

Authors: Sorin Şipoş, Ioana Blajec, Cosmin Patca, Manuela Bârza

Translator: Paul Şipoş

Stepping into the Huta Slavia complex means entering a world born more than 200 years ago. We invite you to take a walk through the times when the first Slovaks settled in the Plopiş Mountains, to get to know the life they led, their traditions and occupations, to discover elements of culture, spirituality, religion, ethnography and art.

Let yourself be carried away in history, while you breathe fresh air, feel the tranquility of nature and let yourself be conquered by the charm of the place.

Step in with confidence!

Traseu Ecoturistic "Povestea slovacilor din Huta"

HUTA | SLAVIA



Introduction

The Şinteu commune (*Nová Huta* in Slovakian) is located in the northwestern part of Romania, in Bihor County. It has a surface area of 49,33 km² and a population of 1021 inhabitants, out of which 98% are Slovaks. It is composed of 4 localities: Şinteu, Huta Voivozi, Socet, and Valea Târnei. From a geographical perspective, the commune is located at the feet of the Plopiş Mountains, a subdivision of the Apuseni Mountains, with a maximum altitude of 918 m, at Măgura Mare peak.

The appearance of Slovaks in the area of the Plopiş Mountains, at the boundary between the Bihor and Sălaj counties, is more than two centuries old. *How did the Slovaks come to live in the Plopiş Mountains region? Where did they migrate from and why? What were their main occupations over time? What are the specific cultural elements of the Slovaks in Şinteu?* You will find out the answer to all these questions and a lot more valuable information by accompanying us in the story of the Slovaks in the Plopiş Mountains area, generally, and those in Şinteu, particularly.

The purpose of the route “*The story of the Slovaks from the Huta*” is observing and appreciating the nature and local traditions, thus making it an *ecotouristic route*. At a more profound level, however, we wish to introduce you to the “Slovak world”, to present you with some aspects related to our culture, for you to experiment some of our past, traditions, and customs that we’ve been keeping for centuries. And, why not, for you to taste the dishes specific to the Slovak culture. The journey you are about to embark on is not an ordinary hike; it is a trip back in time, where you will be greeted with stories fondly and passionately recounted by the creators of “*The story of the Slovaks from the Huta*”: Miroslav and Emilia Jabloncsik.

The entry to the ecotouristic route is next to the Huta Slavia restaurant, following the signs towards the trail. Along the way, you will find thematic attractions, sculptures representative of the Slovak world, spaces built for reenacting certain crafts, such as livestock farming, plant cultivation, cooperage, weaving and more. The periplus goes further through

the Slovaks' history, the wanderer being invited to discover more about their popular beliefs and traditional customs.

An element of special cultural value is the ensemble of wooden figurative sculptures placed along the route. In addition to the symbolic value specific to each of them – about which you will find out more in the following pages, the ensemble introduces us to Slovak folk art, which is characterized by types of sculptures: figural sculptures and relief sculptures. Sculpturing appears as a typically male craft, since it was done by lumberjacks, farmers, shepherds, folk craftsmen, miners, the mastering of the simplest decorative technics being a natural skill in some areas of Slovakia in the first half of the 20th century.

Distances from the main European cities:

Prague – 856 km

Vienna – 571 km

Bratislava – 533 km

Budapest – 329 km

Prešov – 321 km

Košice – 286 km

Bucharest – 562 km

Nădlac – 226 km

Cluj-Napoca – 123 km

Oradea – 59 km

Distances from the main settlements in the area:

Huta Voivozi – 7 km

Valea Târnei – 7 km

Socet – 9 km

Făgetu – 15 km

Aleşd – 22 km
Suplacul de Barcău – 24 km
Budoi – 28 km
Şimleul Silvaniei – 30 km
Derna – 33 km
Serani – 36 km
Vărzari – 38 km
Sacalasaŭ Nou – 38 km
Marghita – 51 km

GENERAL INFORMATION

Commune:	ŞINTEU
Surface area:	4935.24 hectares
Total population:	1.021 inhabitants
Commune center:	Şinteu
Belonging villages :	Şinteu, Socet, Valea Târnei, Huta Voivozi

Geographical coordinates:

North latitude:	47° 8' 47.86" N
East longitude:	22° 28' 56.36" E
Maximum altitude:	757 m

Other neighboring villages where Slovaks live:

Făgetu (slov. Gemelčička): It belongs to the commune of Plopiş and is bordered by the villages Şinteu and Şerani.

Surface area:	1315 ha
Total population:	745 de inhabitants

Geographical coordinates:

North latitude:	47° 5' 37.4" N
-----------------	----------------

East longitude: 22° 34' 54.6" E

Serani (slov. Šarani): It belongs to the commune of Borod and is bordered by the village Făgetu.

Surface area: 788,9 ha

Total population: 628 de inhabitants

Geographical coordinates:

North latitude: 47° 3' 20" N

East longitude: 22° 37' 55.6" E

History of the Slovak community, the migration and the settlement in the Plopiș Mountains region

The central part of the Plopiș Mountains has the appearance of a high plateau, that of Șinteu, with elevations below 800 meters. The Plopiș Mountains cover an area of 530 square kilometers and find themselves in the northwestern region of the Apuseni Mountains. They represent a ridge with a general northwest – southeast orientation and are surrounded by hilly units. The main column of the Plopiș Mountains has a length of 35 km and a variable width of about 5 to 15 km. Due to reduced elevations, similar to hills, they are also called Șes Mountains (*șes* = plain, lowland). They are comprised of crystalline schists. The monotonous appearance of the mountains is interrupted by deep valleys of 100 to 250 meters, some with a wide bottom. The deep valleys determine the apparition of some ridges that fall in steps until the altitude of 400 m, both towards Barcău and Crișul Repede. Among the valleys that drain the mountain space, Bistra Valley stands out, which is quite deepened (epigenetically) in the “Șinteu Plateau” and allows for the separation of the Plopiș Mountains in two compartments:

a northeastern one (less vast and with lower altitudes) and a southeastern one (wider and with higher elevations).

Before the arrival of the Slovaks, this entire mountain plateau was covered almost entirely in deciduous forests (beech, oak, hornbeam). Initially, the colonization of the Plopiș Mountains with Slovaks had mostly economic causes. The Slovaks were specialized in forestry and wood cutting. The local nobles, influenced by the ideas of Austrian cameralism, wanted to obtain additional income by harnessing the local resources. The vast forests could bring important incomes to the local landlords. The spectacular growth of Europe's population in the 18th century enhanced the demand for construction wood in the big cities. Moreover, there was a high demand for potash, which was obtained from the ash of deciduous wood. Potash (potassium carbonate) was a raw material used both in the production of soap and glass. The colonized Slovaks were promised wood for the construction of their houses, the land resulting from deforestation, and a sort of pay. Some of them were colonized as qualified workforce for the newly founded glass manufactures. This is how the Slovak settlements in the plateau area of the Plopiș Mountains came into existence: Șinteu (slov. *Nova Huta*, hun. Solyomko), Huta Voivozi (slov. *Stara Huta*, hun. *Almaszeghuta*), Socet (slov. *Sočet*, *Zachotar*, hun. *Forduló*), Valea Târnei (slov. *Židáreň*, *Židarňa*, hun. *Hármaspatak*), Făgetu (slov. *Gemelčíčka*, hun. *Magyarpatak*), Șerani (slov. *Šarany*, magh. *Sárán*).

They are mountain settlements, semi-compact, characterized by the existence of a relatively high distance between households. Each family picked a house site close to a water source (spring). The conditions for colonization in the area were difficult, being dependent on the preliminary land clearing and creation of allotments of arable land. Following the putting into use of cleared land, the regional character of the settlement has developed, a semi-compact type, with households that developed concentrically, around a yard, at significant distances one from the other, depending on the piece of land that each chose for clearing.

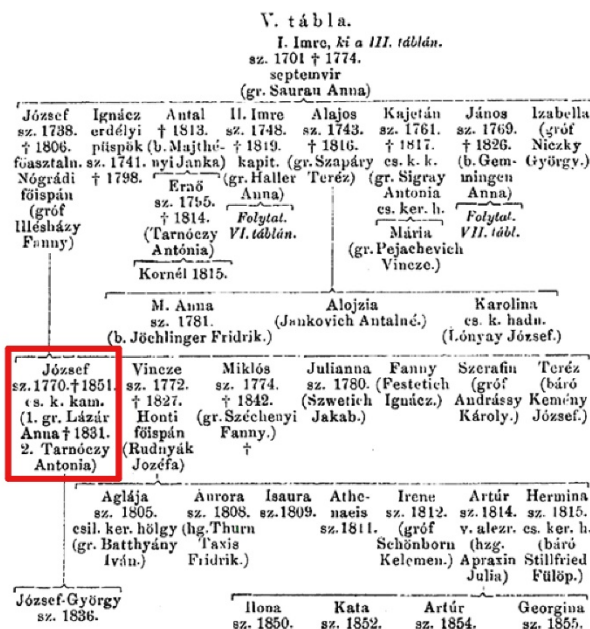
1. The wooden sculpture of József Batthyány



The first objective on the trail “*The story of the Slovaks from the Huta*” is represented by the wooden sculpture of József Batthyány. Created in 2019 by the Slovakian artist Juraj Čutek, from Slovakia, the symbolic statue of the Hungarian count Batthyány with a horse and cart is suggestive for illustrating the founding of the Slovakian localities in the area of the

Plopiš Mountains. Juraj Čutek belongs to some prominent personalities of the Slovak art scene. Especially known are his wooden figurative sculptures with “ready-made” metallic elements. Oscillating between imagination and the real world, Čutek’s works are inspired from history, music, mythology, but also from circus art.

In the past, a significant surface of Central and Southeastern Europe was part of the Habsburg Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, respectively. Due to natural, political, religious, and especially economic causes, the empire’s inhabitants migrated from one place to another. At the time, the land owners of the Plopiš Mountains counties decided to harness their possessions. Being a forested area, an initial deforestation was necessary for founding



Part of the family tree of the Batthyány family

the glass factories and for colonizing the human resource needed for supporting this industry. This is how they brought Slovak colonists, woodcutters, skilled in forestry, whom they offered in change certain benefits: the uncleared lands and wood for the construction of their households. Four big noble families (Bárányi, Bánffy, Batthyány, and Kereszegi), who owned possessions in this area, were involved in the colonization process of the Slovaks in the late 18th century and early 19th centuries.

Count József Batthyány (full name Josef Maria Vince Alajos Erhard) was born in Graz (Austria), on December 22nd 1770, and is part of a big noble family of the Austrian Empire. The Batthyány-Strattmann family owned the Alesd domain from 1779. Around 1830, József Batthyány and his wife, Anna Lázár, built the baroque castle in the center of Alesd (now the City Hospital). He passed away in Vienna on March 25th 1851, and was buried in Németújvár (Güssing, Austria), a town in eastern Austria.

2. The wooden sculpture of Saint Cristof



The Slovak community was and is Christian, of Roman-Catholic faith. The church was one of the important elements in people's lives, and even more so a uniting factor, around which the most important events in their lives took place: weddings, baptisms, important holidays, the celebration of the church's patron saint, and others.

