

‘ȚUICĂ’ IN ROMANIA: THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF RURAL DISTILLING

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Abstract: *Țuică* in Romania: the Historical Geography of rural distilling. The traditional peasant way of life has involved the maximum use of local resources for subsistence with a surplus for commercial activity according to local potentials and market conditions. In the Subcarpathian region of Romania fruit constitute a major resource and plums have been valued for their usefulness in supplying jam, dried fruit and brandy. The latter product (‘țuică’) retains a great importance as a national drink and still has substantial commercial outlets despite the competition from urban-based distilleries and from imported spirits. Following restrictions on distilling in rural areas under communism (especially in areas that were collectivised) there are now good opportunities today in the context of farm diversification and pluriactivity which is crucial for the survival of small farms in the hill regions of the country. The paper investigates the historical geography of plum brandy and considers the potential for future expansion. It also traces the production process and notes the salient regional variations in both the methods of manufacture.

Rezumat: *Țuica în România: geografia istorică a distilării rurale.* Modul de viață tradițional al țaranului a presupus valorificarea la maxim a resurselor locale pentru subzistență cu un surplus pentru activitatea comercială, în conformitate cu potențialul local și condițiile pieței. În regiunea Subcarpaților din România, fructele constituie o resursă majoră iar prunele au fost evaluate pentru utilitatea lor în furnizarea de gem, fructe uscate și băutură. Cel din urmă produs (‘țuica’/băutură) deține o mare importanță ca băutură națională și încă are piață de desfacere substanțială în ciuda competiției din mediul urban-bazată pe distilării și băuturi spirtoase importate. Restricțiile privind procesul distilării din zonele rurale în timpul regimului socialist (mai ales în cele care au fost colectivizate), reprezintă acum oportunități bune în contextul diversificării fermelor și al activităților multiple care sunt cruciale pentru supraviețuirea micilor ferme din regiunile deluroase ale țării. Această lucrare investighează geografia



istorică a acestei băuturi din prune și ia în considerare potențialul de extindere pentru viitor. Prezintă de asemenea, procesul de producție și evidențiază importante diferențieri regionale în ceea ce privește metodele de obținere a băuturii.

Key words: *plum brandy ('țuica'), rural industry, distilling, Subcarpathians.*

Cuvinte cheie: *băutură din prune ('țuica'), industrie rurală, distilare, Subcarpați.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Rural industry plays an important role in peasant life where rural communities are still relatively self-sufficient and pluriactivity remains essential for family survival on small farms. Depending on appropriate raw materials and skills, specific activities form part of the distinctive economic profiles of Romania's natural regions and contribute to inter-regional trade. Maximising the value of farm produce for domestic consumption has required diverse procedures for processing and storage. At the same time small surpluses entered the trading sphere through the activities of itinerant merchants who plied their 'comerț ambulant' in the towns or in complementary agricultural regions (Muică & Turnock 1998). And although limited under communism when the bulk of rural production was handled through government warehouses (involving a unified distribution system with which cooperative farms were closely connected) the land restitution programme post-1989 has restored a number of traditional practices. Some activities were clearly visible as landscape features: water-powered mills concerned with grinding cereals, sawing timber and fulling cloth: in some areas successions of mills were in existence along the valleys, especially in the Carpathian and Subcarpathian regions. The quarrying of raw materials such as limestone and ceramic clays has also left a clear imprint on the landscape. Other activities are less clearly visible because they are carried out within farm buildings and courtyards with fruit processing as an example. In this connection the distilling of plum brandy ('țuică') retains a traditional importance – mainly in Subcarpathian areas – to provide for both local consumption and trade. This activity is an extremely convenient way of converting surpluses of plums (and some other fruits found in the hill country and mountain fringes) into a product that can be efficiently stored (Ștefănescu 1972a).

Plum brandy is deeply embedded in rural culture and through the persistence of small-scale commerce (usually informal) 'țuică' is in effect the national drink of Romania and it comprises a significant element of distinct lifestyles comprising 'civilizația sătească' (Lungu et al. 1970, p.31) where the escape to a private world of family, friends and neighbours has been an antidote for the coercive modernising policies emanating from landowners, local administrators and governments. Thus when Vulcănescu (1991, p.91) says that 'fiecare popor are, lăsată de Dumnezeu, o față proprie, un chip al lui de a vedea lumea și de a o rasfrânge pentru alții' [Every people has a God-given way of looking at the world and appearing to others] he is referring to Romania's cultural profile – with its long-established ecological and spiritual dimensions – which values brandy as an integral part of social activity. The fundamental quality of this convention is also displayed among the tombstones of the unique 'funny cemetery' of Săpânța in Maramureș¹. The tombstone of Husarion – calling on

¹ The Romanian version of the tombstone inscriptions is as follows:

everybody to take a drink on this last occasion – testifies to a skilled distiller who helped neighbours produce good brandy fit for the local women including a ‘ploscă’ of plum brandy for a sweetheart. Meanwhile Stan Toader², who died at the age of 49, was a man of great energy who liked țuică and wine and did much good work in the community digging graves and making crosses: he proposes his last toast with the familiar phrase ‘să trăiți’. We also hear of Mihai Pop (d.1981 aged 42) being ‘greeted’ by his uncle (predeceased) – since fate decreed that they would share the same grave – with the offer of a glass of țuică so they can both have a drink to pass the time without boredom. On the other hand for Dumitru Holdis who died in 1958 at the age of 45, the tombstone touches on the other side of coin: the danger of alcohol abuse in a situation where long winters with relative inactivity could result in excessive drinking of crude spirit. We receive the dire warning of țuică as ‘true venom’ bringing torture and tears to one who loved his drink and finished underground: others similarly addicted will experience a similar fate!

The prestigious ‘Mic Dictionar Enciclopedic’ describes plum brandy simply as an ‘alcoholic drink made by fermenting and distilling various fruits, especially plums’ (Măciu et al. 1986, p.1802). It usually has a strength of 18-24deg and is very well-known throughout Romania, but especially in the Subcarpathians. Although ‘țuică’ is widely used for plum brandy ‘rachiu’ is used interchangeably in the Regat and especially in Moldavia (but ‘răchie’ in Banat) although historical documents generally refer to ‘rachiu’ only and since this is thought to derive from the Turkish ‘raky’ (Candrea 1931, p.1037) ‘țuică’ might be seen as a purely Romanian indigenous term which has become widely used in comparatively recent times. This name may have arisen out of a humorous reference to hard drinkers with slurred speech, though Candrea (1931, p.1363) thinks there could be a connection with the Bulgarian and Serbian ‘cujka’. However, at Vadul Pașei near Băicoi (Prahova), which is a traditional fruit-growing region ‘rachiu’ is still used rather than țuică. And there are places in the lowlands of Oltenia e.g. Bistreț (Dolj) which now use țuică for brandy made from other fruits (apricots, cherries or peaches) while reserving ‘rachiu’ for the distilling of ‘comină’ (the residue after grapes have been processed to obtain a must for wine) although a more accurate name would be ‘rachiu de tescovină’ to incorporate the name of the residue. However ‘țuică de comină’ occurs at Cujmir in lowland Mehedinți. Meanwhile, most plum brandy from Transylvania is distinct in being twice-distilled and usually known as ‘palincă’ (after the Hungarian ‘palinka’)

„Aici eu mă odihnesc Husarion mă numesc. Venit-ați bine la mine; lucrăm la cazane bine și fac țuică de butoi. Veniți bărbaților și voi să vă pun țuică’n ploscuță să o duceți la drăguță. Voi da țuică tot de prună să o beți cu voie bună. Voi da țuică de cireșă să o beți voi jupînese. Și vă zic cu toți să beți și altu’ nu mă vedeți”.

„Aici eu mă odihnesc și Stan Toader mă numesc. Cît am fost pe lume viu băutam țuică și vin și multe lucruri am lucrat. Să ajut omeni în sat fost-am preteni curatras. Mormînte la cruci am turnat dar moarte cu mare urît. Iute m-o pus în mormînt și vă zic ca să trăiți. Mulți ani și fericiti care pe cruce ne citiți și viața a lăsa la 49 de ani”.

„Aici eu mă odihnesc Pop Mihai mă numesc. Măi Mihai untiu meu drag, lîngă tine am venit. Ca să-ți țin de urît cu pahar aduc țuică bună. Ca să o bem de-ompreună să ne treacă de urît. Că așa o fost a nost rînd la amîndoi într-un mormînt. Că viața o părăsăi”.

„Dumitru Holdis: Țuica e curat venin; ea aduce plâns și chin. Că și mie mi-o adus, moartea sub picior m-o pus. Cui îi place țuică bine va păși așa ca mine. Că eu țuică am iubit, cu ea’n mână am murit”.

while in the northernmost part of the region the name ‘horincă’ arises from Ukrainian influence (Stoica & Pop 1984, p.64). In Moldavia too the Ukrainian influence emerges in names for strong brandy such as ‘holercă’, ‘holircă’, ‘horelcă’ and ‘horilcă’; while ‘vutcă’ demonstrates the influence of vodka (Giurescu 1974, p.194). On the other hand in Banat and adjacent areas like Arad, the Hațeg region and Hunedoara (an area of long-standing Romanian tradition) the once-distilled brandy is known as ‘vinars’, derived from the German ‘Branntwein’ (Candrea 1939, p.1424) and possibly alluding to the former practice of making brandy from wine dregs. However the word is usually pronounced ‘ginars’ (since it is not uncommon for Romanians to avoid the ‘v’ sound: in northern Moldavia the village ‘Vicovu’ is usually pronounced ‘Cicovu’ and in the hills east of Bacău locals of Viforeni are usually referred to as ‘Givorani’). It usually has a strength 36-38deg because only the first part of the distillation is accepted (i.e. the rest is recycled). Finally, plum brandy is often linked with a particular area of production e.g. ‘țuică de Văleni’ (i.e. Vălenii de Munte in Prahova) was praised by Emm.de Martonne (1907, p.96) as ‘la meilleure țuică de toute la Muntenie’; also ‘țuică de Argeș’, ‘țuică de Vâlcea’ and so on. But while certain districts have gained a reputation for brandy through the quality of the fruit (with a high sugar content), the high standards of production and the scale of commerce or the nature of the taste or bouquet is not normally specific to a particular region (unlike Scotch whisky where the taste is influenced by the water, the maturation ‘climate’ and the distillery utensils).

Țuică is widely taken at home as a short casual drink (‘băutură’) and also in bars and restaurants, although commercial premises tend to serve other kinds of brandy made in the factories. However, plum brandy has many uses on more formal occasions. A wedding ceremony is traditionally arranged when the families proceed through the village to issue invitations and those who accept drink plum brandy from the wooden bottle or ‘ploscă’ to wish the couple well. At the marriage feast itself țuică is traditionally the principal drink (though wine is becoming more common nowadays). Brandy is also drunk at parties linked with a baptisms and with memorial parties for the dead: these take place immediately after the interment but there are also subsequent rituals (‘parastase’) held after four weeks, six months and a year after death takes place. In the latter case some țuică may also be spilt on the ground as a further gesture of remembrance. Plum brandy is also used as various other religious feasts in parties at home and at church. Heavy work in haymaking or ploughing requires some support for țuică drunk in the fields (directly from the bottle) and also at home in the evening. When carrying plum brandy to the fields peasants have traditionally used the gourd (‘tiugă’) or the ‘țigvă’, from the fruit of *Lagenaria vulgaris*, that can be opened up and used either as a funnel or as a small receptacle. Transactions in the marketplace may also be completed as an ‘entente cordiale’ by a glass of plum brandy, following the custom of ‘adălmaș’ or ‘aldămaș’ after the Hungarian ‘aldomas’ (Candrea 1931). An important stage in house-building such as the setting of the roof timbers, would also call for a plum brandy ceremony. The brandy also has some medicinal significance and the first liter (or so) of spirit distilled from the still is often set aside as ‘țuică aramită’ which although slightly toxic (arising from a small copper content, as the name suggests) is nevertheless useful for external use: a severe cold may be remedied by wearing a shirt doused in plum brandy and a virus may be treated by drinking the normal brandy warmed at the fireside to increase its strength (as ‘țuică fiartă’) along with the fruit of the pepper sweetened by sugar.

Most country people have traditionally produced plum brandy for their own use, apart from small amounts used for presents or barter. With a production of 200-300l in a good year (coming from approximately half a hectare of plum trees within a holding of some five hectares in all) their stocks will be large enough to cope with poor years when plums are scarce e.g. through bad weather when the trees are in blossom. They would not normally maintain large surpluses, but people with an inclination for business and sufficient self-discipline not to drink all their stocks have gained a substantial income from țuică. A thrifty farmer with plum trees in his garden and additional stock on the hills (perhaps in a small sheltered depression or ‘padină’; making up a hectare of ground altogether out of a total holding of some 10ha) might well produce 1,000l of brandy and farmers with good orchard soils that have evolved by landsliding might produce up to 3,000l in a good year. In the past state owners would have had even larger stocks.

There would always be some people with substantial stocks for sale in the village to neighbours who might find themselves short when important ceremonies came up. Peasants with a considerable surplus would become well-known in the district and would attract custom from many of their neighbours seeking small quantities. Some peasants might even run informal drinking houses, taking țuică from the ‘butoi’ in a small measure (‘toi’) of 50g or 100g suitable for individual glasses (as distinct from the ‘talv’ used to fill liter bottles). The proceeds from such business were not inconsiderable, especially in poor years when prices might rise considerably. In 1995 plum brandy was fetching twice the normal price in the Mehedinți after the plum harvest failed completely. Before communism some families might make enough money from such transactions to be able to buy extra land or finance the further education of their children. Additional commerce might take place through sales to inns (‘hanuri’) and restaurants (‘cârciume’). In the 1930s at the fairs at Curtea de Argeș (and doubtless elsewhere) there were drinks hawked by Turkish itinerants and additional facilities in the restaurants and drinking booths (Fleure & Evans 1939, p.59).

Townpeople without relatives in the villages could always get țuică by placing an order with a peasant regularly coming to market with diverse produce: quantity, quality and price would normally be agreed in advance. It was rare for shops to sell plum brandy before the Second World War and it is still uncommon although some retail outlets are now appearing. Exchanges were also made between brandy from the Subcarpathians and cereals from the plains: peasants from the plains might take their cereals to the hills for barter or else the hill people would arrive in the lowlands with potatoes, fruit and plum brandy. In this way plum brandy distilling was a form of ‘industria sătească pentru schimb’ (Vulcănescu & Simionescu 1974, p.94) and involved the use of much-frequented trading roads: ‘drumuri meșteșugărilor’ (Ibid, p.69). Traditionally much of the marketing was carried out at the ‘nedei’ fairs on the high ground as peasants from the mountain valleys congregated on the watersheds. But the colonisation of the plains and the gradual introduction of modern communications increased the importance of trading centres on the lower ground and especially ‘la hotarul dintre dealuri și câmpie’: the hill-plain contact (Ibid, p.111).

