

# Contribution to the knowledge of the scattered villages in the small and medium size mountains of northern Romania (Țibău Mountains case study)

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**ABSTRACT:** The present study is about the smallest rural settlements in the upper Bistrița river valley geographical region and even in the larger ethnographic region of Țara Dornelor. The main effort was made to analyze these mountain hamlets using available sources such as direct and indirect observation and gathering of credible information from the locals by verifying and synthesizing it. In doing so, we were able to establish that the inhabitants of these mountain hamlets have overcome the harsher climatic conditions in the small and medium mountains of northern Romania, managing to adapt and even prosper until recently due to their resilience, the abundance of valuable resources and other day-to-day living advantages.

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## 1. Introduction

A certain degree of attention to this topic paid the researchers from the university centers nearest to the study area such Nicolae Barbu in 1976, I.P Argeșel in 1982, Ion Tănase în 1984, Ioan Iosep in 1999, Marcel Mândrescu in 2012, Costică Brînduș and Alexandru Ionuț Cristea in 2013 and local reserchers such as Ligia-Corina Ilnatiuc (Prejmereanu) in 2014 and Cezar Cernușcă în 2015 (Ilnatiuc, 2014; Cernușcă 2017, 2019). Useful information is also provided by the authors of general works, such as Dan Ghinea in 1996 and Melinda Câdea and collaborators in 2006 (Câdea et al. 2006).

In this study we wanted to bring new information and update the pre-existing ones to clarify the following:

- the origin of the two settlements, reflected in their anthroponymy and toponymy;
- the context of their appearance, evolution to the present day and current state;
- their typology, based on theoretical considerations and personal observations;

- if they belong or not to the Obcinilor Bucovinei hinterland (Barbu, 1976).

The final goal is to create a valuable contribution to the topic, useful to a variety of readers, from the general public to local authorities, students and teachers.

## 2. Study area

In an administrative-territorial point of view Pleta and Fluturica hamlets belong to the Țibău village, of the Cîrlibaba commune in Suceava County (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1** Position of Pleta (white) and Fluturica (green) hamlets of Țibău village, Cîrlibaba commune. Source: Google Maps processing, 2020.

There are two perspectives of this localization of the study area: the first is that it is located at the border between the historical provinces of Transylvania, Maramureș and Bucovina, the second is that it is situated in one of the bordering valley of Obcinele Bucovinei (Barbu, 1976).

Geographically, Pleta and Fluturica hamlets belong to the southern end of the interfluvial main ridge between the valleys of Cîrlibaba and Țibău, the most important tributaries of the Bistrița river in its upper sector. As direct result of their elevation and consequent to the climatic layering, as well as of the influences from the northern and eastern atmospheric circulation, specific to this Carpathian space, the mentioned hamlets are situated in the development area of the spruce boreal forest (Cernușcă, 2019). The nearby Fluturica massif presents itself as a relatively compact mass of crystalline schists, dominating the Cîrlibaba Veche and Țibău villages living space, with a mature relief that does not give maximum altitudes (highest elevation at 1345 meters) because it was affected by strong tectonic displacements and evolved, at the same time, in accordance with very low and in close proximity local base levels (Cîrlibaba valley and Țibău valley). Levelled interfluves with radial arrangement and steep slopes in their lower sections, narrow sectors of the Bistrița Aurie and Cîrlibaba valleys at the intersection with the crystalline schists formations lens define its outer configuration. Due to its elevation and configuration, the Fluturica peak is a fragment of the Pliocene denudation surface - the Mestecăniș surface (Cernușcă, 2017) (Fig. 2).

### 3. Methods

The theoretical part or the desk work meant searching and selecting the most relevant information about the subject available in the dedicated geographical works of the researchers mentioned above, as well as the careful observation of the different cartographic representations of the study area.



**Figure 2** The appearance of the Fluturica massif and the parallelism of the Cîrlibaba (left), respectively Țibău (right) valleys - aerial views from the south and north. Source: Personal archive.

The applied part or the field work meant the identification of credible sources of information among the locals, the interpretation of the results of the discussions with them in a unitary manner, as well as their verification on the field.

### 4. Results and discussion

#### 4.1. Origins

The surname Coubiș is most often associated with the history of Pleta and Fluturica hamlets, because it is known that three brothers, Nicolai, Ion and Petrea owned 300 hectares of land from Iedu, in the Cîrlibaba valley to the Gura Dărmoxei, in the Țibău valley, inherited from Coubiș Gheorghe (Cernușcă from Coubiș, 2020).

