

The Maglavit Phenomenon (1935). Echoes From the „Site of Miracles”

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Summary.

The inter-war history of the Romanian Orthodox Church knew a number of apocalyptic revelations (theophanies or Mariophanies), in many ways similar to those of the Roman-Catholic world (Lourdes, Fatima). Two of them were especially impactful, both due to their echo at the time and to the controversies they generated subsequently among the lay and ecclesiastical elites: the visions experienced by Petrache Lupu at Maglavit (1935), respectively Mother Veronica at Vladimirești Monastery (1938). Although the Romanian Orthodox Church took a cautious stance on these events, they were „validated”, at the time, by the believers who flocked to the „sites of miracles” and testified to the miraculous healings that had occurred there. The present study concerns the visions experienced by shepherd Petrache Lupu (1907-1994) at Maglavit-Dolj in 1935 and is based on the accounts in the times’ press, fragments of memoirs and the various opinions voiced in the church publications between July-October 1935.

Keywords:

History of the Romanian Orthodox Church, theophany, Marian apparitions, miraculous apparitions, Maglavit, Fatima.

In the summer of 1935, the most widely read publications of Romania offered detailed accounts of the „visions” experienced by a shepherd living in Maglavit village (in the south of Romania, close to its border to Bulgaria), as well as the unexplainable healings that had occurred among pilgrims. The facts are generally known to the [Romanian] public, so I will provide only a brief presentation. On Friday, 31 May 1935, on a spot known as the „tree stumps”, shepherd Petre Lupu – who was deaf-

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mute according to some of the reports, or had some degree of speaking impairment, according to others², claimed to have encountered a white-bearded Old Man, who commanded him to tell people to repent, observe the feast days, attend the Church and stop sinning. However, the shepherd said nothing to the villagers. The apparition occurred again on the following Friday (7 June 1935), when the Old Man reproached him his silence, and on the third Friday (14 June 1935), when the Old Man commanded him to talk.

On Saturday, 15 June 1935, Petrache Lupu first described his visions to the village people, also announcing the parish priest Nicolae Bobin and the mayor Florea Stănică. On Sunday, 16 June 1935, during the Pentecost liturgy, Petrache Lupu had another vision of the Old Man, standing in the Holy Altar next to the Holy Cross; the Old Man called him and the shepherd entered the altar through the Holy Doors. The Old Man appeared once more to the shepherd of Maglavit on Sunday, 7 July 1935, commanding him to go to „the greatest man in the country”, then for the last time on 8 August, when he saved the shepherd from the wrath of the devil. A pilgrimage began as early as June 1935, gathering tens and later hundreds of devout people from the neighboring villages, all seeking to obtain a first-hand, detailed account of the wondrous event. Very soon, these happenings of local interest became the core of a phenomenon of national coverage, which built upon itself according to the „snowball effect”, at the intersection between the media propaganda, polemical debates on the specific character of Romanian spirituality, and political discourse on peasantry and the situation of rural Romania.

Reporters of the major interwar daily newspapers *Dimineața* [*The Morning Press*], *Curentul* [*Latest Developments*], *Universul* [*The Universe*] were immediately dispatched to Maglavit to describe the magnitude of this pilgrimage. They quoted the shepherd's account (interrupted by their questions), mentioned the astonishing fact that the other shepherds could also hear the voice speaking to Petrache but were able to see only him, and not least interviewed the village priest and published his opinion of Petrache Lupu, a „*devout and honest man*”³. Most importantly, they made known the healings among the pilgrims.

² Petrache Lupu had been declared unfit for military service, because of his hearing and speech impairment. Later, the Military Hospital in Craiova diagnosed him with „*bilateral otitis media with effusion, with tympanic perforation, and slight mental disability*” (Prof. Dr. G. Marinescu, Member of the Romanian Academy, *Lourdes și Maglavit* [*Lourdes vs. Maglavit*], Bucharest, „Universul” Publishing House, 1936, p. 38).

³ „Un om care a vorbit Vineri cu... Dumnezeu. Sate puse în mișcare de mișcarea unui cioban [The man who spoke to... God, last Friday. Villages stirring at the declarations of a shepherd”, *Dimineața*, Thursday 27 June 1935, p. 13.; „*Local people are very impressed by*

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A few days later, the headlines were taken over by *Curentul* newspaper, whose editor-in-chief was Pamfil Şeicară. From 3 July 1935 onwards, *Curentul* published a number of reportage articles, most of them authored by Constantin Jaleş, the journalist dispatched to Maglavit⁴. At first written on a cautious, tentative tone, the articles went on to provide a literary-sensationalized version of the simple account provided by Petrache Lupu, and of his life, and ended up by taking a firm stance in favor of the phenomenon regarded as a divine miracle⁵. *Curentul* found in the huge crowds of believers, and their piety, sufficient grounds to validate the shepherd's visions⁶.

what they have been told, and apparently the mass suggestion is so strong that even our correspondent is sending us somehow emotional accounts. This is what he tells us (...) The road leading into the village is packed with cars, carts, villagers travelling either on horseback or on foot, carrying their bags on their backs, all moving down the dusty dirt road, each striving to reach as fast as possible the spot where God has descended on earth. All villages I passed by were stirring (...) We arrived at Maglavit, half an hour later. The village was in turmoil. Before the mayor's office, the whole village had gathered: men, women and children followed by their pigs and by shaggy dogs. The priest and the mayor were both doing their best to answer the endless stream of questions, and especially to explain things as clearly as possible”.

⁴ „Viața omului care a vorbit cu Dumnezeu [The life of the man who spoke to God]”, *Curentul*, 3 July 1935, p. 2; „Cum s-a arătat Dumnezeu ciobanului Petre [How God showed Himself to shepherd Petre]”, *Curentul*, 4 July 1935, „Mănăstirea lui Dumnezeu [God's Monastery]”, *Curentul*, 20 July 1935, p. 3; „Maglavitul-loc de pelerinaj [Maglavit – a place of pilgrimage]”, *Curentul*, 29 July 1935, p. 3.

⁵ „Cum s-a arătat Dumnezeu ciobanului Petre [How God showed Himself to shepherd Petre]”, *Curentul*, no. 2662, Thursday 4 July 1935: „*It was a Friday, the sun had started to set. Petru packed some food in his satchel, said goodbye to his wife, kissed his children and, as usual, headed for the sheepfold. He went down to the pond, then entered the woods. The sky was clear, the twilight was setting in quietly and calmly, like a blessing. On the pond, a few villagers were handling their fishing nets. The steep hills on the left of the pond had taken a deep blue hue. At the west, the sun was still sending forth its rays, dimmer and dimmer as it was setting. Nothing of all this was new to Petre, but as familiar as we find the streets, the pubs, the dust stirred by streetsweepers and the car horns. He was walking quietly, maybe thinking about his child, maybe about the sheep he was so fond of... But his thoughts were suddenly interrupted. His vision seemed to blur, and out of this blur, above the ford, on the grass strewn with tree stumps, under the endless blue of the evening sky, only at a few steps' distance, he saw an old man as we find only in the holy books. His face of ineffable sweetness was framed by white hair and beard, as shining as the vestment he was wearing. His hands looked like wings. His feet were hovering above the ground. Petre was seized with fear. He rubbed his eyes with shaking hands. He thought he was dreaming. The light of the blue eyes, as blue as the skies whence they had descended, embraced him while the voice of God said: Fear not my son, it is I!”.*

⁶ Constantin Jaleş, „Maglavitul loc de pelerinaj [Maglavit – a place of pilgrimage]”, *Curentul* year VIII, no 2687, Monday 29 July 1935, p.3: „*All these people are believers, and their belief is based on an undeniable fact: that shepherd Petre Gh. Lupu used to be mute, but*

Regarding the attitude of *Curentul* newspaper towards the events of Maglavit, two facts are worth noting. Firstly, Pamfil Șeicaru, its editor in chief, decided to have a standing cross placed on the spot of „*the tree stumps*”, where shepherd Petre had seen God, „*as a token of reverence and belief in the miracle of Maglavit*”. Secondly, *Curentul* contributed directly to building a monastery „*on the spot where God showed Himself to shepherd Petre*”, covering the expenses entailed by such a project⁷.