Before communism brandy was arguably important in maintaining cohesion in the villages when the wealthy “cemented their own status by purveying alcohol to their communities” (Kideckel 1985, p.433) and by being prominent in any and every kind of

activity. Drinking celebrated village communality even though it also masked inherent processes of class conflict. The pre-socialist village of interlocking kin networks was underpinned by an increasingly differentiated class structure and subjected to various stresses, but alcohol checked such stress and true to form “took the edge off sub-surface conflicts” (Ibid, p.438). The more prosperous peasants held licences for single or double distillation as a matter of course and charged rent for poorer families to use their equipment: “both in the control of distilleries and in brandy manufacture prevailing social relationships were reproduced” (Ibid, p.434). Yet “the intensity of ‘cazan’ sociability was notable” (Ibid, p.435) involving the producing group, owner or second and a stream of relatives and friends: “discussions were broad and along with the labour exchanges common during distillation helped solidify the bonds of household and network and those between the classes as well”. Regular drinking was a feature of the ‘cărciume’ usually owned by the middle peasants and generally using one room in the owner's house (though there might be a separate structure in the courtyard when the owner's was wealthy). They were typically family enterprises providing work for all members in tending the bar, waiting and cooking since there was typically a full complement of food and beverages including local brandy as well as wine and other drinks obtained through merchants: once again drinking could be a positive force for community interaction. And the importance of alcohol could also be seen at Christmas when the ‘ceată’ stopped at each house to sing, play instruments and dance with the young women: brandy gave each household a role in the festivities and entertaining the young men was a means of showing-off daughters to suitors and future husbands.

Drink remained important under communism despite the propaganda against it. Control of the fruit and alcohol stocks allowed prices to rise steeply and as the state made money from alcohol. ‘Bufet’ managers were encouraged to improve alcohol sales while professionals were only too happy to accept gifts of alcohol for services rendered by doctors, dentists and bureaucrats. People used alcohol to “actively seek status and upward mobility in the fermenting society of multilateral socialist development” (Kideckel 1985, p.445). And there was still a need for group contact to ensure coordination in the planned economy so workers and foremen would drink at the end of a shift or during trips to the mountains; while harmony within the collective farm would be enhanced by drinks at the bar after annual farm meetings; not to mention eating and drinking at farm headquarters by the local leaders and visiting dignitaries (Kideckel 1983, p.73).

However despite its importance the topic is a difficult one to research historically because the documentary sources are rather limited. Production estimates are totally lacking, although activity was clearly intense with a trend towards more individual activities as distillation ceased to be a virtual monopoly of monasteries and large landowners. Ethnographical studies of Romania summarise the situation and Iordache (1985-6) lists many of the plum trees, as does Pop (1988) while there are a number of useful regional studies (Apolzan 1987; Irimie et al. 1985; Rădulescu 1937; Stoica & Pop 1984). Nineteenth century county surveys (e.g. Alessandrescu 1887; Condurăţeanu 1890; Iorgulescu 1892; Lahovari 1888) are often very informative with regard to plum trees but only a few mention the specific places where brandy was distilled (and without detail on the scale of production or the marketing arrangements). Our approach has been to study the industry in many different parts of the country and to collect data on the production methods, the terminology and such material

as may be available by way of oral history. This review consolidates our findings from the 1990-2005 period and a further survey will concentrate on the terminology which is highly complex as was demonstrated by Neiescu’s (1971) study Maramureș showing how certain terms were specific to each individual commune.

1.1. Plums and other fruits

Our study focuses on the plum which is especially useful for the peasant. Plum trees yield quite consistently for long periods: some 100 year old plum trees are known at Preluca (Maramureș). But plum trees are susceptible to severe damage in the event of bad weather during blossom. Therefore, processing in particularly good years must aim at a surplus to compensate for poorer results at other times. The plum was known in Pliny’s time and was introduced from the Caucasus; spreading to other areas with a warm climate (Constantinescu 1955). It is thought that people were selecting plum types (likewise apples and pears) as early as the Dacian and Roman periods; while the planting of fruit trees on hill grazings should be seen as a traditional conservation strategy for sloping land, with crops on level surfaces only (Constantinescu 1957). Plums constitute an important source of sugar which is highly advantageous for the production of the spirit. Distilling has therefore become traditional in Romania through the processing of fruit rather than the use of cereals (though German and Polish influence to this effect is of some significance in Transylvania). Being easy to store for domestic consumption or for commerce on a local or regional scale (unlike wine which must be kept in full bottles), brandy suits the Romanian peasant who has to perform a wide variety of tasks and cannot achieve excellence in all of them. Indeed, it is no surprise to find a strong correlation between the distribution of plum orchards and Romanian settlement. The name ‘prun’ crops up quite frequently in placenames (Jordan 1963, p.97): Pruni, Pruniș, Prunișu, Prunișari. Pruneasca, Prunești, Perja, Perjul, Dealul Perjului, and Perjoaia; also Slimnic, Slimnul, Sliva and Slivuța from the Slav ‘sliva’ as well as Silivaș, Silvas, Silvașul de Câmpie, Silvașul de Jos/Sus, Silvașul Român and Silvașul Unguresc derived from ‘Sclivaș’ coming from the Hungarian ‘szilvás’. However the use of plums has not been given great attention in the literature and this paper is an attempt to profile a familiar but under-researched topic. The products include ‘magiun’ (or ‘povidla’) which is a jam that does not contain sugar, and dried fruit (‘prune afumate’) prepared by heating over a fire using a tray or ‘lojniță/loșniță’ or (without smoke) in a furnace (‘as’) – or simply dried in the sun to make ‘poame’. Some plums are very suitable for ‘chisăliță’: a hot dessert produced by forcing the plums through a mesh to remove the stones and then mixing the fruit with maize or wheat flour. There is also some production of acetic acid known as ‘oțet’ or ‘șagar’ in Mehedinți. References to these activities – highly specialised in certain areas like Dumitrești (Vrancea) – can be found in the researches of ethnographers and sociologists in the years before and during the Second World War (Constantinescu 1942; Rețeganul 1942); also a summary is also available in our earlier work (Muică & Turnock 1996; 1997) but otherwise this paper will concentrate on brandy.

The main zone of production is the Curvature Carpathians (Figure 1), but there are also favourable natural conditions for fruit throughout the Subcarpathians as well as Bistrița (Balciu 1997) and Bucovina, where Popovici (1963, p.124) recommended the plums of Putna. There are also parts of Maramureș and Oaș: especially the latter where plums (as well as apricots, peaches and vines) are found in the depression in the 200-400m altitudinal band with volcanic rock (rich in nutritive minerals) and gentle slopes with a southerly orientation: areas

where the natural vegetation is oak forest on southern slopes (beech on the northern slopes) with many chesnut trees; while climate is moderate with oceanic influences compared with the continentality of Moldavia across the Carpathian climatic boundary (Ștefănescu 1972b; Velcea & Savu 1982). Tufescu (1974, p.450) also refers to the tradition of fruit farming in broken hilly country offering south, southeast and west-facing slopes with warm climate and brown-forest soils. The area includes the Getic Piedmont, the Mehedinți Plateau and Plaiul Bumbesților (the southern fringe of the Parâng Mountains with beech and oak woodland). An upper limit of about 1,000m has been noticed on Plaiul Bumbesților and at Fundata (e.g. on the edge of Piatra Craiului mountains southwest of Brașov) where trees often show signs of disease (though for unknown reasons). In view of the multiple use of land, trees are not usually densely planted, a situation which arises in part from the prevalence of landsliding. Trees are typically found on land which is used for a range of other agricultural purposes extending from cropping to haymaking and low-intensity pasturing with partial invasion by scrub. Often such land is worked from secondary farmsteads ('târlele') on the higher ground where seasonal family activity is based (Rădulescu 1937, pp.118-22). Traditionally each house would have its garden, including an 'ogor' a well-fertilised mini-farm with fruit trees, as noticed by Apolzan (1987, p.64) on the Platforma Luncanilor of Hunedoara. It is quite usual for peasants to cultivate the ground (though not to sow crops) over an area of up a meter radius from the tree but potatoes may be planted further away, using a spade or 'sapă'. But plum trees do especially well on the hill slopes and well-drained plateau lands (with salt largely washed out) especially where landslides have taken place but where conditions are now relatively stable (Muică & Turnock 1994). The lower terraces are also satisfactory, with alluvial and brown soils but without excessive humidity in contrast to higher terraces with highly acidic, podsolised soils and relatively high humidity where results are not nearly so good (though improved drainage can make a difference). The lower altitudinal limit lies at 250/200m where conditions become too dry.

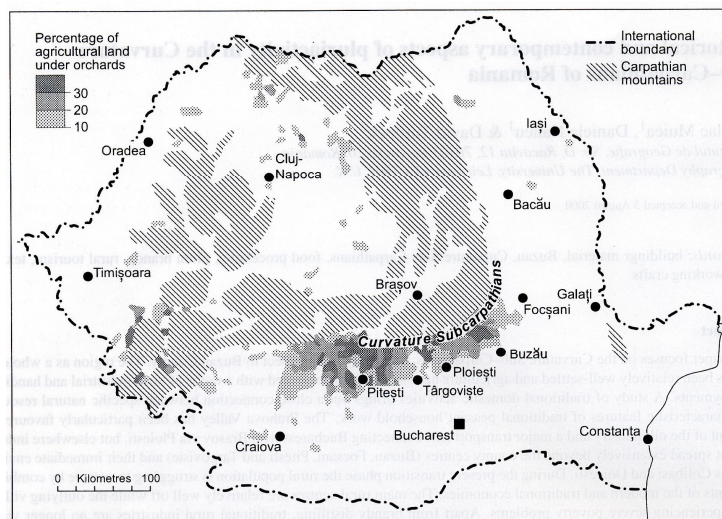


Figure 1: Main areas of fruit growing in Romania (after Ștefănescu 1972b)

There are various types of plum, described by Pop (1988, pp.133-9) and several varieties appear in specific areas such as ‘clotușă’ and ‘tuleu gras’ types used for țuică in the Getic Piedmont (Velcea et al. 1971, p.103). However a basic list would begin with ‘prună de toamnă’ (not normally of good enough quality for jam, dried fruit or acetic acid) otherwise known as ‘prună bistriță’, ‘prună românești’ or ‘prună vânătă’ (also, in the case of Siriu in the Buzău Mountains, ‘prună ungurești’, referring to its diffusion from Transylvania with its Habsburg influence). With the colour of a cornflower when ripe, it is associated with a range of soil types in all parts of Romania although it is never the dominant type and is not considered the best for țuică (having relatively little liquid and sugar). It also tends to ripen relatively late in the season when the temperatures are not so suitable for maturation. However it is an excellent fruit for the preparation of various preserves for winter use, having much meaty (‘carnoase’) material which is easily separated from the stone (‘sâmbure’), but with other names in particular regions including ‘os’ in the Mehedinți Plateau. ‘Prune de toamna alțoi’ or ‘prune vanat nobil’ are larger than the normal plums of this type and have been created by plant breeding. Such plums have basically the same characteristics but stones are smaller the fruit is meatier and the yield is generally heavier. ‘Prună grasă’ is more widely used, being found widely throughout the Subcarpathian zone (though in rather small numbers in any one place). The plums have the shape of a pigeon’s egg, but slightly elongated, with a violet colour which darkens during ripening. The fruit is succulent and sweet but ripening takes place relatively late (though before ‘prună de toamnă’) but this type is generally difficult to dislodge from the tree: hence the need for a long pole of beech, hazel or hornbeam known as a ‘targă’ (all the more so because in contrast to most other plum trees, the tree has many needles - reminiscent of the bush *Prunus spinosa* - which makes it difficult to climb). In the process of harvesting many branches get broken. Left to itself the fruit will usually remain until the first frost. Horticulturists have been able to produce improved fruit (‘prună grasă de alțoi’) providing larger plums but this type has only been adopted to a limited extent.

The ‘prună de vară’ (otherwise known as ‘prună roșie’ or ‘prună albă’) is found extensively and are among the best for țuică. It has a reddish-violet colour when it start to mature and this later turns to a violet-purple. The plum is again similar in shape to a pigeon’s egg, though slightly more elongated. It falls off the tree easily (in contrast to ‘prună grasă’) and the stone can be removed without difficulty. It is generally very sweet and juicy when ripe but there are many local varieties e.g. in the hills of Buzău the plums are meatier but less sweet than those in Mehedinți and other southern counties (including Arges, Gorj and Vâlcea). They are among the first plums to ripen but unfortunately (as with ‘prune grasă’) they do not all ripen at the same time. Ideally therefore the fruit should be picked in stages but labour may not be available to do this and there is also a security consideration; while in any case fermentation works better when the container is filled right up at once even if some less-ripe fruit is taken by use of the ‘targă’. Finally it should be stressed that particular types of plum trees go under a range of local names e.g. ‘prună bistriță’ is known as ‘prună acră’ at Poiana Mărului (Brașov) but ‘prună tomnatică’ in the adjacent commune of Șinca Nouă. And there are many local plum trees with their own characteristics: e.g. ‘prună albătuță’ is known at Târgu Lăpuș (Maramureș): it matures early, is easy to separate from the stone and is good for eating; ‘prună capucă’ from Bistrița-Năsăud matures relatively early compared with the well-known ‘prună bistriță’ while ‘prună ciorască’, known at Oarța (Maramureș) matures only in late autumn. However a comprehensive listing is not possible.