As a result, the placing of objects with profound religious significance on a path of reconstituting the culture and spirituality of the Slovaks was self-evident. The wooden sculpture of Saint Christopher (slov. *Sveti Kristofor*), the second objective on the ecotouristic route, was created in 2019, by Martin Kalman. Celebrated in the catholic faith on July 25th, Saint Cristofor was the patron saint of travelers, of pilgrims; in modern ages, he is also considered the patron saint of drivers. Before the Second Vatican Council, Saint Cristofor also belonged to the so-called 14 Holy Helpers. In the Slovak community it is said that, along the cumbersome road they made, the settlers were protected by this saint.

According to the legend, he was the son of a pagan king (in Canaan or Arabia), married to a Christian woman. Thanks to her prayers, a baby was born, that the king named Offerus (Offro, Adokimus, or Reprebus) and dedicated him to the pagan kings Apollo and Machmet. Offerus was very strong and big. When he grew up, he wanted to serve only the strongest person he ever met. Therefore, he served a powerful king, and then Satan. However, after a while, he discovered that even Satan was afraid of something: he was trembling in front of the cross. He thus searched further and found an anchorite; he told him about God and taught him the basic truths of the faith. He chose to join Christianity, and following the baptism, received the name of Cristopher. In adulthood, he became a "carrier", carrying across a very large and deep river, believing that was his God-given purpose. One day, one of those wishing to cross the river was a small child. He took him onto his back and started crossing, but with every step, Christopher felt on his shoulders such a great weight, that he feared falling into the river and drowning. After they crossed the river, the child presented himself as being the Redeemer of the entire world, the immense weight the carrier felt being,

in fact, the weight of the world that He carried on his shoulders. Then, he told him to stick his staff into the ground on the riverbank: “You carry the one who created the sky and the earth. I am Jesus Christ. Stick your staff into the ground and it will turn green. Then, you will realize you truly carried me”. Christopher did so, and the next day, the staff had taken roots and transformed into a green tree. Many people converted after this miracle. Upset, the king ordered the saint to be decapitated.

The sculpture of Saint Christopher from the Huta Slavia complex is full of meanings for the Slovaks in the area. In the 17th century, the situation of Slovak serfs had deteriorated compared to the previous century. The tributes had reached unprecedented proportions, the freedom of movement was practically eliminated, and the *corvée* doubled. The rural population was abandoning their native settlements en masse and seeking refuge in other regions. Thus, a first wave of Slovak migration took place in the first decades of the 18th century; the Slovaks fled the northern counties of Hungary (present-day Slovakia) and settled in Estergom, Komárom, Nógrád, and Pesta counties. In the region of the Plopiș Mountains, the Slovaks arrived from the end of the 18th century, first in the lower-lying areas at the foot of the mountains, laying the foundations for the first valley settlements of Budoii and Vărzari. At the beginning of the 19th century, the colonization of the Plopiș Mountains plateau took place. The foundations for the mountain settlements are thus laid, of scattered type: Huta Voivozi, Valea Târnei, Socet, Făgetu, Șinteu.

Initially, when the first colonists settled in the area, about 50 families came. In 1838, there were 512 Slovaks and Czechs in Șinteu. In 1880, in the Roman Catholic parish of Șinteu there were 2942, and at the 1930 census, 1245 people of Slovak or Czech ethnicity were registered in Șinteu. In 1941 they reached the demographic peak, a number of 7096 ethnic Slovaks being registered (Șinteu commune – 4219 Slovaks, Plopiș commune – 2877 Slovaks). Over the years, due to the socio-economic and political conditions, the population underwent fluctuations. Consequently, at the 2011 census, the population of the Șinteu village comprised 458 Slovaks. Presently, the Slovak population in the Șinteu area counts 1754 Slovaks (Șinteu commune – 984 Slovaks, Plopiș commune – 770 Slovaks).



Religious representation of St. Christopher

3. The Savior of Europe Sculpture



Very stylized head, no portrait. Eyes detached from the face. Astonishment, amazement and pain, all exacerbated by a tear that lightly levitates in space. Ears that make up a stylized cross, a symbol of Christianity. Silent pain. Faded pain, impossible to express by open mouth, entwined by an immaterial pyramidal structure. An immense void.

This is what you see and feel when you arrive in front of the third statue: The Savior of Europe Sculpture. Created in 2019 by a group of students led by painter, sculptor, illustrator, and university professor Jirků, the sculpture appears to be from another world. The impressive head conveys at the same time energy, aggressivity, frustration, but also bewilderment regarding the future of Europe. The only thing that seems certain here is the reference to Christianity, the return to one of the founding values of the European Union: “In Christianity our arts developed; the laws of Europe were – until recently – rooted in Christianity”, said Thomas Stearns Eliot, Nobel laureate in Literature in 1948. Similar to the

European space, the region of the Plopiș Mountains is a multiethnic and multid denominational place. And the display of a statue like *The Savior of Europe* in this space only but confirms the fact that the people here cherish diversity, spiritual and cultural values.

It is a real honor to display inside the Huta Slavia complex sculptures created by one of the greatest contemporary artists in the Czech Republic, university professor Boris Jirků. Former professor at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague, Boris Jirků currently teaches figural drawing and painting at the Ladislav Sutnar Faculty of Design and Art at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen. At the same time, he is a doctoral and master supervisor – classical media (figurative drawing, graphics, illustration, painting, sculpture) at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica. He is the organizer of the FIGURAMA exhibition, which presents works of students from 15 universities in Europe and the US. He devotes himself to free drawing, painting, graphics, illustration, fine art in wood and metal, and to artistic creations in architecture. He participated in dozens of exhibitions in Czechia and abroad. In 2019, he took part in a sculpture workshop in the Huta Slavia complex, where, together with his students, he created the Savior of Europe Statue.

4. Belvedere



You are at the point with the highest altitude within the Huta Slavia perimeter. Before your eyes, vast views unfold, which lure your gaze and invite you to discover them.

Not very far away, the neighboring settlements can be spotted, guarded by churches whose towers rise to the blue sky. The churches, built here by the first generations of colonists, gathered the congregants to mass with the sound of the church bells. And, since we're talking about huge stretches of land on which the population was dispersed and of a too high distance between inhabited houses, it is necessary that we mention that people built several bell towers, so that the sound of the church bell could be heard without problems, wherever you were.

During those times, the bell had a special significance. Its sound was obviously associated with faith, with the call to church. At the same time, it was used for announcing the death of a person or for alerting the population in case of danger. It was, therefore, present at all important events in traditional life, becoming a symbol of the rural space.

In a more distant plane, on a sunny day, towards the East you will distinguish the Șimleu Depression and the Meseș Mountains, whose line continues further in the SE direction with the Pădurea Craiului Mountains. Afterwards, looking towards the southwest, you will notice the Văratec Peak (755,9 m), where the Bistra river springs. In the most distant plane, one can even spot the Vlădeasa Peak (1836 m), from the Vlădeasa Mountains.

And at the base of the tower where you find yourself, the Huta Slavia complex stretches out. From this point, you can see some of the attractions on our trail, while, in the background, you will notice the sprawled-out houses of Șinteu.

The splendid views delight your eye and make you, at least for a few moments, want to feel in harmony with the charm of the place, with the beauty of nature. Pious, you let your soul fill up with the sound of the church bells around, and then your return home recharged, grateful for the beauty of the places you have discovered: boundless stretches of snow and ice during the winter, an explosion of greenery and flowering trees in spring, the dark green of the dense forest, waiting for you to discover its coolness in the torrid summer days, or the spectacle of fog and fiery colors that settle on the entire expanse, with the arrival of fall.

We are in love with this place in any season and we invite you to discover it as well, explore it and forget, at least for a few hours, about any stress or tension from daily life.

5. The barn – a multipurpose place.

The Slovak celebrations



We invite you to... the wedding! And not any wedding, but one you have never seen before; maybe only your grandparents or great-grandparents. What you need to know about it is that it doesn't take place at a restaurant, not even at a cultural center, like it was common until not long ago, but... in the barn!

On our hike on the eco-touristic trail at Huta Slavia we have arrived in a completely unexpected place, a multipurpose barn. Since the association between two such different terms might astonish you, let us make a few clarifications. The building that you see in this

location is a barn (slov. „*humno*” or „*stodola*”), a household annex that served in the past especially for storing fodder, cereal, agricultural tools and even for sheltering cattle and horses. Since the available surface area was very large, the barn could be transformed, when needed, into a space where gatherings, festive meals, various parties and, why not, even weddings, were held. The celebration took place in a barn or shed, in the yard and inside the house, and later in makeshift tents. The preparations began several days before the celebration itself and involved the help of the entire family, of the neighbors and all members of the community. Together, they cleaned, cooked and prepared all those necessary for the great feast.

The reconstruction of a barn in the Huta Slavia complex was done not only for reminding those visiting us of our ancestors’ life, but also for creating a complex space, where various events could be organized even now, especially those related to celebrations, be they religious or laic. Therefore, in the barn you will discover different thematic exhibitions, presenting the life of the Slovaks, or you will find information about their most important celebrations over the year. We also aim to mark some of them, by organizing events to which those willing to join us are invited.

Traditions related to the wedding

Regarding the wedding and its organization, multiple changes occurred over the years. At the beginning of the 20th century, still common were the customs according to which youngsters had to court long before the wedding and that partners were still chosen with the approval of the parents, who aimed, through the wedding, to increase or at least preserve their fortune. Thus, the boy’s mother or one of the aunts went to propose the girl. If the girl and her parents did not agree with the boy for various reasons, they had to give him an answer on the same day. If they agreed, they gave him a positive answer, but no sooner than 3-4 days, for people not to believe that she couldn’t wait to get married. Then, both families agreed to go notify the priest about their decision. In the following weeks, the future groom went to the girl’s house and officially proposed to her. The groom, together with the bridesman, went to invite people on the part of the groom, while the bride and the bridesmaid went to invite people on the part of the bride. Only the two pairs of godparents were invited by the two future spouses. The godparents were those they had chosen at the Anointing (*Birmovačka*). After the Second World War, most weddings were held on Sundays. The preparation for the wedding started long before. One week prior to the wedding, the women in the family and the relatives prepared special pasta (*brdovce* – made with the loom). A big tent was set up in advance, in which all wedding guests could fit. Then, the cakes were prepared and the bread was baked.

The wedding started on Sunday morning. The fiddlers, along with the bridesmen, set off for the godparents’ house. From there they all went to the groom’s house. Here, the

godfather gave a farewell speech (*odberanka*) on behalf of the groom, through which he bid farewell to his parents, family, friends, and neighbors. The groom kneeled in front of his parents. After the speech, they sang:

<i>Zbohom, zbohom, mamko tatko,</i>	<i>Goodbye, goodbye, mom, dad</i>
<i>Vychovali ste ma sladko</i>	<i>You dearly raised me</i>
<i>Ďakujem vám za vašu lásku</i>	<i>I thank you for your love</i>
<i>Bo ja idem na tu dlhu prechádzku.</i>	<i>I'm going on that long journey</i>

<i>Zbohom, zbohom, bratia, sestry,</i>	<i>Goodbye, goodbye, brothers, sisters</i>
...	...