As for the accounts provided by *Universul* daily newspaper, these were rather belated and originally evinced an attitude not only skeptical, but downright hostile to the events of Maglavit. The article published on 24 July 1935 by the title „The alleged miracle of Maglavit” deplored how the „*pure souls of many thousands of devout people*” were deceived into undertaking the journey, denouncing Petrache Lupu in harsh terms as „*sick*”, „*idiot*”, „*a con man*”. The Maglavit phenomenon was described as nothing but „*a distressing expression of the times we are living*”, „*a bold, reckless insult against religion*”, „*a theatrical performance*”, aggravated by the fact that authorities ought not to believe the shepherd’s words, nor ought the priests subscribe to such „*impiety*”⁸. When the local bishop Vartolomeu Stănescu of Râmnicul Noului Severin (1921-1938), requested the prefect of Dolj that authorities put an end to the pilgrimage and have the shepherd sent to Bucharest, for a medical examination, the journalist N. Ciocardia of *Universul* published the article „So much for the miracle of Maglavit”, and announced that the „*crazy fool*” had been taken to Bucharest. The reportage took a personal note when the journalist stated that he was leaving on

now is able to speak; he used to be deaf, but now he is able to hear. Any attempt at denying these facts is futile. Maglavit and shepherd Petre have entered the souls of the faithful and nothing can undo this.”

⁷ Constantin Jaleș, „Mănăstirea lui Dumnezeu [God’s Monastery]”: „*Seeing the importance attached to such miracles by countries of great cultural tradition...we have proposed, with a view to rekindling the Christian faith, that the miracle of Maglavit should be honored by constructing a chapel, on the spot where God showed Himself to shepherd Petre. Without any need for a fundraising campaign, we appear to be on the point of receiving an avalanche of donations, in order to honor the holy places at Maglavit, where God spoke to his chosen one. Most probably God’s Monastery will enjoy wide support from all the Orthodox believers. We will gladly make known in the pages of our newspaper all donations received by rev. Bobin for this lofty purpose.*”

⁸ „*Pretinsa minune de la Maglavit [The alleged miracle of Maglavit]*”, *Universul*, Wednesday, 24 July 1935, p. 1: „*For a few weeks now – since the „miracle of Maglavit” as it is dubbed by certain officials, certain priests and certain publications – the pure souls of many thousands of believers have been struggling to see the face of the „prophet” and the place where the miracle allegedly took place, and to listen to the gibberish speech of a sick man – I shall not call him a con man, as he is much too dull-witted – encouraged by the mysticism of simple people, who are spreading this myth, and by the condemnable tolerance of priests and authorities*”.

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holiday with a sense of contentment „*having done his duty*” and welcomed this measure that in his opinion demonstrated the „*triumph of the truth*”⁹.

At the beginning of August, the newspaper *Universul* reconsidered its attitude; however, the reason of this change is unclear. A few days after the skeptical N. Ciocardia had left on holiday, the editor in chief (Stelian Popescu) appointed another journalist named G. Lungulescu to report on Maglavit. In his first article, the reporter stated that „*the mystical, supernatural nature of events had a massive impact on the masses*”. The newly-appointed reporter echoed the encomiastic accounts of *Curentul*, speaking of the „*invisible, spiritual powers of the shepherd*” Petrache Lupu, as they had been described by the village priest Nicolae Bobin¹⁰.

The major stake for the respective publications was the result of the medical assessment of the mental health of shepherd Petrache Lupu. In early August, *Universul* newspaper triumphally announced that following the medical examination conducted in a sanatorium in Craiova, Petrache Lupu had been declared sane. Interestingly, doctor Mihai Albu – the director of the sanatorium, who according to *Universul* belonged to the Greek-Catholic Church, and thus was „*strictly objective from the religious standpoint*”, did not confine himself to issuing a strictly medical statement, but declared himself convinced of the truth of Maglavit events¹¹.

⁹ „O curioasă intervenție a episcopului Vartolomeu [A strange interference from Bishop Vartolomeu]”, *Curentul*, 29 July 1935; N. Ciocardia, „So much for the miracle of Maglavit”, *Universul* no. 205, Sunday 28 July 1935 : „*I note, with the satisfaction of having done my duty, and the relief I feel as a good Christian, two steps taken with a view to putting a stop to this comedy which has already been going on too long...One is the telegram sent by bishop Vartolomeu Stănescu to the prefect, to this effect: until the medical diagnosis issued by dr. Paulian, we insist that you forbid any procession undertaken locally. Thus, „strict orders” have been issued so that any group be prevented from travelling to Maglavit. The journalist concludes his article by adding: „I end here and, as I am leaving on holiday, I let know all those who have been wasting their time to send me letters full of the most abject insults, and all those who have started rumors about me going mad, having paralyzed, or having killed myself, that I am safe and sound and fully satisfied that I have done my duty. And to those who in their letters have supported me, I announce the triumph of the truth*”.

¹⁰ G. Lungulescu, „Întâmplările de la Maglavit [The events of Maglavit]”, *Universul* year 52, no. 213, Monday 5 August 1935: „*The impression of perfect honesty, which I had from the first moment on meeting his gentle, sad gaze – that of a child raised in the middle of suffering, the gaze characteristic to our people... the gaze of endless meekness and patience, this impression was reinforced by what he was telling me, and how he was telling it...Shepherd Petre Lupu is as humble as he is honest. But he won me over by the power of his innocence, his demeanor, and the Common sense evinced by every word he says*”.

¹¹ G. Lungulescu, „Știința medicală favorabilă lui Petre Ciobanul [Medical science is favorable to Shepherd Petre]”, *Universul*, year 52, no. 217, Friday 9 August 1935: „*Inasmuch as my own medical knowledge allows me to make an assessment, I assert that this poor*

A similar personal involvement, beyond the purely medical practice, was the case of the great professor Gheorghe Marinescu (1863-1938), who also examined Petrache Lupu in the summer of 1935. His opinions, first presented in the pages of *Universul*, were further elaborated on in his book *Lourdes vs Maglavit* (Universul Publishing House, 1936). In this book's preface, the reputable neurologist and member of the Romanian Academy, invited the „enlightened clergy” to remove any doubt on this phenomenon, so that Maglavit may become „a place for Christians to pray, for the sick to find comfort, and a true clinic for the scientists where they can study the nature of the frail human being”. Professor Marinescu considered that the happenings of Maglavit, „although sensationalized by the healing accounts, and exploited by those who have vulgarized the events to suit their interests, cannot be simply regarded as the attempt from newspapers to sell better, or the expression of petty local interests, as certain persons think”. In his opinion, the Maglavit phenomenon comprised two aspects: one of the miraculous healings, by which the shepherd appeared as a thaumaturge, and the psychological-moral aspect. Regarding the healings, dr. Marinescu asserted that „faith healings” can occur in the case of particular medical conditions, as demonstrated by his former professor of Paris, Jean Martin Charcot; regarding the second aspect, it was a fact that the preaching of Petrache Lupu had as a direct consequence a moral transformation of both fellow-villagers and pilgrims. His conclusion followed: „This peasant of Maglavit is not mentally deranged, but he is an apostle of this [Christian] morality, for he is not interested in money or honors, and with the money raised he wants to build a church and a hospital. Aren't these institutions socially important?”¹²

The findings of the medical commissions represented a turning point in the course of events. Physicians declared that Petrache Lupu was sane, thus legitimizing both the pilgrimage that continued, and the involvement of the eparchial center in organizing it. An estimated 20,000 faithful visited Maglavit daily, which posed great difficulties to local authorities, especially in ensuring the necessary hygiene conditions, given the serious **risk** of **epidemic** outbreaks¹³. In his turn, bishop

shepherd is not a mentally challenged person, as I expected him to be, nor does he pose any danger for the society. In conclusion, based on my own findings as well as what I have been told about Maglavit, and with all my competence as a scientist, I declare myself a believer, thus I believe in the miracle of Maglavit.”

¹² Prof. dr. Gh. Marinescu, „Miracolul” de la Maglavit în lumina psihologiei și a moralei” [„The miracle of Maglavit in light of psychology and ethics”], *Universul*, no. 275, Sunday 6 October 1935; Prof. Dr. G. Marinescu, Member of the Romanian Academy, *Lourdes și Maglavit [Lourdes vs Maglavit]*, „Universul” Publishing House, Bucharest, 1936, pp. 5-6, 46-47, 52.