However, the plum brandy production area is now slightly more extensive than the distribution of the orchards would suggest because modern transport makes it feasible to buy-in plums where none are available locally. At Cujmir (Mehedinți) in the lowlands of Oltenia some peasants used to buy plums from the local state farm (IAS). Also in the Dorna Depression of Suceava (e.g. Dorna Candrenilor) and the Lăpuș Depression of Maramureș distillers often cart plums from surrounding villages (or else use cereals) in preference to buying the țuică (which is what peasants in the valley of the Moldavian Bistrița still do). A compromise adopted by some plains peasants e.g. Caracal (Olt) is to buy dried plums ('prune uscate') for a 'borhot' made by mixing with warm water and sugar. Again, although țuică is traditionally made from plums, other fruits may be used (either alone or in combination with plums). Apples and pears are now used widely e.g. in the Prislop area of Bistrița-Năsăud (where pears are considered better than apples), but it is usual to mill the fruit (certainly if hard) and produce a paste called 'dărălite' in the Oarța area of Maramureș: the mill is called a 'dărălău', but 'cioclodar' at Caransebeș (Caraș-Severin). Indeed plums may be milled in certain circumstances. In parts of Buzău and Vrancea pears are preferred to apples (as was also the case in Gorj and Transylvania in the inter-war period). In the Râmnicu Sărat area of Buzău pears are pulped and left to ferment for 8-10 days but they may be sliced and then left to dry (as 'poame') during warm, sunny days in autumn, with storage in a dry, cool place; then placed in a wooden or plastic vessel with tepid water and syrup added for fermentation in order to make 'rachiu primăvară' with plum stones added to the 'borhot' as a deception which produces good results.

'Corcodușe' (from *Prunus cerasifera*) is a wild cherry - small, round and not very sweet – with distant origins in the Caucasus from where it spread westwards to Romania. Often found in the vicinity of spruce forest, as at Corbu in the Bistricioara Valley (Harghita), they are the only plums available in many areas and are therefore used for distilling (especially in the plains) although the product is not very strong because the sugar content is low. At Brădeanu (Buzău) for example there are local plums ('prune țigănești') which do well under dry conditions – while 'prune grase' may be available they are usually of relatively poor quality due to dryness – there is a preference for 'corcodușe' that don't need a lot of sugar when ripe (any sugar, if needed, may be added in the form of syrup). 'Corcodușe' are however more acceptable when mixed with other plums (or other fruits), although in Transylvania they may be ignored altogether. But this tree is very suitable for grafting branches of apricot with substantial plantings of such trees made during the communist period in the Romanian Plain, the Danube floodplain and Dobrogea: production was used very largely for the table although the poorer quality fruit was used for țuică and yielded a drink with a distinctive bouquet. Other plum types include 'bobolane' from the Mehedinți Plateau (also known as 'gogonete' in Olt county): they are spherical in form, two to three centimetres in diameter (like a small egg) and yellow in colour when ripe. All the fruit tends to ripen at the same time and fall easily off the tree. It can be used for distilling on its own and because of the high sugar content and the entire distillation can be accepted as țuică. And with the fruit available relatively early in the season, it is recalled that plum brandy from this source could be available at Prejna (Mehedinți) in time for the feast of St. Maria in the middle of August.

Reference may also be made to the 'ciorane' from the tree known as the 'cioran' (but 'dronc' – and the fruits 'droance' – at Prejna). Resembling small hens' eggs and yellowish when ripe, the fruit falls easily from the tree and is very succulent. It can be used for brandy but

it does not give such good results as ‘bobolane’ because of the sugar content is low. Reference should also be made to the ‘dud’ (mulberry) and ‘zarzăr’ (wild apricot). Finally quinces are known at Caracal (Olt) – and there are many cherry trees in the hills with a fruit that yields țuică with a distinctive bouquet, provided distillation takes place immediately after fermentation. Another option (already referred to) is use the residue (‘comină’, ‘prăștină’ or tescovină) generated at the ‘must’ or ‘vin’ stages of wine production, with the addition of sugar in the form of syrup. Finally there is the cereal option which is widely used in Transylvania e.g. ‘țuică de cereale’ is produced in the Prislop area of Bistrița-Năsăud with maize flour mixed in hot water with fresh water and sugar is added – also some wheat flour and brewer’s yeast (‘drojdie de bere’) or mill residue (‘tărățe’) – and left to ferment for 10 days. In the plains at Alexandria (Teleorman) maize is used in preference to the local ‘prună gușată’ although nearby at Tătăraști the locals persevere with rest for ‘țuică de prăștină’ and low grade fruits for ‘țuică de zarzăr’: the name also used for brandy made from ‘corcodușe’.

1.2. The Apuseni Mountains: A Case Study

The Apuseni Mountains show using all the options being used. Here there is a great need for alcohol where life is hard (as in other mining regions) while there is also a tradition of ‘comerț ambulant’ extending across the adjacent lowlands. But given the topoclimatic conditions the area is marginal for plum trees which are at their limits of tolerance in the upper Arieș basin. Aspect and gradient are locally important because fruit from the south slope (‘față’) is thought better than fruit from the north slope (‘dos’): indeed steep, north-facing slopes are usually forested in their entirety. Plums are found in the valleys especially in ‘hoanci’ grassy depressions (similar to the ‘padină’ of Mehedinți) but not higher up because of frost. Several types are available but only two are available in the upper Arieș around Albac (Alba) where the season is delayed by two or three weeks compared with adjacent areas in Bihor and Hunedoara. A local type of ‘prună grasă’ is almost spherical and offers both an autumn variety (sour, even when well-ripened in late September/early October, but tolerant, prolific, easy to harvest and process) and a summer variety (sometimes differentiated as ‘prune roșii’) which again is less sweet than elsewhere though easy to handle. Likewise, ‘prune bistrite’ are considered the best for brandy in the area across an extensive area between Bistra and Gârda but they are only rarely available now due to the ravages of pollution. Other plums are less widely found. ‘Prune albe mari’ or ‘prune bolunde’ are traditional plums now in decline and only occasionally found in the Câmpeni area as well as Buceș-Vulcan and Dealul Muntelui below Bistra. Meanwhile the smaller ‘prune albe mici’ (or simply ‘prune albe’ since ‘prune albe mari’ are now rare) occur in the same area – but also Avram Iancu – where they are good for eating and distilling and are picked at the same time as the summer variety of ‘prune grase’. There is a local variety at Buceș-Vulcan lying to the south of Câmpeni is a much more favoured area with a number of local plum types as well as other fruits. It is similar to ‘prune galbene varatice’ which occurs in the same area along with other local plums: ‘prune droanțe/droance’ which are available in late autumn in the same area but are difficult to harvest (sometimes remaining on the tree until the winter snow because they are difficult to dislodge) and also process, as is also the case with ‘prune bubulene’ and ‘prune ursăști’ which ripen relatively early, though not ‘prune mariene/broștești’ from which the stone is removed easily. Finally, the semi-wild ‘prune culducuțe’ are small spherical plums that rather sour and dry and used only when no other fruit is available.

Distilling has however advanced in this area where there were fewer small stills before communism in areas with little fruit (although there remain contrasts in still between the Arieș valley – with 120l at Avram Iancu and 120-180l at Sohodol as well as ‘clandestine stills’ of 50-70l – and Buceș-Vulcan where the largest stills reach 350l). For example in the upper Arieș valley where distilling used to be rare there are not only stills at Albac and Gârda but another at Pătrăhăițești (an elevated outlying hamlet in Arieșeni commune). Various other fruits are available in these marginal situations. Sweet apples (‘mere poinice’, ‘mere salcii’ and the new ‘mere ionathane’) and pears. There are also wild apples good for distilling e.g. at După Piatră above Buceș-Vulcan and even sour apples are useful for ‘oțet’. The ‘corcodușa’ (known in the past as ‘zarzără’ as was the case throughout Transylvania) – generally violet/yellowish and violet and including a new larger variety that is more distinctly yellow – are found in the hills of Bistra and Lupșa (where there are enough plums) but also higher up at Gârda, Horea and Sohodol where they are greatly needed. Meanwhile the sweet cherry (‘cireșă’) – generally wild – is used for brandy at Buceș-Vulcan, Pătrăhăițești and Sohodol, while the ‘coarnă’ or Cornelian cherry exists at Buceș-Vulcan and is used when the harvest is a good and where grape residues (often known as ‘dreve’ in this area) provide a further option. Above Câmpeni țuică is obtained very largely from apples which are well-adapted to the conditions (complicated recently by pollution). However for most fruits conditions become particularly difficult in the Arieș valley above Bistra: not just for plum trees, but also for apple, cherry and sweet cherry trees which may bear fruit in alternate years. And these trees effectively do not exist higher up than Gârda and Scărișoara: indeed conditions have been getting more difficult over the last two or three decades while pollution has been noticed at Buceș-Vulcan in recent years. Plums are brought in to Gârda from orchards at Brusturi (Bihor) which is an important area for distilling with stills of 150-250l). Some apples are also brought from Bihor because they are thought to be of better quality than those in the Câmpeni area. Even so, fermentation (‘hierb’ in this area) is more difficult for apples than in regions with a warmer climate: distillers at Buceș-Vulcan add boiling water and some boil the apples in a still until the skin splits before pouring them into the fermentation vessel with warm water. By contrast in the lower valley (e.g. at Baia de Arieș) the milder climate is more conducive to fermentation and a better quality of brandy is produced. Finally, cereals are used in several places including Albac and more widely in poor years for fruit by people who have experience of commerce. Recipes may be quite complicated with preferred ratios involving several types of cereal, although the stills and working methods are not so well perfected as in Maramureș/Oaș.

2. THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

The work of harvesting the plums (‘scuturatul prunelor’) is an important part of the agricultural programme in late summer for summer plums (prună albă/de vară/galbenă/gâtlană/goldană/roșie) and autumn for the others (prună de toamnă/grasă/poroabă/țiganești/vânete). Some plums will readily fall from the tree, especially when ripe (e.g. ‘bobolane’ which develop a yellowish colour) and it is only necessary to shake the branches to dislodge all the fruit. More vigorous shaking may be necessary for the less-ripe fruit (especially ‘prună de vară’) and the ‘targă’ may also be needed. ‘Prune grase’ are most difficult to harvest and many branches may be broken in the process. Gathering the fruit (‘adunatul prunelor’) usually involves packing into wicker baskets (nowadays large plastic containers: ‘butoiaie de plastic’) and transport by cart to the farm.

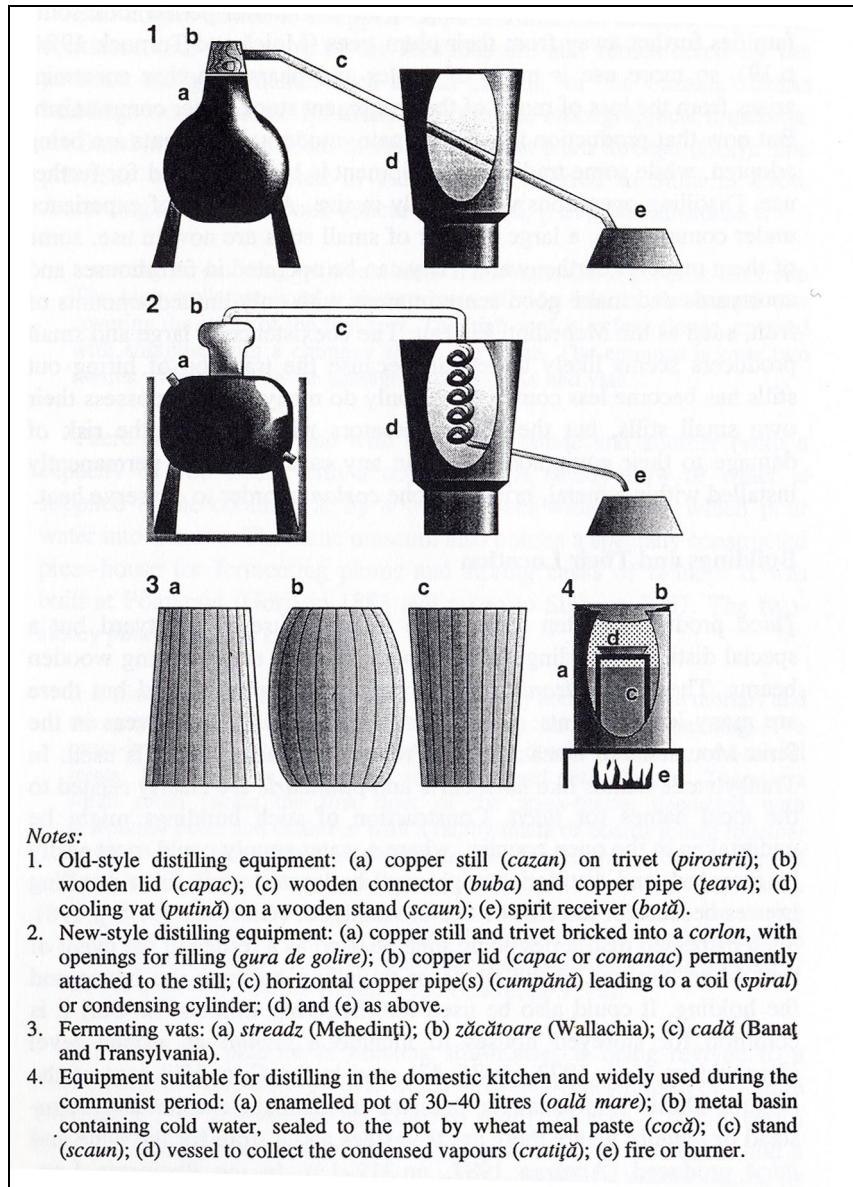


Figure 2: The distilling process

Fermentation of plums – known as ‘fiertul prunelor’ in Muntenia and Oltenia but ‘dospitul prunelor’ in Transylvania (though ‘acritul prunelor’ in the Apuseni) – takes place in the autumn. The same applies for other fruits e.g. summer apples/pears are processed the following autumn at Sohodol (Alba), but autumn apples are usually distilled in the spring of the following year at Voinești (Dâmbovița). The usual name for the wash derived from fermented

fruit is ‘borhot’ (especially in Muntenia, Oltenia and Transylvania) although confusion can arise because the same name is used for various forms of residual material (dregs, grounds and lees) and specifically draff and grape husks. There are many local names in Transylvania e.g. in the Apuseni we have ‘fermentare’ in Câmpeni, ‘fiert’ in Buceş-Vulcan, ‘hiarbă’ in Avram Iancu, and ‘hierb’ in Sohodol; while pulped apples are called ‘dreve’ at Sohodol – although the same name is used for fermented plums at Avram Iancu and for ‘borhot’ in general at Hârseni (Braşov) (Kideckel 1985, p.434) – while all fermented fruit is known uniformly as ‘borhot’ at Bistra and Horea. In Mehedinţi the word is ‘comină’ although this can also have different meaning in parts of Oltenia as the residue from the production of must (the first stage in the vinification process) most commonly known as ‘tescovină’. In the eastern part of Gorj and in Vâlcea the fermented fruit is called ‘boască’ the residue in the still after distillation is known as ‘boroghină’.

