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**rites of passage
in the ethnographical area of
SĂLAJ**

Doctoral Thesis Summary

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Doctoral Thesis summary

At the beginning of the chapter regarding *Birth*, we sought reasonable to emphasize that, in the ethnographical zone of Sălaj, wedding fecundity rituals, prenatal rites and the rituals with regard to confinement, are meant to help the child better integrate within the community, within the kin, within the livelihood. In this context, they are developed rituals that mark the transition from one stage of existence to another revealing core group values. It is still believed insistently, even to this day, that the passage from the stage of pre-existence can be positively influenced by following a series of norms and still, present birth ceremonies differ from ancient ceremonies, a fact reflected by the sources of our study. We expressed our view upon these ceremonies which preserve only faded aspects of ancient customs, practices and beliefs that are part of common structural typology as shown in the works of other researchers. They certify the affiliation of the ethnographical zone of Sălaj to the cultural area of the north - west of Transylvania with aspects of cultural features extremely eloquent concerning the unity of Romanian popular culture. As may be noticed, the originality of these features speaks about an individualization of this zone within the larger North- Transylvanian space. Here, as in every part of the country, the community closely watches over the path that must be made smoothly and protected from long periods of instability.

Briefly, we outlined the fact that the birth of a child is considered as a unique moment, even if during a community lifetime, is an event of recurrence which receives social and cultural pressure reflected by a set of behaviors and attitudes. We can assert that no radical changes regarding the act of birth have been depicted giving the fact that the most significant moments of our existence appear, every time, on the same background of solidarity and respect of traditional norms and with the same depth of emotions and feelings.

First of all, according to the persons questioned, the state of pregnancy is deeply marked by feelings of worry and anxiety brought about by this exciting mystery of man's appearance in the world, received with joy but with fear as well. It is believed that God has the absolute power upon the couple's fecundity and therefore, the number of children did not represent an obvious interest, an attitude of ignorance that also has its origins in rural community's religious-based beliefs regarding the act of birth. What we must consider is the fact that, in the absence of trained persons, the midwife, a woman more or less experienced, was the one who shared her „medical” knowledge to other women, to daughters- in- law, who, most of the times became midwives as well. Empirical practice, as stated, took the place of knowledge from medical and scientific domains, a deficiency that may be added the existence of complex prohibitive attitudes having a preventive or curative purpose. In this respect, the expectant mother was exempted from hard work that might put in danger little baby's life - a very important remark giving the fact that the cases of death (both, mother and fetus) were not few due to the ignorance concerning some norms of behavior, as we were informed.

The conclusions of our study based upon our research stated adequately in the body of our paper as well, outline the existence, in the traditional community of Sălaj, of magical methods of protection, closely watched by the mother, the mother- in- law and other old women to be respected, as there was no competent person to provide health care. Most of the times, the confined woman was constrained to start her household duties shortly after giving birth, despite the fact that she was still weakened. The children had to follow the same treatment giving the difficult living conditions, which demanded great force and vigor in

order to survive. Infant mortality frequency was a reality until the population loss has been stopped, at first, by the progress of science and medicine. These aspects have been discussed in separate chapters.

Our aim was to analyze the customs with regard to birth, which unfold over a long period of time, starting with a series of fecundity rites from the wedding, continuing with rites preceding the birth of the child and with the rites that concern the birth itself, the confinement period, the ceremony of Christening, the postnatal period - which show the need to follow certain practices; after an overview, we stopped upon some important aspects. Most families had up to seven children or even more while nowadays the number is two or three; the joy of having children was greater at the birth of the first children, a feeling that faded along the years for the other children's birth. We made some notes in what concerns the significant event of man's existence, marked by popular rituals having their roots in magical beliefs meant to protect him; this is also the case of a child's birth, a joyful event that gathered the entire community, jointly participating at this event. Consequently, the natural care, as we stated, of giving the child a place in the community, of protecting and influencing his destiny, resulted in a variety of concerns related to the moment of birth. Any harm or bad influence could be avoided, according to the ancient mentality as long as certain norms were respected, norms that concerned especially the post-natal period of six weeks.

In this context, we specifically outlined the fact that the godfather and the godmother maintain with persistency their privileged role in the life of folk popular practices, most of them having Christian roots. We analyzed these complex means of expression of a united community, belonging to the traditional popular environment, still governed by ancient practices, founded hundreds of years ago. Although they appear obsolete in the eyes of the young, these practices are assimilated even since the childhood and define an ancient and solid world outlook.

We also marked the fact, according to popular beliefs when a child is born, a lode star appears, a star that eventually becomes a shooting star in the moment of death. According to villagers from Sălaj, the life of the new-born child is not influenced by the Fates alone but also by the circumstances of the birth itself. For instance, if the child is born with the umbilical cord curled up around his neck, this is a sign for a hostile destiny. The interest for the baby's fate in the moment of birth is still kept nowadays. Wedding most important moments include some rites and fecundity rituals for - according to the answers offered - "the woman's wish is that to be a mother and marriage is for giving birth". Consequently, the habits concerning the birth start from the wedding ceremony when some ritual gestures with special meaning for fecundity are made, chosen in moments that have a symbolical value: the girl leaving her family, the group of friends and the transition to another level of different meanings, and having different duties. We analyzed the symbolical gestures of this habit that are meant to express the wish to have descendants but also - in exceptional cases - gestures for delaying or even hindering pregnancy. Nowadays couple's wish is for a maximum number of three children, a higher number being considered as shameful, as concluded on the field, although, in the past, the pride grew along with the number of children. In traditional society, the wish of the new founded families of having children was based on several facts: the perpetuity of the family, of the name, the need for labor hands, the proof of couple's health. As declared by the participants to our inquiry, the actions meant to affect fecundity were made by women who had a considerable number of children and wanted to put an end to the procreation, the young girls that were not married or the ones with poor living conditions; we were specifically told, in most cases that, during the communist government, there were cases of death of some women due to the empirical methods of causing the abortion, methods used by the so-called "experienced persons" working in secret and having the endless fear of being punished according to the law. Seen from the point of view of

