

AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATION AND THE EVOLUTION OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION FROM ROMANIA (1864 – 1921)

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to carry out a comparative analysis, along with the fundamental leap made by Romania, along with the transition of the economy to the phase of capitalism. From the study we will be able to observe, the ascending line, in particular, the accumulations, in the agricultural field, because the country was one in which the population existed and lived, predominantly, in the rural environment, and the basis of the development of the economy was due to the exploitation of the land, in particular, extensive. We stopped at a few milestones that we analyzed carefully, with reference to: the effects of the agrarian reform of 1864, the structure of the agrarian population, the structure of agrarian property, the structure of agrarian property, production relations - agricultural leases and tenancy, the increase in agricultural areas, grain culture, animal husbandry, endowment of the land cultivation sector (agricultural inventory), Development of commercial agriculture, production relations, all this, in the conditions when the natural, economic, social, political conditions were taking place at moderate, but progressive parameters. At the same time, we are also analyzing the situation when Romanian agriculture was in a period of crisis, because the facts were unfolding differently and other, more energetic, but effective measures were needed to adapt to the new conditions. Everything is exemplified by statistical data of the historical moments we refer to, inspired by credible documents.

Key words: agricultură, proprietate agrară, cultivarea pmântului, relații de producție, criză agrară

JEL Codes – A12, B10, H12

Introduction

The extent to which the process of land dispossession of the peasants served as a historical premise for the formation and development of capitalist elements in the economy is illustrated by "the degree of spread of wage labor and the manner in which it was carried out. In the west of Europe, such a process has its beginnings in the 15th century" (Maurois, 1987) and is considered to have ended, broadly speaking, towards the end of the 17th century.

"In the Romanian Countries, the process of capital formation and accumulation began in the second half of the 18th century, but with greater intensity in the first half of the 19th century". (Savin, 1947)

The dispossession of the direct producers, of their means of production, mainly took the form of the dispossession of the free peasantry, on the one hand, and the permanent limitation of the lands of the dependent peasantry, on the other.

In the Romanian Countries, the main sources of formation of the bourgeoisie were: merchants, rich craftsmen, well-to-do peasants, tenants, moneylenders and zarafis, part of the feudal lords. As for the proletariat, the main sources were: the peasantry migrated to the cities - to which were added journeymen, apprentices, craftsmen, servants, etc. This is how the pre-industrial urban proletariat was formed.

"The dispossession of direct producers was accompanied by the accumulation of large sums of money and large fortunes" (Bozga et al, 1996), which is equivalent to the formation of financial capital.

A brilliant Romanian economist, Virgil Madgearu, states in a reference work, entitled "Evolution of the Romanian economy after the world war", that "the development of capitalism takes place in three stages: first, commercial capitalism is born which transforms

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into industrial capitalism and then in financial capitalism, and the engine of these developments is its appearance in more advanced countries". (Madgearu, 1940)

Virgil Madgearu's model is viable and is also being tested on the Romanian territory, it being known that in our country, the most important sources of money accumulation were internal and external trade, usury and then the leasing of large estates, the system of leasing to private individuals - Romanians or foreigners - of some state services and revenues - customs, taxes, the collection of taxes, as well as the venality of state jobs that could be bought by private individuals, with certain amounts of money, and the revenues obtained from their practice, often through abuses, belonged entirely to the buyers.

As in the whole of Europe, the Romanian countries did not leave the pattern of the formation of capitalism, commercial capital having an important contribution to the undermining of feudal structures and the emergence of the capitalist economy.

But, by tradition, Romanians had, for many hundreds of years, entered public consciousness, the realistic and correct and realistic idea, moreover, that only those who possess medium production can be masters of their destinies, and they always fought without exception to the idea of having land. With the formation of Little Romania, one of the fundamental objectives of the governments was the solution of peasant problems, through the implementation of the agrarian reform, from 1864.

1. The effects of the agrarian reform of 1864

After the agrarian reform of 1864, in front of the new landowners who constituted the majority of farmers in small Romania, there were many problems related to the technology of cultivating the land, the improvement of varieties and breeds, the procurement of agricultural inventory, the protection of crops and animals, etc. Precisely for this reason, the agrarian problem and agriculture constituted the key factor in the evolution of the Romanian society and economy, until the beginning of the first world war.

2. The structure of the agrarian population

An enormous rural mass, a high birth rate and an economy with modest possibilities of placement in other spheres of activity have created a growing demographic pressure in the villages.

In 1899, the rural population represented 81.1%, and after a decade and a half, in 1914, the same proportion was maintained, even with a slight increase - 81.99%. The situation did not differ substantially in Transylvania and Bucovina.