Fermentation requires large wooden vats (‘vase pentru prune’) of 1,000-2,500l though some are as small as 400-500l. Once again the name varies: ‘butie’ is common in Muntenia and Oltenia – ‘polată’ at Voineşti – but ‘cadă’ is used in Transylvania (also ‘ghioabă’ in Alba – and ‘voz’ in Hunedoara, reflecting Hungarian influence). Made of wooden staves (‘doage’) of oak or fir and cylindrical in form with only a slight difference in diameter between top and bottom, they are typically 2.0–2.5m high and steps are usually needed to ladle out the fermented fruit using a large wooden spoon or ‘cauc’. In the Buzău/Vrancea Subcarpathians where the vessel is called a ‘tocitoare’ the diameter at the base is smaller (c.105cm) than at the top (c.135cm) whereas in Mehedinţi (where the vessel is called a ‘streadz’) the diameter at the bottom is larger. In Argeş, Gorj and Vâlcea the ‘butie’ is shaped like a barrel with the largest diameter is in the centre. The vessels are usually kept in a cool sheltered place (‘cazanie’ or ‘şopron’) at the back of the house or close to the still (and may be used during part of the year for storing cereals) but for rapid fermentation a warm place is needed. Rather different is the ‘hârdău’ (‘hurdău’ in northwestern Transylvania after the Hungarian ‘hordo’) which is a wooden vat of 75–85l made from staves of which two are elongated with holes drilled (‘ca urechi’) so that it can be carried by two men inserting a pole. And where fruit is limited one such vessel may suffice. It is also feasible to ferment plums in the same plastic containers used to carry fruit from the orchard (which may again be used to take the fermented fruit to the still where distillation takes place elsewhere – as was often the case under communism when peasants fermenting fruit at home but were obliged to use the central distillery). However it is more usual at this stage to use a ‘cărător’: a barrel of some two meters in length and some 65cm in diameter at the centre which is carried horizontally on a cart with the fruit loaded through a large square-shaped opening in the centre (plainly the central staves must be extremely broad for an opening of this size to be made in it). In the communist period when cooperative farm members were not allowed to own oxen the cart would be drawn by a single cow (feasible enough on level ground) while ladling the fruit from the ‘cărător’ and into the still is usually done by means of a small bucket (‘găleată’) but usually with an arm or handle about a meter in length and known as a ‘ciolmic’.

Fermentation continues until a hard crust forms: this is usually known as a ‘pat’ but it may be also ‘pod’, ‘plută’ or ‘scoartă’. Plums ferment (‘fierb’/‘se acresc’) relatively quickly although each type of plum is different and should ideally have its own vessel. However Constantin Butucă, a distiller at Pătârlagele (Buzău) considers that in the case of acid plums (collected relatively early in the season) the fermentation period is three weeks at the most and

for other plums it would be less. By contrast apples need more preparation: previously pulped with a wooden hammer (‘covată’) they are now reduced to paste by an electrically-powered machine (sometimes known as a ‘dărălău’) and are always placed above plums in the vat because this accelerates the process. With pears by contrast fermentation begins quickly when the fruit is really ripe. And in the Dumitrești area (Vrancea) where brandy is made in spring from ‘poame’ derived from pears, the poame is placed in lukewarm water with sugar and is left to ferment for just 8-10 days. Meanwhile a cereal borhot – made typically from a mixture of sprouting rye, ordinary rye, maize and wheat (with local variations in the ratio) mixed in boiling water; stirred until the taste is sweet (whereupon lukewarm water is added to produce a thin liquid with beer yeast is added) – should be ready after a week with a skin (‘floare’) on the surface. It is worth noting that fermentation may also be made more difficult by cool conditions: thus distillers at Buceș-Vulcan (Hunedoara) add boiling water. Also, as already noted, even plums as well as some sugar to obtain more spirit. Also that even plums are occasionally milled e.g. ‘prune grase’ in Bistrița-Năsăud.

2.1. Distilling

The distillation process for the fermented plums (‘prunele din fiert’) and other fruit, which requires great care and skill, makes use of a still known usually as a ‘cazan’ (a word of Turkish origin) but ‘caldare’ (of Latin origin) in Transylvania. The work is normally done in the autumn as soon as the ‘borhot’ is ready because after the ‘pod’ is formed alcohol will be lost by delay. But, especially in the case of plums harvested late, it may be postponed until the spring just before the start of major agricultural work such as hoeing – while avoiding the risk that warmer weather will start a second fermentation, in which case the ‘pat’ will sink and alcohol will evaporate. Indeed, a reason for the fermenting vessel having a smaller diameter lower down is that the sinking of the raft may be arrested for a time. Description of the distilling processes will start with the equipment widely used before the Second World War and familiar to the lead author as a youngster helping his parents in the village of Gornovița (Mehedinți). Nowadays such equipment is quite rare but the principal changes are summarised later in the section. The still is usually made of copper since this gives the best results and avoids the corrosion and consequent toxicity that occurs when iron is used. Before communist collectivisation stills were usually larger than 80l and typically 100-200l, but in the more prosperous villages with an abundance of fruit there were some very large stills of 450-500l known as ‘povarne’. The very largest still known to the authors is 750l and belonged to Constantin Țapardea of Comănești (Mehedinți) until confiscated by the communists. Acquiring a still involved a significant commercial decision: most were brought from itinerant Roma, known as ‘zlătari’ or ‘țigani nomazi’ – but in Mehedinți ‘țigani nemțești’ or ‘caldarari’ with the latter referring to coppersmiths in general. Craftsmen could be engaged at fairs (Fleure & Evans 1939, p.57) but they would also travel round the villages and in any case peasants would need to establish the maker’s credentials because of the danger of cheating through the use of iron (suitably coloured to give the appearance of copper) and they would also try and work with maker to ensure a good quality job.

Small stills were quite rare because it was usual for the poorer peasants to hire a still of conventional size from a more affluent neighbour (though he would have the trouble of transporting either the equipment or the ‘borhot’ and would pay a rent (known as ‘cazanit’ or ‘uium’ in Gorj and ‘vama’ in Mehedinți) amounting to about a tenth of the production – but as

much as a sixth has been known –. paid in cash or kind. cash: usually the latter when spirit was sold on the market (or to people calling at the house); whereas people who did not make commerce would have little money in hand and would prefer to pay in kind. The cazan owner or his second would normally be present to tend the fire (requiring much skill), look after the equipment and ensure the proper ‘take’ at the end – and with double distillation in Transylvania there is always an expert in charge. Now that stills are usually contained by a ‘corlon’ the ‘borhot’ must always be brought to the still; so it is quite usual for the owner to keep a ‘cărător’ to help his clients – who would otherwise have to use a ‘hârdău’, perhaps with small tree branches placed on top of the ‘borhot’ to minimise spillage (although where the distance is very short – and even in the same farmyard - a miscellaneous selection of vessels can be pressed into service). Under the circumstances ‘cazane’ may be in almost continuous operation from September until streams began to freeze, usually at the end of December, with the possibility of several hires in one day (avoiding the need for reheating) with relatives being involved in successive batches e.g. a father staying on to help his son-in-law.

The copper still has a wooden cap or lid (‘capac’) which is fitted on to the ‘ozna’ – the rim or shoulder of the still some 4.0cm wide – after the loading of the wash or ‘borhot’. The ‘capac’ is traditionally fashioned from a piece of wood and may be as much as 80cms high. A copper tube (‘țeavă’) runs from the top of the ‘capac’ through a large container filled with cold water to cause condensation (‘răcire’). Usually there is a single tube (about 15cms in diameter and slightly tapering) but sometimes there are two ‘țevi’, as noted at Curtișoara (Gorj), and three have been reported from Corodești (Vaslui) on the Bârlad Plateau of Moldavia and at Racovița (Vâlcea). In all cases the tubes must be attached to the ‘capac’ through a wooden ‘bubă’: a circular wooden tube of 25-30cms to engage both the slightly-inclined square-shaped orifice in the ‘capac’ (where it has a diameter of 12-15cms) and the condensation tube where the diameter tapers to 7-8cms. Alternatively there may be the appropriate number of small tubes ‘țevi mici’ (preferably made from the wood of the sweet cherry – “țevi de lemn cireș” – because this rarely cracks) to connect with the ‘capac’ rather than a single ‘bubă’. Of course the joints at either end of the ‘bubă’ (or its equivalent) must be sealed to prevent the escape of vapours from the still (‘răsufla cazanul’): pieces of cotton or hemp cloth may be used in the first instance (especially for the ‘bubă’) before clay soil is applied at the two ends of the ‘bubă’ and also at the contact between the ‘cazan’ and the ‘capac’. Indeed sealing is a major consideration to stop the vapours escaping i.e. to stop the cazan breathing (‘să nu răsuflă cazanul’ or ‘să nu buvnească’). And since the wooden parts do not always fit tightly there are significant gaps to be filled. Binding materials were needed for application by hand or a plastering tool, with choice depending on a combination of convenience (what is economical and readily to hand) and tradition. Clayey earth (‘pământ argilos’) is widely available and is known under various local names: ‘humă’ in Gorj and Mehedinți, ‘clisă’ in Buzău and ‘lut’ at Voinești (Dâmbovița).

The earth must be mixed with water by a ‘treading’ process (popularly referred to as ‘se calcă’ done by hand) or with a small implement. At Gornovița (Mehedinți) it is usual to mix in cow dung. The material is then applied to the various joints, either by hand or with the use of a plastering tool. But cotton and linen rags are needed to ensure that the sealant does not come into contact with the spirit (especially the ‘bubă’ which must be completely covered) while surplus material can be placed on the ‘capac’ to block any tiny gaps in the wood and help guard against the risk of explosion by increasing the weight. At the end of the first cycle the ‘capac’ is

removed by pulling it gently towards the operator while vapour escapes in the opposite direction; clay is removed from the lip of the still and placed in a bowl (typically made from a hollowed-out piece of wood) for recycling with the help of dregs (‘boască’) generally thought to be better than water since the organic matter makes it more adhesive, although working with ‘boască’ blackens the hands for as long as a fortnight! As will be emphasised below, with modern equipment sealing is relatively simple because there is no ‘bubă’ and the various parts (all of copper) fit together tightly. Indeed the ‘capac’ may be permanently attached to the still where there is a duct at the bottom the still to evacuate ‘boască’ and another at the top for recharging with ‘borhot’: only a little clay is still needed (alternatively ‘coca’ which is a paste made by mixing maize/wheat flour, bread or hot ‘mămăligă’ with warm water plus some ash or clay for older equipment with more fissures). Finally the condensation pipe is fitted to run obliquely through a wooden cooling vat usually known as a ‘putină’ or ‘răcitor’, but ‘cazăniță’ in Mehedinți, ‘țiver’ in parts of Muntenia and ‘voz’ in Hunedoara – where the same word as is used for a fermenting vessel – traditionally with a greater diameter at the base (c.1.5m) than at the top (c.1.0m): typical figures for Buzău although the difference is often greater in Mehedinți. Typically secured by three or four metal hoops and placed on a wooden platform or ‘scaun’, the ‘putină’ is usually round in shape but in Vrancea and central Moldavia (where the term ‘durbacă’ is used) it is elliptical so that a greater length of the ‘țeavă’ can be surrounded by water (taking advantage of longest axis).

As the spirit condenses in the tube it runs into a ‘botă’ (‘burie’ in Mehedinți and ‘sofei’ in Gorj); while a lighter container suitable for transporting spirit is known as ‘fucie’): a small wooden vessel made from staves of acacia or oak; also cylindrical in form with a slightly greater diameter at the base than the top with a capacity sufficient to hold all the spirit condensing during a single distillation cycle: a ‘botă’ of 20-25l would be appropriate for a still of 200l (45l for a still of 450l). The ‘botă’ is closed at the top apart from two holes: a large one in the centre (cut through a relatively broad stave) for brandy that can be poured into a cask for storage and a smaller hole at the edge for air. As the brandy condenses it is directed into the ‘botă’ by a small wooden attachment (usually of beech wood) to the pipe known as a ‘sclipuș’ in Mehedinți or a ‘pană’ in Gorj. However at Mușetești (Gorj) the bark or ‘coajă’ of ‘prună de toamnă’ is preferred because it can impart a slight yellowish colouring to the brandy. But today a small metal or plastic funnel is usual. Short tubes from the hemlock or elder may be used to check the strength of the țuică. In Vrancea, where there were usually two tubes, the ‘botă’ is replaced by a ‘găletar’ which has a similar construction but is open at the top. When the still is over 400l a ‘hârdău’ may be used, although, as noted above, such a vessel is normally used as a small fermentation vat or a receptacle for transporting ‘borhot’. However, this method can create problems, for at Mușetești (Gorj) a case is remembered where such a vessel full of spirit was left temporarily unattended some distance from the farmhouse: a cow seeking water drank gulps of țuică and promptly collapsed!

2.2. The Fire and the Fuel Supply

The fire is lit in a stone, brick or iron grate under the trivet (‘pirostrii’ in Gorj) on which the still stands. Initially a strong fire is needed to start the distillation process (‘pornirea cazanul’) but once the spirit starts to condense the fire is damped down to burn steadily, with damp cloths placed on the side of the still or round the tubes to act a form of control. Some fuels like poplar and willow burn too quickly, almost like a ‘foc de paie’ (a straw fire) which

must always be avoided to prevent burning the 'borhot' at the bottom of the still and giving the brandy the smokey taste of 'țuică afumată'. Another consequence of a strong fire is 'bueste cazanul' causing the 'borhot' to rise into the 'țeavă' or 'da roșu de țeavă' at Curtișoara (Gorj): this affects the taste and colour of the spirit while leaving a reddish colouring at the bottom of the still and in the pipe. Burning may be aggravated by small bits of woody material picked up when the plums were harvested: although such material will tend to fall to the bottom of the fermenting vessel there is a danger that some of it may be inadvertently transferred to the still. These problems can be minimised by placing young beechwood branches ('ramur cu frunze') on the bottom of the still, while the 'borhot' may be agitated by a birch stick ('măturoi') until it boils when the 'capac' is fitted: then the 'borhot' is agitated automatically and the danger is greatly reduced. Of course, this method means that some vapours escape and a small amount of spirit is lost but most distillers would consider it a small price to pay for a good quality brandy. It is also important not to overfill the still with 'borhot': a still of 140l may be filled almost full with 120l of plum 'borhot' but only 105-110l for pear and 90-95l for a cereal 'borhot'. 'Drojdia de vin' calls for particular care and it is recommended that the still should not be more than half full. However, a crucial issue arises over proper control of the fire and economical use of fuel. The principal fruits used for brandy are found in areas that are also reasonably well wooded with deciduous trees. Acacia and hornbeam are acceptable as is the wood of the fruit trees themselves: apple, cherry (both sour and sweet), nut, pear and plum. However, beech wood tends to be used most often because of the prominence of this species (while oak is valuable for construction, furniture and fencing - and the wood from plum trees is much sought after by blacksmiths as a source of charcoal: indeed it is not uncommon for such material to be accepted as payment in kind for their work to maintain a reserve). But all wood used for the fire must be dry to ensure the necessary heat, although a mixture including small amount of green wood, which contains too much water to make a good fire on its own but can be useful for control, especially when some reduction in the force of the fire is needed as the spirit starts to flow i.e. at the stage of 'pornirea cazanului' when a moderate heat ('jar') must be maintained steadily until the distillation is complete and the fire is damped down. At this stage, the fire may be cooled by water and a rake (typically about 80cms in length) may be used to draw off small pieces of charcoal that can be used in the smithy. However, with modern stills having ducts to simplify the operations of removing 'boască', washing the still and refilling with 'borhot', the fire hardly needs damping down at all.