today's society, the cult for the one's family and people referred to as a "larger family", is based on a powerful tradition that has in its center the undeniable pride of perpetuating the family; in this context if the wish of having children was the most important, the idea of sterility was seen as "a curse", interpreted in most cases in a magical sense; the respective woman was considered the victim of evil persons' hostility who casted spells upon her, witchcraft charms which were, naturally, we dear to say, fought against. The parents' wish is that of having healthy, beautiful children, wish that is undermined to this day by the fear of not giving birth to children with infirmities or signs – all these being out of the normal. We submitted to our attention the interdictions during the pregnancy period implied by the popular beliefs, based on the idea that mother's behavior can influence the physical and moral features of the child. The pregnant woman had to respect some unwritten rigors and certain stages having a normative character, all these strict beliefs that regarded, however, the woman's health. During pregnancy the woman protected herself from some actions in order to not endanger the life of the child, interdictions and attitudes that had a taboo character. As repeatedly declared by the people questioned, the parents were happier at a boy's birth, carriers of the name and of the family. They were seen as a future reliable help at the household works and it was considered that they would not cause so many troubles and concerns for the parents; also, on the day of birth, especially of a boy, there was the habit of putting him on the table, a special place as „to become a person highly appreciated by the others.” The influence of the destiny by means of word and gesture, was an aim in the context of a strong creed in the ethnographical zone of Sălaj, however, along the years a part of this ancient ensemble of manifestations, generated by the moment of birth have lost its consistency or had even forgotten, continuing to exist only in the memoir of the elder.

We outlined the tradition that precedes the birth which presupposed that the woman should read prayers daily and to receive the Eucharist more often in order to give birth easily and to have healthy children. Seen as inconceivable nowadays, is the old habit emphasized insistently, of giving birth directly on the ground or by the fireplace, on one's bended knees, all these in the context of a lack of medical assistance at the countryside - nowadays births are under control of a medical staff at a maternity.

In the territory investigated, at the moment of inquiry, the period that precedes the birth lost its features concerning the rituals meant to ease the birth. Nevertheless, some measures that vary from one village to another in the region, lasted; from the series of practices used in favor of "an easy birth of healthy babies" - last motif of the avowals of the inquired participants, most of them are received from the Christian faith, traditionally inherited, according to which the priest has the most significant role. The women were fasting, praying, going to monasteries and churches, leaving diptychs, confessing and receiving the Eucharist making consecration of the house especially if the risk of not having descendants (this possibility is received as a risk while the alternative of resignation or more, that of adoption were inconceivable) is generating beliefs, fears, frights. What is more important to notice is the fact that the mother's symptoms in the period of the nine months were seen as "pieces of witchcraft" from the part of the hostile persons and they were fought against by means of "purification by fast and pray".

We insisted upon the fact that, in the traditional village, women were giving birth at home until the medical system's progress along with the maternities; cutting the umbilical cord required a certain skill and symbolized the cut of child's bond with the mother, as well as the fact that he/she is joining the community. The midwife was preparing the first bath of the child with water brought from the well or from the spring, after the sunrise, in a new pot used only for bathing; the object used to be put in the first bath differed from one village to another, but the ritual concerning the water was always present. The midwife was still the person who brought the first little clothes, who took care of the cradle keeping a prayer book

just next to the baby, along with the incense and the basil. For a beautiful voice the child was given water from a small bell. We discussed about the midwife's duty to take care of the child and mother during a period that lasted from one day to several weeks; she brought the food, did the cleaning and sprinkled with holy water throughout the house. If the child was dying, the greatest fear was that of a death without being Christianized, consequently he/she received a name and the midwife pronounced the special words of the baptize above the child's head while sprinkling holy water. The three days after the child's birth were considered to be decisive; therefore, certain rites meant to protect him were fulfilled. The midwife left the baby with his mother a gesture symbolically marked by the midwife who took a thread or a lint off her clothes and said " I leave you the sleep and the breast" while putting the lint in the cradle. This gesture was made by all the persons coming to see the child.

We afterwards made a sketch of the background of traditional life: the elder women were the ones who informed the future mother about the interdictions that they must be aware of, believing that, if they are respected the child's life is not put into danger. In this context, the midwife who was in most of the cases, an old person as well, took part at the birth along with the entire unfolding: of the birth rituals and the ones regarding the proper entrance of the child in his family, people and village community. The confinement period is considered to last forty days after the birth, a period in which the confined woman is given a series of limits/constraints: she must not leave the courtyard, not pass over water, otherwise she loses milk, not bring water from the well, not baked, not go to church for she is not "pure". In this period a series of behavior interdictions are formulated as well; the child's clothes must not be left outside after the sunset, the water from the bath must not be thrown after the sunset, the mother must throw the milk surplus only on flowers, at the bottom of a vineyard or of a tree for not "losing her breast", no woman during menses should be near the child as not to defile him, the child must not be left alone or be scared. In the cradle it is useful to put, as we were informed in the field, incense, a prayer book and not least, the child should be told stories or one should sing to him, for better sleep. It was respected, in most cases, Church's advice to give the child only one name which should be the name of a saint, apostle, martyr, or pious, on the ground that the saints had only one name and that on the Day of Judgment, Jesus Christ would call each person on one first name, which, on the other hand, cannot be changed except for the cases of persons who become monks. The name is considered to be in a close relationship with the person's destiny and the action of changing it would imply a weakening of latent forces of luck that could turn against the human being in this way. According to the tradition, the child's name should be decided on the eighth day after birth; giving the child a name symbolized not only the individualization but also the proper entrance in the society. The criteria used when choosing the name proved to be quite limited, but above all - as already shown, the closest religious celebration from the moment of birth was taken into consideration; the child received the saint's name along with his/her protection, protection from a model of virtue. In what concerns a family name, the child received either the name of the father, the grandfather, the great-grandfather, the godfather or the name of a respected villager, admired for his qualities or welfare that the child could resemble. The old criteria are not having the same firmness nowadays, although it is known that according to the tradition, the same of the child should have a spiritual reference, saints names from the orthodox calendar - whose protection they receive in the moment they are offered the name, that is on the eighth day after birth - aspect underlined constantly in our survey.

We submitted to analyze the entire set of gestures related to his beginning moment, rich in symbolical meanings; the preparation of the first bath also belonged to his category of gestures, bath in which different objects were put, having magical powers as well as the

power to transmit their foremost virtues and qualities to the child. This transfer is defined in the virtue of a basic principal of magic which requires the necessity for the water to be unspoiled, new, pure; it will eventually be thrown in a clean place, in a river, or if there is no flowing water in the nearby area, it may be thrown in the garden, at the roots of a tree, practices that may have a positive influence on the child protecting him/her of any harm, firstly by not leaving him lonely, then by keeping close to the child an iron made object which was seen as an object having the power to protect the child and that banished the bad spirits while the mother was away. We mentioned the increased care especially in the period of six weeks that precedes the christening of the child, period in which, without the guardian angel the child was extremely exposed and therefore vulnerable; in order to be kept away from “bad eyes”, a red thread was tied to the child’s arm; in order for the child to have dimples in his chin or her cheeks, that zone was pressed insistently with the finger.