During all this time, the groom bids farewell to everyone. The whole procession sets off for the bride's house. The groom, with the bouquet of flowers that he will give to the bride, is accompanied by two bridesmen; behind them come the godparents, parents, family, and then the other guests. The fiddlers came last and sang all the way. Once at the bride's house, the procession stops at the gate. This is where the custom of negotiating the bride begins. Initially, another person dressed as a bride is presented (in ripped white clothes, with her face covered), a theatrical scene with a humorous purpose. After this scene, the bride's godmother, who had also helped her get ready that morning, brings the bride, for whom the negotiation with the groom starts. After they reach an agreement, the groom hands the bride the bouquet, and she sticks a cockade to his shirt's lapel (*pierko* – in a free translation, *feather*). The bridesmaids hand out the cockades as well, first to the bridesmen, then to the godparents, the father and the other boys and men invited. The girls did not wear cockades. There were only two main bridesmaids, dressed the same. This way, they stood out among the other guests. The godmother and the bridesmaids each brought a wedding cake.

Then the farewell speech (*odberanka*) is given on behalf of the bride, through which she bid farewell to her parents, family, friends, and neighbors. The groom's godfather held this speech too. Nowadays, these speeches are delivered by the starosta.

After these rituals, the procession started walking to the church. If the distance that they were going to cover was long, they would occasionally stop on the road. The fiddlers were playing, and everyone else was dancing. The godmothers had baskets with *cozonacs* and cakes with them, and the godfathers a bottle (*vlaška*) of wine or palinka nicely adorned, with which they were serving all the guests.

The bride was accompanied by the bridesmen, and the groom was accompanied by the bridesmaids, to the altar. They then sat down on either side of the couple. The godparents were sitting behind the bride and the groom. After the ceremony, they would go to the party. This time, the bride went together with the groom. The bridesmen and bridesmaids, together with the godparents, followed them.

Once in front of the gate, they were stopped again. Here, also in the spirit of tradition, they had to prove that they were capable of managing themselves. The groom had to crack a piece of stump and the bride had to sweep the broken shards of a plate or other vessel. All the

while they joked around, had fun and enjoyed themselves. After passing this “test”, the actual party started, which lasted till dawn.

The biggest cake was cut at midnight and given out to all the wedding guests. The bride changed her wedding dress for a new one and they put a bonnet on her head, as a sign that she was already married. Sometimes, the wedding continued the next day, and the relatives kept having fun while disassembling the tent.



Two Slovak weddings in front of the church in the Fagetu locality. In the middle, priest Hadrava – September 1933



Slovakian bride and groom in the Fagetu locality – photograph taken on 26.11.1933

Slovak culture, calendar customs form a special structure that is strictly respected by all members of the community. Here are some of the most important holidays of the Slovak community:

On January 1st they celebrate the **New Year**, a day when all the men and boys go caroling („*Vinšovať*“) to relatives and friends. The lyrics of the traditional carol were the following:

*„Vinšujem vám na tento šťastlivý Novy Rok
aby vám dal Pán Boh zdravie, šťastie,
hojne božské požehnanie,
na dieťaťko potešenie,
hojnosti, prajnosti, úrodnosti,
v komorách, v stodolách, všetkých veci dost',
aby ste boli veselí
ako v nebi anjeli.
Pochválen Pán Ježiš Kristus.“*

*„I wish you a Happy New Year,
May God give you health, luck,
Godly blessing to the full,
May you rejoice at your child,
May you have in abundance all that you want, bountiful harvests,
In pantries, in barns, everything in abundance,
To be joyful,
Like the angels in the sky,
Praised by our Lord Jesus Christ!”*

One of the most popular Slovak holidays is **Fašangy**, a three-day ball. It was organized in the period between January 6th and until the first day of the Lent, a period when traditions symbolizing the end of winter and the beginning of spring intertwine. On this occasion, the boys received beautifully embroidered handkerchiefs from the girls, which confirmed the girl's agreement to dance for three days, at the organized balls, with that boy. Boys who failed to catch a girl's attention were not allowed to wear a feather on their hat and had to wait until they too received a handkerchief. The end of the celebrations was announced by the ringing of the bell. In Bihor, however, the priest himself came to announce the end of the ball.

On **Easter** (slov. *Veľká Noc*), the feast of the Resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ, a series of activities were organized, religiously respected by all believers. The rituals began on the Maundy Thursday, the day when the bells are tied and the *semantron* is used. The Good Friday was the day of confession; no one worked and a very strict feast was maintained. In Bihor, the water in the streams or in wells symbolized the blood of Christ, and this is why the cattle were sprinkled with water ever since the morning and, through prayers, health was demanded for the family. On Holy Saturday, the women began to prepare the ham, decorated the eggs, kneaded the *cozonacs*. At midnight, between Saturday and Sunday, people went to church. Easter Sunday was an occasion for the family to meet for a festive meal in the parental home. Easter Monday was for all Slovaks the day when they went sprinkling. In the morning, the girls were brought to the river or to the well and they were sprinkled with water. Lately, the sprinkling with water has been replaced by the sprinkling with perfume. The girls gave adorned eggs to the sprinklers. In the villages of Bihor, boys would also go sprinkling on Tuesdays, but now it was the girls that went to the boys who had forgotten to sprinkle them the day before.

Other important celebrations of the year are: Epiphany (slov. *Tri krale*), Ash Wednesday (slov. *Skareda streda/Popolcova streda v kalendaru*), Saint Joseph (slov. *Sv. Jozef*), The Annunciation (slov. *Zvestovanie Panny Márie*), The Day of the Dead (slov. *Čierna nedela* sau *Smrtna Nedela*), Palm Sunday (slov. *Kvetna nedela*), The Dormition of the Mother of God (slov. *Nanebovstúpenie Panny Márie*), Pentecost (slov. *Turice*), The Feast of Corpus Christi (slov. *Božie Telo*; lat. *Corpus Christi*).

6. The KORBAČIKY stable



During the massive migration process of the Slovaks from the northern counties to the southern ones of historic Hungary, throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, sheep farming is attested to be a basic occupation of the Slovaks. At the end of the 19th century, sheep farming was widespread especially in the village of Valea Târnei. The sheep were raised for meat, milk, and wool. In addition to sheep, in the traditional household we also encounter cows and oxen, probably the animals most often used both for agricultural work or traction and for providing different dairy products: milk, yoghurt, cheese, butter, etc. Each household owned at least one cow.

On the Slovak table, dairy products were consumed regularly, raw, processed, or in a mix. Milk, yoghurt or sour cream were often added to soups. The famous „*polesnak*” or „*točna*” potato pie, a dough made of potatoes and baked in the oven, was consumed with a glass of yoghurt. Traditional dumplings made of potatoes mixed with various types of cheese were also a typical food. Certain sauces, „*omačky*”, were based on dairy products. The simplest sauce was made from flour mixed with milk and also called „*Mučna omačka*“, where part of the milk was boiled and the other part was mixed with flour, then gradually added to the boiled milk and mixed. We can also mention sweet or salty milk dumplings „*Drobance z mliekom*”.

The most used cheese in the local Slovak cuisine was quark (slov. *tvaroch*), a sweet cheese, easy to make. Cow milk, after fermenting, was boiled, and then strained through a linen cloth. It would be left to strain until no more whey would drip from it. This quark could also be preserved. The oldest preservation process was that of salting, mixing and pressing in a wooden or clay container. The quark mixed with cumin and black pepper, and preserved, was also called bitter quark. The kneaded and preserved quark could also be dried or smoked. Dried quark was grated on cakes or pasta. The dried and sliced quark made from salty cow cheese was mixed with fresh quark; they were then placed in the cellar and matured for several months, in a clay container, during which time the quark softened so much that it could be eaten with a spoon. This was a favorite delicacy of winemakers, who served it with red wine.

Another Slovak-specific type of cheese is *korbačik*. It is a kind of thick cheese made of cow or sheep milk. It can be served smoked or unsmoked. It originates in the Orava region in Slovakia, where some of the Slovaks that migrated to Romania come from. It is produced in the form of long strings, which are then twisted or braided. The name *korbačik* comes primarily from its shape. It is derived from the word *korbač*, which in Slovakian means a whip braided with straps or twigs.

Bryndza, another type of cheese very much appreciated by the Slovaks, is a salty sheep cheese. *Bryndza* and its name have their origins in the pastoral cultivations in the Balkan Peninsula and the Mediterranean Sea. It arrived in Slovakia through Wallachian colonization in the 15th and 16th centuries. In Slovakian, the term *bryndza* refers to kneaded

cheese. Generally, it is considered that the first *bryndza* was made in Slovakia by pressing matured, well mixed and salted sheep cheese; prepared in this way, it was placed in clean, dried sheepskin. After being sewed, the sheepskin stuffed with cheese was hung and smoked to last longer.

It is assumed that Slovaks had contacts with Romanians long before arriving on the current territory of Romania. As part of the transhumance process, in the Middle Ages, the Wallachian shepherds arrived with their herds of sheep even in southern Poland and northern Czechia and Slovakia. From a cultural point of view, between the inhabitants of Zakopane, mountain resort in the southern Tatra Mountains, and Romanians, there are important similarities. The local producers there sell *bryndza* (Rom. *brânză*, Engl. *cheese*) and say they are *pastyr* (Rom. *păștori*, Engl. *shepherds*) or *bacia* (Rom. *baci*, Engl. *chief of shepherds in a sheepfold*). Moreover, most of the dairy products were decorated with the Flower of Life, symbol that bears numerous meanings ever since ancient times. On the locals' gates, symbols can be found that are also present on the Romanians' gates in Maramureș and Bucovina: the *rope twisted in two* and the *tree of life*. Therefore, it is possible that the Slovaks learned from the Wallachian shepherds, that they called *valasi* or *valach*, the craft of obtaining dairy products.

In the Korbačik Stable at Huta Slavia, you can observe some of the means of the time of producing these types of cheeses and even taste some of the delicacies made here.

7. The pig's house. Zabijačka



If you visit the Șinteu area during the first part of December, you have every chance of being invited to a „*zabijačka*”, i.e., the celebration of pig slaughter, a century-old tradition, still respected in many households. While for some people it represents a harsh practice too, for others, this custom is an important part of the local culture, which brings people together, being an opportunity of joy and celebration. In the old days, the growing and slaughtering of pigs in households was carried out several times a year, due to economic rationales. People used to slaughter hogs to store their meat for the harsh winter months or for the meals organized in the family on the occasion of important celebrations: weddings, baptisms.