¹³ Prof. Dr. G. Marinescu, *op.cit.*, p. 36. The first suspicions of typhus appeared in late August, were promptly spread by newspapers, then were discarded just as promptly:

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Vartolomeu Stănescu issued a circular letter entitled „Decisions issued to honor the miracle of Maglavit-Dolj, 1935” (No. 10.775/1935) by which a church was to be constructed on the spot where the miracle had occurred, and to be dedicated to „God the Father” and „The Holy Virgin Mary”; construction works were set to begin on 14 September 1935. The amounts of money necessary for the building and maintenance would be raised by voluntary donations offered by pilgrims, as well as the monthly contribution of 1 leu [the Romanian currency], collected from all Orthodox faithful in Oltenia¹⁴.

This massive amount of newspaper articles entailed one of the most interesting debates on the Romanian people’s spirituality, a debate which engaged almost all theologians and intellectuals of the times. I hereby present, in chronological order, a few of these opinions in the hope that I will be able to resume my investigation for a more extensive study. It is important to mention that the debate was joined not only by those who had visited Maglavit and could provide a first-hand account of the events, but also by persons who voiced their „objective” opinions without ever reaching this „place of miracles”.

In early August 1935, the great historian Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940), director of *Neamul românesc* [*The Romanian Nation*] newspaper and an important member of the National Church Assembly, joined this debate despite having never visited Maglavit. While *Curentul* and *Universul* were willing to announce the daily chronicle of healings, *Neamul românesc* was equally intent on debunking the emerging myth that was being created around the wondrous events. The great historian wrote several articles on Maglavit, speaking of the sense of mystery in human life, the spiritual and moral state of Romanian peasantry after the war, the positive role of the Church in disciplining and channelling any personal initiative in the religious realm, and the potentially harmful role of the press which could manipulate and misdirect the religious feelings of the masses¹⁵. Nicolae Iorga was convinced that man lives

„Epidemics of typhus and scarlet fever at Maglavit”, *Universul*, year 52, no. 240, Sunday 1 September 1935 (prefect Beloiu travelled to Maglavit, where he took all necessary measures and isolated the sick, in order to prevent mass contamination); „There were no cases of typhus at Maglavit”, *Universul* year 52, no. 241, Monday 2 September 1935 (there were only 2 cases of typhoid fever, and serious measures were taken in order to prevent an epidemic).

¹⁴ Rev. assist dr. Petre Sperlea, *Vartolomeu Stănescu, Episcop al Râmnicului Noului Severin (1921-1938)* [*Vartolomeu Stănescu, Bishop of Râmnicul Noului Severin (1921-1938)*] Basilica Publishing House, Bucharest, 2014, p. 75.

¹⁵ „Minuni țărănești [Miracles among the peasants]”, *Neamul românesc*, no 174, Tuesday 13 August 1935, p. 1; „Țărănism și Maglavitism [The Peasants’ Party policy vs Maglavit policy]”, *Neamul românesc*, no 198, Thursday 12 September 1935, p. 1; „La locul minunilor

surrounded by mystery and that the human mind will never be able to fully comprehend it. Everything in man's life is miracle and mystery, but it is wrong to attach personal, individual interpretations to them. In this context, the Church has a great role to play as an established institution, guided by canons and governed by a hierarchy; it cannot seek inspiration in mass phenomena, without running the risk of populism and demagogical action and thus slipping into anarchy. Iorga took a firm stance against his „beloved fellow journalists” accusing them that, for lack of other topics to discuss over the holidays, they made the miracles of Maglavit into their daily headlines, thus misrepresenting the Romanian people by providing a „false image of sick mysticism” and prejudicing the expectations of religious renewal which people had for Maglavit: „What had appeared in the beginning to announce a religious awakening, which indeed deserved to be welcomed and supported by all means available to the press, has turned into a chase after mass healings, and a contagious spiritual disturbance from which our peasants must be protected”.

Very interestingly, Nicolae Iorga related the events of Maglavit to the political conflicts of his times, and took advantage of the great pilgrimage to the Dolj village in order to engage polemically with the leader of Peasants' Party Ion Mihalache and with the idea of the „peasants' state” he envisaged. During the first decades following the war, with the agrarian reform and the establishment of universal suffrage, peasantry was thought to embody the true values held by the Romanian people¹⁶. According to the views of the Peasants' Party leaders, this social class, affiliated and directed politically, was the only alternative to the bourgeois state represented by the Liberal Party, which had proven to be unable to defend the interests of peasantry. Actually, the „Peasants' State” was a hotly debated topic at the time, as demonstrate the May and June issues of the newspapers I have examined¹⁷. Nicolae Iorga thought that the Peasants' Party leader was going to fail to attract voters from the rural areas, as he was facing an unexpected challenge. The obstacle was not another party, as could have been expected, but a poor shepherd who was rallying hundreds of thousands of people

[At the site of miracles]”, *Neamul românesc*, no 199, Friday 13 September 1935, p. 1; ”Ziare și „minuni” [Newspapers and 'miracles'’], *Neamul românesc*, no 203, Thursday 19 September 1935.

¹⁶ Lecturer dr. George Enache, „Biserica-societate-națiune stat în România interbelică. Explorări în orizont liberal [Church-society-nation-state in interwar Romania. Inquiries from a liberal standpoint]”, *Revista Teologică [Theological Review]*, no. 2/2010, pp. 166-202.

¹⁷ „Domnul Mihalache și statul țărănesc [Mr Mihalache and the Peasants' State]”, *Curentul*, 22 May 1935, p. 12; „Congresul național țărănesc de la Giurgiu [The National Peasants' Congress in Giurgiu]”, *Curentul*, 23 May 1935, p. 3; „Manifestarea național-țărănistă de la Iași, D. Ion Mihalache expune programul pentru înfăptuirea statului țărănesc [The national Peasants' Party meeting at Jassy. Mr Ion Mihalache presents the political agenda for creating the Peasants' State]”, *Curentul*, 25 June 1935, p. 6.

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around him. Very ironically, the great historian noted that this was a serious problem not only to Mr Ion Mihalache, but also to the peasants themselves, who were facing a dilemma: *Today’s peasants... are facing a new predicament. From now on, whom are they going to follow: Mihalache or Petrache?*”¹⁸.

Between 22-25 September 1935, Father Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993) visited Maglavit, where according to his own statements he had an astonishing, unexpected personal experience. At the time, the great Romanian theologian had been a priest since 1932, an editor of the periodical *Telegraful Român* [*Romanian Telegraph*] since January 1934, and a professor at the Theological Academy „Andreiana” in Sibiu (professor at the Chair of History and Pastoral Theology since 1 July 1932, and a tenured professor at the Chair of Dogmatic Theology and Apologetics, since 1 October 1936)¹⁹. His description of the events he witnessed at Maglavit was first published in *Telegraful Român* on 29 September 1935 then republished in the review *Renașterea* on 6 October 1935²⁰, as a truthful confession: „*I professor and priest D.*

¹⁸ „Maglavitul supralicitează Topolovenii [Maglavit outdoes Topoloveni]” in *Neamul românesc*, no. 163, 1935, 30 July, p. 2: „*Can you imagine that? A party which, after such great defeats as its repeated and failed attempts at governing the country, having changed its leader three times and its platform many more times, finally succeeds in finding a genuine peasant for its leader - Mr Ion Mihalache from Topoloveni, and in drafting a political agenda with the most alluring demagogical promises, such as the one of the Peasants’ State.....A party which finds its force not in its platform, in what it has done or might do, but rather in its numbers: the tens and hundreds of thousands of peasants whom it can convene at will, in whichever part of the country. Such a party suddenly learns that somewhere – unfortunately, precisely in Oltenia, where Mr Mihalache first demonstrated his magical abilities of fascinating the peasantry of Romania – such a party encounters not another peasants’ political representation, but a mere peasant absolutely uneducated, unschooled, who has never journeyed abroad, a poor shepherd who may not have any sheep of his own, but proves to be able to bring together – just like Mr Mihalache – first hundreds, then thousands, and then tens of thousands and even as many as 100 thousand peasants at Maglavit in Dolj, where so far he has only been shepherding other people’s sheep... Maglavit successfully outdoes Topoloveni!*”

¹⁹ Florin Duțu, *Viața Părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993) [The Life of Father Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993)]*, Floare de colț Publishing House, Bucharest, 2015, pp. 16-17.

²⁰ Rev. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, „*Vindecările Minunate văzute de mine la Maglavit [The miraculous healings I witnessed at Maglavit]*”, *Telegraful Român*, year LXXXVIII, no. 41, 29 September 1935, pp. 2-3, article included in the volume *Cultură și duhovnicie. Articole publicate în Telegraful Român [Culture and Spiritual Directorship. Articles published in Telegraful Român]*, vol I (1930-1936). Book published with the blessing of His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, edited, introduction, notes by Ion-Dragoș Vlădescu, Basilica Publishing House, Bucharest, 2012, pp. 712-717; Pr. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, „*Vindecările Minunate văzute de mine la Maglavit*”, *Renașterea* year XIII, no. 47, Cluj, 6 October 1935.