Outside the main fruit growing and distilling areas rather different situations arise. In the mountains, where the shortage of fruit usually means that brandy is made from cereals, the beechwoods give way to fir, juniper, pine and spruce which are not so satisfactory for the fire: the black Banat pine is a very good source but such wood is comparatively rare. However, in the plains where all wood is in short supply, it is necessary to use poorer material such as poplar and willow that burns too quickly. And in the silvosteppe where there is virtually no woodland remaining, there may be no choice but to use hay and crop residues. At Alexandria (Teleorman) maize and sunflower residues are used but when spirit starts to flow only wood is used to keep the fire under control since the modern system of scraping the still bottom is not employed to stop burning. Maximum use must be made of thinnings from acacia plantations and other meadow woodlands as well as branches broken off fruit trees by the wind. In areas with hydrocarbon reserves (Gorj and Prahova) 'gaz de sondă' can provide a steady heat; so much so that that the distiller can leave the still for periods of up to three hours. Indeed, clandestine production of brandy during the communist period in domestic kitchens often

involved the use of bottled gas (‘aragaz’) in lowland areas, while large distilleries built by the state in fruit growing lacking a supply of gas (e.g. Lunca Dunării) would use diesel oil. To economise on fuel it is now common (as already noted) to place the still within a ‘corlon’ (‘cotlon’ or ‘cotron’). The classic ‘corlon’ encloses the still tightly with flues for the hot air to circulate while supporting it at a convenient height above the grate where the fire is lit. In the communist period it became common to use an oil drum (‘butoi de tablă’) with a space all round the still for heat to circulate. Although less efficient than the classic ‘corlon’ (since additional support is needed on either side of the grate), this method did offer some fuel economy, while allowing for the rapid dismantling and concealment of in the event of a sudden inspection by the authorities. Another economy measure has been copied from large distilleries by some peasant distillers although it is not yet widely used: the heat from the cazan may be used to pre-heat the ‘borhot’ for the next batch (‘cazanul următor’) if the pipe connecting the still to the condensation vat passes through a copper tank specially installed above the still. There is a further advantage in that the heated ‘borhot’ can be fed by gravity into the still when it is ready for recharging. Indeed, cycles may continue as long as necessary. In Transylvania where the still is called a ‘caldare’ peasants would ask each other ‘câte caldari ai făcut?’ i.e. how many batches of plum brandy have you made?; while the word ‘schimbare’ signifies the switching of the procedure back to the beginning.

2.3. First and Second Distillations

The first liter of the distillation which is whitish with a bad taste and usually called ‘fruntea’ – but ‘redeș’ or ‘rezeș’ for the proceeds of apple ‘borhot’ in the Apuseni) and ‘chicuș’ in Vrancea – is often set aside as alcohol for external medicinal use because of its small copper content (hence ‘țuică aramită’) appreciated as medicinal alcohol as a massage (‘frecții’) to help with rheumatism. Meanwhile the last part is variously named ‘codină’ (Gorj), ‘otcă’ in parts of Transylvania – with some corruption to ‘votcă’ through the influence of vodka since the Second World War), ‘poriz’ in Mehedinți, ‘poslede’ in Buzău and ‘poslete’ in Vrancea: words which derive from Slavonic and mean ‘from/at the end’ (Giurescu 1974, p.199). The last part is notable because the strength of the spirit starts to decline and distillers must decide how much of it they wish to retain and store as țuică. Strength can easily be tested by throwing spirit on the fire: unless the fire flares up it can be assumed that the alcoholic content is very low. It is also reported from Hârșeni (Brașov) that strength (‘tărie’) was assessed by placing brandy on the still with a hot coal: the intensity of the burn would indicate whether distillation should continue. Women could use their eyes which would smart through contact with alcohol. So when the flow has become very feeble or weak, or when the ‘botă’ is full (i.e. ‘botă plină’), the distillation process can be cut off (‘rupe cazanul’) although on the Bârlad Plateau it was usual to keep the last part of the distillation running with the proceeds added to the borhot of the next cycle to make it more liquid. It would now be time for the owner of the equipment to take his ‘vama’ and for all those present to sample the product. Maize and potatoes may be cooked to provide ‘porumbi fripți’ and ‘cartofi copți’ to eat with the brandy on what is traditionally a merry occasion to which passing travellers are traditionally invited. With this in mind distilling may well correlate with christian festivals since people are generally available on such occasions, whereas political holidays are not so widely respected by the peasantry.

The first distillation produces traditional ‘țuică românească’ with a strength of 18-24 deg, but in most parts of Transylvania the produce of the first distillation is called ‘suzlă’ and it is usual to distil twice and produce ‘țuică întoarsă’ as it is known in the south of the region; alternatively (as already noted) ‘palincă’ in the central part, after the Hungarian ‘palinka’, and ‘horincă’ in Maramureș as a result of Ukrainian influence. Other names may refer explicitly to particular areas like ‘țuică de Turț’ and ‘țuică de Zalău’. Occasional double distillation is also reported from Banat but the practice of double distillation in the former Habsburg territories is by no means universal: indeed it is curious that while many parts of the Apuseni do go in for double distillation, the Brad area of Hunedoara does not – although it is particularly well-endowed with fruit. There is no clear explanation for this anomaly although it could be that the practice elsewhere arises from the traditional dependence of the Moți peasants on ‘comerț ambulant’ and in particular the exchange of brandy for maize at Turda; resulting in a preference for double distillation because of the higher value in relation to weight. However only borhot from apples and pears is now distilled twice: the borhot from plums is distilled only once, as at Sohodol (Alba). The procedure for the second distillation is identical to the first except that it is ‘suzlă’ that is put into the still rather than ‘borhot’ and activity will continue until the product is almost like milk (‘slab laptoasă’). However a forestry worker from Bixad (Oaș) interviewed in 1994 mentioned that a smaller still of 300l (known as a ‘baterie’) was used in his village for the second distillation compared with a much larger still of 500l for the first. Once again the first liter of so of the distillation may be set aside for external medicinal use (since the alcohol may be too toxic for drinking). The spirit is usually colourless, though it may become slightly milky (‘lăptoasă’) towards the end of the distillation as the strength is reduced. When this situation occurs in the second distillation in the Târgu Lăpuș area of Maramureș it is usual to stop the process and throw away what remains in the still while retaining only the strong spirit which is known as ‘horincă verde’. But in general the second distillation must be handled with particular care: the still should not be too full, the size of the ‘capac’ must be correctly related to the volume of the still and the fire should not be too strong in order to reduce the risk of an explosion through the great pressure of vapour: fatal accidents have occurred when distillers have not had the same experience as Transylvanian specialists. The second distillation may use the same still or there may be a smaller still dedicated to the second phase which reduces the volume of the first distillation by about two-thirds although it could be as much as four-fifths (a ration of 5:1 rather than 3:1). Thus there is a range of still sizes in various Transylvanian locations: 60-350l at Lechința and 250-500l at Prislop (Bistria-Năsăud); also 120-160l at Rogoz (Maramureș) – with ‘capac’ capacity reckoned as a third of the still, while still shapes vary between tall-thin and low-fat. The second phase may be referred to as ‘întors’ (meaning a return) and the product may be called ‘rachiu întors’. But the normal name for the second distillation spirit is ‘vinars’ as opposed to țuică for the first; as at Lechința (Bistrița-Năsăud), although ‘profriptă’ is used in Banat. However at Avram Iancu (Alba) ‘vinars’ is used for the first distillation more usually referred to as ‘suzlă’ or ‘otcă’, with the latter (known in the Apuseni and Maramureș/Oaș) often corrupted to ‘votcă’ by Russian influence – as at Bistra (Alba) – although inappropriately since real ‘vodka’ is much stronger than ‘votcă’. A curious hybrid is ‘votchii’ used in the Apuseni at Horea and Sohodol.

2.4. Modern Distillation

Although fermentation procedures are little changed apart from the tendency at centralised distilleries (which emerged under communism) to sink pits into the ground and line them with concrete. The results have not been particularly good because the lower temperature which made for incomplete fermentation (while of brandy believe that a chemical reaction between the ‘borhot’ and the concrete affected the bouquet of the țuică – with a possible solution through insulation by a layer of bitumen). But distillation has changed quite radically because the modern factory-made still – which may be called ‘alambic’ from the Arabic ‘alambik’ and the French ‘alambique’, although the name has also been used historically as Buznea (1932) points out for Runcu (Gorj) – rarely uses the wooden ‘capac’: instead there is a copper dome in the shape of metropolitan’s or prince’s hat (‘comanac’) which is the name used in Banat and Transylvania. The copper cap is specially made to match the capacity of the still (with a volume one third of still capacity) and to fit the top of the still, slotting tightly on to the shoulder and inserted into a lip (‘buză’) some four centimeters high on the outer edge of the rim. This greatly reduces the need for sealants: instead of using substantial amounts of clay (very necessary where the wooden ‘capac’ became somewhat deformed through the heat and humidity) it is often sufficient to use small quantities of ‘mămăligă’ or paste made from wheat flour (‘faină de grâu’) and warm water. The copper ‘capac’ is much more durable than the old wooden type but ideally the metal needs ‘working’ (i.e. hammering by a skilled metalworker, traditionally Roma) so that the metal is transformed from ‘cupru industrial’ to ‘cupru alimentar’. The modern stills are also equipped with a control system or ‘sistem de părghie’ involving an ‘învârtitor’: a wooden or copper scraper attached to an axle running vertically through the inside of the still and operated by a handle on the top of the lid – or at the side of the still, which is possible through a gearing mechanism (‘tija cu lanțuri’) to agitate the ‘borhot’ at the bottom of the still and prevent it sticking: the horizontal system is preferable because it is not affected by the removal of the ‘capac’ which may be necessary at the end of each batch. Another important refinement is the manufacture of stills with orifices at the top and bottom: respectively for filling the still (through the ‘gura de umplare’) and evacuating the ‘boasca’ (by the ‘gura de golire’). These features mean that the ‘capac’ can be permanently attached to the still and the distillation cycles can follow one another more quickly. However the typical small ‘family’ still does not usually have these features and the ‘capac’ must therefore be movable, though the tight fit maintained by the use of copper means that sealing is relatively simple. The copper ‘capac’ or ‘comanac’ also provides a test for the presence of alcohol: if a flame turns blue then there is still alcohol present but if not then the distillation must cease.

The vapours are now usually transferred to the condensation vessel along a horizontal pipe or ‘cumpană’. Up to three tubes (‘țevi’) may now be used: generally two for a still of below 150l capacity and three for the bigger pieces of equipment. Moreover, the copper used for the ‘capac’ can be worked so that the piping can be attached into sockets without the need for a ‘bubă’. The condensation system or ‘sistem de răcire’ is different again. The pipes may still be fixed to the ‘putină’ following the traditional system (frequently noted in parts of Gorj, Maramureș and Vâlcea) but it is more usual to use a ‘spirală’ or ‘serpentină’ (‘șarpe’ in Banat) or a cylindrical box (‘cilindru de condensare’) in which vapour arrives at the top and leaves as țuică at the bottom. The cylinder is about 15cms in diameter and 50cms tall; usually containing four copper disks (including the two at either end) which conduct the low temperature from the cold water (although not all are in direct contact with it) and increase the

cooling surface. Cylinders may alternately consist of a number of tubes which follow the same principle; while a compromise between the cylinder or coil and the straight tube is a tube with a single loop; or a condensing vessel that is oval in shape. The connection between the ‘capac’ and ‘răcitor’ comprises a copper tube (1.45m long and 5-6cms in diameter) named ‘coarbă’ in Buzău and Muscel, ‘cocaie’ in Gorj and ‘punte’ in the Lăpuş country of Maramureş. It is worth adding that since the still and condensing vessel now tend to be the same height the tube runs horizontally between the two with a single pipe, bent at 90 degrees where it is inserted into a vessel at each side. However the pipe may be in two halves (requiring a ‘mămăligă’ seal where they join in the middle). Also the bends in the pipe may be less pronounced so that the pipe joins the two vessels at an angle. Finally, it is also common to see the ‘botă’ replaced by an enamelled kitchen pot (‘găleată emailată’) or glass bowl (‘borcan de sliclă’). Indeed glass jars of up to 50l may be used as both ‘botă’ and ‘butoi’. This arises partly because vessels were lost under communism and relatively few have been made since the revolution. However, the traditional method prevented re-evaporation that would weaken the brandy and produce ‘țuică trezită’ (a brandy more like water). Moreover, the glassware will not expand to accommodate high temperatures and one old lady from Curtișoara (Gorj) who had stored țuică for her funeral party was surprised to find that during hot summer weather pressure had built up and cracked the container: all was lost through spillage and evaporation leaving only the tell-tale aroma! Finally it should be emphasised that modernisation does not occur everywhere and the wooden ‘capac’ – often fashioned from the end of a barrel - is still used in parts of Oltenia including Bălcești, Glogova, Licurici, Podeni and Turceni: places in Getic Piedmont where plums are not particularly abundant (hence fairly small stills of 55-60l at Licurici and 80-130l at Bălcești) and people have little money for complete modernisation. A mixture of old and new may often be found within the same distillery e.g. a wooden ‘capac’ and ‘bubă’ with tubes of sweet cherry wood (‘burnele’) leading to a modern condensing cylinder (at Știrbești near Bălcești); with the possibility of a copper tube running through the cylinder to eliminate the ‘bubă’.