Pig farming was an old occupation, attested in the Plopiș Mountains area ever since the 14th century. The oak and beech forests provided food for pigs (acorns and beechnuts). Hog farming was a basic occupation for Slovaks in the Plopiș Mountains region, providing them with an important amount of food. Normally, the hog slaughtering day proceeded as follows: at around 6 in the morning, the man responsible for slaughtering the pig arrived, most of the time, the butcher of the community. Then, the butcher got to work: he stabbed the pig, hanged it, and then started slicing it, separating the main parts: the head, the collar, the thighs, the belly, the back. During this time, the women and the kitchen helpers prepared in big pots what was needed for cooking the pork products: hot water for boiling the organs and cleaning the intestines; rice for preparing some types of sausage. Some of the meat was used during the day, to prepare the sausages or other processed products; the other part of the meat was kept for winter. For this purpose, it was smoked and stored in lard jars, which were then kept cold in the cellar. This way, the Slovaks ensured their meat supply during the whole winter.

Some of the traditional dishes prepared by the Slovaks on the occasion of the pork cutting are: *mozgy*: ground meat mixed with eggs and brains; *jaternice* or *hurky*: sausages made of rice and offal; *tlačenka* or *biršojt*: pieces of meat, herbs, and garlic, all in a gelatin mix (pig head cheese); ham (*šunka*); *podbradnik*: jowl; salo with garlic and paprika (*slanina*); *klobasa*: smoked Slovak sausages; traditional liver pâté; roast pork.

8. The tree trunk



At the arrival of the Slovak colonists on these lands, the area was entirely covered in thick forests. Over time, most of the forests were cut down, both to make room for houses, grasslands, agricultural crops, and for the use of wood. Before entering the birch forest at Huta Slavia, on the left, you will encounter a tree trunk more than 250 years old, making it one of the oldest trees found in the region. In an advanced state of decay, the tree trunk seems to bear witness to other times, when the only sounds coming through the thickets of the forest were the voices of the woodsmen and the blows of the ax, followed by the sound of silence, when, tired from the physical work, the men rested for a few moments.

Life as a lumberjack was not easy in the 18th and 19th centuries. They worked from dawn till dusk and had only a lunch break. Until the 18th century, when they started using the hacksaw, the woodcutters (slov. *drevorubač*) worked in pairs. Later, they organized themselves in work teams, made especially of men belonging to the same family or related.

The group was led by a master, who also acted as a mediator for contracts between the loggers and the forest owners. When the place where they carried out their work was close to the village, the forest workers came back home every day; however, when the cuttings took place at longer distances, they lived in the forest, either until the end of the week, or during the whole season, in temporary dwellings. During rest periods, they made different household objects, handmade from wood and very often decorated with sculptures.

The long-term stay of the men away from the household influenced the way of life of their families, leading to a reorganization of the community. All who remained home were involved in the maintenance of the household, and the kids were raised by women or older family members.



Cleaning up of a tree trunk by cutting off the branches with an ax (source Apáthy, Drevorubačstvo a spôsob spracovania dreva. In: Horehronie I. Ludové zamestnania. Bratislava



Tree-cutting (sursa Apáthy, Drevorubačstvo a spôsob spracovania dreva. In: Horehronie I. Ludové zamestnania. Bratislava 1968, p. 270)

9. The birch forest



In Şinteu, the young birch forest can be understood as a symbol, a simulation of the forested area that existed here when the Slovaks came. As we have already mentioned, the main occupation of the Slovaks ever since the beginning of their arrival and the reason why they were colonized was forestry. The Slovaks were accustomed to working in the forest, this being the predominant activity carried out in their places of origin. Every Slovak family received wood for housebuilding. The house site was chosen especially depending on the existence of a water source (spring). After building the house, each family exploited the vast forests around their household. The land resulting from deforestation came into the free use of the one who cut down the forest, which is why they had the interest to deforest as much as

possible. Secular trees like beech, sessile oak, hornbeam, wild cherry tree or ash tree were exploited with tools typical to forestry: handsaw (two-man saw), ax, hatchet, etc. Horses, but especially oxen, were used to transport the wood. The number of horses in the Slovak settlements was low at the beginning of the 19th century, but later increased due to the advantages that horse exploitation had as opposed to that of oxen: speed, endurance, mobility. The best-quality trees were cleaned, shaped and transported to Aleşd or Tileagd, from where they went abroad (Budapest, Vienna, Bratislava). The spectacular population growth in the 18th century increased the demand for wood in the major European cities. This wood brought substantial gains to landowners. The lower-quality wood was used for obtaining potash and afterwards for the glass huts. Slovak households were also built from this wood. The local toponymy (*Varatik, Salajka, Do Šokut, Veľka Voda, Magura, Rovenka, Na Hanky, Rubana, Chrapcin, Palence, Polence*) is reminiscent of other techniques of deforestation, less to the liking of feudal lords: the technique of burning (the forest was set on fire) and the drying technique (the trees' stem was carved all around, which caused the trees to gradually dry out).

After the removal of the forest, the resulting land came into the free use of the Slovaks and could be used as arable land, grassland or pasture. After cutting the trees, the forest had the tendency of regenerating. Instead of the oak or beech trees the birch appeared. The birch (lat. *Betula pendula*) is a tree whose height reaches 20 to 25 meters. It is an indigenous tree, which grows especially in the northern temperate climate. It is not a pretentious species when it comes to soil, withstanding frost and drought. An invading species, it is among the first species to settle in a deforested territory. It can either grow alone (birch forests), or mixed with other species.

For all the Slavic peoples, the birch is a tree with multiple uses. In Russia it is considered a national tree, celebrated during the Green Week at the beginning of January. On the Plopiş Mountains plateau, the birch is a very widespread species. Birch wood was used by Slovaks for maintaining the fire in households. Its thin and white bark was used for lighting the fire.

Ever since the time of the Slavs, various therapeutic effects of the birch were known. Birch sap was harvested in spring, before budding, and was used in treating different diseases, being known as “the gods’ drink”. Birch leaves and buds were used to make tea, which was also used to treat various conditions. Moreover, sticks for agricultural objects were also made from birch. It was however not used in construction, as it rots quickly in the presence of water. There is the custom in some villages that, on May 1st, birches (“*maje*”) decorated all the way to the top are placed at the girls’ gates for boys to express their sympathy towards them.

10. The thresher and reaping



BATOZA ŞI
SEKERIŞUL

Following deforestations on the Şinteu plateau, large stretches of arable land ensued. However, the low soil quality resulting from these land clearings, the presence of rocks, roots and stumps made the arable lands not productive enough. Consequently, livestock farming was the main occupation of the Slovaks. Most of the lands were used as pastures, grasslands, or were cultivated with fruit trees (mainly plum trees, apple trees, and cherry trees). On the best lands, two agricultural crops typical to the Slovaks mainly developed: ray crop and potato crop.

Wheat was the most sought after and cultivated grain over time. Wheat was made into everyday bread, but bread also had augural powers. In the peasant mentality, bread had supernatural powers; through bread one could more easily get in contact with divinity, with the ancestors' souls. However, the low soil productivity in the high area of Şinteu made wheat cultivation difficult, its yield being low. This is why wheat was cultivated on smaller areas, often mixed with other cereal plants (barley, oats, ray, millet). Ray adapted more easily to the natural conditions in the Plopiş Mountains area, being an unpretentious cereal and generating a high yield.

After the preliminary preparation of the land (manuring, plowing, harrowing), sowing took place. It was done manually, either in spring or fall, depending on the chosen cultivation. The harvest took place in summer, with the participation of the whole family. All other work was left aside until the end of harvest. Men sewed, while women and children gathered the ears and formed crosses. The cereals were then carted to the threshing floor or home, to be threshed; here, they were stored in ricks or barns. Initially, threshing was done with the help of animals, and later with the thresher. A threshing machine existed in Şinteu during the first half of the 19th century. Cereals were then stored in different ways (grain storage holes, barns, tubs, grain crates etc.), and, when needed, they were ground at the water mill. Beyond its bread qualities, hay was also cultivated for its long, hard straw, the best for building roofs, and sometimes chaff was used to fill pillows.

11. The spring with enchanted water



No tourist route would be complete without the presence of a place to sit, take some rest and drink pure, fresh and refreshing spring water. Being in full communion with nature, you will feel that the water you drink straight after its emergence from the mountain gives you new powers. And, all of a sudden, that water quenches not only your thirst, but also your soul's desire for regeneration, quiet, and purity. Because pure water not only nourishes the body, but also the soul, and the spring becomes a place of peace and light, an oasis for the agitated individual of our ages.

Popular beliefs with regard to the sacred value of water have always existed. It thus goes without saying that, ever since their arrival, the Slovaks chose their house site depending on the existence of a spring in the area. On mountainous territory, almost entirely covered in forests, springs were much more frequent than nowadays. Every family needed a water source. Water was the source of life, because it ensured life and health for humans and animals. With this water the dough was kneaded from which bread was baked, with spring or well water the girls were sprinkled on Easter Monday. Therefore, water not only had a household use, but also magic properties, symbolizing the origin of life, a means of purification, and a source of regeneration.

The Huta Slavia spring lies in the middle of an almost wild forest. The smooth sound of water, the cool shade and the whistling of the wind through the trees invite you to stop over for a while in this place. However, beyond the apparent silence that it surrounds you with, the forest can also become a space of the unknown, of dread, of spells, of fear. In Slovak folk culture, the forest is a fantastic place, where all sorts of phantasmagorical things happen. Based on these occurrences and the popular imaginative capacity, a plethora of stories and tales resulted, that transport us to a fairytale land. One of the local Slovak folk tales, known and transmitted down through generations, is the tale „*Zakliata hora*” (*The Cursed Forest*), which was recounted by grandparents to grandchildren and was a literary work taught even in the Slovak-taught schools in Romania. The tale „*Zakliata hora*” (*The Cursed Forest*) tells the story of a fictional world in which supernatural beings live and activate, such as the „*drak*” or „*šarkan*” (*dragon under the form of a many-headed bat-winged serpent, which blows fire through its mouth and has poisonous blood*), *striga* (witch) and „*animals*”, which were actually cursed lads.

We invite you to read this story right here, next to the spring, while you stop for a break on your trail.

Zakliata hora (The Cursed Forest)

- Slovak folk tale -

Once upon a time there was a little house where a poor widow lived with her two sons. The sons resembled each other so much, that even their mother found it difficult to differentiate them.

As the boys grew older, they started working to bring a minimum income to the household. When they saw others going out in the world in search for better earnings, they too began to think about leaving. Their mother agreed to that, just hoping that nothing bad would happen to them. The sons started preparing for their departure, went to the forest and cut enough wood for 3 years, during which time they'd be away from home. Before their departure, their mother asked them to go hunting in the forest, to bring something to eat for her to pack for them. The lads roamed the woods, from morning till night, and found no trace of animals. Upon their return home, they were met by a pack of hungry wolves. They threw them a piece of fat bacon and bread, and the wolves joined them. The next day, at the crack of dawn, they went hunting again, but this time they didn't manage to hunt anything either. Upon their return home, they saw two bears fighting each other. They threw them a piece of salo and bread. The bears stopped fighting, joined the lads and followed them home. Nor the third day did they hunt anything. Only two lions fighting each other; they calmed them down and brought them home.

