

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

This paper will explain the ethnic, geographic, family, and/or religious culture or cultures of my youth. I relied heavily on my own recollection of my upbringing and several questions from senior family members. Using the required reading material from chapters 1-3 of Intercultural Communication Encounters as a guide, I will provide an explanation. The information in the assigned reading material provided me with a better understanding of how the very words that we use are a reflection of our own cultural backgrounds yet how all cultures appear to have certain universal aspects in common.

Keywords: *Communication, Intercultural, Roots*

MY ROOTS

The recollection of my upbringing is one of happiness with being well cared for and loved. Just like the majority of Americans, my family origins are from Western Europe. It almost appears as though my parents picked the midpoint between the places of their birth's to raise a family of their own. Even though my mother and father viewed the importance of attending church very differently, religion was a big part of my youth. I do like to believe that I have gained the best of the culture that I have experienced throughout my life.

Starting with my earliest memories of my paternal family, I remember visits to rural East Texas where my father was born and raised. My father's family name was derived from "Sponheimer", with forefathers from Germany. He grew up picking cotton and working hard as many did in his time, selling eggs and whatever products that the family could sell at their small grocery store. I remember the main event for the adults when our family would get together was a domino game called "42" that was played with partners who became very competitive and would often last until late in the evening. The sense of "family" was at the center of it all, which

sadly, didn't last long after my "mama's" death.

The maiden name, "Wagner" is telling of my mother's German heritage with her grand parents actually being immigrants from Russia. They settled in the northwest part of Oklahoma with the purchase of a claim from a fellow railroad worker. Arriving with little more than a healthy dairy cow and a growing family, they went on to manage large crops. I do have dear memories of my grandma's apple pies fresh from the oven. However, it was my wild cousins that introduced me, as a minor, to drinking beer and fast cars, usually together.

My mother and father were married and ultimately bought a house in the suburbs of Oklahoma City where I was raised as a child along with my younger brother and sister and on occasion my older brother from my father's first marriage. Mostly I know of my surroundings as a young child through photos of the home based business which my father successfully provided for our family along with much help from my mother and most of the family over the years. He worked very hard throughout his life but he always managed to make time to go fishing, often with the whole family in tow. I may have been raised in the city but we would often go out to property that we owned outside of town to work on a large garden and play in the dirt, thus at least preserving a sense of being in contact with the soil as our ancestors did.

I was baptized and raised as a Lutheran, attending church regularly without my father ever going with us. I always knew that he was raised Baptist and have many fond memories of attending my "mama's" church and hearing "Amazing Grace". The fact that my parents had different churches caused me some confusion and led me to have some doubts. Even the fact

that I had been thoroughly instructed and confirmed into the Lutheran church as a teenager, my doubts ultimately led to me not attending church and even quitting my belief in God. While not a practicing Christian for some time, it was the values demonstrated to me by my parents that helped me to remain a generally good person. Ironically, it was the very loving and caring words of a local Baptist preacher for my father and our family as his life ended after a long battle with cancer that helped me to begin to once again seek God.

Keeping the broad range of what determines our culture in mind, I think that I can now begin to understand the ways that I have been influenced throughout my life. Even with the

differences in my parents families, there is much commonality. Never angry with my parents for their lack of religious unity, I'm thankful for the questions it raised which eventually led me to a deeper faith. The stories of my youth may not be filled with great intrigue and adventure, but nonetheless shaped me into the person I am today, for better or worse.

References

Learner Materials

1. Klopff, D. & Mccroskey, J. (2007). *Intercultural Communication Encounters*. Boston: Pearson/ Allyn and Bacon.

Kissing in Romania

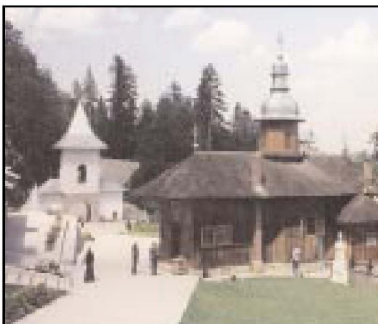
by Noel Spoonemore



With the nuns at Agapia

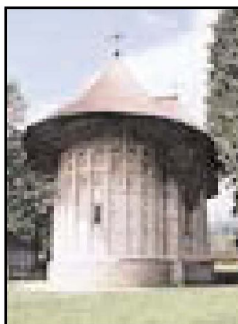


Agapia monastery



Sibastria monastery.

