

THE STATUTE LABOUR

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Abstract: *The Romanian villages, whose origins date back in the old ages, have created and preserved life settlements which have allowed them remain unchanged over time and proved the high quality of a well done thing. The long lasting existence of these patterns of organization of the village life has been so high that they have coexisted, over time, with the statehood organizational structures, preserving their regulatory force unaltered, regardless of the historic era. The statute labour is included among these patterns or life settlements, still preserved in the Romanian area; it is the result of shared experience and life in common. The basic principles of the statute labour are solidarity „economic brotherhood”, mutual aid - principles generating social consistency.*

Key words: *village communities, statute labour, priest's statute labour, solidarity, mutual aid.*

1. Introduction. The collective character of the village life

The rural communities have been, with each generation, generators and keepers of some life settlements or patterns designed to plan the social life in a round path unaltered, simple and natural „in the shade of history making events.” The old forms of organization and development of the village life, like communities, joint property, village household, forest composessorates, the common right (the land's custom), evening sitting of village women, young men's groups and the statute labour, etc, with their unaltered organisation and their frequent mission of life building, have opened vast horizons and the opportunity of lasting throughout

centuries to the rural world. The process has not been carried out, however, in a uniform manner all over the Romanian area.

Thus, some of these settlements have fully preserved their impact on the life of rural communities, coexisting with the organizational state like forms (political-administrative, economic and juridical forms); others have known a continuous process of dissolution under a constant, overwhelming and constraining pressure emerged from the new circumstances generated by the state authority, a process completed with a relatively late integration of these villages in a superior political organization.

Therefore, the Romanian villages contributed to the emergence of a world

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with ancient origins, with original and complete patterns of life, with a collective economic organization empowered with force of constraint and rights to intervene in the operation of the constitutive individual (family) households.

Each inner part of the personal property was validated through this process of „organic founding” of the rural settlements „by endless probing and adjustments, of failures and long repeated successes, of collective character, anonymous, of the whole peasantry of the village” [7, I, pp. 78-79], which is not anything else but what Georg Simmel called „projections on the ground of the social forms”.

We are disclosed, this way, a whole village, „a joint property reality which lives on old principles of solidarity” [3, p. 34], derived from a human „natural ethics”; according to Mircea Vulcănescu, within this reality, the economic activity enters a life all-encompassing community. The vestiges of old forms of association in the work like the plough, mowing, statute labour are an expression of the solidarity, honour which ennoble the village communities. The statute labour will be tackled below.

2. The statute labour

In our villages, the economic life world has been more than a simple and repetitive endeavor to acquire the natural-biological basic goods; it belongs to a broader life ordination, being enriched with hopes, feelings, traditions, religious beliefs, moral principles, etc.

The economic individualism and the endless desire of gain, which is in fact capitalism, planned to be inferred in the human soul and to produce „an economic

dominance of all the values of life” through falsification „of the natural relationships between the individual and the meaning behind his actions” [8, p. 71], the village communities opposed them and encouraged a balanced lifestyle against a „tyrannical accumulation” and they turned solidarity and mutual aid into life ruling principles, generating community cohesion, refusing the temptation of endless prosperity.

Thus, a community of work (and life in general) has been preserved, in which „everyone does all kinds of chores to become self-sufficient and neighbours help each other” [8, p. 58]. Statute labour was this cooperative-work, founder of the Romanian villages.

According to Henry H. Stahl, the statute labour, as a traditional institution of cooperation in work was preserved until late, at extended scale in our rural communities; on a smaller area, the statute labour has not been left apart even nowadays, revealing beyond the functions of economic nature, its social, psychological and the ritual strong meaning. It is interesting that Stahl makes a connection between the statute labour and „the villagers’ morals and manners”, having noticed, just like Ştefania Cristescu-Golopenţia, that the economic aspects in the Romanian villages „hire not only the workforce, but also his whole soul turned into sacred or profane prayer” [1, p. 35].

Reconciliation with oneself, appraisal of the fellow, lack of the interest in gain at any rate, permanent availability of involvement in the benefit of the statute labour’s discharging the land worker of the dissolving selfishness and integrates it into „a superior reality” which preserves its

soul and character intact and manages his life.

Congregating as „statute labour”, a common institution of the Romanian villages, is generated by factors caused by geographical aspects (conditions of relief and pedo-climatic conditions), historical (an ancient order of life preserved regardless of the historical era), psycho-social (based on relationships of kinship and neighbourly relations), a certain rhythm of village work (respecting thoroughly the agrarian village-calendar).

As economic manifestation, the statute labour is a form of cooperation and mutual aid in work, in which „an associated group” of the members of family households, is running „together, a non-differentiated operation” under the conditions of „a linear division” of labour [7, III, p. 288]; such a cooperation was based on moral order guarantees regarding the performance of these activities in a special succession specific to each of the partner family households.

The ancient, traditional character of these associations is outlined by Henry H. Stahl; according to him, these statute labours can be considered as the continuation of (...) much older skills than shown by the documents or customs, characteristic of all the village communities founded on a specific area” [7, III, p. 288]. As regards the archaic Romanian communities, Stahl also pointed out the concern of these rural communities, in the spirit of the provision and thorough planning to divide, in the benefit of the community use, parcels of land to be cultivated according to the statute labour system, and the harvest obtained to be used in order to cover „some common functions”.