Seeing that they couldn't hunt anything, they filled their bags, bid their mother farewell, took the animals and hit the road. They traveled together for three days and three nights, until reaching a crossroads with a tall linden. The older brother told the younger one that it was time to part ways, one should head on one path, and the other one on the other path. They agreed to carve their names on the tree bark and to stick a knife in the trunk. If blood came out, it meant the other was alive, but if water came out, it meant he was dead. Said and done: they carved their names, stuck their knives and walked further, each on their own path.

The older brother arrives at a settlement surrounded by black cloth. Here lied the well from which the locals drank water, and which was guarded by a twelve-headed dragon. To be able to drink water from the well, the inhabitants had to bring a girl in exchange, otherwise they could not gain access to the well. When the king's daughter's turn came, he ordered the settlement be surrounded by black cloth and announced that he would give his daughter and half of the kingdom to the one who managed to kill the dragon. The lad decided to kill the dragon and set the beautiful young lady free. He went to the castle together with his animals and demanded they be well fed and that he got a sharp sword. He then set off together with the king's daughter. He brought her to the well to lure the dragon. In the moment when he pulled his head out, the lad cut it. The dragon screamed in pain and took out the other 11 heads from which he blew immense flames. The animals also rushed to the lad's defense. This way, he managed to cut off all the heads, from which he chopped off the tongues and put them in his bag. At night, after everyone was asleep, the coachman cut the boy's head and forced the princess to swear she would not divulge to anyone anything that happened. The

coachman took the dragon heads and ran with them to the king, confessing that he had killed the dragon.

When the other animals woke up and saw their master dead, they started crying their eyes out. The bear brought from the snake a piece of greenery that he wiped his neck with three times, and when he put his head back, he healed. The lad woke up, took his animals with him and walked further.

One month later, he returns to the settlement, where he notices that the black cloth had been removed. Here he found out that the coachman had killed the dragon and that the next day he was to marry the princess. The lad became upset and set off, together with his animals, for the kingdom. When she saw him, the princess ran into his arms. The king and the other guests were watching in bewilderment, and the coachman was shaking like a trembling poplar. After the king's daughter confessed everything, the lad took out the dragon tongues from his bag to prove that what she was saying was true, and the king gave him his daughter along with half the kingdom.

One morning, the boy noticed on one side a yellowed forest. He found out that it was the cursed forest and that those who entered it never returned. One day, he told his wife that he was going hunting. He took his animals with him and left. He had barely arrived at the back of the garden, when a fox jumped in front of him. He followed it but could not spot it. The fox was luring him deeper and deeper into the forest. All of a sudden, the fox disappeared, and our lad realized he found himself in a thick and very dark forest. He sat down next to an oak and, because he was hungry, he lit a fire and started frying some salo. At some point, he heard a voice coming from the tree that was shouting "I'm cold, I'm cold". He looked up to the tree and saw a curled up old lady perched there. He told her to come down next to the fire if she was cold. It got quiet, but then she started screaming again "I'm cold, I'm cold". The boy told her once again to come down and warm up if she was cold. Again, no answer. When she screamed for the first time, the boy, already angry, bluntly told her to either come down and warm up or to shut up. The old lady answered that she would come down, but she was afraid of the animals and asked if she could hit them with a rod to ward them off. The young king agreed, the old lady descended from the tree, hit the animals, ran to get a frog and started spinning it around the fire. At a certain point, she started saying: "You fry fat bacon, I fry frog. I will eat fat bacon, and you will eat frog". After repeating this several times, the boy got angry and set the animals against her, but they didn't react, because the animals had been turned into stone by the stroke of the rod. He turns towards them, but at that moment, the old lady hit him with the rod, turning him into stone too. She then grabbed him and threw him in a pit.

The younger son was returning home when he reached the crossroads. The moment when he pulled out the knife from the tree, water started pouring from it on one side, and blood on the other. Puzzled and worried, he set out to find his older brother. He roamed the

forests and plains and reached his brother's kingdom. He stopped by at the same tavern that his brother had stopped at when arriving here. The tavern keeper noticed the striking resemblance with his brother and recounted him his acts of courage and that one day he disappeared without a trace. The lad thanked the tavern keeper and set off with his animals for the kingdom, where he was received by the king with open arms. Next morning, at the crack of dawn, he noticed the sad forest, about which he learned is cursed. Right away, he realized that his brother could only be there and that something bad had happened to him. He set out to find him. He was met by the same fox that lured him to the tree at which his brother had stopped too. He lit the fire and started frying fat bacon. The animals sat down on the side and started licking the petrified animals. At some point, the heard a voice coming from the tree that was shouting "I'm cold, I'm cold". He told her to come down next to the fire if she was cold. The old lady answered that she would come down, but she was afraid of the animals and asked if she could hit them with a rod to ward them off. The boy sees the petrified animals and realizes she was trying to fool him. He answers that the rod wouldn't help her but would only anger the animals and they would swoop on her. She should give him the rod and he would ward them off with it. The old lady gives him the stick, but the boy doesn't hit the animals, but rather the ground, and the old lady descends from the tree. At a certain point, she starts saying: "You fry fat bacon, I fry frog. I will eat fat bacon, and you will eat frog". The boy gets scared and immediately pits the animals against her. The lad tells her to resurrect the animals, and that only then would he set her free. She gives him her boots and tells him that in the tree she has a golden rod for him to climb after. The boy hits the animals with the golden rod, and they immediately come back to life. He pits off the other animals against her as well, and tells her she wouldn't set her free until she let him know where his brother was. The old lady was dying of pain, so she told him about the pit where his brother was and asked him to rub him with an ointment that she would give him. Said and done, his brother was brought back to life. Our boy took the rod and hit the old lady, who immediately turned to stone. At that moment, the entire forest lit up and turned green. The six animals of the boys turned into lads, hugged each other and rejoiced being set free. They were looking around them and could not believe their eyes. One of the boys confessed that they were all brothers from the royal family, but they were always arguing with each other. This is why they were cursed to fight each other like wolves, bears and lions, until two innocent brothers would tame them and teach one another how to do good. And now they gave them the entire kingdom and confessed that they wanted to live on together.

They returned to the royal palace, where they made a great feast. Shortly after, the sons brought their mother and they all lived happily ever after.

THE END

12. The Bistra River



In every people's culture, regardless of the moment we're referring to, water is a fundamental element. Regarded as a source of regeneration, both on a physical and on a spiritual level, water is not missing from any community. The establishing of a settlement is done in direct relation with the existence of a water source; the fertility of the lands and, implicitly, the harvest, depend on water; the religious rituals involve the immersion in water during baptism. We thus see that water is related to the idea of rebirth, purification, baptism, renewal, regeneration.

In the forested area of the Plopiș Mountains, at the arrival of the Slovak colonists, water could be found in abundance. Numerous springs with clear, pure water emerged from deep below the mountains, ready to bring the life, energy, and blessing that the people settling here needed. The Slovak colonists settled their homes in places where sources of running water existed. It is remarkable that there were so many springs there, that each household had one. Over time, due to massive deforestation and the expansion of the population, many of them dried up. Those remaining nowadays flow into Bistra, a river stemming from the central area of the Plopiș Mountains, from under the eastern foot of the Văratec peak (755,9 m), from around the Valea Târnei locality. Initially, it presents itself as a very small mountain stream, however, as it arrives at its mouth, it collects the water of some affluents, eventually reaching a length of 47 km, with a drainage basin of 175 square kilometers. The river crosses the relatively smooth plateau of the Plopiș Mountains mainly on the direction southwest-northeast. From next to the Șinteu locality and until its exit from the crystalline area, Bistra crosses the direction southeast-northwest. In this sector, the gradient is high. It crosses 10 localities: (Șinteu, Pădurea Neagră, Voivozi, Popești, Bistra, Ciutelec, Bogeii, Tăuteu, Poiana,

Chiribiș) and flows into the Barcău river next to the Petreu locality, being one of the most important affluents of Barcău.

The Bistra river's name comes from Slavic (*bistru=fast*), and in the 18th century it was mentioned in other forms as well: *Berczecze, Vale Hankritai*. Before the massive deforestation of the Plopiș Mountains plateau, the Bistra river had much higher flow rates. Around the Bistra watercourse and its main affluents, a meadow vegetation developed, with characteristic elements: alder, poplar, willow, reeds. In the swift mountain waters, there were fish (especially trout) and crabs.

13. The Lourdes Cave - *Lurdska jaskyna*



On our wanderings, we often need to take a break. To unwind, leaving our troubling thoughts aside for a while. To stop for a break – not only for the body, but above all for the soul. There are many places where we can do just that, but the most adequate one was and still is nature, the space where humans feel as if they've returned to their origins, in communion with the Creator and the Life-giver. Such a place, hidden deep inside the woods, where you almost seem invited to meditate, to ponder the meaning of life and to search for the Divinity's guidance, is the Lourdes Cave, one of the landmarks on our track. For Roman-Catholic believers, stopping here becomes a good moment for reinforcing their faith.

In the Catholic cult, the Lourdes caves are considered witnesses to the appearances of the Holy Virgin Mary. Throughout history, there are numerous references to her apparitions, with the purpose of providing guidance, of encouraging believers, of healing or working wonders. One of these apparitions took place of February 11th 1858 in Lourdes, a small French locality situated at the feet of the Pyrenees. The Virgin revealed herself to a 14-year-old girl, Bernadette Soubirous, who had gone out to gather brushwood together with her sister and a friend. Sick with asthma, the girl could not keep pace with the two girls; left behind, she is surprised, at a cave entrance, by the presence of a “lit up, smiling lady dressed in white, wearing an azure ribbon”. Frightened, Bernadette fell to her knees and started praying. When the other two girls returned, they found Bernadette glowing with happiness. Believers regarded



Construction of Kalvaria and the Lourdes Cave in the Sacalasăul Nou locality

this apparition as being one with the role of purifying the place and, soon enough, they started going to that place to pray, and to be healed. Remaining a pilgrimage place to this day, the Lourdes Cave gathers millions of catholic believers annually, and not only. The first apparition of the Virgin Mother of Lourdes is celebrated every year on February 11th.

The Lourdes Caves are currently located in places with a special significance for believers, as testimonies that should remind them of a joy they received, or of a hardship they managed to overcome, being helped by the power of faith. Pilgrimage to the Lourdes Cave, regardless of its location, feeds the soul, strengthens people's faith and helps them not lose hope, even when the hardest troubles can be removed. Having the role of directing people towards faith, The Lourdes caves remain one of the most important elements of the Slovaks' faith everywhere.

14. The wild cherry tree and the hornbeam sapling



There are so many things that amaze the traveler's eye! Clear mountain springs, the deep green of the woods, the harmony all around us. And, when we think that nothing else could surprise us, we reach the wild cherry tree and the hornbeam sapling. Two trees whose destinies, although apparently different, intertwined in a harmony which inevitably brings two lovers to mind. As though risen from the same root, the two trees have been here for decades, as a testimony to a love story that defied time and hardships. Seated in their shade, it's like we can almost hear them whispering words of love to each other and reminiscing memories of the years they grew up next to one another, when they shed their leaves together, when they rejoiced at the spring green and sheltered together the birdsong. They will always be here, united, like a witness to the passing of time for us, as a symbol of the harmony that we have to preserve, and an encouragement to seek love, no matter how different we are!