2.5. Later phases of Activity

The final part of the operation involves the removal of the residues from the still: this material is widely known as ‘boască’ but various other names are used in different localities: ‘boroghină’ in Vâlcea (already noted), ‘bozon’ and ‘bortila’ in Curtișoara (Gorj), ‘mastahat’ in Corodești (Vaslui) and ‘terci’ in Wallachia; also ‘halbe’ in Maramureş but ‘monturi’ around Baia Mare; and ‘laturi’ in other parts of Transylvania. Confusingly the cereal residue in the Prislop area of Bistrița-Năsăud is called ‘borhot’. The material may be ladled out of the still by an ordinary jug or ‘cauc’ and simply thrown away; indeed there are many amusing stories of the consequences of careless dumping involving the intoxication of animals (e.g. the flock of geese that was late returning home) and adulteration of a public water supply (at Brad where dumping by a stream immediately above the intake flavoured the water and prompted the newspaper headline ‘țuică through the tap!’ But a cereal ‘borhot’ yields residue of good fodder value (usually taken off by filtering the ‘borhot’ prior to distillation) and ‘boască’ from plums may be given to pigs if there is any remaining food value: indeed in the Buzău Subcarpathians the waste (locally known as ‘terci’) is given to cattle and sheep, along with surplus fruit. Constantin Butucă of Pătârlagele considers that the best fodder value arises when ‘prune grase’ (but not ‘prune de vară’) are collected late in the season; otherwise it tends to be too acidic and is discharged directly from the base of his still to the stream where poultry appear to show some interest! However ‘boască’ is credited with some medicinal value for livestock against a

liver complaint called ‘galbează’ in Buzău (e.g. the Râmnicul Sărat and Slănicul Buzului valleys) and ‘calbează’ in Mehedinți (though mainly for sheep since the material is not strong enough for cattle); also against intestinal problems on the Bârlad Plateau.

In the past ‘boască’ was quite widely used in some areas for human food, usually with initial separation of the liquid and solid parts by using a piece of hemp cloth as a filter. In the Vâlcea hill country, where the liquid part is known as ‘posircă’ (a name used in most parts of Romania to indicate a brandy or wine of poor quality), the solid part – which alone is known as ‘boască’ in this area – was eaten with ‘mămăligă’ and maize bread (‘mălai’ or ‘turtă’). The Vâlcea peasants would also mix ‘posircă’ and maize flour to make ‘terci’ for eating along with similar foods like ‘chisăliță cu șagar’ and ‘mălai cu șagar’ (‘șagar’ being plum vinegar) and fermented plums. This was a routine followed regularly in the period before communism, but only very rarely now. A similar diet was in force in the Mehedinți using maize bread and fermented plums but not the residual material from the still: in this area the liquid from the still is called ‘șagar de boască’ or ‘oțet de boască’ and the solid material ‘boască strecurată’. Despite jesting over such frugality, the poor were obliged to use everything available, especially during years of scarcity. Such preparations – watered down and fortified by a little sugar – was appreciated especially by the children on days of fasting from animal products (‘zile de post’) and also the great fast (‘postul mare’) during Lent and the six weeks or so before Christmas. Finally, where little fruit is available it is possible to use the ‘boască’ a second time (‘mâna a doua’) for distillation if it can be fortified (by the addition of bread, potatoes, sugar and yeast) and contained in plastic in a warm place to accelerate fermentation. This procedure is rare but was reported from the Siriu barrage construction site in the northern part of Buzău county where the workers had only limited access to fruit. The ‘boască’ was recycled with bread, sliced potatoes, sugar and ‘drojdie de bere’ – fermenting for 18 days (less in Gura Teghii nearby where surplus melons from the local cooperative store were mixed with other fruit): a good strategy for workers wanting brandy irrespective of quality. In some parts of Mehedinți ‘boască’ is fortified by the addition of sugar.

At the end of a distilling session the equipment is dismantled, with the ‘botă’ moved out of the way to prevent any foreign matter getting into the brandy at this stage. The ‘capac’ and ‘bubă’ are removed and the clay seal is scraped away with a ‘mistrie’ (a tool used in building work). Such material can be saved for use again by using a large wooden spoon (‘albie de lemn’) or an iron tool (‘lighean’): but it will now be dry and will have to be mixed with ‘boască’ to restore its adhesive qualities. In the interest of hygiene all the equipment should be cleaned e.g. to remove any burnt material sticking to the bottom of the still using a small piece of brick for scouring. But cleaning should extend to the inside of the cylinder when the end can be removed and it is important to wash the tubes with ‘oțet’ (acetic acid) (or wine with salt) in order to remove the toxic oxide (‘coclerală’); then with pure water and finally wiped dry with a cloth ready for the next filling. If this is not done the brandy may develop the greenish colour of ‘țuică arămită’. Other suitable substances include washing soda (‘sodă de rufe’) noticed at Bumbești (Gorj) and Rotopânești (Suceava); also detergent. In the Strehaia area of Oltenia Roma craftsmen are credited with the idea of tinning the still by painting on ‘cositor’. However, in many areas these modern methods are not known e.g. Curtișoara (Gorj) and in parts of Moldavia including the Bârlad Plateau where only warm water is used. But there are other traditional procedures e.g. the near-sold ‘raft’ of fermented plums – now decomposed and putrified (and sometimes fed to pigs when distillers do not consider it too

toxic) – may be placed in the still with water added in order to ‘distill’ purely for cleaning purposes (in the ordinary way of course, water is never added to the ‘borhot’). Another option is to boil up water in the still containing the ‘urzică’ plant (‘dorleac’ in Moldavia and Wallachia but ‘dolece’ in Banat and the Mehedinți). And in the Bălcești area of Vâlcea stills are washed out with a liquid containing tomatoes that have not quite ripened: a method attributed to Roma. In any case the first batch (‘primul cazan’) may not be entirely satisfactory, even after cleaning, due to the bad taste imparted by ‘cocleală’ and this is why it is traditional for the first few liters (at least) to be kept aside for external medicinal use. After each distilling session the still should be washed and wiped dry. Cleaning should also remove any burnt material sticking to the bottom of the still. Finally the still should always be stored in a dry place.

2.6. ‘Țuică’ Storage

Good țuică is bubbly (‘mărgele’) when agitated but the quality of some brandy may improve with keeping for a period of up to seven years, although it is not usual to refer to țuică in terms of its age and prices do not tend to vary according to the number of years of maturation. Storage is very important in terms of minimising evaporation losses. A ‘butoi’ filled with brandy should be stored in a cellar (‘beci’ or ‘pivniță’). In Gorj it is common for storied houses to include a ‘pivniță’ at ground level for storing wine and/or brandy (Stănculescu et al. 1973, pp.36-43) while special buildings may be erected as described below. On no account should brandy be stored in an attic where warm, dry conditions can result in the diffusion of the alcohol through the wood. A peasant from Berca (Buzău) who stored țuică in such a place ready for a wedding feast was shocked to find the barrel completely empty a year later: the vessel was perfectly good but the conditions of a silvo-steppe climate caused the brandy to evaporate! Spirit is conventionally stored in a ‘butoi’: a wooden vessel in the shape of a barrel, generally made of staves of oak (occasionally acacia or mulberry which contributes a yellow colour to the brandy) but not the wood of the plum tree. The ‘butoi’ will normally be kept in the horizontal position so that the opening (‘vrană’) in the centre of the barrel is uppermost and can be used for filling and also for taking out brandy in small measures.

Traditionally a large wooden funnel (‘neleu’ in Gorj and ‘nelei’ in Mehedinți) is used to discharge the contents of the ‘botă’: it is round at the bottom where it fits into the orifice of the ‘butoi’ but is usually square-shaped at the top. For sampling țuică it is common to use a ‘tâlv’ derived from a fruit providing a long stem with a bulb in the middle: the stem can be placed into the ‘butoi’ and țuică sucked into the bulb. The ‘tâlv’ is still found occasionally in cellars but it has been largely replaced by modern factory-made utensils in metal or plastic. Brandy may also be taken out through the bung-hole in a long thin 50ml measuring glass known as a ‘țuică’ in the Vălenii de Munte area of Prahova. This gives rise to the saying ‘o țuică de rachiu’ although it is unclear if this gives a clue to the origin of the word used for the brandy itself (Giurescu 1974, p.194). There will also be a second orifice at one end of the barrel and so arranged that it can be used to dispense large quantities of spirit required to fill liter bottles; though a small ‘butoi’ will usually have only one orifice. And when referring to the volume of either fermented plums in the fermenting vessel, or brandy in the cask, it is traditional to talk of ‘vadră’ rather than use the usual liter measure. However, traditionally the ‘vadră’ differs in terms of liter equivalent between the regions of the country: 15.20l in Moldavia but only 12.88 in Muntenia. As a further complication people in Muntenia and

Oltenia now refer to a ‘deca’ as 10l, while older people prefer the old word ‘vadră’ to indicate the same measure without appreciating that word traditionally indicates a larger volume.

Normally there would be no difference between țuică consumed in the home and the produce used in commerce. However, it is reported that the relatively strong brandy made in Banat may be watered down when sold. The peasants of Domasnea commune near Teregova (Caraș-Severin) produce a plum brandy of 28-30deg but also a weaker product of 18-22deg normally used in commerce; presumably because demand is for the milder drink that is the norm in the adjacent region of Oltenia. Dilution to the required strength can be done with fresh water, perhaps containing some sugar (and frequently with burnt sugar syrup), but this practice is restricted to the particularly strong brandy produced in Maramureș. Dilution may also be achieved by adding tea made from various plants found in local pastures but normally pure water is satisfactory. There is also the question of taste and colour. The bouquet (‘parfum’) of the spirit may well reflect the fruit from which it is derived: plums or apples, apricots, cherries and peaches as the case may be. It may be strengthened by breaking some fruit stones (‘sâmbure de fructe’). Flavour may be enhanced by using the wild mint ‘izmă’ (*Mentha sp*) as at Lopătari (Buzău). And while taste is paramount with scope for considerable variety in the case of twice-distilled țuică (though less so in the case of brandy that is twice distilled), it is increasingly fashionable that plum brandy should be slightly coloured to assume the appearance of cognac. When watering-down the strongest țuică some colour can be added through the addition of syrup comprising burnt sugar. Another method (already noted, for example, at Mușetești in Gorj) is to secure a ‘nuanță slab-gălbuie’ by fitting a piece of plum tree wood for the ‘sclipuș’ at the end of the copper pipe: this introduces some colouration into the spirit. In the Bălcești area of Vâlcea, a small fork-shaped piece of wood (‘crăcană’) from the wax cherry or plum tree is inserted to have the same effect. Another method is to place the leaves from apple or quince trees into the ‘botă’ or ‘galeată’ into which the brandy flows. Alternatively these leaves may be placed in the casks in which the brandy is stored. A final method is to take bits of wood from the bush ‘scumpină’ or ‘scumpie’ (*Cotinus coggygria*), although it is only rarely found.

The best-known system is for colouration comes from the casks themselves which are made from staves of acacia or oak; with mulberry wood having the greatest effect. Hence the value of a ‘butoi’ made of oakwood, including some staves of mulberry. Peasants will almost always leave their țuică to mature for at least a year in the cellar, so there is plenty of time for the wood to influence the colour of the brandy. Indeed, it is well-known that țuică will go on improving with age providing the casks are topped up each year. For brandy is generally easier to store than wine and peasants always have respect for a fully mature plum brandy: ‘să fie roasă de vreme’. Finally it is worth stressing that brandy with an undesirable taste and colour can result from burning at the bottom of the still. Smoke results in a brown discolouration and the spirit may be transferred to the next batch when the condition can be corrected (although if the taste is not affected a ‘dubious’ appearance may be no more than a matter for jest). However, discolouration is a more serious problem when it occurs at the beginning of the distillation (‘făculului la cazan’) due to oxide (‘coaleală’) on a still which has not been well cleaned: such ‘țuică arămită’ can only aside as ‘spirit medicinal’. Finally reference should be made to drinks based on țuică; a good example being ‘crampă’ which is prepared in the Apuseni for family occasions by mixing melted sugar (giving colour and aroma) with one third alcohol and two-thirds water and tea - and boiling. Sugar was not used in the past but now –

with better supplies – ‘crampă’ is hardly acceptable without (while some naturally insist on undiluted țuică).

2.7. Distillery Buildings

Țuică production often takes place in the house or courtyard but a special distillery building or still-house may be erected using wooden beams (‘bârne’ in Mehedinți). The name ‘cazanie’ is normally used but there are many local variants: ‘povarnă’ in Gorj and Vâlcea and ‘velniță’ in the Siriu Mountains of Buzău and Vrancea; while in Transylvania names like ‘horincărie’ and ‘palincărie’ are clearly related to the local names for țuică. Construction of such buildings might be undertaken in the open country where an all-important cold water supply could most easily be arranged. Indeed, distilleries might well be located away from a dwelling house because of the risk of fire breaking out (Giurescu 1974, p.198). Such a building could also be used for sheltering animals or as a refuge in the event of rain while working in the fields not to mention the benefits for holding animals or sheltering in the event of rain while working in the fields. In the Gura Văii area of the Danube Defile it was usual for peasants to maintain a secondary farmstead or ‘pimniță’ where with fruit trees and a store for brandy production and storage (Apolzan 1987 pp.312-3). And on the Platforma Luncanilor a ‘casă de bârne’ as in Cioclovina provided storage for food and fodder as well as a ‘voz’ for fermenting plums (Ibid, p.96).

Still-houses tended to disappear under communism because of security considerations, but many of the locations are still remembered by the peasants and given names such as La Cazanii or La Cazanie. However the practice is now being revived to a modest degree, as noted in the early 1990s at Brâncovenеști north of Reghin (Mureș) and another at Carașova, south of Reșița (Caraș-Severin). In both cases a small building has been erected by the stream and a small waterwheel (with tin cans for scoops) providing a steady supply of cooling water. The cans emptied water into a flume which ran into the distillery building. However, under such circumstances it would not be usual to leave the equipment unattended throughout the year. Constantin Butucă (mentioned above) has built a still-house beside the Mușcel stream in Pătârlagele: it measures 4.0mx4.8m. and has piping to pump water from the adjacent stream and also to evacuate warm water and ‘boască’ back into it.