In the same way, the smaller Măgura Mică hamlet (12 km from the village of Țibău) was the fief of the three Proțiu brothers Alexa, Ștefan and Mihai, who owned properties up to Buhăiescu in the Cîrlibaba valley, respectively down to Alexeni in the Țibău valley. They owned an even larger fortune in Ukraine, in the village of Șipote. At present the only resident family, Daniliuc after the husband, inherited on the wife's side some of the former properties of Proțiu family (Cernușcă from Proțiu, 2020).

Pleta and Fluturica villages, only two years after their formal recognition in 1896, were incorporated into the village of Cîrlibaba, thus losing their previous status of independent settlements (Poenaru, 2019). The fact that currently those two hamlets are included in the village of Țibău is due to their electrification campaign, started in 1979 from the last mentioned village (Cernușcă from Faiciu, 2019).

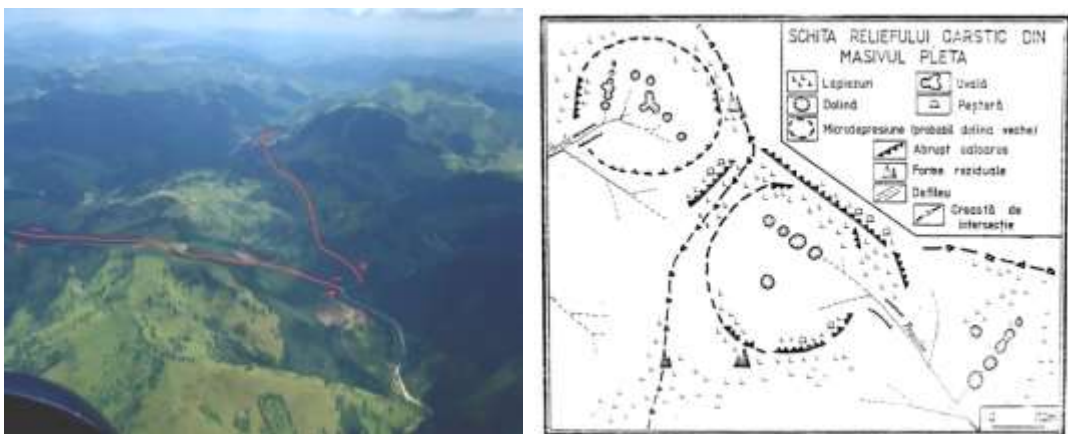
## 4.2. The natural background

The expression mountainous plain as part of the description of the Fluturica settlement (Bobeiciuc, 2012) does not seem so absurd due to the smoothness of the upper part of the mentioned interfluvium, rendzines and rendzinitic soils that contribute to the fertility of hayfields, subsistence farming as a basic occupation of the inhabitants (Fig. 3).

The toponym Pleta in local Ukrainian means flat stone or flat rock and corresponds to the general shapes of the terrain. In this sense, we believe that the sinking of the northern compartment of the Dragoș Vodă-Tătarca fault (Vodă, 2013), in relation to the main interfluvial ridge is responsible for the *plai*-geomorphological landscape of the Pleta area. The landform shapes, specific to the more or less degraded by karstification process rocks of the post-Austrian sedimentary cover (clays, black clays, red marls, sandstones, conglomerates, limestones), determined Mr. Tănase Ion to map them (Fig. 4).



**Figure 3** Rendzine type soil in hayfield – Fluturica hamlet Source: Personal archive.



**Figure 4** Pleta area - Aerial view from the south side (left). Personal archive. Detailed map (right) (Tănase, 1984).

We could say that the Fluturica form is the diminutive of the butterfly (Poenu, 2019), or it is due to objects that reflect sunlight (roofing sheets, window glass, limestone cliffs) lined up at the top of the interfluvium.

### 4.3. Population

The anthroponyms of the older or more recent residents of these hamlets are self-evident for the ethnic origin of their inhabitants. In Fluturica we know about the families Coubiș, Plecanciuc, Trisciuc, Bobeiciuc, Bobeica, Mehno, Focșec, Tironeac, Juravle, Proțiuc and in Pleta about the families Coubiș, Borha (originally from Galicia), Ialovei, Macoveiciuc (coming from Zeletin), Jecalo, Zaiț (Cernușcă from Șcundea, 2020).