The wild cherry tree and the hornbeam sapling do not, however, symbolize love, but the life that the Slovaks from Șinteu led, one in harmony with nature. The large distance between households, the long roads crossed by the locals to ensure their necessities and the somewhat isolated life determined the Slovaks here to find themselves in nature, keeping a strong link with their natural environment. Nature was like their second home. A place that provided some of the resources of life (game meat, wood for construction or fire), a shelter during troubled times, the forest remains for people a symbol of a terrestrial paradise, where one can escape to find oneself.

Nature inspired people to create, decorate their homes, tools, household items, with floral motifs; to write stories, songs, and poems, which have the communion between humans and nature as their theme. There are numerous such songs that circulate orally even now within the Slovak community in Şinteu. We reproduce here one of them:

Vyrástla lipka, vyrástla borovička

*[:Vyrástla lipka, vyrástla borovička,
vyrástol z ruže kvet:]*

*[:a keď ma ty nechceš ani nemiluješ
povedz že mi to hned'!:]*

*[:A keď ma nechceš, ani nemiluješ,
ani ma neľúbiš,:]*

*[:ja v noci nespím, len na teba myslím,
ty za inou chodíš!:]*

*[:Ani ťa nechcem, ani ťa nemilujem,
ani ťa nemám rád,:]*

*[:pretože si plana, tancuješ do rána,
preto ťa nemám rád.:]*

*[:The linden blossomed, the juniper blossomed,
The rose blossomed, :]*

*[:If you don't want me, nor do you take a fancy to me,
Tell me right away:]*

*[:If you don't want me, nor do you take a fancy to me,
Nor do you love me:]*

*[:At night I don't sleep, I think about you
You're after other girls:]*

*[:Neither do I want you, nor do I take a fancy to you
Nor do I like you:]*

*[:Because you're mean, you dance till the morning
That's why I don't like you. :]*

15. Grandma's house



CASA BUNICII

Who hasn't spent at least a holiday at their grandparents' country house? Where we felt the most spoiled, because grandma always welcomed us with delicious foods, and grandpa couldn't wait to take us out, to show us the animals, the garden, the newborn calf and whatnot? When you come to your grandparents, it is imperative that you leave all your worries and troubling thoughts at the door, and that you let yourself almost drawn into a space sheltered from the passage of time or the troubles of the world. Here, grandma's only annoyance is if you don't finish everything off your plate, and... I believe few are those who have the courage of upsetting grandma this way. But you couldn't really do that anyway, since grandma only has "secret" recipes of the most delicious foods: potato pastries (*polestniaky*), grated potatoes (*točna*), cheese, cabbage or squash dumplings (*halušky*), sweet *knedle* with jam or plum jam, steam-baked buns (*buchty na pare*), doughnuts (*pampušky*), pierogi (*pirohy*), dried fruit (*sušenky*) and many more. In fact, ever since you've arrived at her place, she has only greeted you in a hurry and carefully hugged you, paying attention not to stain your fancy clothes with her hands full of flour.

Because all grandmas are like this: they wait for you in their doorstep and welcome you in their home, a small stylish traditional house, surrounded by a garden full of flowers. Flowers that are also cared for by grandma, when she takes a break from the other thousand chores she has to get done. She always comes your way in her flowery dress, over which she wears a worn-out apron like in the old days, but which she is not ready to give up on, because her mother made it for her by hand in her youth, and "today no more such quality things are made...", as she often says. Welcoming, warm, she will greet you with your eyes full of love and longing, all the while pretending she was upset for your unexpected delay. In fact, she tries to mask her emotion that's overwhelming her and the happiness that, for at least a few hours, she has someone to struggle for.

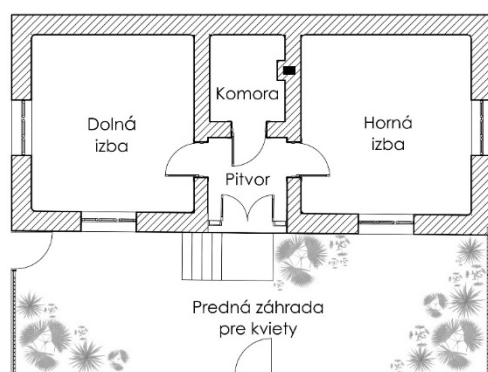
And then, you enter her house. It looks exactly as you remember it. Maybe there are some things you have grown out of; the petrol lamp is hanging on the wall like in the years back when it was the only light source. The small wooden furniture, with the same decorative objects brought by grandma as dowry: plates painted by hand by her sisters; towels woven by her mother, and small pillows that she sewed herself. You sit down at the table, and grandma hands you the steaming-hot food. You notice her hands cracked by the passing of years. And then, you stop her in her hectic rush, you hug her and, suddenly, all the memories from the childhood you spent here come to your mind: the walnut tree in the yard, the wooden swing, the giant dog that you ran with all day, the rooster that woke you up in the morning.

Grandma's hill house keeps all these memories almost untouched. You will find here everything you lived during your childhood, things that you may have forgotten of, but which will now make you feel truly in the house of your own grandparents. Grandma's hill house is a traditional Slovak household, built in the 20th century. It is typical of the Šinteu commune. The household is composed of two buildings, a dwelling house and an annex, used as barn, stable, and henhouse. The house is made of four rooms: a porch (slov. *pitvor*), pantry (slov. *komora*), and two rooms, the upper room (slov. *horná izba*) and the lower room (slov. *dolná izba*). In front of the house, enclosed by a fence of metal mesh, there was the flower garden.

As in most homes in this area, the house's structure is mostly made of local, natural materials. The foundation and elevation are made of stone, plastered with lime-cement on the outside, applied through manual splattering. The house's facades are painted in green, emphasized and outlined at its extremities. The windows are composed of three wings, with frames around them. Moreover, on the façade we can also observe several geometrical ornaments, that further enrich the outward appearance of the house.

The roof is made of tiles and is a gable roof. The broken gable is made of wood, with two vents for the attic. This element, the broken gable, has its origins right in the time of construction of wooden houses from wood and wood logs and is preserved to this day. This semi-eave had both a role of protection against bad weather and an aesthetic one, optically reducing the construction's height and contributing to the roof's proportionality. The inside maintains the atmosphere of a house inhabited 40 to 50 years ago. The furniture, the household items or the decorative ones are common, frequently appearing in people's homes in the same period.

We invite you to discover the special charm of this place and to spend several hours in this space, which seems cut off from the world.



The plan of a traditional home in the Huta (source: Ioana Blajec)

16. The potato pit



GROAPA DE DEPOZITAT
CARTOFII

The 18th century brings about important changes regarding crop plants. New crop plants appear, among which the most important were corn and potatoes, of American origin. Even if these plants originating from America were brought to Europe by Cristopher Columbus at the end of the 15th century, their spreading in the rural cultivations happened much later. Corn spread relatively quickly. It was generalized in the Bihor agriculture in the second half of the 18th century due to its qualities: high productivity and the fact that it could be easily added to the composition of bread.

In Şinteu, corn was cultivated in the gardens around households, along with other vegetables (cabbage, carrots, parsley, beans, lentils, squash, tobacco, etc.). The potato plant was one of the most widespread plants in the mountain settlements of the Slovaks, being cultivated here ever since their migration to Romania. Potatoes offered a very high yield, perfectly adapted to the poor soil in the highlands and to the climate conditions. Furthermore, they were rapidly added to the composition of potato bread.

For storing harvests, it was necessary to create optimal conditions during the storage period, so that they could maintain their properties in the long term and, at the same time, be protected against storms or fires. Besides the cellar that we usually find in the Slovak households, dug into the ground and partially positioned in the house's basement (beneath a

house), another storage method were pits. In these pits, situated somewhere near the household, one could store potatoes, beet, carrots, cabbage, etc.

In Şinteu, the potato storage holes were dug in a bell shape, at a depth of around 2 to 3 meters and with a diameter of 2 to 1,5 meters. Here, potatoes were protected from bad weather for a whole year. The main purpose of these storage spaces was maintaining and preserving the harvest for a longer period, to be consumed both by people and animals.

Potato cultivation on these lands is also done nowadays. Moreover, some Slovaks keep using the pits dug in the ground for storing vegetables. Such a hole can also be found on the premises of the Huta Slavia complex.

17. The potash hut



Potassium carbonate is known to man ever since immemorial times. Initially, it was used for washing clothes, because, in the alkaline environment it created, fats could more easily be decomposed and any stains disappeared after the first wash. Soap factories use it in their production. In ancient times, the wood was burned, and following the burning, about 500 grams of potassium carbonate were obtained for one cubic meter of wood.

Besides wood burning, there was also another way of producing potash: over the wood ash one would pour boiling water; the resulting concoction was poured into the hearth, over woodfire. This procedure had to be carried out with a lot of skill, for fire not to escape, and then for potash to deposit on the bottom of the hearth.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, hundreds of potash huts could be found all over Europe. In the Şinteu area potash (slov. *salajka*) was produced ever since the 18th century. Since potash was in great demand in Europe, and forests were plentiful, the local nobles rapidly realized that producing potash could bring additional income. As a result, they founded the first potash huts, called in German *Potaschen Hütten*, as part of today's Budoii locality, the first Slovak locality founded in Bihor County. Here, the procedure for obtaining potassium carbonate or potash (K_2CO_3) by burning wood, leaves and grass, was the following: leaching of crude ash through softening in vats and water washing; evaporation by boiling the lye in large vessels or boilers; re-boiling (calcination) for enriching the potassium carbonate;

evaporation of the lye; the subsequent processing of crude potash.

The potash huts were considered to be the first places where Slovaks settled. Such a place was the center of the Fäget village (slov. *Gemelčička*), where the church is located, visible from Belvedere. Once can also find the memory of these times in the place's toponymy. This way, in Huta Voivozi, in Fäget etc, the „*salajka*“ toponym can often be found, where wood was burned and ash was boiled in the old days.

18. The cooperage workshop



Illustration of a potash hut in Pottbusch (Germany) – Potash burning (Fig. LESSMANN 1984,



Wood processing has represented, since ancient times, one of the most important crafts in people's lives. Even back then, wood was very often used in construction, especially for homes. Planks were used more for inside the houses, especially for building beds, tables, chairs, and other pieces of indoor furniture.

Wood was also used quite a lot for manufacturing various agricultural tools like plows, pitchforks, rakes, shovels, tools for carrying out different crafts (looms, the potter's wheel, the pitchfork and the spindle), but also for household items or items useful for the household (food bowls, ladders, shelves, etc.).

As a raw material, among the types of wood that were used, we mention: black locust, ash (used for the diverse components of carts), beech (used in construction, furniture, tools), oak, walnut tree (used for pieces of furniture), sessile oak (used for manufacturing staves), fir, pine, cherry tree (used for producing spoons), etc.