*Humor
monastery,
established in
the 15th
century.*



About a month before my trip to Romania I had dinner with my friend Chris Shove and his wife Joanie who invited me to join them on their trip for some business and mostly vacation. We discussed some of the customs there and greetings in Romania and a few other countries Chris had traveled to including Russia and Poland.

I wasn't sure that I was even going to be able to meet them until the week before I left. I thought it was a wonderful opportunity since Chris had many contacts there and friends that spoke English and could help me get around.

Once I got there I somehow mixed up the greeting of kissing a woman's hand when meeting them in Poland as being the way I should be greeting them in Romania. It wasn't until my second day and the third woman I greeted this way that I learned of this.

This was my first trip to an Orthodox country. It was a very rich experience especially coming from Oklahoma where Orthodoxy is almost unheard of. I was able to see a lot of the country from the Black Sea to the Carpathian Mountains. It was very beautiful. The food was incredibly good and I didn't eat any fast food at all. The country is flowing with milk and honey....Oops! I was drifting into a dream of Romania again.

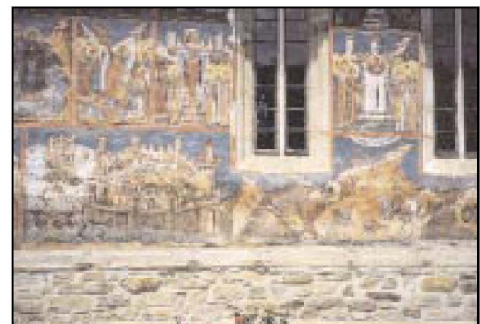
Since the fall of communism in 1989 many things are obviously changing especially now with the hope in Romania entering the European Union. As far as the Church is concerned, there are new Churches being built everywhere even in the smallest of villages. Along many of the roadways tiny little chapels were common.

I witnessed the irony that Romanian author and NPR commentator Andrei Codescu spoke of on a travel program I heard earlier this summer. He described how common it is to see someone talking on a cell phone racing a BMW around a farmer in a horse drawn cart in traffic.

While walking across a street I passed a priest and without knowing the right thing to say I greeted him with "Buna" which I later learned was an almost disrespectfully casual greeting for a priest. I asked a few people later how I should ask a Priest for a blessing but either they didn't know or they didn't understand me.

I had a wonderful time visiting the "Painted" monasteries with a friend of a friend named Elena who just so happened to be on vacation and had visited the monasteries many times. She also wanted to practice her English. We stayed for three days with some of the nuns that Elena knows at the very beautiful Agapia monastery. Here is where I learned the respectful greeting for women, clergy and elders which is "sarut mina". It literally means "I kiss your hand".

I had no idea that there were so many different icons in the Church. It seems like the entire Bible is depicted through the icons on both the interior and exterior walls of these monaster-



Frescoes on outside wall depicting fall of Constantinople, Moldovita monastery

ies. One of the most memorable ones I saw was showing the fall of Constantinople. I don't think that the monasteries get too many American visitors. A couple of monks I met were intrigued by the fact that I was someone that became Orthodox and that I would want to see the monasteries. One priest I met very much wants to come to America and share with us that his country is much more than starving orphans.

I met a lot of wonderful people there and made some very good friends. I am already planning my return visit next year. I made the transition to home by spending a wonderful week at Holy Cross Seminary near Boston, MA attending the conference "Bringing Orthodoxy to Contemporary America" but that's another story...