Stăniloae, testify before God and the people, about the following miraculous healings, which I myself witnessed at Maglavit, in full awareness and control of my faculties". Father Dumitru Stăniloae went on to enumerate nine „wondrous facts” he had witnessed himself at Maglavit, where he had the opportunity to talk to the people who claimed being cured of various diseases, illnesses or infirmities.

Beside the miraculous healings he witnessed and to which he testified, Father Dumitru Stăniloae himself had a strange experience, while he was listening to the speech of Petrache Lupu. We quote the testimony of Father Dumitru Stăniloae: *„I also confess that, in addition to the miraculous healings I witnessed myself, and saw with my own eyes, I experienced another miracle: I did see, without any doubt, but keeping my calm and critical thinking, a strange figure behind Petrache Lupu, while he was standing on the platform, around 11 a.m. It looked like a big-sized bust, of a blue-greenish hue, that could be seen against the horizon. It was not a cloud, for it moved to the right or left, following the movements of Petrache, and it did not dissipate gradually, but it appeared and disappeared all at once. Neither was it the shadow of Petrache, because others were standing on the platform next to him, but nothing could be seen behind them. I had heard many people speaking about this bust-shaped appearance, but I did not know what to think of it. Now I saw it myself, as did many people who were around me: father Mocanu, his wife, my wife, and other persons”*.

On 6 October 1935, the same day when Father Dumitru Stăniloae published his article in *Renaşterea*, Emil Cioran – then a grantee of Humboldt Foundation, published his own essay in the newspaper *Vremea [The Times]*, by the title „Maglavit and the Other Romania”²¹. Emil Cioran never travelled to Maglavit and declared openly that the person of the shepherd lacked any interest in his eyes. What he found interesting were the visions themselves which, according to Emil Cioran, were mere hallucinations, in the positive sense as pertaining to that realm of psychology which manifests the depths of our soul’s life. Because, Emil Cioran stated, *„you can see God only if He is overwhelmingly present within you. The hallucination is the expression of a supreme inner actuality. Nothing is seen by the ordinary persons, because their souls contain nothing but themselves. How is it that so many people, have proved so responsive to this miracle? It would be too simplistic an explanation, to refer the whole country to the psychiatrists”*.

Emil Cioran found it infinitely more important to note that Maglavit was a collective phenomenon, able to reveal a less known trait of our people and thus to contradict his own previous opinion that *„the Romanian people is the most skeptical in Europe”*. However welcome is the fact that Maglavit disproves the labeling of vulgar skepticism (that is, doubting both transient and eternal things), it also demonstrates the

²¹ Emil Cioran, „Maglavitul și cealaltă Românie [Malavit and the other Romania]”, *Vremea*, Sunday 6 October 1935.

regrettable primitivism of the country: „Maglavit proved, once and for all, how primitive and backward we are. It reveals the state of the whole country. This finding is certainly sad, but also useful as it frees us from so many detrimental illusions. Romania is as backward as Maglavit.” Of all the goings-on at Maglavit, Cioran appreciated only the solidarity created among Romanians, which could be beneficial to Romania if it could find an expression in the political developments. „The psychosis generated by Maglavit must be converted and put to good use”, he stated, so that it might contribute to the emergence of a great political phenomenon, able to radically transform Romania.

In January 1936, the journal *Gândirea* [*The Thought*] published an extensive article written by professor Nichifor Crainic (1889-1972) to present his own findings, following the visit he had paid to Maglavit on 23 October 1935²². The aim of this article was, according to its author, to present the man whose humble personality had stirred „this huge wave of mystical faith”. He followed three directions: the assessment of the shepherd’s mental health; the assessment of his manner of praying for the people; and the assessment of his religious psychology, respectively. Ignoring the divided opinions of the experts and specialists, who according to him, show „a regrettable lack of respect for their own medical background and the very lack of scientific certainty, at its current stage, of the discipline they represent”, Nichifor Crainic noted that the shepherd possessed „a vivid intelligence, ability to pass reasonable judgments, common sense always at work, and admirable memory. In contrast, the symptom of idiocy is the absence of intelligence, and a mental disability is at least translated as the incapacity of making judgments and remembering. He has greatly changed since he had his vision: **he can hear, and consequently he can speak**. His intellect, which is very active, now has the means of expression it previously lacked. This is extremely important and is ignored by those physicians who without a proper investigation or examination of this case, insult the noble medical science by their unrealistic, ridiculous verdicts” (p. 5).

The distinguished professor at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Bucharest outlined two major elements of the religious personality of this shepherd, which were not mutually exclusive despite their apparent contradiction: the „lack of religious education” of peasant Petre Lupu, which typified the illiteracy of the whole peasant class in the Romanian Principalities; and the force of his prayers for the others, prayers which he created himself. Nichifor Crainic attested to this, stating that „his words, so simple and unostentatious, are said in such sincerity, so intently, that they fill your heart like a fire. And when he adds „I pray you, Lord” his voice has such childlike

²² Nichifor Crainic, „Vizită la Maglavit [A visit to Maglavit]”, *Gândirea*, year XV, no. 1, January 1936, pp. 1-11.

familiarity and such closeness to the divine powers, that it is impossible not to believe that this man has indeed touched on the mystery of life and the world".

Regarding the religious psychology of the shepherd, the author confessed in his article that he was less interested in the account given by shepherd Petre Lupu to the pilgrims, and more in his gestures and his facial expression that accompanied this account. Focusing his attention on these details, Nichifor Crainic testified, as did Father Dumitru Stăniloae, that he had seen behind the shepherd „*a luminous apparition of human form*". This unexpected sight troubled him, especially as a few moments later several persons in the crowd exclaimed that they had seen it, too. We quote the testimony of professor Nichifor Crainic on his own vision experienced at Maglavit, which weighed much in his assessment of the events: „*I would have expected anything but a miraculous apparition, at that point. I was not concerned with such apparitions, because I did not believe they occurred. People who are credible enough had told me they had seen them. However, I had not believed them. Not because I do not believe in the possibility of supernatural apparitions in general, but because I had imagined that the people coming to Maglavit are under the suggestion caused by the great religious prestige of this place, and thus they hallucinate. I rubbed my eyes at once and I felt myself, in order to make sure I was fully aware and conscious – and I looked again: the luminous phantom was still there*" (p. 7). After a „cool-headed" self-examination that demonstrated he was not the victim of delusion, hallucination or nightmare, the author concluded: „*I rest assured that the luminous apparition existed objectively, in itself, outside ourselves and was not the outward projection of our temporarily troubled minds. I repeat that we retained our complete self-control at all times* [Nichifor Crainic had been accompanied by two journalists of *Gândul* newspaper - N. Crevedia and Dragoș Protopopescu]. *Besides, why should a grown person risk being ridiculed by claiming that he had seen things appearing out of the thin air? Is this aimed to impress skeptical or atheist people? But I know full well that the religious truth needs no miraculous apparitions in order to demonstrate its salvific power. I know just as well that while some of the saints of our Church were indeed granted visions, many others had no visions at all and still they continue to enjoy the greatest veneration for their holiness*".

Nichifor Crainic's personal experience of Maglavit provides the core of this essay, between introductory considerations and conclusions. As a general statement, he considered that „*the Maglavit phenomenon is much too complex to be confined within the limits of cold reason*". This was a collective movement, engaging millions of people, and what prompted this movement was the inward – hence uncontrollable – experience of a lonely, illiterate shepherd. It followed that the essence of this phenomenon was decidedly mystical. According to this logic, the phenomenon could not be explained by psychology or religion in the conventional sense, since the events went beyond the borders of common psychology or common piety. If a religious

person does not normally seem unusual to the fellow people in matters of faith, in the case of Petre Lupu there were two possible explanations to account at least partially for the events of Maglavit: either this phenomenon, which had a subjective character, pertained to the abnormal psychological manifestations and so it could only have a pathological explanation; or it pertained to the domain of the supernatural, and so it could only have a mystical explanation (p. 1). Since the doctors had declared that Petrache Lupu was not mentally challenged, then his religious psychology pertained to the domain of mystical experiences (p. 10). „His case, Nichifor Crainic concluded, *requires extensive theological research, in order to ascertain its true nature. We have merely provided a descriptive presentation, with no other claims than the complete honesty of recorded facts. If we are wrong, which is quite possible, time will tell. It is only time that can offer any certainty, either to disprove or to confirm our perceptions. Actually, this is the method employed by our Church, which proclaims and acknowledges saintliness only when appearances and possibilities have become certainties*” (p. 11).