No doubt that the abundance of wood in the villages inhabited by Slovaks fostered the development of woodcraft. Agricultural objects or components of agricultural objects were obtained from wood (ax handles, grubbing hoe, scythe, pitchfork, spade, pickaxe, etc.). The agricultural objects were produced during wintertime, a calmer period from the point of view

of the agricultural calendar and a time when wood was in its vegetative pause, which ensured an increased resistance.

A specialization of craftsmen occurred in the rural world, depending on the wooden objects they were producing: coopers (manufactured barrels, tubs or different wooden containers, with “staves”), wheelwrights (manufactured wheels and wooden carts). Barrels were generally made of hardwood (beech, oak). Tubs could generally also be made from softwood (poplar tree) or from coniferous wood. It was from softwood (willow, poplar tree, birch) that especially household items or items used in the household were made (plates, spoons, troughs, basins, gutters for watering the animals).

The craftsmen’s tools were the axe, hatchet, adze, knife, knives, compass (for drawing curved lines), but also various holders on which the wood was placed during work (wood-cutting stand). Depending on the product’s complexity, its effective creation could last from several hours up to several days. Wooden objects were usually sold on the occasion of annual fairs or weekly markets in Aleşd, Popeşti or Suplac.

In the cooperage workshop at Huta Slavia, both tools traditionally used for wood processing and numerous objects produced in the Plopiş Mountains area are displayed.

19. The weaving workshop



One of the most important elements when referring to a people’s culture is its art. Popular creations – done either by popular craftsmen, specialized in their craft, or by the ordinary men, who created various items out of pure pleasure or out of necessity –, represent a veritable heritage that we receive from our ancestors. For they used art not only to create grand, spectacular things, but also to embellish even the most insignificant household items. Slovaks’ houses were always decorated with handmade objects; the construction elements – gates, frontons, galleries, porticos, pillars, window lintels, doors, beams, were sculpted by the local sculptors and carpenters. The indoor decorations – from plates, pillows, shelves, beds, to the cloths on the wall and linen, could become, through the touch of a skilled hand, veritable art pieces. This is because, although certain motifs were recurrent, each craftsman had their own freedom of expression, conferring their piece originality and a special touch.

Among all the elements that were passed from generation to generation, the best kept ones were those related to woven fabrics. Since there was a loom in almost every home, it goes without saying that the women in the community knew the craft of weaving. Every girl needed a dowry to get married. Because of this, every girl was included from a young age in the process of preparing the dowry. They would weave pieces of clothing, rugs, dish towels,

wall coverings, towels, tablecloths, bed sheets. The activity was carried out by women during the cold season, when agricultural work didn't require their presence. In the production of clothes and woven fabrics, they used wool, linen, and hemp, and therefore the lands cultivated with linen and hemp were customary in any rural settlement, due to their utility in domestic industry.

The Slovak traditional costumes were of a special beauty. Since the Slovaks colonized on the Plopiş Mountains plateau had arrived here from various regions of Slovakia, there's been a blending in the specificity of folk costumes. Moreover, we must not forget about the fact that in the new localities where they settled, they lived in communion with Romanians and Hungarians, which also led to mutual influences with regards to traditional clothing.

At the end of the 18th century, the basic fabric used in clothing was produced from local resources, the main pieces of clothing being manufactured from hemp cloth or from felt, which was made from homespun white woolen.

Several pieces of clothing typical to men of those times are: the ***guba*** made of a woven wool fabric, with long hair on its surface. The guba had a simple straight cut, with a transverse seam on the chest, falling beneath the waist, and sometimes down to the knees. It was worn over the shoulders; at times, during winter season, men wore a *şubă*, a long fur coat; the loose, tunic-shaped ***shirt***, with no collar and tied up in the front with a lace or buttoned up; over the shirt one would wear, a vest (*lajblík*), especially for celebrations; the loose traditional trousers, falling down almost to the ankles; a narrow ***apron***, manufactured of homemade cloth; in their waistband they would wear a wide leather ***belt*** (*širokí remeň*) encrusted with spikes and decorated with leather appliques, characteristic to forest workers; the *kabanica*, an article of clothing made of white rough homespun, worn during chilly weather; on their feet they wore opanaks at work and black boots during celebrations.

Women wore a ***shirt*** (*oplecko*), and over the shirt they would wear a large headscarf with fringes (*haraska*) rolled up and tied at the back, or a jersey (*vizitka*) with buttons from top to bottom, which were flared in the length of one palm from the waist down; the simple white ***petticoat*** with no creases (*spodnička*), sometimes laced (*štikeliš*), then white petticoats with small and dense creases (*kiňteš*) and lace at the bottom. A skirt (*sukňa*) of different colors and floral, geometrical motifs; over the skirt they would tie their apron (*zástera* or *zoponka*), which could also have a lining/lace, or not. In modern times, during celebrations, over the shirt and petticoat one would wear a sleeveless ***dress*** sewed at the waist, manufactured from died cloth; on colder weather they wore a sort of thick blanket with fringes, folded in the shape of a triangle, and wrapped around the shoulders. Other times, they had a coat with long sleeves, made of loom woven wool (*vlna*); younger and wealthier girls wore fake fur, called *barančina*. The headscarf (*šatka*) was worn by married women. On their feet they wore opanaks, and in winter black leather boots.

As a result of rapid urbanization, the wearing of the traditional costume has been abandoned. Nowadays, on special occasions, youngsters more often wear green ***hats***, with a slightly narrower brim, and men wear black hats, with a wider brim. They appear dressed in

shirts made of woven hemp cloth, or made of finer cloth with an undefined cotton warp (*miserove platno*) or a thin and soft cloth warp. Sometimes one could find shirts with a gusset at the shoulders, a tall and flipped collar, and cuffs on the sleeves. The collar is buttoned up with three colored buttons, positioned in a triangular shape. Instead of the loose traditional trousers, after World War I, men wore tighter **trousers** (*priče - nohavice pricove*), manufactured from black or green cloth, the white trousers further being made of rough homespun woolen fabric (*sucno*).

Women wore their hair pulled back, coiled in a bun in the shape of a snail named **kont**. Girls' hair was combed with no parting towards the back, tight above the nape of their neck and braided in one or two ponytails, which were then tied in a bun named **čupka**. Older girls used to put colored **ribbons** (*mašličky*) and the end of the ponytail, ribbons that hanged below the hips. On their head they wore a calico **kerchief** (*šatka*), always white with geometrical motifs or with tiny flowers imprinted on it, black or blue. Colored kerchiefs appeared later too. Married women tied their hair in a loop (*kont*), and then placed a white, laced (*faldičky*) **bonnet** (*čepec*) on their head, emphasizing the loop's shape through the cut. Over the bonnet they would place the starched kerchief, tied at the front, getting the typical shape of Slovak women's adornment. The kerchief was starched with flour or with potato water. The extremities were flared. They wear a **petticoat** and **shirt**. Over the shirt they can have a black atlas **vest** (*lajbik*) adorned with gimps. The most original article of clothing in the female costume was the **shirt** (*oplecko*). It was the only piece embroidered by hand, all the other pieces of clothing only being ornamented with gimps, ribbons, laces. The shirt was manufactured from thin white cloth (*patelát*) or from very fine white cloth (*silónové*). The lining (*fodrička*) is beautifully embroidered on the edges. It is adorned with little crosses (*křížiky*), meander lines, geometric motifs (*reťazka*). The little lining is tied with a very fine seam based on knotted points, a hem (*obrubek*) alternating at 4-5 cm between red, yellow, green, and blue. Although apparently very simple, the seam, and the embroidery on a single sleeve, respectively, both require two days of hard work. The skirt (*sukňa*) can be made of Holland-like cotton fabric, calico, etc. Generally, the background is white, pink or light blue and has tiny floral motifs imprinted on it. It is worth mentioning that Slovak women display a preference for pastels, in this way the traditional costume giving off a pleasant chromatic effect. Under the skirt they would wear white, loose petticoats with small and dense creases, made of a thin cloth (*patelatovy spodník - kiňteš*), and underneath a set of petticoats tailored more tightly from hemp cloth (*konopný spodník*). Over the skirt they would wrap an apron (*zástera* or *zoponka fertuch*). Another clothing article is the **vizitka**. Vizitka is manufactured from damask, atlas, libertine, calico, etc., being lined with cloth or flannel.

On their feet, in winter, women would wear **opanaks** tied with leather lacings (*nadkonce*) until above the center of the calf, over the cloth wraps (*onucki*). Later, opanaks were replaced by boots, worn with white socks.

20. The glass museum



MUZEUL STICLEI

To supplement their income, the feudal lords decided to exploit the vast forests around. This is how the glass huts were founded. A glass hut is mentioned in the Plopiș Mountains area as early as the end of the 18th century, being one of the oldest glass manufactures in Transylvania, largely speaking. For founding a glass hut one needed specific conditions: sand (even if insufficiently clean), quartzous gravel, vast forests for the excessive fuelwood consumption needed for the melting furnaces, deciduous forests, whose wood was burned to obtain the ash needed for preparing potash, as well as minerals from the oxide of which different dyestuffs were produced. The Plopiș Mountains area was propitious for the development of such a craft. The glass foundries had the appearance of wooden sheds or barns sheltering the install glass melting equipment, the one for reannealing finite products, other workshops and their annexes.

The activity in the glass huts was carried out by a small number of qualified workers. The functioning and maintaining of manufactures were, however, ensured first of all through the serfs' work, on account of land dues and even in return for payment. Secondary works such as wood cutting or transportation, the extraction and transportation of quartz stone, maintenance work, the transport of end products counted as serf tasks of the inhabitants. A special category of the Slovak colonists were workers specialized in the glass production craft. A first registering of the glass hut in Huta Voivozi on the civil status registers appeared in 1802, however it is evident that it was much older (germ. *glasshütte*: *glass*=glass, *hütte*=metallurgical plant or smelting plant). In 1826, along with the glass hut in Huta Voivozi, another glass hut is recorded in Șinteu (*Sólyomkő*). The natural resources depletion in an area meant the closing of the glass hut and its relocation to a more adequate place. This is what happened to the foundry in Huta Voivozi, which was moved in the first half of the 19th century to Șinteu. Besides the glass hut, multiple furnaces were also needed, where the ash necessary for glass making was produced. Glass huts produced fairly simple objects, needed on the local and regional commercial market: pharmaceutical articles, laboratory tools, fast-moving consumer goods (jugs, glasses, dishware, window glass), decorative products (fish, ducks, vases). Towards the middle of the 19th century, the glass hut in Șinteu moved to Pădurea Neagră. The construction of the glass factory in this place was made due to multiple reasons: the Bistra stream had enough water for grinding the quartz; wood found itself in significant quantities in the surrounding forests and was used for producing potash and for melting quartzous sand; the secondary materials were brought from the surroundings (arsenic, saltpeter, salt, manganese, argil, etc.). The workers qualified in obtaining glass continued practicing this profession, commuting to Pădurea Neagră.