Some distilleries are now preserved in museums. At Dumbrava Park in Sibiu there is an exhibit from Sârbești (Gorj). The premises were constructed in 1935 and transferred to Sibiu in 1966. According to the guidebook (Bucur et al. 1986, p.69) the still house is “a rectangular building with oak-beam framework and a porch at the front. The high walls are lined with two rows of alder-boards, the second row covering the joints of the first row. The high roof is in four slopes, covered with shingles, with a chimney above the ridge. The entrance is over two meters wide, allowing the passage of large casks and vats”. There are two stills, one with a wooden ‘capac’ and another (with a capacity of 500l) with a copper lid. A steady flow of water is supplied to the cooling vat by a water wheel with scoops which pour water into a flume. The same museum also houses a specially-constructed press-house for fermenting plums and storing casks of țuică. It was built at Polovragi (Gorj) in 1883 and taken to Sibiu in 1967. The two storey ‘pimniță’ standing on a slope “is made of boards (built of stone masonry and quick-lime mortar) and the press-house proper which forms the first floor of the building. The press-house is built of square horizontal fir-beams joined in end-to-end joints. The roof is in four

slopes and is covered with shingles. There is a small room facing the first floor of the press-house, decorated with sculptured poles and closed in with a railing made of bopards joined together by grooves. The entrance is a wide double door allowing the passage of large casks. The access is by a massive ladder, carved out of a tree-trunk. The stone cellar is used for housing the fermenting vats and for storing food. The first floor is used for keeping the casks of plum brandy, placed in a row opposite to the door, various other [items] used for plum-picking as well as kegs made by the village cooper” (Bucur et al. 1986, pp.71-2).

3. HISTORICAL SUMMARY

3.1. Before Communism

Stoicescu (1980, p.212) refers to continuity in agriculture, viticulture and fruit growing in the Subcarpathians. But while fruit growing (including plums) was common in the villages of the Moldova valley in Medieval times, the distillation of țuică is not mentioned (Matei & Emandi 1982, p.77). It is believed that knowledge of distilling spread from Poland into Moldavia in the course of the fifteenth century, by the reign of Alexander cel Bun at the latest (Giurescu 1974, p.192). The first specific references to brandy (‘rachie’) arise in the sixteenth century, but it is argued from the matter-of-fact nature of a reference to the distilling and selling of brandy by the mother of Michael the Brave that it was common at this time (Giurescu 1974, p.195). Certainly fruit-growing developed rapidly during the Medieval period, with vast orchards on both the estates and on peasant-owned land indicated through ‘prun’ placenames which relate specifically to plum trees already mentioned (Constantinescu 1994, p.68). Out of a total of 19 such villages six are clustered in Oltenia (Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți and Valcea), five in Transylvania (Alba, Bistrita-Nasaud and Cluj) with another five in the Bucharest area (including Ilfov and Teleorman) and the remaining three in Arad and Buzau (Jordan et al. 1974, p.212).

But the scale of distilling is difficult to establish. Although brandy seems to have been appreciated by soldiers and by Turks residing in Wallachia during the seventeenth century (notwithstanding the advice of the Koran), some historians believe that even in the 1790s consumption was linked mainly with urban dwellers sampling local production e.g. Brașov which still had a reputation for manufacturing copper stills in the nineteenth century. The implication would be that, whether distilled from cereals or plums, brandy drinking became common only in the eighteenth century when distillers are mentioned in Bucharest and Râmnicu Sărat. However, an inventory of Wallachian monasteries in the 1730s shows they possessed over 70 stills and plum brandy evidently brought in a considerable income to the Neamț monastery in Moldavia (Giurescu 1974, p.198). So it is possible that documentary references indicate the more widespread circulation of plum brandy rather than the beginnings of distillation which may go much further back in time, especially in the villages (albeit with very primitive equipment). However, the commercial importance of țuică was certainly demonstrated in 1781 when Alexandru Ipsilanti forbade the importation of foreign wine and brandy so that local produce could dominate the market: hence we are told that “most of the inhabitants of the country in the hilly districts of the north [i.e. the Subcarpathian counties of Wallachia like Arges, Dâmbovița, Gorj, Mehedinți, Muscel and Vâlcea] have planted plum-tree orchards in forests, woods and thistle-covered land” (Ibid, p.200). Through this “thrifty

pursuit...they make plum brandy in large quantities, sell it and earn a living, even those that cannot have vineyards” (Ibid, p.200). Ipsilanti did not refer to Buzău, Prahova, Râmnicu Sărat and Sacuieni or Saac but this was presumably because distilling was already common in these areas and what was new was the spread of this activity westwards through the principality. It seems that the rapid growth of the industry which produced “remarkable gains from the sale of alcohol” was stimulated by the peasants’ right to use deforested hill lands free of tax (at least initially); so plum trees were planted in large numbers “sometimes to the prejudice of arable land, grazing fields and even vineyards” (Constantinescu 1994, p.127). Activity was most intense in Wallachia because the Polish tradition of distilling alcohol from cereals remained strong in Moldavia and Transylvania. Evidently the name ‘rachieu’ was used for brandy being made locally from fruit and wine dregs whereas ‘holercă’ was made from cereals and imported from Galicia and Podolia.

Unfortunately there is little information on the rural industry in the nineteenth century although it seems to have remained an important part of the seasonal rhythm of rural activity and much brandy was drunk by the peasants themselves. Distilling is certainly mentioned as a domestic industry (‘industria casnică’) in the late nineteenth century (Zane 1970, p.11), but the landowners derived the greatest benefit. Commerce involving plums features prominently in the period after Organic Statutes, with trade in the hands of landowners and agents who had links with urban markets (Bucharest and Craiova in the case of traders based in Muscel) (Corfus 1969, p.273). In the 1840s it seems that landowners were fully exploiting their position because peasants wanting țuică during the winter would often bargain their next plum harvest at a low price; with the government acting in 1846 to stop this abuse and ensure realistic prices. However this unfair trading (‘comerț spoliator’) continued throughout the plum-growing areas and further attempts were made in 1847 to ensure fair prices (Ibid, pp.273-4).

However, there would have been competition with urban distillers (who comprised a section of Romania’s small-scale industry) and from cheap imports in the era of free trade that must have limited market penetration. 76 distilleries are mentioned in Bucharest alone in 1842 (Corfus 1969, p.200). The census of industrial establishments carried out by D.P.Marțian in 1860 enumerated 1,700 brandy distillers in Wallachia, reckoned as small-scale industrialists separate from the pluriactivity of the peasantry (Turnock 1977, p.335). Levels of consumption are difficult to establish with any accuracy but it seems likely that țuică was widely used both in the home and for refreshment on journeys as Jonathan Harker found when he was helped on his way by Count Dracula’s servant: “there is a flask of slivovitz [the plum brandy of the country] underneath the seat, if you should require it” (Stoker 1974 p.17) although it is unlikely that anyone in Transylvania would have used the precise word ‘slivovitz’.

Alcohol production and trade was an obvious revenue target at the urban level and hence there is some statistical cover (Popovici 1963, p.324). Eighteenth century evidence points to considerable activity in the monasteries. A ‘catagrafia’ for Wallachia in the 1730s covering 60 monasteries shows 70 ‘cazane/caldări de rachieu’: they were mostly simple but some had two tubes for condensation and one at Strehaia had three. A similar document for Moldavia in 1743 refers to ‘caldari’ and particularly large installations at Mânăstirea Neamț (Olteanu & Șerban 1969, p.255). In 1832 rural Wallachia had 583 ‘velnite/poverne’ of which 196 came from Saac county (soon to be divided between Buzău and Prahova) with another 223 from Argeș, Dâmbovița and Muscel combined and 73 from Olt and Vâlcea. There were

another 41 (presumably larger units) in the towns and markets which included not only the larger centres in the hill regions and adjacent lowlands (including Bucharest with nine) but also Vălenii de Munte and Filipești had 15 between them while Găești, Urlați and Slănic had another seven (Ibid, p.332). Other small town/market locations include Ciocănești, Drăgășani, Topoloveni and Valea Călugărească in Wallachia; while in Moldavia several small markets or ‘târğușoarele’ were involved including Bucium, Burdujeni, Cotnari, Fălciu, Frumușica, Huși, Lespezi, Moinești, Nicorești, Panciu, Podul Turcului and Sulița. The towns were probably using cereals (at least in part) and various names are quoted for distillers: berani, brăgari, horilcări; povarnagii, rachieri and vutcări emerge with respect to Bucharest, Buzău, Craiova and Iași alone (Ibid, p.265). However the prominence of the small towns of Prahova ties up with the legendary reputation of the local plums (Vălenii de Munte in particular). There is also reliable data for the 1830-50 period on the proportion of the total number of stills in rural areas and while these make no accommodation for capacity it is possible that the counties with the highest rural shares indicate the areas where plum brandy production was best established: over 80% for Dâmbovița, Mehedinți, Muscel and Suceava; and over 90% for Argeș and Prahova (Ibid, p.332); though the danger of fire meant that distilling was done on the edge of towns. Evidently some entrepreneurs were renting space from the church for distilling: Ioan Băcanul of Păcureți and Simian Lagăfațul at Matița (Saac) were renting land from the Buzău Episcopiate. And there are references for the early nineteenth century to individuals getting permission to distill as ‘slobozenie’.

Oral evidence suggests that in the inter-war years most country people were producing plum brandy for their own use apart from small amounts used for presents or barter. And following land reform in 1923 the more prosperous peasants were increasing their stake in the business. With a production of 200-300l in a good year (coming from approximately half a hectare of plum trees within a holding of some five hectares in all), their stocks were large enough to cope with poor years when plums were scarce. People with an inclination for business and sufficient self-discipline to maintain their stocks could gain a substantial income from sales of țuică;. A study of Runcu (Gorj) refers to small stills (‘alambicuri’) and a small number of large ‘poverne’ which were probably installed in special buildings (Buznea 1932). Almost certainly the owners of such stills would be distilling on a scale greater than their capacity to generate wash and hence they would need to buy ‘borhot’ from other peasants (with scope for returning the ‘boască’ if anyone wanted it). The large stills were probably transportable and available on hire to peasants who would install the equipment in their own farmyards for a day at a time so that families could spend a day distilling the wash prepared from fermented fruit.

Brandy was being traded over considerable distances. The Bugă family in Curtișoara recall local țuică being supplied by cart to restaurants in Petroșani before the Second World War while brandy was also taken by cart to the plains. Pătârlagele had liaison with Brăila/Galați and Constanța for export to Greece before the Second World War and carts were proceeding from other villages in this area (e.g. Gornet above Sibiciu de Sus) to Întorsura Buzăului, Sf. Gheorghe and Sighișoara with the cachet of ‘țuică deVăleni’ applied to a wider area of the Curvature Carpathians (with similar plum resources and the advantage of proximity to expanding urban complex between Bucharest and Brașov). Țuică was taken by ox-cart or horse-drawn cart (‘căruță’) from the Mehedinți Plateau to Turnu Severin restaurants (along with cereals, hay, cheese, potatoes and fruit): a considerable journey requiring an overnight

stay (hence Hanul Rusu at a crossroads near the villages of Călinești and Șiroca) but with the opportunity of handling building materials and salt as a return load. A licensed ‘cazan’ did not carry to right to commercialise țuică given the state monopoly but although inspectors were liable to intercept consignments on the edge of towns considerable restraint was generally shown by the excisemen.

3.2. The Communist Period

This was a period of revolutionary change involving widespread expropriation in order to establish cooperative farms and in the process stills along with farm machinery were confiscated. Romania fell under Soviet control at the end of the Second World War and while Stalin did not seek incorporation into the Soviet Union he did impose a degree of suzerainty which reduced the country to satellite status governed by a monopolistic communist party managing the economy through central planning. Cut-off from western investment and forced to develop through her own resources (with the additional burden of war reparations to the Soviet Union) resources had to be generated internally by seizing privately owned wealth in land, property and business. While almost the entire rural population was subject to cooperativisation, it was the owners of the larger holdings who were worst affected, with still ownership taken as an indicator of wealth. Thus țuică played a significant role in the ‘class war’ of the 1950s that sought to give the ‘poor peasant’ even though official perception of the Mehedinți Plateau as deprived area gave the lead author of this paper an advantage in communist society as a ‘poor peasant’ even though he had been educated partly on the proceeds of his father’s distillery. But since agriculture was meant to generate resources for industrialisation (accelerating previous efforts involving substantial state interest for the communists to takeover) all rural incomes were low and part of the impoverishment involved the prohibition of private distilling in favour of cooperative stills – and some new centralised “large distillery complexes which took the bulk of locally produced fruit by a system of compulsory contracting with the collective farms” (Kideckel 1985, p.439). Only in non-cooperativised mountain areas was it possible for individuals to take out licences for distillation – at costs much higher in real terms than before, while taxation of orchards also became more burdensome. As the privately-owned ‘cărciume’ were replaced by a new generation of ‘bufeturi’ controlled by the party through the system of consumer cooperatives cheap ‘home brew’ was replaced by more expensive brandy produced through official channels with competition from urban breweries and distilleries as well as foreign brands. And “while village social networks have become attenuated under socialist development and there are fewer reasons for striving to maintain them through the rounds of drink buying characteristic of the pre-socialist village” (Kideckel 1985, p.442), urban locales became more popular and prestigious.

Under communism large stills of 300-400l were used only by cooperative farms as ‘cazanele satului’; sometimes with smaller stills in the side valleys to avoid long cart hauls. Some new distilleries were built in villages where there was a large scale of plum production by cooperative and state farms e.g. Pătârlagele (Buzău) and Stoenești (Vâlcea). At Pătârlagele a distillery was built in the district (‘raion’) capital and was supplied by cooperative farm members as well as the Căndești state farm which was allocated some of the best land in the area. Peasants with ‘borhot’ made from the plums in their own gardens (plus some stolen from the cooperative) were obliged to use the factory, where the wash would be checked for volume

and strength. A peasant supplying (say) 100l of ‘borhot’ (from which 20l of țuică would normally be obtained) would receive five liters of brandy plus some cash. At Bălcești (Vâlcea) peasants were not even allowed to produce ‘borhot’ and their fermenting vessels were confiscated along with the stills and storage vessels. In this way (along with the urban distilleries) the state had an effective monopoly on the production of spirits with exports to the USSR and trading monopolised by the ‘Vinalcool’ enterprise (‘Gostat’ in the case of the state farm system). Some plum brandy was traded by Vinexport (Bucharest) and could be located in airport shops at a strength of 36deg distilled from ‘prune bistrițe’ and matured in oak casks; while dried plums were also exported to the USSR - and The Netherlands – from the Dumitrești area of Vrancea.