These facts are known and preserved, but only in the memory of the elder lasted prescriptions like the one according to which, after birth, in the well-known and mentioned period of forty days, the confined woman should drink holly water for protection and for “the child’s milk to be blessed”. The water was brought by the midwife or by someone in the family, from the church since the mother could not leave the house, water that must be put in every bath.

We considered interesting to analyze the way in which the concern for the wellbeing of the baby, for its harmonious and complete growth has received nowadays features that would have been hard to conceive a few decades ago, and this, in the context of the life standards development and of the easy access to information and education, fact shown insistently in the testimonies of the questioned person.

We examined the special treatment in the case of children died without being Christianized, treatment marked by indifference because these children were buried without the custom of burial, a fact extremely surprising to those unaware of the sternness of popular mentality. We tried to clarify some problematical aspects; according to the Christian-Orthodox doctrine the baby should be Christianized after, in case it was ill; tradition forbids as well marriage between of the godfathers and of the godchildren considered “brothers”, along with the right to godfather/ godmother of those who “are leaving together without the marriage ceremony or that have been stopped to take the Eucharist by the bishop or priest”. We outlined also some practices of the Orthodox Church, for instance the ones referring to the fact that, before standing as godfather/ godmother, one should confess oneself and take the Eucharist. In the case the little one becomes an orphan, it is the duty of the godfather and the godmother to raise it. The importance received joyfully by the spiritual parents of the child could also be seen in the fact that they were offered special places at table, “next to the priest”. At the feast following the baptize, only the close persons attended in a small number, the women brought the food while the men brought the drinks for helping the family of the new-born child, who also received gifts. Nowadays, the feast following the baptize is far more complex – from the point of view of the participants, sometimes up to a hundred, as we were related, and from the point of view of the unfolding of the events.

We also intended to analyze some aspects regarding the nursing and the wean; the moment the baby was not offered mother milk anymore, generated fears and concerns, founding a new step in the relationship built at birth and presupposing a temporary detachment from the mother – a step towards the independence of the child but also of the mother, to whom, the nursing and therefore the complete dependence of the child meant a restriction and certain psychical troubles. If the child was ill and had little chances of surviving or if several brothers had previously died, the habit of giving the child “for nothing” or the habit “to sell the baby”, was practiced. A woman having a considerable number of healthy children and that had no dead children was chosen and she received a

symbolical amount of money. According to the value scales of the traditional society – as seen – boys birth in the family generated a greatest joy compared with the cases of girls birth., for they carried the family's name, the unity of the patrimony and that of the family while the girls, for getting married, needed their marriage portion, fact that contributed to the diminution of family's wealth unlike in the case of boys. With the same view was implied the fact that the girl must keep her honor piously, a fact that presupposed an increased vigilance from the part of the parents and of the persons from the family, which gave birth to other several fears and concerns. In the case of accidents of this type, the disgrace of the family had to be redeemed by the “enrichment” of the girl's marriage portion and by the acceptance of certain severe conditions that otherwise were absolutely out of any consideration.

Given the redundancy of the information offered regarding the raise and protection of the child – especially in the period of six weeks from the birth - we will try to outline only the important aspects. Thus, the little baby was carried in a cradle on the head or in a knapsack on the back and could always be moved by means of some strings. They were nursed by the mother, not by a nurse while, “if the source of milk drained the child received cow milk, but never one could hear that the child was put to another breast”. They wore poor clothes and shoes – sternness that helped them become stronger since they were little, which made them gain strength in order to be able to survive within an environment which was often hostile. The child took part at the works related to the household as soon as his/her age was fitted for these works. They took care of the animals, getting accustomed to some activities of the household in order to earn the daily bread on one's own as soon as possible.

The poor living standard was not in favor of an attitude of profound affection towards their children, at least not revealed, in the context of a large family, in most of the cases having minimum four children – there was no control over the number of children, although the partners could have this control. Moreover, life unfavorable circumstances, the sternness of labor, most of the times exhausting, the varied deprivations, the high degree of ignorance, which generated therefore certain indifference, shallowness regarding the relation parent-child. Nevertheless, nowadays we can talk, without generalizing, about a real cult for taking care of the children's physical and mental health and for their integration in the society, the act of birth also having a social aspect.

We also intended to analyze the vulnerable situation of certain children: according to the mentality of villagers from Sălaj, the children that were not born in a married couple, together with the ones that have physical or mental infirmities, body signs, regardless of their origin, are seen as belonging to a particular category – out of the ordinary – as we dare to name, which is given a variety of interpretations, some of them completely surprising. Blood tie is a very strong one; therefore between the members of a community, “the family would vanish” having no descendants, which explains why the adopted children were coming, in most cases from the family (nephews), so that the wealth could be kept without any waste. On the other hand, in what concerns the stepchildren or the ones that were adopted, the issue regarding the relations takes another shape, as we tried to demonstrate.

Regarding the nuptial cycle, deeply connected to the community's mentality, it may be inferred, based on our field research approach, that although today only a part of the customs are followed, they entailed the dynamic participation of the entire community who watched over the establishment and integration of the new couple in the social life of the community. The deeper sense of those beliefs meant to ensure happiness and wealth to the new founded family continues to be valued by performing certain acts – more related to spectacular than to their ancient magical essential character, a fact that researchers outline. The complex popular ceremony offered by the wedding, whose social character has always been marked, is seen as a plenary feast. In this point we make an adequate remark that relates, as a matter of fact to our entire approach: we mention that, the research of this broad theme