The same issue of *Gândirea* review published an article by Father Dumitru Stăniloae, „Încercare despre teofanii. Interpretarea vedeniilor lui Petrache Lupu [On theophanies. Commentaries on the visions of Petrache Lupu]”, a comprehensive theological study, containing many insights into matters of psychology and psychoanalysis²³. Whereas his account of the visit to Maglavit, published in *Renașterea* review, ended abruptly, with no conclusions or commentaries („*These are the wondrous things I witnessed at Maglavit. I take full responsibility before God and my fellow people, in that I am declaring nothing but the truth. I will not recount here any of the miracles described by others. I can only say that many occur every day, more than anyone can count. I conclude without any commentary. This article contains mere facts*”²⁴), the study published in *Gândirea* aimed to demonstrate the error of those who claimed that God cannot show Himself to the people, based on the

²³ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Încercare despre teofanii. Interpretarea vedeniilor lui Petrache Lupu [On theophanies. Commentaries on the visions of Petrache Lupu]”, *Gândirea*, year XV, no. 1, January 1936, pp. 14-29. The study is based on a number of articles published in *Telegraful Român*: „Încercare despre teofanii (I), *Telegraful Român*, year LXXXXIII”, no. 40, 22 September 1935, p. 1; „Încercare despre teofanii (II), *Telegraful Român*, an LXXXXIII”, no. 40, 20 October 1935, p. 1; „Încercare despre teofanii (III), *Telegraful Român*, year LXXXXIV”, no. 2, 5 January 1936, p. 1; „Încercare despre teofanii (IV), *Telegraful Român*, an LXXXXIV”, no. 3, 12 January 1936, p. 1-2; „Încercare despre teofanii (V), *Telegraful Român*, an LXXXXIV”, no. 4, 19 January 1936, pp. 1-2; The five articles are included in the volume *Cultură și duhovnicie. Articole publicate în Telegraful Român*, vol I (1930-1936), pp. 705-711; pp. 718-722; pp. 759-768; pp. 769-778; pp. 779-787.

²⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Vindecările minunate văzute de mine la Maglavit [The wondrous healings I witnessed at Maglavit]”, *Renașterea* review, year XIII, no. 47, Cluj, 6 October 1935.

text of the Gospel according to John: „no one has ever seen God” (John I, 18). His ample dogmatic, psychological and psychoanalytical arguments led Father Staniloae to a categorical conclusion: „As we can see, there is nothing to prevent us from inferring that Petrache Lupu has indeed seen God. His vision has all the attributes of a theophany”.

Some of the church publications described the visions of shepherd Petrache Lupu in enthusiastic terms, while others chose not to address the events of Maglavit. I mention *Renașterea* review, the official publication of the Diocese of Cluj between 1923-1950, which saluted Maglavit as a „Romanian Lourdes”, stating that people should receive this mystery with veneration and gratitude, and heed its call to holiness; it also encouraged pilgrimages to Maglavit which „can do much to facilitate pastoral work and prove very successful in fighting against the sects, which as we see have completely disappeared around Maglavit”.

Professor Nicolae Colan, the future metropolitan of Transylvania (1957-1967), at the time the rector of Academia Andreiana in Sibiu, raised the same question as Father Dumitru Stăniloae: „Can God show Himself to people?”. „Obviously, He can, answered the erudite Transylvanian theologian in the pages of *Viața ilustrată* [*Life Illustrated*] , the journal whose director he was. *It often happens that God shows Himself to those simple but pure in heart, and speaks to the „unwise” ones in order to put to shame the „wise”. Petrache Lupu may be one of such „unwise” through whom God humbles the „wise ones” of our times. The „saint” of Maglavit, as the pilgrims call him, is not preaching a new Gospel. He calls people to repentance, urges them to have greater faith in God and greater love for their neighbors. The same does our Holy Church through the voice of its consecrated servants. This is why the humble apostle of Maglavit does not even claim the title of leader for some new sect. By his exhortations, as simple and pure as his heart, he directs his fellow Christians towards the Church, so that they obey the commandments of „the Lord’s bride” (the Church) and return to the path of salvation²⁵.*

Not only newspaper articles, but also a number of books were issued in the same year 1935 by various personalities who had visited Maglavit and felt compelled to share their experience there. Such is the case of a priest at Boteanu Church in Bucharest - Dumitru Antal, the future bishop Emilian Antal (1945-1948), and nephew of Patriarch Miron Cristea; he visited Maglavit on 22 August 1935 and his book documenting his visit was printed by Tipografia Cărților Bisericești [the Church

²⁵ Nicolae Colan, „Fericiți cei curați cu inima. Minunea de la Maglavit [Blessed are the pure in heart. The miracle of Maglavit]”, *Viața ilustrată*, year II no. 8-9 (August-September 1935), pp. 1-2.

Books Printing Press]²⁶. Much more interesting is the case of priest Dumitru Cristescu, counsellor of the local bishop Vartolomeu Stănescu of Râmnicul Noului Severin, who in 1935 issued at the diocesan publishing house the brochure entitled *Scurte lămuriri asupra minunii de la Maglavit [Brief explanations on the miracle of Maglavit]*. Priest Dumitru Cristescu together with vicar bishop Galaction Gordun and priest Constantin Stănică – president of „Renașterea [The Reawakening]” Society, was a member of the commission which assisted the eparchial assembly of priests (Maglavit, 28 July 1935). On this occasion, rev. D. Cristescu was required to make a detailed report on the happenings in the „village of miracles”. On that Sunday, the delegates from the eparchial center attended the liturgy in the village church, which was followed by an impressive procession to the place known as the „tree stumps”. Surprised and somehow intimidated by the great number of people taking part in the procession, rev. D. Cristescu declared in his speech before the crowds that his report would be favorable to the wondrous events, and that he anticipated an equally favorable response from His Grace Vartolomeu Stănescu²⁷.

In this context, I mention the interview given to *Universul* newspaper by the Patriarch of Romania, Miron Cristea²⁸. The Patriarch was asked to comment on the possibility for people to see God. His answer summed up the tradition of the Orthodox Church on this matter; he also stressed the interference of the human factor in how signs and miracles are perceived: „*The Holy Scripture, and especially the Lives of Saints, mention many such cases. Throughout the times, God has chosen people through whom he guided the mistaken mankind, by means of „signs and miracles”. Of course, in such situations, beside the facts proven to be real, people’s imagination also invents miracles which actually never happened. Especially the Romanian people, so*

²⁶ Rev. Dumitru Antal, *Ce am văzut și ce am auzit la locul minunatei întâmplări de la Maglavit [What I saw and heard on the spot of the miraculous event of Maglavit]*, Bucharest, Editura Cărilor Bisericești [Church Books Publishing House], 1935. For a brief biography of the metropolitan of Bukovina (eparchy which in 1947 became the Archdiocese of Suceava), see Archim. Mihail Danieluc, *In memoriam. Arhiepiscopul Emilian Antal [In memoriam. Archbishop Emilian Antal]*, *Lumina* newspaper, 14 June 2011;

²⁷ Constantin Jaleș, „Ce s-a petrecut duminică la Maglavit-Dolj [What happened at Maglavit – Dolj on Sunday]”, *Curentul*, 31 July 1835: „*Christian brethren, it is very difficult for me to confirm, on behalf of the Holy Archdiocese, what has happened here. I am here to gather information and present my findings to His Grace Bishop Vartolomeu, and I am sure that His Grace will rejoice when he learns that God showed Himself here on the Danube banks, at Maglavit. I exhort you to obey the good advice offered to you....I will report to His Grace that a miracle occurred here, on the field where Petrache Lupu used to bring his sheep. His Grace will pass a decision, as God will help him decide.*”

²⁸ „IPS Patriarh Miron Cristea despre Maglavit [His Eminence Patriarch Miron Cristea on Maglavit]”, *Universul*, year 52 no. 254, Sunday 15 September 1935, pp. 1-2.

imaginative, is strongly inclined to exaggerate. Such exaggerations are bound to appear around the events of Maglavit. Time, however, will reveal the truth about these facts, leaving aside any additions produced by word-of-mouth storytelling. This is why the Church authority – the Holy Synod, based on the research that is underway and the opinions of competent persons, will pass a definitive decision in due time”.