Their present population, of Ukrainian origin, consists of permanent and seasonal residents, the latter maintaining the assets inherited *on the hill*. The average population density is estimated at the value before the Austrian colonization, at around 5 inhabitants on square kilometer (Cernușcă from Onofresei, 2020). They are mainly raising animals on the hayfields and pastures, but are not limited to summer grazing agriculture. They manage to adapt subsistence agriculture to the conditions from well over 1000 metres above sea level, the households making room, within their perimeter, for ploughing patches on which potatoes, vegetables and greens are grown, necessary for family consumption. During the harsh winters, the connection with the outside becomes difficult to impossible to maintain, the time getting a different rhythm for these isolated Romanians.

### 4.4. Social background

These families of Ukrainians, with many children, became related to each other and came to be known in the Cîrlibaba community under the generic name of *those on the hill*. The strong sense of ethnicity, close relationship between the families and the tough lifestyle led to the formation of a clan mentality, which has been preserved until today. The rivalry with *nemții*, the inhabitants colonized by the Austrian authorities in the valley below, was proverbial, manifesting itself especially at community events until the 60s-70s (Cernușcă from Faiciuc, 2019)

There was even an internal rivalry, so to speak, between the Coubiș and Borha families, which manifested itself even during the communist period (Cernușcă from Onofresei, 2020). Also, in the context of the communist rural systematization policy, in Fluturica and Pleta there was no village built space, only animal stables and summer huts were approved for construction. The maximum development, appreciated by the number of inhabitants, seems to have been the 60s to 80s period followed by the decline. Some emigrated to Banat, others moved to the valley below, on plots left available after the emigration of the Germans (Cernușcă from Coubiș, 2020). Besides the fact that they are known in the community for their hospitality, as great animal breeders, skilled furriers, weavers, tailors, wood carvers and egg painter with an inborn artistic sense (Ihnatiuc (Prejmereanu), 2014) the skills for using the wood, the up to date evidence of properties and the understanding of the natural signs in the Coubiș family also impressed the head of the Forestry District in Cîrlibaba (Cernușcă from Onofresei, 2020). At present, approx. 5-6 families or even fewer live here.

### 4.5. Organization and functionality

The two hamlets correspond to the scattered mountain village type, without texture, with households grouped on family dwellings (Fig. 5). The spatial extension is large, the living built space and the estate overlap, with the notable exception of the hayfields delimited by stone walls. The dwellings that make up these hamlets “rest” on well-defined domains, with production, storage, conservation and residence/rest functions (Cândea et al., 2006).



**Figure 5** Scattered mountain village structure with households grouped in family dwellings (red spots)- aerial view. Source: Personal archive.

The Fluturica hamlet has a perimeter of approximately 3.9 km and an area of approx. 300,000 m<sup>2</sup> and the Pleta hamlet has a perimeter of approx. 4.2 km, with an area of approx. 212,000 m<sup>2</sup> (according to Google Maps data, 2020).

Their internal cohesion is maintained due to the existence of a network of paths and trails that make possible the circulation in all directions. The connection with the higher peaks (ex: Iedu, Țapu Mic and Mare) is made through so-called "*plaiuri*". The remote hamlets rests suspended from the main valleys floors, Cîrlibaba and Țibău, so that the access from these valleys is more difficult, with narrow sectors and steep slopes. From the Cîrlibaba valley floor, we could even say that it is hidden, because it consists of two narrow valleys of some right tributaries of the Cîrlibaba river, connected to the Cîrlibaba road by two wooden bridges. There are several routes from the Țibău valley floor, the most important being the concrete bridge from Pleta. An easier circulation might be on top of the interfluve, along and across it due to the existence of the lowest mountain saddle in the Țibău mountains area, located at 1190 m above sea level. Under these circumstances, the family dwellings spreaded on both sides of the mentioned interfluve, are known as Fluturica Cîrlibabei and Țibăului, respectively Pleta Cîrlibabei and Țibăului.

## 5. Conclusion

We manage to formulate the following:

- these remote mountain hamlets are of Ukrainian origin, which appeared and developed due to the special practical sense of the Carpathian man and his perfect adaptation to the natural environment by exploiting its economic potential to the maximum;
- people were attracted to these places by the abundance of valuable resources such as biodiversity, spruce wood, flat stones, fertile soils, meadows and natural pastures, and other certain advantages of day-to-day living, such as free possession of land, tax exemption or tax evasion, avoiding the authorities, a freer life in general;

- typical settlements of *plai* (Barbu, 1976) or true human redoubts (Mândrescu, 2012), they both belong entirely to the Obcinelor Bucovinei hinterland similar to those in the upper valleys sectors of the Suceava and Moldova rivers;
- strongly affected by the depopulation process, these monuments of Ukrainian cultural identity, which complete the Cîrlibaba settlement specifics, are stubborn to exist.

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