presupposed, as in the case of the other two chapters, the use of speech transcriptions from a tape recorder (made available at the records of folklore of the Romanian Academy) and direct transcriptions made under dictation, the interviews being accompanied by the direct observation of a wedding from the village Ban, in the summer of 2008 (along with the participation to other ceremonies that did not specifically represented a subject of research but contributed to the buildup of a solid and relevant image of the subject matter, being in favor, among others, of the questionnaires application, the analyze of certain significant aspects but also detailed discussions about the subject matter aimed at). The questionnaires were formulated by us, the questionnaires of Ion Muşlea being the source model (*The Folklore Records of the Romanian Academy, Studies, founding memoirs, activity reports, questionnaires, 1930-1948*, Commentary, notes, chronology, comments and bibliography by Ion Cuceu and Maria Cuceu, Foreword by Ion Cuceu, Publisher: Foundation for European Studies, Cluj-Napoca, 2002), a guide mark of great value that also lays down the criteria for ranging the folklore-based sources. We specify that we considered proper to render the regional version of the language, having certain phonetically, lexical and grammatical particularities – that we dare to consider extremely relevant and surprising for both, us and the ones less acquainted with this territorial branching of language which, as outlined, shows some specific features, particularly relevant for this context. With a view to avoid using a special sign notation for rendering the language aspects, as being beyond our authority and competence, we sought suitable to transcribe exactly as we were spoken, to transpose (and to do the necessary adjustments when needed, to ease interpretation). Also, we considered our initial aim to render the language in a different shape, the manner of speech of the persons questioned in a different tonality, embellishing the structures, as a gesture of distortion, of falsification that would have been detrimental to the image we intended to render. Therefore, instead of using the foot of the page we considered the brackets to be more adequate. The annex includes, besides the bibliography repertoire, texts on nuptial and funeral themes, selected according to their relevance, as well as photos from weddings and funerals (some of them took by us, others made available by a questioned person from the Cernuc village – selected from a set of such photos, collected from most places that were investigated). We structured the study in parts and chapters, guided by the authenticity intention, according to which, we rendered as such the regionalisms, regional phonetics, certain phonetically and morphological forms, as well as the syntax, sometimes obscure, difficult even; we maintained forms of anacoluthon, cacophony, dissonance or forms that belong to traditional expression and that probably do not reveal at first sight.

As known, nuptial scenery is built upon a long traditional practice and custom, including symbolical episodes and successive manifestations. Wedding gives occasion to manifestations that contain faded reflexions of mythical thinking that have their multiple sense, according to the answers we were given in the territory investigated; however, the ancient magical grounds have been lost, as a consequence of the faded ritual rigors.

As reflected by the researches, the wedding in Sălaj, belongs to Transylvanian wedding specificity area, made unique however by some particularities. The spiritual values of the villagers of Sălaj surprise by a complex relevance as contemporary reality shows remarkable aspects in the peasant way of thinking. Solidarity is patent, the participants' contribution is that of money, but also of home used objects, rarely, that become a real material aid for the new founded family. We advance in this way, the statement according to which certain aspects of the complex nuptial ceremony, seen as a developed expression of the unity of a community, bears particular features, ancient traditions that individualizes the wedding of Sălaj in the context of Romanian wedding specificity, traditions that are well preserved or, on the contrary, that are subject to transformation, to the development of traditional ceremony, of the former manifestations that had a deep archaic character.

The wedding feast must be abundant as required by tradition, but the folk manifestations that accompany all the other moments of the ceremony, are equally impressive: a synthesis of traditional elements that coexist with more recent ones and resulted from the process of unceasing development which marks the act of creation as well. Some aspects represent therefore, an innovation that started approximately thirty years ago while others preserved their ancient roots based on magical rites, despite the considerable assaults of the last decades. We will also mention that inobservance of the moral code, of the interdictions that regard the wedding as: spiritual relationship, remarrying before the period of one year in case of widowers, high age difference, kidnap, a child's birth before marriage – represent a cause of disintegration and instability that affect the entire community. We can say that the ceremony moments have somehow preserved throughout the territory, although the portrait of a wedding differs from one place to another within the same village. As we were related, one explanation would be the material conditions of the couple, the frequently met preference to hire a building at the town, or, if the guests are invited to the village's house of culture, the preference to resort to restaurant services, simplifying in a visible manner the customs regarding the cuisine. The number and the meaning of the key moments differ from one place to another; also, some ritual aspects' meaning had faded, nevertheless this did not affect the complexity of wedding unfolding.

More important is the fact that the unfolding often gets an epical shape as the achievement of passing to the new stage generates not only concerns and anxiety but also a variety of feelings that regard optimism, joy and a certain moral vitality. The ceremonial ritual course with its significant moments represent today, for the rural community, an equal number of opportunities to jointly accompany the couple that, according to basic elements of magical belief, must be watched over and protected especially in these moments, given its vulnerable statute, a conviction that governs the beliefs and the mentalities. The foreshadowed image, with deep ritual-mythical connections is that of the fulfillment of a sense of duty regarding the solidarity in difficult moments, a creed whose recurrence and depth was a real surprise.

According to the studies made by specialists the reasons for marriage were multiple, from the impulse to live in communion with someone, following the divine demand, to the wish to have a legacy for the descendants, to maintain the name, to perpetuate the family, to have the aid and support of children when older, to rely on persons to carry out their Christian funerals, the diptychs, the requiems. The persons questioned upon these matters insisted to outline the fact that the period that precedes the wedding, as required, is maintained in most cases nowadays, from one to five years, in the context in which a longer postponing would lead to consider the girls over twenty-five years old as “stuffy”, “closed”, and those over twenty years old as a “hag”. According to the traditional mentality, some character features like diligence and kindness were very appreciated while, according to the moral standards, “belonging to a good family” was the mark for a special family, a prominent family of the community, mark that attested the fact that the boy was fitted for marriage. Professional preparation, “the education, a well-paid job”, the profession, were among the criteria for choosing the partners. The decisive element was that of being kind and able to fulfill the activities required at every age and sex. According to a local saying, “beautiful is what you like”. In the traditional society from Sălaj, a complex structure of directives, prescriptions meant to strengthen man's resistance when facing the effects and the evil forces coming from the outside. The feelings of psychological safety and stability were vital and in order to keep them pure, the man with respect to tradition found himself in the position to respect this set of prescriptions also. Ignorance towards them (some having a magical side) concerning some actions that resulted in suffering, generated insecurity and instability for both, the individual and the entire community. Contrary to what is showed on the surface, arbitrary actions did

not belong to this area of foresights – that has an essential value and a profound coherence in the mind of community – commentary based upon the information at hand and which deliver unexpected meanings.