I conclude by presenting the stance taken by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, because this took time to be outlined, especially during the years 1936 and 1937; no decision was issued to identify the event of Maglavit as a theophany, however a number of decisions were passed in relation to specific aspects generated by this phenomenon. In the Holy Synod’s meeting of 5 October 1935, based on the report submitted by His Grace Bishop Vartolomeu of Râmnic and Noul Severin, concerning what was happening at Maglavit; taking into account the *„enthusiasm and religious zeal stirred in the faithful people”*, as well as the great number of pilgrims that travelled there daily; given the *„positive effects reported on the moral and religious life of the children of our Holy Church”*; and especially since *„neither the theophany which Petrache Lupu claims to have had, nor his advice to the people, are in contradiction with the teachings of our Holy Church”*, the Holy Synod decided to appoint a Commission to *„collect on-site information and follow the developments at Maglavit, sending reports and proposals to the Holy Synod”* and recommended to the local bishop to urgently proceed to organizing and providing spiritual guidance to the faithful who undertook the pilgrimage to Maglavit. For this purpose, it was decided to send to Maglavit a sufficient number of clergymen who, alongside the local priest, were assigned to assist and tend to the spiritual needs of the multitude of devout people who came on pilgrimage. Not least, the Holy Synod decided that *„the offerings and donations are to be collected and used, following the decision of the Church authority, for the construction of a place of worship”*²⁹.

This decision, which did not actually make any pronouncement about the character of theophanies, but only concerned the proper management of the mass movement generated by them, was rather belated and discontented those who expected a clear attitude from the Church’s part. Consequently, the proceedings of the National Ecclesiastical Congress, held between 15-17 October 1935, were animated by heated debates concerning Maglavit. Discussions were started by Nicolae Iorga who publicly addressed Patriarch Miron Cristea, whom he considered to be *„a man of true Transylvanian integrity”* requiring him to step in and put an end to the situation where *„clergymen are selling the miracle and deriving profits from pilgrimages”*. Nicolae Iorga showed that he *„could not belong to two churches”*, one represented by the Patriarch and the other *„a rural one, improvised on a whim”*, just as he could not

²⁹ „The meeting of 5 October 1935”, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română [The Romanian Orthodox Church]*, year LIII (1935), November-December no. 11-12, pp. 199-200.

belong to two Orthodoxies, because the Maglavit occurrences had led him to believe there were two distinct Orthodoxies. „I want to know which one is the true Orthodoxy. Should it be the one I disagree with, then I would resign and withdraw at home, with my historical Orthodoxy”. The great historian continued his line of argument by stating that it was the duty of the Holy Synod to ensure the peace among the people, by inquiring into the matters that cause unrest in the Church. The fact that Holy Synod failed to take a clear stance regarding the events, paved the way for anarchy and, he concluded, „it would be too sad that our Church should lower itself to the level of Maglavit”³⁰.

In the following years, Petrache Lupu visited other eparchies, which forced the respective bishops to take a clear stance in relation to him personally, as well as the visions he claimed to have experienced. He came into contact with the political leading class of the Kingdom of Romania, even with the highest-ranking officials, and thus Emil Cioran’s dream seemed to possibly come true at some point in the future; scholars and theologians continued to write about him, taking various positions. The pilgrimages to Maglavit intensified, and so it seemed that no one and nothing could stop them. Professor Gheorghe Marinescu even asked rhetorically: „Could one forcibly put an end to the extraordinary affluence of believers visiting Maglavit? I wonder who would be able to do it?”³¹. Our great neurologist passed away in 1938, and never imagined that the pilgrimage to Maglavit could indeed cease.

Under the communist regime, Petrache Lupu was imprisoned and after his release from detention, he maintained silence for the rest of his life. The press made a U-turn and reversed its policy, debunking the events of Maglavit, while theological literature accumulated a great number of articles on the character of genuine theophanies, articles written at a time when, as rev. prof. dr. Constantin Drăgulin put it, „researchers into Fundamental Theology were allowed to work in their field, but could never contradict the postulates of militant atheism”³². Father Dumitru Stăniloae

³⁰ „Ce este Biserica ortodoxă. Intervenția dlui profesor N. Iorga la Consiliul Superior Bisericesc [What the Orthodox Church is. The address of professor N. Iorga at the High Ecclesiastical Council]”, *Neamul românesc*, year XXX, no. 227, Friday 15 October 1935. The moment is also mentioned in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* review, year LIII (1935), September-October no. 9-10: „the debate of this topic, although it was not the competence of the National Ecclesiastical Council, occasioned confessions of the faith from the part of some laymen of vast scientific or philosophical culture” (p. 407).

³¹ Prof. Dr. G. Marinescu, *op.cit.*, p. 51.

³² Rev. Prof. Petru Răzuș, „Criteriologia falselor teofanii [Criteria for recognizing fake theophanies], *Studii Teologice* [Theological Studies] year 1 (1949), no. 3-4, pp. 226-237; Idem, „Criteriile revelațiunii divine și combaterea falselor teofanii [Criteria of divine revelations and fight against fake theophanies]”, *Studii Teologice*, year 1 (1949), no. 5-6, pp. 345-364; Rev.

himself published a study condemning the „fake mysticism” with general statements on such phenomena, but without any explicit mention of Maglavit or Vladimirești, another movement that was taking place at the time³³.

My research is not exhaustive, as it covers a limited period of time (July-October 1935). Therefore, I have not addressed other interesting positions, for instance that of Nae Ionescu, one of the most influential interwar intellectuals, seen as the mentor of Mircea Eliade or Constantin Noica. On the other hand, the available materials covering this period did not allow me a full reconstruction of the diverse reactions, attitudes, theses and antitheses instantly generated by the effervescence of Maglavit phenomenon. However, I have certainly acquired a more nuanced perception on the course of events, which does not allow me to doubt the sincerity of Father Dumitru Stăniloae or the professor of Mystical Theology Nichifor Crainic in describing their own experience of Maglavit, nor the good faith and probity of professor Nicolae Iorga in denouncing this phenomenon in harsh terms, warning against anarchy, and demanding the Church to take a clear stance on such events. Nothing, however, could convince me that the great daily publications of the times, with national readership and impact, did not pursue their own interest by creating a great stir in the press and taking advantage of it. Interestingly, two more „theophanies” appeared in the aftermath of Maglavit, in the summer of 1935, and were widely advertised by the press. We wonder, as did some of the times’ journalists, whether the miraculous apparitions demonstrated that Romania was chosen by God *as a special place, like no other in the world* or were there certain agents that aimed to exploit the great financial and moral capital gained by the Danubian village?³⁴.

In this context, some strange coincidences have caught my attention. I note them without making any conjectures or speculations. At the time, Maglavit was an estate of Madona Dudu Church in Craiova, donated by cupbearer [a boyar rank] Barbu Portărescu in 1763. The journalist Constantin Jaleș wrote: „*Among the estates donated to this church [Madona Dudu] was the estate of Maglavit. While the other estates*

Prof. dr. Constantin Drăgulin, „Părintele Petru Rezuș, un apologet de seamă [Father Petru Rezuș, a remarkable apologist]”, *Lumina* newspaper, 31 March 2011.

³³ Rev. Prof. Dumitru Săniloae, „Formele și cauzele falsului misticism [Forms and causes of fake mysticism]”, *Studii Teologice* no. 5-6/1952, pp. 251-271.

³⁴ „După Maglavit, Găvănești în județul Buzău [After Maglavit, Găvănești in Buzau county]”, *Curentul* year VIII, no. 2687, 29 July 1935, p. 3; „Minunea de la Maglavit a făcut pui [The miracle of Maglavit is multiplying]” *Universul* no. 205, Sunday 28 July 1935; „Și în Prahova s-a produs o minune? [Another miracle in Prahova?]”, *Universul* no. 243, Wednesday 4 September 1935; „Fata dintr-o comună din Prahova care spune că a vorbit cu Dumnezeu [The girl of a Prahova village, who spoke to God]” *Universul*, Thursday 5 September 1935.

The Maglavit Phenomenon (1935). Echoes From the „Site of Miracles”

were either expropriated or sold, Maglavit remained the only significant financial resource for the construction of the monumental church. From the very beginning this estate, despite the ruthless abuse of those supposed to be administering it, was a precious source of income for the church named after the wonder-working icon of the Virgin. Is it surprising that God chose His man in Maglavit?³⁵.