Workers in a glass factory, 1913
(source: HUNGARICANA.HU)



Fabrica de sticlă din Pădurea-Neagră Fekete erdői üvegyár – Schwarzwald
Suliători în lucru – Üveglövők munkában

The glass factory in Pădurea Neagră – blowers (source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/14810000@N00/10248100000/>)



21. The palinka distillery

Like most foods, alcoholic beverages too used to be produced in the household. In valley settlements, where the climate and soil were adequate for vineyards, wine was produced in particular. Hilly areas, however, were not favorable for viticulture, the terrains resulted from deforestation being more adequate for cultivating fruit trees. The most frequent trees were plum trees, apple trees, pear trees, and cherry trees. Some of the fruits obtained were kept for winter, while others were commercialized in the neighboring markets or fairs, while most of the fruit was used for producing palinka. Plum, apple, and pear palinka was produced, but the most famous and typical one to the Plopiş Mountains area was the palinka made of cherries, the wild cherry trees being very widespread on the Plopiş Mountains plateau.

Palinka production has been a more than two-century-old tradition for the Slovak community in Şinteu. Palinka was and remains to this day the typical beverage during major events of family life (baptism, wedding, funeral), as well as of community life, being offered during village balls, local celebrations, and other events.

Palinka is an alcoholic beverage exclusively produced from the fermenting and distillation of fleshy fruits or of a fruit mix. The first step in producing a high-quality palinka is choosing the raw material. The fruits must be harvested and processed only during optimal periods, so they don't lose their flavor. After harvest, the pits are removed, and the fruits are crushed. They are then left to ferment, to obtain the so-called pulp. Once it reaches the desired fermentation level, the distillation process comes next, by boiling the pulp in a special cauldron. The result is a product reflecting the bitter perfume and taste of fruits. The following step is sieving and bottling the palinka. An important aspect is the strict adherence to the necessary conditions for the storage and maturing of the palinka. The best palinka producers will strive to obtain the perfect beverage, savory and fragrant, which should be drunk with pleasure and bring joy to the guests' tables. From palinka, in combination with different fruit varieties, one can prepare liquors and other derived products, which are characterized by their unmistakable fruity scent, intensity, elegance, and vitality.

In the Huta Slavia palinka distillery, you will discover a space presenting the entire process of obtaining palinka, from the preparation of the fruit pulp to the fermentation,

distillation and bottling processes. You have the opportunity to try out the locally produced palinka, which will surely delight you!

22. The water mill



One of the most popular attractions at Huta Slavia is the Water Mill. Placed here so tourists can observe the craft of milling, this attraction draws both children and adults curious about the way in which the power of water can be used in the household.

Water mills were most widespread especially during feudalism, being situated on the banks of rivers whose flow rates were quite high. According to feudal law, only the master could build a mill on his estate. Water mills were essential for the rural inhabitants, because it is where grain was ground, of which bread was made, people's basic food. By means of water mills, villagers ground their cereal harvest and obtained the flour they needed to live on until the next harvest.

Water mills, however, had other uses too. There were plank mills, which used the force of water to set the sawmills into motion, which then cut the woods and created the planks needed for construction. On the boundary of each settlement there was usually at least one mill, not at a very large distance for the inhabitants. The mill was located in an adequate place from a natural point of view, which would provide it with the water resource and a drop of water sufficient for setting the mill wheel into motion. The water mills have one or more wheels powered by the force of flowing water. The entire collectivity participated in the construction and repairing of the mill. For the rendered services, the miller and the mill master usually charged a third or fourth of the ground products: *"At the mill we got in a line after those with the best-quality grain. It was said that you actually received the flour from the grain of the person in front of you, because it remained in the installation. And the flour from your grain got to the one after you."*, testifies a local.

Another use of waterpower was washing big woven fabrics, like broadcloth, counterpanes, rugs. These were put in a place called a *vâltoare* (*whirlpool*), a traditional

installation made of wood, which captured some of the river water. Under the water pressure and due to the strong oxygenation, the woven cloths were cleaned right away.

Janko mlinárech
(John the Miller)

Janko mlinárech
Na vršku leží,
[:A ten jeho mlin
A ten jeho mlin
Nadarmo beží:]

Ani nemele,
Len tak falšuje
[:Janko mlinárech
Janko mlinárech Dievki miluje:]
Švárna dievčina,
Dones do mlina,
[:Málo, lebo moc,
málo, nebo moc,
len dones na noc.:]

Já ti zemelem,
Míto neveznem,
[:Len ta já trikrát,
Len ta já trikrát Pekne obejmem:]

Aj ma obejmaj,
Aj mi míto zal,
[:bodaj mlinárov,
Bodaj mlinárov
Šeckich čert zebrał.:]



23. The Oil Mill

Along with flour, one of the foodstuffs of prime necessity in people's houses was oil. Like most products, this too was obtained in the past either in households or in village mills. Oil mills were used for grinding seeds of oil plants, like linseed, squash, sunflower, which were then pressed in order to extract the vegetable oil. These oils could be used both as foodstuffs or for cooking, as well as raw materials, as lubricants for greasing certain tools and mechanisms. Moreover, oil was an important foodstuff that couldn't be missing from daily nutrition during days of fasting. The leftovers following the pressing were used too, as animal food or fertilizer. Consequently, oil mills could meet many of the community's needs.

In the Plopiș Mountains villages, at the beginning, the most widespread was the oil obtained from linen. This was due to the fact that the lands here were propitious for cultivating linen, but also to the fact that linseed oil had special properties. Housewives certainly knew these properties and used it as a raw material both for cooking and for its curative properties, linseed oil being utilized up to this day for its antiviral, antibacterial, antiparasitic, and antitumoral qualities. Later, however, linseed was gradually replaced with grains, which were less costly and had a greater production yield, in the detriment of nutritional quality. Little by little, the squash, but especially sunflower, became the main oilseeds used in oil production.

At Huta Slavia you can visit the Oil Mill, an attraction aimed at presenting the old craft through which oil was produced from cereal, as a live sample of this region's tradition. The mill is ready anytime to make a demonstration of its utility for the visitors. By visiting the Oil Mill, you'll have the opportunity to learn about every stage of the oil-production process, from the harvesting and pressing mechanism all the way to the bottling.

24. The Gingerbread House



Here we are, almost at the end of the trail “*The story of the Slovaks from the Huta*”. We covered about 2,5 km together, so it’s time for a long-awaited snack break. And what better place to do that than the Gingerbread House?

The Gingerbread House is certainly one of the most popular landmarks on the Huta Slavia Complex map. The reason for this is that here you will truly feel spoiled, whether you are 6 or 60 years old! We provide you delicacies of the most diverse, that thrill the little ones, or bring the childhood flavor from long ago to the memory of the grown-ups. And, along with the flavor, the feeling of traveling to the past, to the times when the famous Slovak fairs were organized.

The fairs were organized on the occasion of important religious landmarks, like the celebration of the church’s patron saint (slov. *Odpust*). Usually, when one of the churches in the area celebrated its dedication, the neighboring parishes would also join in on the event, the believers in neighboring villages organizing processions. They thus set off on foot for the locality where the celebration was held. The path was long and often lasted several hours; on the way, the believers would sing church songs.

The Şinteu Church has St. Chiril and St. Metodi as Patron Saints. They are celebrated every year on the first Sunday of July. During this celebration fairs were organized after mass. These celebrations represented veritable social events, capable of gathering people from the vast region that we’re discussing about. Arriving here either to buy or sell goods, people seized the opportunity to meet again, to recount their joys to one another, to spend several hours or even several days in a completely unique atmosphere. They forgot for a while about their daily hardships and about the difficulties of mountain life.

At fairs people would eat, drink, and sometimes party with fiddlers; competitions were organized between boys and young men of the community. The entire atmosphere was governed by joy, singing, good cheer, and sprinkled with delicacies prepared in their homes by locals: gingerbread, colorful pryanik (slov. *medovníky*) in various shapes (most often in the shape of a heart, doll, horse, bunny, or rosary), twisted candy, ice cream cones, clothes, toys (flutes, trumpets, dolls), jewelry and accessories (earrings, rings, glasses). Amusements spots would be built at the bigger fairs, where children could spend their time in the carousel or riding the so-called swing carousel (slov. *kolotoč*).

One of the favorite desserts preferred by the Slovaks was the burnt sugar cake. Like any delicacy, it had a secret recipe and was so hard to make, that not everyone dared to prepare it. Sometimes, there were only one or two women that cooked it in the community, preparing the cake for anyone willing to savor it. The delicious burnt sugar and caramel walnuts cake, decorated with egg foam and sugar powder, remains for Slovaks one of their most savory childhood memories from these lands.



25. The Smithy

Before the years of urbanization, most of the things needed in a community were produced locally. Be it basic foodstuffs, like flour and oil, or objects needed in the household or different tools, the community was in such a way organized that it could ensure as much as possible of its members' needs. Therefore, in the Plopiș Mountains villages, there were, in the past centuries, different workshops: for carpentry, cooperage, smithing, and so on.

The smithy was an indispensable workshop in any locality. This craft was usually inherited from father to son. The blacksmith was servicing the needs of the rural community, and sometimes his products were sold in weekly or annual markets. The specificity of the localities within this area, one of mountain villages, with many of its inhabitants working in forestry, imposed a great demand of tools necessary to this craft. Axes, hatchets, handsaws, chains, and two-man saws were produced. Besides these, objects needed for agricultural work or even for agricultural coupling pins, like the metal support of carts and wheels, were also produced. In some households one can find even today tools like grubbing hoes, scythes, spades, pitchforks, manufactured in this area decades ago. Some objects necessary for women working on the loom or in the household were also made by the community's blacksmith.

The necessary raw material, namely iron ore, was usually brought here from the southern part of the county, where such resources existed, and then processed in the workshop. The objects produced were diverse and ensured the carrying out of the main local activities.

In the Smithy at Huta Slavia, hundreds of such objects are displayed, having been manufactured by the locals of this area. The objects, of a great variety, are witnesses to a time when every community could manage itself, producing most of the things it needed.

26. The Souvenir Shop



Like the kind hosts that we are, we can't let you leave without something delicious, to sweeten the paths you roam, or for you to have a small souvenir to remind you of the world you have just visited. We know you will bring away with you the most beautiful experiences from the Slovak world, the best shots with your favorite attractions here, however, after a visit at the Souvenir Shop, you will actually be able to bring home a glimpse of this universe.

We welcome you to cross our threshold, to discover products created by local craftsmen, small handmade objects, decorations, but also several assortments of typical Slovak snacks! Very carefully and passionately selected for our guests, the products in the shop are ideal both for you and as gifts for your friends or family.

Čakáme na vás!

On the back cover:

On the ecotouristic route at the Huta Slavia complex, "*The story of the Slovaks from the Huta*", several landmarks have been placed that mark the most important elements of Slovak culture. The purpose of this endeavor is to ensure the knowledge, promotion and preservation of the Slovak cultural patrimony, to pass - to both the younger generation and the tourists visiting us - the feeling of belonging to a world with well-defined traditions, unique customs, rituals and occupations that have harmoniously blended together with those of the natives over the centuries.