Anticipation rites are dominated by the rites meant to ensure marriage, the ones made for guessing the predestinated husband, the ones based even on spells that have the same marital aim and therefore the aim to maximize the couple's relation. Religious mentality of the peasant does not accept destructive magical practices, doubtfully regarding the category of "specialized wizards", connected to the evil spirits and always having an illegal practice. The acts that aimed at influencing the fate, had a feminine dominant, fact that gave birth to objections from the part of men – as outlined by the questioned persons – and whose belief is situated beyond the magical horizon, assimilated to the obscure forces. More drastically sanctioned is the search for "specialized" persons, who manifest, as we were explained, hostility towards the Christian doctrine and moral. This is totally against any kind of magical approach, may them be done with a view to get married that "makes them less guilty", as we explicitly can conclude after the investigation in the territory.

It may be said that the old interdiction based on beliefs regarding the days of the week represent an important category, as follows from our investigations: Thursday and Sunday were considered proper days to woo, because the meeting had to unfold under good auspices (and especially, the discussion around the marriage portion that was a decisive element). The wooing and the engagement could continue at table that varied according to the welfare and position of girl's parents. Material goods, the movable and the real estate, gave birth to most passionate discussions because the difficulty of reaching a compromise in what concerns the economic base of the future family could even ruin the plans of other future initiative. From our discussions we may say that women proved to be the most combative while the men's attitude in barging upon the wealth matters, as we less expected, was rather indulgent. From the dialogues evoked the explicit material claims could be seen, especially in the case of the mothers that have many children, "demands" directly proportional to the number of daughters that had to receive a dowry. The bridegroom family had the authority and the right to choose the godfather and the godmother who are attributed a central role in the structure of the wedding, creating by their presence and material and emotional involvement, the most dynamic moments, especially since most of the traditional shouts were addressed to them. As we were told by a part of the interview participants, the success of certain moments was based on the best man's talent for improvising, as in the case of bringing the hen or the redeem of bride's shoe or of the bride herself if she had been stolen. The custom of having a party in the evening before the wedding (*șiratăul*), whose tradition and means of expression are probably more vigorous in other ethnographical areas, is no longer practiced with the same intensity in the village that were subject to our attention, or even at all.

Although in the ensemble of the nuptial ceremony – unchanged in its intimate essence, an entire variety of artistic manifestations – can easily be cut segments whose recurrence, from wedding to wedding, seems infinite, nevertheless, in every manifestation they speak about certain aspects and circumstances that are unique in that particular village. Constant is however, the wooing, anticipated by the relation between the young (based on mutual love feelings and understanding; the persons questioned highlighted the fact that the situations in which the material criteria is having the precedence, a characteristic of old times, are rare) and by the parents' consent. The following period impose a more dynamic rhythm destined wedding preparations: the shouts in the church, the establishment of the engagement day, the godfather and godmother choose, of the persons concerned with the invitations, the religious ceremony, the wedding feast, preparations that also include other gestures and ceremonial attitudes, having deep meanings as resulting from the sources made available to our research. Consequently, closely related to these events are the invitations to the wedding,

the preparation of the flag, in an atmosphere of joy, the preparation of food, the adorning of the garlands – moments guided in virtue of a certain custom, consolidated along the years, having the property to last, to survive on an ancestral background.

We have proposed to analyze the traditional wedding ceremony throughout its course; very representative is the moment when an old woman, another young girl, having the face covered or a strange make-up, a little girl, a doll or other wrapped object (a broom for instance) or a disguised man, who act as the bride and is presented to the bridegroom together with the procession. The assistance jointly participates to create a peaceful atmosphere, a mirth atmosphere, intensified by the episode of great significance marked by the arrival of the bridegroom's procession at the bride's house. Although the ritual functions fade in favor of those that are parts of the ceremonial art, the custom for the bride to receive the forgiveness is still kept. In the case of the bridegroom, this part of the ritual is omitted as can be observed, which can be explained by the fact that the bride is the one who "leaves her nest", compared to the bridegroom who, in most cases remains in his parent's house or close to them. The community inferred certain convictions regarding the girl's marital conditions, which was sympathy worthy, most probably based on a concrete reality, on certain habits that gave voice to expressions adjacent to the prejudice. In this context, the moment of separation, marked by the expression of forgiveness, that preserved the same rite in the case of the bridegroom, is expected to be extremely emotional, an expectation often reminded by the questioned persons; they highlighted the fact that, if the assistance is not brought to tears, it is the head of the wedding that is made responsible for not having rendered the people sensitive, for not knowing to make use of the proper means to persuade.

A subtle game is used in order to fuel the deep feeling of alienation that generates fears and anxiety. A special moment like this requires thus, to be valorized by the head of the wedding, a person who is expected to have a talent for acting as well as for improvising, in order to successfully respond to the requirements of both, bride's and bridegroom's wedding guests. The importance of the bride's weeping received a ritual importance, having a major echo upon the set of nuptial ceremony unfolding. This fact was an expectation within the wedding ceremony, as revealed by the persons questioned, and was asked by the good traditional order itself, having a demand for authentic and real and not feigned emotions. According to the local tradition, the procession, on its way to the wedding ceremony, was organized in such a way that the special guests were next to the wedding couple and to the godmother and godfather, as well as to the flag bearers, the couple's companions, the musicians. Very important to notice is the fact that on the course of the road, the people were shouting. The wagons or during the winter – the sleighs, were adorned while the procession was very commanding especially if horsemen were present – if the wedding couple was coming from different villages. We did not received answers that would confirm the fact that, at the dance that was held outside in the moment of wedding ceremony, the bridegroom's companions received a greater attention, moreover, the dance itself has a weak recurrence in the declaration of our informers. Throughout the ensemble of the wedding ceremony, in traditional folk environments that were subject to our investigation, the companions of the bride receive the same importance appreciated as equal to that of the bridegroom's, as the responses reveal. In all the villages researched, the meaning of certain ritual acts was omitted or vaguely described, the rites practiced in our folk area being old. The defining element for classifying the wedding as being „rich” or „poor” is the abundance. We did not collect nuptial poems or expressions regarding the cuisine that would mention the food and its significance. The importance of the wedding feast was many times highlighted constituting the most complex event in a wedding context. At this point we must mention that in the traditional life, the importance of the person charged to watch over the food preparation (socăcița), whose statute was very special and active as well, based on experience and competence and who

watches that the feast gains a ceremonial shape, demanded however by the feast's proportions. The ritual scenery asks for the houses of the wedding couple to be adorned as well, the gates must have fir branches, corrugated paper, flowers, ribbons and above the gate, the well-wishing „Welcome!”. The wedding couple has the duty to thank every guest for being present, for the gifts, having a glass of wine with the guests at table. The in-law also had this duty and offered cakes and traditional drink (țuică) to the special guests or to the ones coming from far away. As a rule, these persons, as well as the ones who offer the couple consistent gifts, receive, as a sign of gratitude, a special attention, often expressed by means of presents, an attitude seen by the village community as a sign of decency and therefore absolutely natural.