Starting from this concern specific to the rural communities, the rulers of the political life of the Romanian Principalities at the beginning of the XIXth century (by the protecting power), found appropriate to introduce both in the Organic Regulation of Wallachia and Moldavia, the provisions related to the obligation to establish „a tsarina of the reserve”, and was intended to be worked in common (in statute labour) by the inhabitants of the villages and the harvest obtained was to be used in case of emergency.

Keeping, during the interwar period, in the Romanian agriculture, the peasant family household as the typical form of organization, in which „man, work and the land intermingle”, deepening the patch of land previously worked by the ancestors” [6, p. 372 and 378], also meant keeping, at a less extent and on a narrower area, the statute labour. Virgil Madgearu was the one who predicted the role and importance that the statute labour could play within a national economy with peasant structure, as this Romanian economy during that period was.

The great economist and politician, envisaged, „in a fruitful action to the development of the villages”, a substantial role of the old institution „on which is based the whole progress of the Romanian village: the statute labour”; within this „working community” Madgearu considered necessary and appropriate an institution to raise the villages „from thier inferiority background” [4].

The quality of life of the inhabitants in the rural communities had to be founded not only on material wealth, but also on „a spiritual community, through the revival of the best traditions (...) with love of the fellower, aimed at spiritual growth through

God” [4]. It is achieved through this moral foundation of the economic life, by the contribution in the benefit of the rural community to the beneficial effects of social solidarity based on free will. This ambitious project, which Virgil Madgearu hoped to see fruitful by the meaningful work of the young generation alive at the time was blocked by the beginning of the second world war and, especially, by the radical political change (of the political regime) that took place in Romania in middle of the last century.

The statue labour has been preserved despite all the degradation that it had been subjected to this world of „these people of the natural”, according to the Romanian philosopher Constantin Noica, against the whole succession of temptations which marked this world, because peasants, with a strong spirit of rural community avoided both „the pitfalls of becoming bourgeois or proletarian”.

3. The priest's statue labour

The inhabitants of the rural communities have always given enough, due to the close appraisal of the priests, representatives of God in front of the community and intercessors for the community in front of God. Great and blessed and blessed is the role of the priest in the rural community's life, all the time: by the Word of high importance in teaching, by long lasting patience in understanding the inner turmoil, by convincing advice, touching presence both in case of joys or sorrows.

Therefore, beyond the love with which they accompanied „the doctor of souls” villagers deeply desired to honour Him,

gathering at the right time, in statue labour to work the land of the Church (in some cases villagers also worked the priest's private-owned lands) (in some cases villagers were in work and private-owned lands by the priest).

On the first Sunday of the year, the village priest agreed on „statue labour beginning” for all agricultural works over the year; people were allowed to work the Church lands those days of a minor celebration (except for „Pălie” 21st July and 3rd August, when the villagers themselves stopped working the field for fear of not having their harvest burnt).

On the other hand, at Epiphany, the priest used to collect „tows” (processed hemp), and „to be honoured”, they used to receive wheat, pork ribs, money; in some villages, the priest would receive even firewood on this occasion. The tows used to be spinned during the Easter Lent, during the spring evenings, by the skillful wives; they used to meet in a statue labour after „they had finished the chores” to finish joyfully and in full dedication, the tows spinning and to have a good start at the highly useful linen the household.

The village community used to join, according to neighbor-related relations, all the agricultural works over the year (planting seeds, cultivating, hay crops, reaping etc.) on the land of the Church to help „whether the villagers have time or not”. All work in the statue labour used to be done in deep appraisal for the priest and wore full devotion to the one who used to pray with devotion and offer what has been sent from the Father of lights, especially strength and hope for land workers.

But among the work done on the church's land, the wheat „sickle statue

labour”, has had a ritual meaning since ancient times and appraisal brought to God for the rich wheat crops, grown at the right time; the belief of our ancient village communities inhabitants according to which this marvelous seed bears God’s face, our Redeemer, has been preserved unaltered.

At the end of this activity, the young men and women used to weave „the wheat wreath” or they used to decorate „the mace” in the shape of a cross, of the most beautiful ears of wheat, picked according to a specific ritual and agrarian and religious meanings carefully observed. Bringing the mace at the priest’s house used to be accompanied by songs and joy, „Cântecul buzduganului” or „cununii” („The Mace’s or Wreath’s Song”) or „Dealul Mohului” („Mohu’s Hill”) being representative in this respect.

At the end of the statue labour, the village community used to keep the mace carefully, even solemnly (around the religious painting or hanging down the beam), giving it, in due, uses related to fruitfulness practice and growth in the constitutive households (in the nuptial practices and to intensify the wheat germination effects for crops).

4. Short considerations

The peasants used to congregate in statue labour, after the ritual of the alternative labour belongs and mutual help for individual and community welfare, to do work various types of work: domestic work, agricultural work or and administrative work.

The statue labour, this quiet, serious and fruitful work used to give our village communities strength and cohesive force,

constructive direction. With reference to the statue labour [7, III, p. 288], Henry H. Stahl awarded the due importance to the productive and psychological virtues of shared labour; he brought to light „the morals of the shared village households”, which discharged from the human being of the economy tyranny; he conveyed the real force of the villagers’ faith whose proof is the long lasting existence of shared work in the Romanian rural area.

The survival of these old patterns of life that „boycotted” history (like the statue labour) made available to Romanian villages those primary resources of revival and progress.

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