opted to keep these in Romanian, except in cases a name has a well-known variant in English (for instance, Bucharest instead of București). In the case of Transylvania and the Banat, the names of persons or places will be used according to the current official version. In the case of place names, we will often specify the German and Hungarian names, in order to facilitate the orientation of readers in the bibliography complementary to our study, which can vary freely in its use of particular naming conventions (we will often use the tripartite Cluj-Napoca/Klausenburg/Kolozsvár pattern). Regarding some terms that are very specific for the context we are approaching, we will often use these in the original language, in italics, followed by the most accurate translation into English that we can provide, according to the model *pravilă* [book of laws].

Regarding the terminology of witchcraft, we will try to maintain a coherent approach through a systematic rendering in English of the various terms used in Romanian. We will start from the current form of the language, in which the most used terms are the nouns *vrăjitor-vrăjitoare* (translated as *wizard-witch*) and the verb *a vrăji* (translated as *to bewitch*). The noun *vrajă* would be best translated into English as *spell*. Up until the nineteenth century, the most used terms were *farmec* for the act of enchantment, *fermecător-fermecătoare* for its human agents and the verb *a fermeca*. We chose to translate them, according to the specific connotations that they have developed over time, as *charm*, *charmer* and *to charm*. The noun *enchantress* will also frequently be used for *fermecătoare*. For old nouns, as *strigă-strigoaică-strigoi*, or for the rare Transylvanian regionalism *bosoarcă*, we will resort to the terms *sorceress-sorcerer*, as the closest semantic entities and the easiest to understand for English-speaking