In a distinct chapter we analyzed the shouts, among which the ones dedicated to the bride have a surprising weight throughout the ceremony ensemble; they speak, once again, about the great importance given to the young girl in the scenery of passage fulfillment...., having a talent for improvisation, spontaneously make up the moral and physical portrait of the acting roles in the nuptial scenery, interconnected without any doubt. Thus, physical beauty appears in the peasant vision as a mirroring of moral profusion. It is also mentioned the existence of expectations related to a moderate way of life, in the context of an ideal human destiny achieved within a marriage blessed with children only. The shouts performed contribute to the creation of a dramatically atmosphere, the drama of leaving behind the marks of the age preceding the marriage, a period with no concerns, contrasting with the new social role that implies a series of responsibilities and difficulties, a statute marked by the absence of dear persons, the childhood places, the girl'

The aim of the last chapter is to present funeral customs and beliefs. In our diachronic and synchronic approach, we have noticed that some funeral related activities are different now than they were in the past because of the social changes, modernization, forced industrialization; these mutations have led to the loss of important elements from the ritual. For example, nowadays, for the funeral repast one gives away objects bought from the city, which do not always have the best quality. Even the knot-shaped bread, the communion bread and the sponge cake are bought from the baker's shop and rarely baked at home. Therefore it is more and more difficult to talk about “authentic”, “unaltered” funeral customs in the area of investigation. The research of the present study can be viewed as an attempt to recover testimonies of a traditional way of life and thought, which is fading under the new socio-economic conditions and the urbanization process, despite some resistance to change. The radiography was meant to be as objective as possible according to the field data. The field research methodology comprised the participative observation, the interview, the questioner, the process of telling one's life. The pieces of information from the present paper are the result of field investigation in the area of Sălaj which took place between 2006 and 2011. They are backed up by academic works and the materials available at the archive. The villages selected for the investigation are: Aghireș, Badon, Ban, Cernuc, Cizer, Crasna, Crișeni, Deleni, Dolu, Fildu de Jos, Fildu de Mijloc, Giurtelecu, Șimleului, Hurez, Marin, Meseșenii de Jos, Meseșenii de Sus, Plesca, Popteleac, Pria, Ortelec, Sălăjeni, Sânpetru, Strâmba, Sutor, Tihău, Treznea, Voivodeni. We have to say (when talking about some of the above mentioned villages) that, several times during our research, we obtained substantial information from people we met in different occasions such as funerals or weddings and thus we did not have to go to the specified location. On the one hand we thought it was very interesting to see the way in which the peasant sees death as a temporal separation – he/she thinks that the soul has to cover an initiation road to a new world which is linked to this one; in this respect, in order to emphasize the research, those who respect the old cultures have populated their space with elements carrying special meaning. On the other hand, the funeral related customs are not specific to the investigated area, but comprise quasi-general spread

elements, the archaic folklore facts coexist with the adaptations, having to mention that the latter fade, in some regions, because of the preponderance of ancient rituals considered efficient only if the norms implied by their usage are strictly respected. Any exception would compromise the objective of separating from the old state and of integration of the deceased in the new world. The present work also shows actions that precede the funeral ritual, some with particular and regional character, having particular forms, others with general character, and all of them have a response in the continuity of the symbolic preoccupations. Therefore, most beliefs give credit to the fact that the human must always be preoccupied with assuring himself a place in heaven by performing good deeds and especially by charity acts. In the rural community, it is believed that these facilitate the access to post existence and guarantee a suitable place in the afterlife. Death is viewed as a natural fact, which has to be accepted with resignation, so the components do not seem to be encysted: the family calls the priest to perform some ritual related actions, to confess and give the Eucharist to the dying man, they prepare the candle – these are the most frequent actions. I tried to elucidate some attitudes generated by the proximity of death, so, not only at unction, objects of the dying person, especially clothes are taken to the church along with oil and flower, in order to be sanctified by the priest, for chrism; during the same ceremony, these become sacred. This transfer makes them able to ease the pain of the sick person, who will wear the clothes and will use for cooking (not frying) the sanctified oil and flower, which, as I said before were given attributes they did not possess earlier. The persons questioned did not offer a clear motivation for their attitude, saying it is a duty, that of playing a part in front of the community, an obligation for which they do not question the efficiency. I outlined that some activities are blurred in the memory of the informers, since they did not practice them in the moment of speech. The religious services practiced by the priests for the dying person are constant, that is to say the confession, the offering of the Eucharist, the unction. In this respect, the members of the family must pray relentlessly, must fast, must give charity, funeral repast, must give a number of masses for the dead, and must pay for divine service at churches and monasteries in order to ease the soul of the dying person.

According to the popular belief and the religious dogmas, the therapeutic operations have a purifying role. If a stage of the process is skipped, the treatment is no longer effective and the ill person cannot defeat the evil forces. The long suffering of the dying person is explained by the sins he or she committed, which can be forgiven by taking the Eucharist and by confessing, offering thus a spiritual regeneration. As it is easily presented, the input of the Christian dogma is prevailing and orients one's attitude towards specific sacred rites, where the priest has the most important role. These attitudes remained the same throughout time although, sometimes, they may not match the same mentality patterns. The church's bells announce some person's death; a black flag is hoisted in the church's gate and at the house of the deceased until the funerals. According to traditional norms, the death of someone implies a lot of preparation, guarding and prophylactic procedures. In the investigated villages, the ritual and ceremonial acts have a magic, distinct significance; all the actions have a marked ritualistic character. From this point of view, one can say that certain attitudes are imposed by tradition: the funerals preparations, the cleaning, the knot-shaped bread is baked or bought, all the things needed for the funeral are brought, the cooking for all the people who attend, whether they are family or strangers coming to help. Women and girls unbraided their hair, men do not wear anything on their heads until after the funerals, most of them have beards and everybody is wearing mourning garbs. Our aim is to present the customs connected to the purification and dressing of the dead person, which are based on real hygienic necessities, although the elements that relate to superstition is more powerful; there is the belief according to which the destiny of the dead in the other world is influenced by the way in which the living respect the custom when it comes to the preparations before the funerals, the

organization, the periodic requiem for the dead which take place after three weeks, after six weeks, after six months and after one year, afterwards the memory of the dead is already starting to fade.