Overall, within the Romanian territory (the sources for Bucovina are for the entire historical province), the population increased from 8,567,700 inhabitants, in 1860-1869, to 13,200,000-13,320,000, in 1910-1912, so by approximately 52.9% over five decades.

3. The structure of agrarian property

Beyond their particularities, the reforms that took place within the national state and in the other Romanian provinces outside it conditioned intensely polarized property relations and perpetuated a significant share of large property in the structure of rural life.

"The fiscal censuses of 1896, 1902, 1905, carried out on different types of property, indicate a structure of arable and forest property, according to the table" (Creanga, 1940)

Table no 1. The structure of arable and forest property

Property category	No. properties	Cultivable area in ha	% of the arable surface	Forestry	Total	Proportion
Up to 10 ha	920 939	3 153 645	40,31	350 000	3 503 645	34,08
10 – 50 ha	36 100	695 936	8,89			8,52
50 – 100 ha	2 405	166 847	2,13			
Peste 100 ha	4 171	3 810 351	48,67	2 077 290	5 882 641	57,40

Sursa – (Mureşan, 1995)

In Transylvania, according to the censuses of 1895 and 1902, households - up to 10 acres, totaling 71.4% of the total number, owned only 17.8% of the arable area, while the large property, of over 200 acres, owned 36.6%. As the national domination had left traces, the agrarian problem also had a pronounced national aspect, the Romanian element being strongly limited by the overlapping one - Hungarian or German. According to the 1910 census, the Hungarian landed aristocracy owned 85.7% of the estates over 500 ha, and the German bourgeoisie - 7.7%, while the Romanians owned only 5.7% of these properties. (Pascu et al., 1964).

In Bucovina and Bessarabia the proportions were roughly similar, however, the large property was better represented.

And in Europe, around the same time, the big property was not an exception. An extensive estate, capitalistically exploited, existed in England (Maurois, 1987). The large estates in Russia and the Baltic countries had larger dimensions than in Romania, but there were large properties in other countries as well.

Capitalism marked a natural evolution in the peasant sector of agriculture, acquiring new contents through its effects materialized in the differentiation of wealth that was accentuated due to the accumulation of capital. From about 110,000-120,000 peasant households deprived of land at the time of the 1864 reform, it reached about 400,000 - in 1913 (over 25% of the total peasantry) (Oțetea et al., 1967) The rate of land dispossession was faster than the demographic one, the movement towards the lower strata of the peasantry being obvious.

As a result of this state of affairs, the capitalist sector of agriculture was established within the peasant economy. About 3-4% of the total households owned 9-10% of the total arable land. The distinctive sign of this type of household is its lucrative character, the possibility of producing more than the consumption needs, but in terms of yield, forms of production organization and profitability it has remained at a lower level, compared to European standards.

The characteristics for the process of formation of the village bourgeoisie, in the economic conditions of this era, were the primarily usurious ways and methods. For this reason, the sphere of the bourgeois economy of the village was not individualized and did not generate specific performances of a technical-productive order, at the level of the rural economy. At the same time, the movements that occurred within the peasantry, towards its lower layers, did not lead to the formation of a compact mass of agricultural workers, day laborers or employees, as in Transylvania, Hungary or Italy.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the agrarian proletariat amounted to about 156,000 people, and in the years preceding the first world war, to about 200,000. The rest of the landless peasants, although they had lost their status as small producers, infiltrated the structures of the tenancy system.

4. Production relations - agricultural estates and tenancy

The transformation of the large landed property into a modern form of exploitation, of the farm type, took place slowly, due to the lack of capital to endow the large property, the fact that most of the inventory belonged to the peasantry, the lack of available paid labor and the mentality noble, medieval, which some of the landowners manifested in the sense that they did not intend to personally handle the administration of their own estates. Under these conditions, the relations between landlords and peasants took the form of agricultural permits, so that the first legal norms in this sector were issued in 1866, then in 1872, 1882, 1893, 1907. In practice, agricultural permits took three main forms: *dijma la tarla* (lease in labor), *dijma de a valma* (dije in products) and rent in money.

After the peasant uprising of 1907, an agrarian legislation was adopted to improve relations between landlords and peasants, to support agriculture and in the interest of public order. The law of agricultural permits, from 1907, prohibited the obligations imposed on the peasantry. A maximum rent and payment for agricultural work was established for regions and counties, the establishment of communal shelters.

Between the landlords and the peasants was interposed the category of tenants; the large tenancy constituted a characteristic of agricultural relations. From the last decade of the 19th century, leasing trusts came into existence (Puia, 1991) which, over time, imposed oppressive conditions.