Romanian Orthodox Monasteries & Churches Photos

In the 5th-18th centuries, monasteries in Wallachia and Moldavia were generally erected, financed and maintained by enlightened ruling princes, high dignitaries or high clergymen. Monasteries became the main promoters of art and culture, with learned scholars, schools, training centres, libraries, and printing facilities attached to them. Their development was also due to the valuable assets and vast estates, forests, vineyards, lakes etc. that they owned, which were donated by their princely founders, landowners or by wealthy believers.

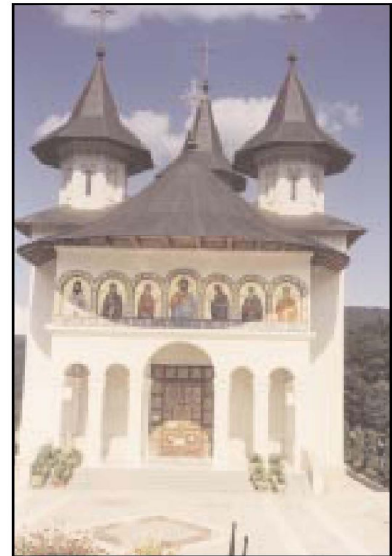
Monasteries in Romania, especially in Moldavia and Wallachia, have been most cherished, and probably are the best preserved cultural sites in the country. One may justly wonder why.

A glimpse on monasticism, its roots and cultural connotations may, to a certain extent, provide answers to the question.

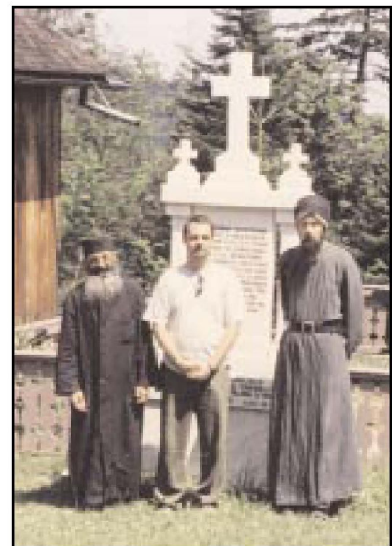
Another reason is of a historic nature. Romania was geographically placed at the crossroads between the Eastern and the Western worlds, a rich land encountered and coveted by three empires (Hapsburgs, Ottomans & Russians), and consequently, ravaged by foreign invasions (mainly of the Turks), for centuries long. In the Middle Ages, Wallachia and Moldavia were under Ottoman suzerainty, meaning that their ruling princes were Romanian, elected by local boyars; the countries were free to deal with their internal affairs as they pleased, but they had to pay an annual tribute to the Ottoman Empire. Monasteries, of which many were fortified (during Stephen the Great's rule in Moldavia, or during Matei Basarab's rule in Wallachia), represented a subterfuge devised by the Romanian princes in order to delude the Ottomans' interdiction to built defence fortresses that could oppose resistance to them. The great number of monasteries and churches may be also related to the Romanians' constraint to hide themselves and their precious assets in safe and hardly accessible places (usually located near the Carpathians and the Subcarpathians) at times of war. The art and historic treasures kept in monasteries are living tokens of the Romanians' need to store and preserve their history and culture at difficult and uncertain times. Likewise, the Romanians' yearning to keep their identity through Christian faith, as a people confronted constantly with the "strings and arrows" of fate, their need for stability and security may account for the great number of churches and monasteries raised all over the country.

The fact that religious edifices in Romania are generally better administered and better equipped with brochures, postcards etc. than most other Romanian cultural attractions like museums, archaeological sites, monuments is yet another aspect to be considered.

But whatever the arguments related to the religious sites that actually make up the bulk of heritage tourism in Romania, the monasteries that one can see today, which fortunately have escaped the lapse of time and the evils of history, transcend their Orthodox significance, and give an accurate account of the Romanians' spiritual life, artistic wealth, and saga.



A newly constructed monastery



With two monks,



Relaxing with friends