

# Introduction

The Romanian peasants consider the stars only after they have risen into the sky in the evening, at midnight and at dawn, between June to September, especially during July and August, the middle of their agricultural activity. Only the shepherds reckon the rest of the year; thus the stars they follow are called “shepherd’s stars” by the other peasants.

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What made me study the Romanian sky from a scientific point of view, and not leave it to other, more competent, people, from literary circles?

I think it is necessary to answer this question here.

From being a child, I knew many things about how the peasants divided the sky into constellations, and some of the beliefs and legends of the peasants about these star patterns. My parents were farmers. My father possessed estates in Ilfov, Vlașca and Buzău counties, and lived with my mother among the peasants. With her investigative spirit, my mother was especially interested in the peasants’ beliefs. As a cultured woman with a remarkable memory, she remembered very well every story, and had a special gift to re-tell them beautifully. When I was a child, she told me a lot of popular tales and legends, and a great many of them still remain in my mind.

She also showed me the sky, telling me many things about it, but as a child, I did not realise their importance. However, in part, I came to know what the peasants from Ilfov, Vlașca and Buzău counties thought about the sky.

I imagined that there must be more than these peasants knew, from the population as a whole, and I waited for other men, as I said before, more competent than me, to collect and write about all these things. But seeing that my expectation still remains unfulfilled, I decided, after advice from some of my fellows, to begin this work myself. God grant that this beginning should be an impulse for those whose ability is richer than mine. To make this work as complete as possible, I intended to realize researches across the whole country, taking as my co-workers many teachers in rural areas. For this purpose, in 1896 I made a sky map, projected for the location of Bucharest. On it, I put all the astronomical constellations visible from Romania, in their classical Greco-Latin groupings, with detailed explanations for each constellation. Then I sent the map to all the teachers in Romania, with a special letter in which I requested them to ask the oldest peasants about their beliefs in the constellations, the sky, the Earth, Sun, Moon, eclipses, thunder, lightning, clouds, rain, etc., and anything else they wished to communicate to me. From the papers returned to me, plus my own researches, I have created what I think to be both an interesting and comprehensive work. It is true that many of the papers did not tell of anything significant, but in 39 of them, I found very important information. These answers came from the following counties: 1 each from Mehedinți, Muscel, Dâmbovița, Buzău, Râmnicu-Sărat, Brăila, Putna, Bacău, Botoșani, Tulcea; 2 each from Vâlcea, Olt, Ialomița, Dorohoi; 3 from Argeș; 5 from Prahova; 13 from Neamț.

Before entering into this material, I wish to declare something. I will present all as it is known to me, or as it was communicated to me. I wished to be consistent with myself and with my brave teacher co-workers. At the end of this work, I will present a list with their names and locations, and also some of the old peasants’ names who made important contributions.

Finally, as I feel it to be necessary, I will reproduce antique ideas and beliefs, especially of the Greeks and Romans, about the constellations, heavenly bodies, celestial and meteorological phenomena. And I will try to show from which place, and how, some of these old beliefs came to us. Perhaps it is a daring risk for me to do so, but I considered it to be useful.