Not coincidentally, among the books written on the events of Maglavit, and published as early as 1935, there is one authored by I. Constantinescu, epitropos [manager/administrator] of Madona Dudu foundation in Craiova, where he spoke very openly about the financial projects of the establishment he managed. Mr Constantinescu stated that the Administrative Body [Epitropia] of Madona Dudu church was entitled to collect the donations made at Maglavit, since the „Holy Apparition” had occurred on the estate that was owned by this church, and could be thus considered to „emanate, through the divine power, from the Holy Icon (the Holy Virgins’ icon in possession of Madona Dudu church)”³⁶. We do not know how this intention was put into practice. Bishop Vartolomeu Stănescu established several „councils” and „committees” in order to manage pilgrims’ donations, and in early 1936 he founded and gave legal personality to the „Evangelical Foundation Petrache Lupu”. I will not elaborate any further, but I found that the administration of the establishment at Maglavit was the „bone of contention” in the 1936 and 1937 meetings of the Holy Synod³⁷; a very controversial topic in the Parliament, where certain voices demanded the deposition of bishop Vartolomeu Stănescu of Râmnicul Noului Severin, accused of abusive attitude and heresy; and, not least, it was a concern

³⁵ Constantin Jaleș, „În satul omului care a vorbit cu Dumnezeu [In the village of the man who spoke to God]”, *Curentul*, year VIII, no. 2688, 30 July 1935.

³⁶ I. Constantinescu, *Despre arătarea dumnezeiască de la Maglavit [On the divine appearance of Maglavit]: „for us, the epitropi [administrators] of the above-mentioned institution (Madona Dudu church)...claim the right to manage the donations, as belonging and being rightfully due to the church and institution we serve...We claim this right because it was on the estate and property of this institution, that the Holy and Divine Apparition took place; because in our opinion, the Holy and Divine Apparition of Maglavit may emanate, through the divine power, from the Holy Icon (at Madona Dudu church) therefore it is linked to this Holy Icon and its miracle-working powers”* (I Constantinescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12).

³⁷ In the meeting of the Holy Synod of 10 March 1936 it was decided that „all Committees, councils and bodies administering the funds collected at Maglavit will be dissolved”, the construction project of Maglavit had to be discontinued, no construction work could be carried out without the approval of the Patriarch, and if the bishop of Râmnic disobeyed these orders, then the Holy Synod was to declare the parish of Maglavit a stavropegiion under the direct authority of the Patriarch of Romania (rev. asist. dr. Petre Sperlea, *Vartolomeu Stănescu. Episcop al Râmnicului Noului Severin (1921-1938)*, Basilica, Bucharest, 2014, volume published with the blessing of His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel, pp. 76-77).

for king Carol II who deemed it appropriate to place this foundation under his patronage, by royal decree³⁸.

Another controversial aspect concerning the „Maglavit phenomenon” is the comparison between Lourdes and Maglavit, obsessively reiterated in the times’ press, books, and even church publications. This comparison appeared very early on, almost concomitantly with the news of the „wondrous events” of Maglavit, and was insistently circulated in both lay and ecclesiastical circles. Professor Gheorghe Marinescu made this discussion into a book, after he had delivered four conferences on this topic in November 1935³⁹. Admittedly, there are comparable elements: the integrity of the visionary girl of Lourdes, who would not accept any money or other gifts from the pilgrims; the credit granted to her by the village priest; the favorable verdict of the medical commission. On the other hand, other elements bear no comparison: the facts that Bernadette joined a convent, was declared a saint by the Roman-Catholic Church, and Lourdes is still today a pilgrimage destination in the Roman-Catholic world, and a place where healings that cannot be explained by the medical science occur.

The priest Dumitru Cristescu at the end of July 1935 put forth this idea, tinged with local pride: *„Just as the Catholics have turned Lourdes into a place for pilgrimage and spiritual and bodily healing, I think that so can we the Orthodox make Maglavit a place for healing, of the bodies and especially of the tormented souls... Putting a stop to our Christians’ local processions would be tantamount to harming the pure soul of our beloved Oltenia, destined for eternal bliss”*. The September issues of *Renașterea* journal in Cluj contained a number of enthusiastic remarks: *„All the indications are that we shall have a Romanian Lourdes”* or *„Those familiar with the glory of Lourdes, from their own experience or from the books – and there are many among us – a glory gained over a span of 80 years, have every reason to assert that the prestige of Maglavit outdoes it by far. And rightly so”*⁴⁰.

At first sight, no connection can be found between the Mariophanies experienced by young Bernadette Soubirou (1844-1879), beginning in 1858, and Petrache Lupu’s

³⁸ On the Maglavit phenomenon and the course of events, see Cătălin Craiu, *Democrație și statolatrie. Creștinismul social la Bartolomeu Stănescu, episcopul Râmnicului Noului Severin (1875-1954 [Democracy vs Statolatry. Social Christianity with Bartolomeu Stănescu, bishop of Râmnicul Noului Severin (1875-1954)]*, Bucharest University Press, 2014, pp. 166-170. Cătălin Craiu described the bishop as a controversial personality, with many supporters and as many opponents, very actively involved in the times’ political fights, and also the object of many press campaigns.

³⁹ Prof. Dr. G. Marinescu, *op.cit.*, pp. 9-29.

⁴⁰ „Maglavitul merge spre glorie [Maglavit’s triumphal march]”, *Renașterea*, year XIII (no. 37) Cluj, 15 September 1935; p. 37; *Renașterea*, year XIII (no. 39) , Cluj, 29 September 1935.

theophanies of 1935. The apparitions of the Holy Virgin at Fatima (1917) were chronologically closer to Maglavit, than Lourdes. However, I was surprised to discover that the Roman-Catholic Church carried out the canonization process for the visionary girl of Lourdes, during the interwar period. Bernardette Soubirou was beatified in 1925, and on 8 December 1933 she was canonized by Pope Pius XI⁴¹. The cult of the Virgin of Lourdes had reached the Catholic communities in Romania in late 19th century. In 1885 was published the Romanian translation of a well-known book by Henri Lasserre, *Istoria Madonei de la Lourdes [Notre Dame de Lourdes]*⁴². In the same year, a group of seven pilgrims from Romania visited Lourdes for the first time, and laid there a Romanian flag⁴³, then in 1896, the first icon of Our Lady of Lourdes was brought to Butea (Iași county); the cult extended from there throughout the Roman-Catholic diocese of Iași (Răchiteni, Tg Trotuș, Galați), as well as the Roman-Catholic Archdiocese of Bucharest (Brăila and Cioplea Monastery).

During the interwar period, the cult of the Virgin of Lourdes was much promoted in Romania by the martyr bishop Anton Durcovici (1888-1951) who wrote several articles and published them in the press, founded Marian associations, and greatly encouraged devotion to the Holy Virgin through his sermons and catechesis⁴⁴. It is important to note that in 1931 the Romanian translation of Alfred Hoppe's *Lourdes în strălucirea minunilor sale* [Lourdes im Glanz seiner Wunder/ Lourdes in the splendor of its miracles] (first edition, Iași, 1914; second edition, 1931) was re-published. In 1934 appeared *Novenă către prea Sfânta Fecioară de la Lourdes* [Novena to the Holy Virgin of Lourdes] and also in 1934, *Viața Sfintei Bernadette Soubirou* [The Life of St

⁴¹ Virgil Balibanu, „Sfânta Bernadette Soubirou [Saint Bernadette Soubirou]”, *Curierul creștin*. Official publication of the (Greek-Catholic) Diocese of Cluj, year XV, no. 24, Cluj, 15 December 1933, pp. 207-209.

⁴² This translation by the Italian Gian Luigi Frolo, a professor of Neo-Latin languages and Literatures at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy – the University of Bucharest, generated controversies as several Romanian intellectuals saw it as Catholic propaganda in Romania. For example, A. D. Xenopol wondered in his articles: „What does the Lady of Lourdes have to do with Romania?” (Dănuț Doboș, *Adu-ți aminte, Marie, și de România. Începuturile cultului Madonei de la Lourdes în România [O Mary, remember Romania. The Beginnings of Our Lady of Lourdes' Veneration in Romania]*, Sapienția, Iași, 2018; pp. 131-132).