Distilling was adversely affected by the general neglect of plum trees on cooperative farmland. Plums accounted for 68.7% of all fruit trees in 1957 compared with only 11.8% for apples, but the figures were modified to 57.8 and 19.0% respectively in the middle of the 1966-70 Five Year Plan after major plantings of other fruits (Țufescu 1974, pp.450-1). Another source quotes figures of 42% for plums against 35% for apples in 1976 (Șandru 1978, pp.237-9). Plum orchards were thus neglected in preference for apples, pears and fruits for the urban market. There were some attempts by the collective farms to establish plum trees in the silvo-steppe but trees died after periods of drought e.g. Vadul Stanchii in the southern part of Dâmbovița county, while the insect pest *Eurytoma sp.* was reported in the Dumitrești area of Vrancea attacking plums but not apples to any extent (whereas in Pătărlagele where it first appeared in 1985-6 it ravaged the ‘prune grase’ trees which predominate in this area. Commercial plum orchards may have been ruled out by the costs of both setting up the operation and of harvesting the fruit, especially in view of the difficulty in handling certain types. However, the planting of more productive trees is mentioned in the Getic Piedmont where plum trees still comprised up to 80% of all fruit trees in the area between the Jiu and the Dâmbovița at the beginning of the 1970s (Velcea et al. 1971, p.103). Meanwhile urban-based factory production of spirits usually involved alcohol based on maize, potatoes and molasses from sugar factories (Iordan & Trattner 1960, p.298) but a factory that opened in Focșani (Vrancea) in 1951 to produce alcoholic drinks had five outlying centres for the collection and first-processing of fruit: Bolotești-Țifești, Căndești, Domnești, Odobești-Jariștea and Panciu (Mihăilescu et al. 1970, p.179). There was also an interesting innovation when the Murfatlar vinification station near Constanța used their ‘drojdie’ (the dregs from must production) as the basis for further distillation to yield ‘rachieu de drojdie’ which was successfully promoted as ‘spumă de drojdie’ at international wine festivals.

Meanwhile in non-cooperativised areas stills of 40-60l might be licenced to operate legally for individual use, particularly in areas with plenty of fruit like Muscel (Argeș) and the Drajna-Chiojd depression (Prahova) – especially where peasants’ houses and plots were more than 15-20kms from a distillery owned by a cooperative or local authority – but it was usually possible to produce larger quantities than the authority stipulated. Indeed peasants in such areas were often able to purchase equipment outlawed in collectivised villages. Indeed in Maramureș the rural industry was extended to double distillation which had previously been undertaken in the towns by Jewish businessmen.

For example, people in Bumbești (Gorj) were able to sell equipment to distillers from Arsuri on the edge of the Vâlcan Mountains where there were good opportunities for making

brandy although it was absolutely forbidden to distill from cereals at this time. Exchanges were still made with farming people on the plains who thought that the hill peasants, retaining their own farms, must indeed be rich. They would exclaim ironically “venira Americanii!” – “here come the Americans!” – when the distillers arrived with their surpluses. However clandestine distillation of brandy was a commonplace as the peasants found ways of distilling illicitly in the home or elsewhere, although in much smaller quantities than before using stills of some 20l and the local authorities evidently varied in their attempts to regulate the practice. Old equipment was effectively ‘out of use’ because seizures (sometimes forestalled by burial) involved a ‘clean sweep’ as in the Bârlad Plateau or simply confiscation of the ‘capac’ to immobilise the ‘cazan’.

Small copper, enamelled or earthenware stills of as little as 10l capacity might be used at night without any electric light, although there was always the danger that smoke or smell might alert the authorities or their informers. It was only possible to use small stills kept within courtyards or even smaller installations and – perhaps made of ceramic – which were operated in domestic kitchens. Fish might be burnt on the fire to avoid giving the impression of distilling, while ‘boască’ would have to be carefully stored underground. A small cazan was often referred to as an ‘oală’ which was really a unit of volume amounting to 50l. On a remote farm near Poiana Mărului (Braşov) a small still was used discreetly for a good many years by a local farmer after its purchase in 1975: it consisted of a copper container about the size of a coal scuttle, with a domed lid secured with metal clips and some sealant. Such a ‘cazan’ could easily be placed inside a petrol drum with the grate at the bottom with fuel introduced through a small hole; while a single pipe ran to a square-shaped metal container with a coil inside. With no near neighbours to trouble him, the main need for discretion arose with regard to his son who was a policeman! Meanwhile at Racoviţa (Vâlcea) Ilie Zăvoianu (who died in 1991 at the age of 97) not only resisted collectivisation by exchanging his holding for an alternative plot on the edge of the village but continued to make plum brandy with an enamelled still of some 20l equipped with a crown (‘capac’) made from a nut tree and a single tube (‘țeavă’) passing through a small vat (‘hârdău’) of cooling water. Such a system needed only a small amount of wood which heated the house or byre at the same time. And as a further example, Ion Țapardea from Comănești (Mehedinți), whose family has already been referred to, operated a still of 35l in his home, following the family tradition (albeit on a small scale) because his father (aged 92 in 1994) had once imported a still of 750l from Germany

Earthenware stills worked more slowly than their metal counterparts, consumed more fuel and produced a rather bitter brandy (suggesting that utensils do make a difference albeit one that is unpredictable). But they were relatively cheap and avoided the hazard of ‘borhot’ sticking to the bottom of the still because the temperature was relatively low. It was even possible to dispense with the still altogether and use a large enamelled kitchen pot (‘oală mare’) of 20-30l within which a smaller vessel (‘cratiță’) of just one or two liters was placed on a stand above the ‘borhot’: the top of the pot would then be covered by another vessel containing cold water and the contact sealed with ‘mămăligă’ in order to contain the vapours. Heating the ‘borhot’ would then result in the condensation of the vapours and collection of alcohol in the ‘cratiță’. Some rather larger stills were also used. At Novaci (Gorj) Ion Gălătescu (aged 55 in 1994) had a 50l earthenware still made by a potter from Albeni with which he made țuică for his own use during 1984-9 (just three months before

the revolution) when the police were alerted and he had to bury his equipment in haste. Small improvised stills were set up by Romanians working abroad. Apparently some Romanians working in Arab countries distilled brandy from oranges or other citrus fruits in contravention of Islamic law (and at times have been prosecuted for doing so).

During the later years of communism there was some easing of the restrictions when stills of 40-60l could be licenced more widely for home use and families might cooperate in acquiring equipment, although continued restrictions over hiring such equipment (an unacceptable return to capitalist relations) meant that illicit distillation continued. Indeed small groups of two or three might operate in fairly remote woodland areas such as the Preluca district of Maramureș with vessels of ‘borhot’ hidden away in preparation for nighttime distillation. Several field researchers stumbled over such activities and shared convivial experiences after initial anxiety over their arrival. However the rural police often showed sympathy over such irregularities came to their attention. When a man from Cristești (Botoșani) informed on his neighbour who was distilling at home, the policeman insisted he was busy and could not carry out an immediate inspection; thus allowing time for the distiller to be alerted and the equipment concealed before a check was made after some delay. Of course there was always consternation when an accommodating official moved on and a successor had to be ‘house-trained’ At Prejna (Mehedinți) a new policeman was introduced to țuică by the villagers and subsequently became so careless in the restaurant as to leave behind his pistol and identity documents. Gratitude for the return of these possessions (and appropriate restraint over subsequent reference of the incident) secured the necessary tolerance for the distillers.

3.3. Transition to the European Union

The prohibitions of the communist period have disappeared and anyone can now obtain a licence even in the context of European Union membership. The distilleries at the former collective farms have fallen within the restitution legislation, although it was reported that at Crăciunești near Roșiorii de Vede (Teleorman) a still of 350-400l impounded by the local administration was simply retrieved (by stealth) by the owner after the revolution without repercussions: many similar cases may well have occurred, although it is questionable how much confiscated equipment would still have been held locally in a usable condition. Meanwhile, the large centralised distilleries were privatised. At the Pătârlagele distillery (now privately operated by two Buzău companies – Virmar Com and Ianis Com – selling 24deg brandy in 500ml bottles) peasants can deliver fruit to the distillery and receive four liters of țuică for each 100kg: there is no cash now and even the workers get paid in brandy! But the peasants no longer deliver ‘borhot’ because it makes better sense for people with plums to make their own țuică either in their own still or in one hired for the day. While small-scale rural industry has generally been in retreat since 1945 due to competition from factory production, some activities have gained ground since 1989 through pluriactivity linked the higher level of dependence on small farms (also the reduction in factory employment) and the distilling of plum brandy is a case in point. Modern marketing systems are needed (Lamarche 1991; Maurel 1994) but there are other problems. Rebuilding the plum orchards after communism’s preference for apples and pears is proceeding only gradually and new disease-resistant varieties would be helpful (Balciu 1997); while yields have been depressed by some poor growing seasons and the continuing damage caused by insects, especially the ‘viespe’. The rural

population is now smaller and many small landowners are living a long way from their holdings (Muică & Turnock 1994, p.19), while there is also stiff competition from spirits produced in the towns. However, some smallholders are already planting more plum trees and recent research suggests that young families in the Subcarpathians are keen to invest to rebuild both orchards and vineyards (Hirschhausen-Leclerc 1994, p.322).

Many families now have their own small stills – some of them made of earthenware – which can be operated in farmhouses and courtyards and make good sense in areas with only limited amounts of fruit. And there has been a limited revival for stills of medium capacity as exemplified by the Pătărlagele installation (145l) belonging to Constantin Batucă (the local bakery manager under communism, but now a private businessman with a flourmill as well as distillery) which has already been mentioned. And several other installations of similar size have appeared in the area at Fundăturile and Muşcel as well as Lunca, where Gheorghe Popa's distillery has the refinement has two cement-lined pits (each of 2.0cu.m) where 'boască' is stored to provide winter pig feed, and Pânătau where Alexe Luchian's installation heats the 'borhot' for successive batches. New still-houses built by the more enterprising distillers were also seen in the early 1990s near Reghin and Reşiţa as already noted: in both cases a building was erected on a riverbank where a small waterwheel (with tin cans for scoops) could provide a steady supply of cooling water; discharging into a flume running into the distillery building. There is still a significant amount of hiring of the larger stills (though some owners will not risk of damage to their equipment if they cannot always be on hand to supervise the operations) but the practice of permanent installation of the still within a 'corlon' means that families must take their 'borhot' to the still and not vice-versa: there must also be a well-organised family unit bring wood and carry out all the operations, but still owners will often have a 'cărător' available for this purpose (though plastic drums are now widely used and these can also be used for taking the brandy back home).

Thus there is arguably a future for rural distilling. Making full use of the fruit resources has regularly been advocated by several experts on mountain agriculture (Giurcăneanu 1988, p.84; Rey 1979 p.273), while under the conditions of the transition it offers a way forward towards sustainable development (Pascariu 1994) and agricultural experts have recommended support for the food industry in general (Otiman 1994, p.256). The licencing/taxation regime is quite costly although it appears to be moderated by intensive usage for a short period rather than steady but minimal use for a longer period. It is quite probable that output will increase as the orchards expand: in the Râmnicu Sărat area (Buzău) new 'traditional' plum trees are being planted using the roots of trees dating to the pre-communist period and around Pătărlagele some apple orchards are being restocked with plum trees. Meanwhile the use of other fruits (apples and pears in mountain regions and 'corcoduşe' in the lowlands – albeit with syrup needed to aid fermentation – will extend the geographical area of distilling beyond the Subcarpathian strongholds: indeed at Preluca (Maramureş) brandy produced from pears ('pere puturoasă') fetches double the price of brandy using plums. There are obviously some commercial outlets: țuică made from 'tescovină' at Nicoreşti (Galaţi) is sold to a small restaurant while peasants from Teregova (Caraş-Severin) sell regularly on the market in Timișoara. Interest is being boosted through plum brandy festivals at such places as Băile Herculane and Vălenii de Munte, offering plenty of scope for tasting and sales. And Silviu Zetea of Medieșu Aurit (Satu Mare), who is a successful producer and distributor of plum brandy made from his own recipes with 'elite' outlets in Romania and exhibition

successes (e.g. Brussels International Fair), wishes to form an owners’ association. However, the large urban distilleries have the lion’s share of the market and much of the țuică sold commercially is high-strength brandy distilled in Satu Mare or Zalău, while county and regional plans acknowledging the potential for more fruit processing tend to see the small towns as the best locations e.g. Deta (Timiș) according to Coifan (1999, p.64). Rural areas are certainly producing quality brandy from organic raw materials, but there is some reluctance to cooperate after the experiences under communism, but there are also unscrupulous producers may put domestic bird droppings or even cinders in the ‘borhot’. And while careful producers wanting to offer a ‘homogenous’ twice-distilled brandy will put a large quantity together and add pure water to the point where small bubbles continue to appear (normally a sign of strong țuică), fraudsters may use detergent will reduce the strength at which these bubbles occur.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Plums have long been important for Romanian peasants and they remain an integral part of the harvest routine in the Subcarpathians. Distillation is a major activity although its historical roots are still poorly understood, but this study has highlighted a number of trends evident over the previous century and also a remarkable diversity in production methods and terminology which ideally should be extended into other areas in order to build up a more comprehensive national profile. However, the complete lack of reliable production figures makes it difficult to establish clear trends; although it might be assumed that there was an increase during the inter-war period with many new stills operated by individual farmers after the 1923 land reform followed by restrictions during communism when alcoholism was nevertheless a significant problem. At present there appears to be a revival although plum orchards need further attention and competition from other drinks is strong (witness the importance of beer during the consumer boom of 2007-8). But unlike some traditional rural activities, distilling continues to flourish on the basis of long-established practices combined with significant innovations and it clearly has potential for further commercial development, aided by the momentum behind farm diversification which should include the distilling of brandy and its marketing partly through agrotourism as well as urban consumption and export; especially if farmers can work to agreed standards linked with a more homogenous product. It will obviously be difficult for the business to build up a significant world market share given the investments that have been made by the competition, but Scotch whisky developed from a roughly comparable situation and plum brandy should benefit from the cachet of a rural industry operating in an ecologically-sustainable environment. And the scope for extending its largely unwritten folk-history could also contribute to the momentum for the further benefit of agriculture and rural settlement in the Romanian Carpathians.

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