We highlighted the way in which, in ancient times, the preparation of the coffin received a special interest, especially the objects that had to be put next to the deceased. The ritual treatment was thoroughly respected. Next to the objects put in the coffin that belonged to the Orthodox ritual – cross, prayer books, incense, chrism, holly water, – were placed personal objects like a comb, a shaving set and objects frequently used in the context of our traditional customs. The persons questioned informed us that people used to put in the coffin objects related to the profession of the deceased. At a child's funerals fewer people attended while the number increased in the case of an old person's death watch. Anyone can participate, regardless of age, regardless of any condition. We specified the fact that the abolishment of the participation conditions expresses the idea of uniformity for every difference in the context of this final reality. According to traditional belief, the deceased must be "accompanied", especially if, he/she would be left alone during the night when something evil could affect him/her. If the family invites the priest, the religious manifestation becomes preliminary but it is completed by others that have a popular shape: the persons who are coming talk to the family and offer them consolation, an atmosphere of profound solemnity and sobriety; as for the games that have deep roots in the ancient folk context, well represented in other regions, they exist only in the memoir of the old inhabitants, as a result of the process of dissolution they were subject to. We insisted upon the manifestations regarding the death watch, that nowadays are faded; people are just talking, "dealing the cards", are offered traditional drink (țuică), cakes, sponge cake while the priest and the accompanying persons are offered varied types of food and money. The transition over this limit-space invested with a deep set of symbols is marked, as in the case of the wedding, by certain acts which in case of the funerals, have a preventive character. In this sense, we gathered identical information from all the investigated villages; the custom of breaking a pot when the coffin is taken outside the house has the following meanings: to stop the deceased to return and harm the persons alive, to distract the attention of the grieved family, for some instants, from this tragic moment and also to banish the evil and the death from the house together with the deceased to no longer affect anyone from the family. This purifying ritual appears as an obstacle for other deaths, moment established by the inauguration of the house.

Firstly, we tried to highlight the way in which the community sees to the total observance of the traditional norms regarding the ritual of separating the dead from the living without any blending of the two. Otherwise, the entire equilibrium of the community is disrupted. Certain gestures, some of which considered to be magical, such as the splashing with holy water of the house and its members, the washing of the hands after coming back from the burial ground, the consecration made by the priest, the leaving of the objects that were used to clean the defunct person's body in the coffin, the breaking of a vase when taking the coffin outside, the throwing of earth on the grave (a sign for saying the last goodbye to the dead), the gesture of putting earth at the dead person's neck in order for his family to forget him more easily, mitigate the general fright of the reality of death. We should also mention the fact that the coffin, locally referred to as "sălaș" or "copârșeu", is made of whither oak; there usually is a white sheet under the dead person's body, the coffin has no windows and is incensed before the deceased's body is laid down in it. The oaken cross is kept outside. Of course, the priest, as an official representative of the institution of the Church, has the most important role in perpetrating these rituals. We have revealed the fact that during the funeral procession but also during activities required by the ritual, the man who looks after the church, the cantor and other agents of ritual acts have a special role and

are assisted by the elders who are good preservers of the tradition. The reward for the services which were rendered are money, knot-shaped bread, towels, food, drinks. The relatives and the intimate friends are actively involved in spiritual and material acts, making great contributions to the discharge of traditional rituals. One of the conclusions is that among the participants at the discharge of the customs, the elders are more involved and pay more attention to the strict observance of the traditions. They are also in charge of giving towels, candles, knot-shaped bread to those who helped prepare the necessary items for the funeral ceremony, especially cooking since the family members are not allowed to cook.

We have also foreseen a deeper meaning namely that the moment of transition from this world to the world of the dead is symbolically marked by the funeral ceremony which involves not only a disembodiment and integration but also a boundary stage (transition rituals, the initial phase as Gennep called them) which refers to the journey of the soul, its transition through customs, the concern for positive ascendant spiritual destiny and the preoccupation of facilitating its ascendance to the privileged space (of Heaven). We shall also mention the objects which are part of this category namely the candle that confronts the darkness on the entire period of the journey that the soul must make, the cross, the icons, the objects put in the coffin which will be of use in the other world, the stops made on the road to the cemetery, the funeral repast given in the name of and for the defunct person, the towels offered to be used as bridges which help the soul to overcome aquatic obstacles, the hen that in some places must pass under the coffin to ease the soul's journey, the knead-shaped bread, the alimentary and non-alimentary funeral offerings, the funeral repast held in the name of the deceased person, the requiems that are held by the family of the deceased person. All these rituals required by the ceremonial ritual prove the fact that they are based on the communication between the two worlds.

According to anthropologists such as Frazer and Mauss, these rituals transfer properties from one level to another based on similarity or through contagiousness. We find the establishment of a connection between the two worlds through a parallelism, often invoked in the funeral ceremony by means of names, images, symbols that have the same attributes as the signifiers they replace, very important. As it can be noticed from the researchers' data, the system of beliefs respected and put into practice in this life will also have an effect on the afterlife thus helping the transition to the other world without contacting the living who are truly preoccupied by the distancing and containment of the two entities on the one hand and on the other hand by the soul's absolute rest in the world of the dead without the risk of its coming back.

We have mentioned that the number of people that take part in a funeral depends on the social status, age and cause of death of the deceased person. The factors that are likely to bring a larger number of people at a funeral are the following: sudden death, the death of young people, especially if they are not married, the important position held by the defunct among the community. The comity, the cohesion, the spirit of perception, the respect owed to the deceased person and the compassion towards his family are only a few of the commonsense rules established by the tradition that continue to have an impact on the community.