⁴³ This banner, crafted by a workshop in Paris, was made of velvet in the Romanian colors, bordered with flowers embroidered in gold thread, and had the Virgin's icon in the center ; around it was written „O Mary, remember Romania”, and at the bottom were the coats of arms of the cities of Bucharest, Iași, Craiova, Galați and Brăila.

⁴⁴ One of the Marian associations was the Marian congregation of men and youth in Bucharest, established in 1891; in 1934 it started to publish the journal „Farul Nou [New Lighthouse]”. This journal, dedicated to Bernadette, published several articles on the Lourdes phenomenon and its impact (Dănuț Doboș, *op.cit.*, p. 238).

Bernadette Soubirou] was published at Iași. In 1934, when the Roman-Catholic world celebrated 75 years since the Marian apparitions of Lourdes, a whole issue of the (Greek-Catholic) journal *Observatorul* in Beiuș was dedicated to Saint Bernadette, with the motto „*Christians, remember that you live in the era of Lourdes*” (year VII, no. 3-4, Beiuș, 1934).

From this journal we learn that Father Gala Galaction, writer Dumitru Nanu and „*many Romanian personalities*” went to visit Lourdes, with no mention of the year of their pilgrimage⁴⁵. We know that Dumitru Nanu wrote several articles on Lourdes in *Universul* newspaper, while the writer Gala Galaction admired Catholicism, as he explicitly states in his *Diary*⁴⁶. Not surprisingly, then, Gala Galaction who at the time was a priest (since 1922) and professor of New Testament Exegesis at the Faculty of Theology in Chișinău (since 1926) was one of the first clergymen to write about the „wondrous” events of Maglavit: „*Did God descend among sheep and shepherds?* he wrote in the pages of *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* [The Romanian Orthodox Church review]. *But this has been His predilection since Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. Did the Heavenly Lord approach a man in a meek, familiar way, appropriate for the humble, bucolic background of a poor shepherd, and give him in a few words the essence of His eternal commandments? But this has been His way for millennia*”⁴⁷. We see, then, that the canonization of the girl of Lourdes in late 1934 was extensively covered by the Roman-Catholic and Greek-Catholic press in Romania and that some Romanians may have been interested in the religious celebrations of Lourdes. This chronological proximity with Bernadette Soubirou, brought to public attention one year prior to the events that occurred in the Dolj village, could account for the insistent comparisons between Lourdes and Maglavit.

Leaving aside these coincidences, which could play a role in this mosaic of facts, initiatives and attitudes constituting the „Maglavit phenomenon”, there are a number of uncontested facts: the force of the shepherd’s testimony, which equally convinced ordinary people and the times’ intellectuals; the huge pilgrimage to Maglavit and the healings reported there; and not least, the astonishing moral and religious awakening

⁴⁵ *Observatorul*, year VII, no. 3-4, Beiuș, 1934, p. 140.

⁴⁶ „*I have the greatest esteem for the Catholic clergy. I deeply regret that our own clergy is not at all as intelligent and as learned as the Catholic one (...) I came to be so discouraged by our Orthodoxy, that I really wish that the Catholic propaganda should succeed and that we should convert to Catholicism*” (Gala Galaction, *Jurnal [Diary]*, vol I, second edition, full text. Edited, preface, notes by Teodor Vârgolici, portrait by Mara Galaction, Albatros, Bucharest, 1996, p. 52) ; „*I confess that for a while now, my heart has been with the Catholics rather than the Orthodox*” (Gala Galaction, *Jurnal*, vol II. Second edition, full text. Edited, preface, notes by Teodor Vârgolici, Albatros, Bucharest, 1997, p. 95);

⁴⁷ *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* [The Romanian Orthodox Church Review], no. 5-6/1935, p. 366.

which the phenomenon generated in interwar Romania. In the words of rev. Dumitru Antal, the future archbishop Emilian Antal, „these massive crowds of believers are in themselves a miracle, in our times when faith in God is diminishing (...) All those who have visited Maglavit have become apostles of the faith. For this reason, the wondrous apparition of Maglavit has reverberated, like a divine wave, throughout the entire Christian population of our country, reviving the faith and morals so severely affected of late”⁴⁸. „Miracles happened, this is a fact, said priest Dumitru Cristescu. This is the truth. And beside these miraculous healings, let us remember that the greatest miracle is the sudden awakening of the faith, and the moral revival of the believers, especially in this part of the country”⁴⁹.

Nicolae Colan, the future bishop of Cluj, believed it was time „to rejoice with exceedingly great joy” seeing that the people respond to the call to repent and to live in Christ and His Church, whose apostle, by the will of God, was Petrache Lupu, a „fool” by whom God „will put the times’ wise to shame”⁵⁰. The editorials of *Renașterea* review he directed, pointed out that Maglavit offered an opportunity for the spiritual revival of the Romanian people, precisely by virtue of its peasant character: „The number of those who are heading for Maglavit is on the rise, a steep rise. It is not curiosity nor the promise of any rewards that makes them set off on such a long journey, but unexpected, fervent faith, complete trust, hope for healing their many ailments. I am convinced that thanks to the events of Maglavit, a new life will begin for the villages and precisely because its preacher is a mere shepherd, so close to his fellow peasants, this will succeed. Petrache is not a threat to the Church, but a valuable asset and collaborator of the priests”⁵¹.

I must confess that, although I had started my research enthusiastically, intending to add my own contribution to what has already been written on this topic⁵², I ended up rather intrigued by its many convolutions, which call for an in-depth examination of the Maglavit phenomenon. Because it was not confined to the visions of shepherd Petru Lupu, on which the Romanian Orthodox Church took a cautious stance, and

⁴⁸ Rev. Dumitru Antal, *op.cit.*, pp. 5, 29.

⁴⁹ Preot. Dem. Cristescu, *Scurte lămuriri asupra minunii de la Maglavit {Brieș explanations on the miracle of Maglavit}*, Editura Creștină a Sfintei Arhiepiscopii a Râmnicului Noului Severin, 1935, p. 26.

⁵⁰ Nicolae Colan, „Minunea de la Maglavit [The miracle of Maglavit]”, *Viața ilustrată*, year II, no. 8-9, August- September 1935, pp. 1-2.

⁵¹ „Preoți plecați la Maglavit [Priests travel to Maglavit]”. *Renașterea*, year XIII (no. 48) Cluj, 1 December 1935, pp. 1-2

⁵² Deacon prof. dr. Petre David, *Invazia sectelor. Asupra creștinismului secularizat și intensificarea prozelitismului neopăgân în România după decembrie 1989 [The Invasion of Sects. On Secularized Christianity and the Intensified Neo-pagan Proselytism in Romania After December 1989]*, vol. II, Europolis, Constanța, 1999, pp. 155-158.

theologians had divided opinions. Maglavit generated commotion in the press, and then gave rise to a polemics on the specific character of Romanian spirituality, engaging almost all the important intellectuals of the times; then it was exploited for political purposes both during the interwar period and during the communist regime, and to this day, 25 years after the death of Petrache Lupu, it is still making headlines⁵³ and the local people still take pride in the events⁵⁴.

⁵³ See, among others, the posting of the National News Agency *Agerpres*, entitled „Maglavit, locul care a plasat Doljul în istoria creștinismului [Maglavit: the place that put Dolj county on the map of Christianity]” (Friday, 12 September 2014), actually an interview given by the abbot of Maglavit Monastery. (<https://www1.agerpres.ro/destinatie-romania/2014/09/12/destinatie-romania-maglavit-locul-care-a-plasat-doljul-in-istoria-crestinismului-11-13-35>). See also, the articles published in *Lumina* newspaper: deacon Ioniță Apostolache, „Tămăduirea vine prin credință la Maglavit [Faith healings at Maglavit]”, *Lumina*, 9 September 2010; diac. Alexandru Vanciu, „Profețiile ciobanului vizionar din Maglavit [The prophecies made by the visionary shepherd of Maglavit]”, *Lumina*, 27 August 2018.

⁵⁴ Prof. Dumitru Gelu, *Maglavit 1935-2009. Dumnezeu vorbește oamenilor prin Petrache Lupu [God speaking to people through Petrache Lupu]*, Craiova Publishing House, Craiova, 2010: „Our village – a century-old settlement, where monastic estates used to exist and where the old rulers of Wallachia raised the cross against the heathen crescent, this village on the Danube banks, has joined the world’s spiritual patrimony. Why this place? Because here God found a pure, blessed soul – a young shepherd named Petre Lupu” (p. 12).