The order of the procession is full of rituals and follows certain rules. The system of priorities is as follows: the cross, the banners used for the procession, the man who looks after the church, the cantor and the cart holding the coffin, the family, the relatives, the intimate friends and then the other participants of the procession. The loss of an individual induces disequilibrium in the community, but the funeral repast through the mediation of the priest tries to reestablish the equilibrium. The meal must be very rich in order to strengthen the social standing of the deceased person's family among the community, the social substratum being emphasized at requiems and other repasts. Although the rituals and the

traditions with magical facets lost their initial meaning, the funeral repast continues to hold a main role in the ceremony. Consistent funeral repasts usually depend on the material welfare. The meal usually comprises starters, soup and *sarmale* (forcemeat rolls in cabbage/vine leaves). When people are to sit at the table, priority is given to the priest, and to the other servants of the Church, then to the relatives that came from far away, to the family who eats indoors, most of the times, while the others eat at improvised tables in the yard or in the shed. After the priest blesses the food, a few women who are related to the deceased person of the deceased person serve the food and the drinks. Some of the intimate friends bring food and drinks, to relieve the family from spending too much money although they have to spend quite a large sum (since the funeral repast is a means of assertion of the family in front of the community). After coming from the cemetery, the participants wash their hands and sit at the table, in a prearranged order, according to relationships, affinities, age and status. Usually only one member of each family participates. The topics of conversation are related to how the deceased person lived his/her life, the daily routines in the village, the agricultural labors. If there are many participants, they will be seated at the table in turns, the family members being the last to eat only after thanking the villagers for the help. We will now discuss about certain lacunar aspects regarding the fulfillment of obligations related to the funeral ceremony. The representatives of the Church, the intellectuals, the participants coming from far away have a special status which is acknowledged by the fact that they are seated at a main table. This arrangement is useful because the family will try to serve the food in specially selected dishes and with specially selected tabling, different from those received by the other participants. We discussed these aspects in the last chapter.

We have also mentioned certain aspects related to the post-funeral period. The mourning implies exterior changes of garb, a bounden form in front of the community, but a behavioral and spiritual change as well. This implies certain restrictions, such as not being allowed to work while the deceased person is still in the house, the interdiction to comb one's hair, to sweep the floors, to wash, to work on the field, to shave or cut one's hair (for men), to wear any head coverings. According to the norms of conduct required by the sanctioned and respected system of beliefs, one is not allowed to sing, dance or to participate at parties. As I have already mentioned, the signs of mourning must be worn for different periods of time: a year for parents, husbands or wives, children, forty days for close relatives and a few days for other relatives and for friends.

We also concluded that death produces a social disequilibrium, which will be reestablished after a set of practices which will unfold during a year's time. So the requiem is also subscribed to certain traditional rules: it is done in six weeks' time from the funeral, in three months, in six months, in nine months, in a year, at the All Souls' Day, The Day of the Dead. The commemoration is also done on birthdays, name days, and on every occasion that the family deems it necessary to make a requiem.

In the same chapter we have also mentioned that along with the preoccupation for the afterlife comes the preoccupation for a burial ground, the preparation of the coffin, the cross, the clothes and other necessities for the funeral. In the traditional village of the Sălaj county there is the belief according to which the human being has a body that will return to the clay from which it was made and a soul which was given by a breath of God. According to popular beliefs although the body decomposes, the soul is immortal. It is said that the soul is near the heart, in the chest, and that after the death of the person the soul remains for forty days at the eve of the house, and watches over the living. In these forty days the soul journeys to the places it went to while the human was alive, seeing his good and bad deeds. We should draw attention to the fact that the orthodox Christians believe that the soul goes to heaven or hell at the Particular Judgment, unlike the Greco-catholic Christians who believe that the soul awaits the Last Judgment in Purgatory.

We have also pointed out that the criterion of kindred is not the only one that establishes the location of the graves since this also depends on the moment of death. In order to stay together in the afterlife kindred relationships should be taken into consideration. For example married couples usually have double graves. The urban influence with regards to the monument and funeral signs is perceptible although the wood continues to be preponderant.

In the research space, the three main stages with specific Romanian traditions and particularities that caught our attention are the following: the departure from this world, the integration in the community of the dead and the reestablishment of the social equilibrium which was disrupted by the departure of the deceased person. The death rite in the folkloric-traditional ceremony in Sălaj and the particularities of the research space are proofs of the conservatism and of the antiquity that catch the researcher's interest. Past the structural unity of the Romanian funeral rituals, there is a certain selection but also an ample process of degradation and of disintegration of certain aspects related to this ceremonial reality or of restriction of the range of circulation.

We can easily deduce the fact that the funereal scenario is unitary and well preserved, its defining features do not allow any new details; the superstitious traditions are preserved. A foreigner might consider the entire system of beliefs of the farmers to be full of prejudices and beliefs that are either primitive or absurd thus inappropriate for the present times.

We plan to analyze certain manifestations of a magical substratum that have only vaguely survived in the memories of elder informants. For example, the water in which the deceased person was washed is used to break up or unite two people or to kill somebody. It is also said that the water can cause someone's illness, failures or different shortcomings if the targeted person comes into contact with it. The tying of the knots and of the shoelaces, the braiding of a woman's hair so that her husband does not remarry, objects put in the deceased person's coffin to prevent weddings from taking place, the buttoning up the deceased person are also in this category. The hair, the saliva, the blood, the urine and the excrements of the deceased person can also have a magical role in bringing a lot of wretchedness to the targeted person, a wretchedness that can only be explained and fought against through the mediation of magic.

Finally, another aspect that we highlighted is the fact that the family must carefully throw, burn, bury or hide the elements that might end up in the wrong hands in order to prevent bad things from happening to those who are still alive. It is believed that this profound care is efficient in fighting against the possible evil deeds of the enemies. As we have already noted in the traditional society all feasts and all ceremonials are compulsory and one should act according to the rituals when faced with disruptive factors. The repairing practices are usually the funeral repasts given in the name of the dead and the church services held in order for the deceased persons to find their peace; charity has the same purpose. The rituals of interdiction were caused by sequences of encumbrances. However, nowadays there is a lack of active practices against the evil forces. Thus it is of great importance to perform the funeral rituals accordingly in order to facilitate attainment of an adequate status of the defunct person and to protect the living that are vulnerable in front of possible returns of the dead persons. In the case of those who were believed to have become ghouls, other rituals were held in order to remedy the negligence in certain sequences before the burial.

This paper plans to present an implicit pleading for the research of an ethnographic area that has not caught the attention of researchers. The ethnographic region of Sălaj is considered to be one of the areas that "preserve" most of the old traditions, but also discloses novel aspects.

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