After the great peasant uprising, another law, from 1908 - regarding the tenant trusts, stipulated that no person or association was allowed to lease an area larger than 4,000 ha. Against this background, the law of 1909, regarding peasant communes, sought to eliminate tenants as intermediaries between landlords and peasants.

In 1908, the Rural House was created, intended to support the purchase of land by the peasants through loans, and in 1912, in the meeting of February 20, the draft law on the organization of trade unions was proposed for debate in the Romanian Senate. county farms (Argetoianu, 1991), but which did not result in a favorable result.

5. Increase in agricultural areas

Romania experienced a series of territorial changes. Thus, after the Berlin Congress, southern Bessarabia was ceded, but Dobrogea was obtained, and from 1913 - two new counties, Durostor and Caliacra, were added to the composition of the country. Under these conditions, the first observation that emerges is that the total area per inhabitant, implicitly the agricultural area, was decreasing, as a result of the population growth.

But the most obvious change recorded in the use of the country's territory was that of the considerable increase in arable land, from 3,065 ha, the average of the years 1862-1866 - i.e. 24.5%, to 6,116 ha, the average of the years 1911-1915 - i.e., 45.7% of the territory.

This increase is due, above all, to the drastic decrease in the areas intended for pastures and hay, a phenomenon with major implications for animal husbandry. Thus, permanent pastures and hayfields that represented 3,650 ha - i.e. 29.2%, in the period 1862-1866, reached, in the period 1911-1915, 1,571 ha - i.e. 11.7%.

Table no 2. Agricultural areas and per inhabitant 1866-1915

AGRICULTURAL												NONGRICULTURAL	
TOTAL			Arable		Pastures and Rough permanent		Vineyards and orchards of plums		Forestry		Other surfaces		
Pe-riod	mii ha	ha/hab	hnd ha	%	hnd ha	%	Hnd ha	%	hnd ha	%	hnd ha	%	
1862-1866	12530	3,1	3065	25,5	3650	29,2	101	0,8	3399	27,0	2315	19	
1896-1900	13135	2,2	5458	42	1672	12,7	209	1,6	2797	21,3	2999	24	
1911-1915	13700	1,8	6116	46	1571	11,7	163	1,2	2892	21,6	2659	20	

Source (Mureşan, 1995)

In parallel with the increase in the areas devoted to the cultivation of cereals, the areas devoted to industrial plants also experienced increases: rapeseed, flax, hemp, sunflower, sugar beet, tobacco - some as an effect of the laws encouraging the national industry. Seen as a whole, these areas did not exceed 2-3% of the cultivated areas. At the same time, trees and vines occupied about 4%.

It is appreciated, in this context, that during the period 1878-1914 Romanian agriculture had an extensive and predominantly cereal character.

There was a tendency to increase fodder crops, but also a decrease in the areas left fallow (uncultivated) which, during the five decades analyzed, experienced reductions from 799 thousand ha, at the beginning of the period - i.e. 26.4% of the cultivated area and to 568 thousand ha - i.e. 9.3%, in 1915.

Table no 3. Area by crop categories 1862-1915

Crops	TOTAL		Cereals		Industrial plants		Food Plants		Cultivated plants		Inactive fields	
	hnd ha	hnd hab	hnd ha	%	hnd ha	%	hnd ha	%	hnd ha	%	hnd ha	%
1862 1866	3065	0,75	2222	72,2	10	0,3	34	1,1	-	-	799	26,4
1896 1900	5458	0,93	4760	87,2	117	2,1	49	0,9	81	1,5	451	8,3
1911 1915	6116	0,82	5140	84,0	119	1,9	107	1,8	182	3,0	568	9,3

Source (Mureşan, 1995)

6. Cereal culture

Among cereal crops, oats increased more - to 665%, wheat - to 275% and corn - to 213.5%; the last two impressed by their large share and the extent of the general growth. Thus, the total increase in grain production increased, on an annual average, from 26,336 thousand hl - in the period 1862-1866, to 84,929 thousand hl - in the period 1911-1915, thus rising to 322.5%, compared to the period basic. (Mureşan, 1995)

Calculation on time intervals highlights obvious increases. The average production of wheat and corn per ha, between 1862 and 1915, in Little Romania is presented as follows (Statistical Yearbook 1915-1916), 1917).

Table no 4 Average production of cattle and corn 1862-1915 (hl)

Periode	Wheat	Maize
1862 – 1876	10,9	12,9
1886 – 1900	12,8	13,4
1900 – 1915	15,3	14,8

Source: (MIC, 1917).

It is the opposite situation, compared to the central and western European countries or the USA. There, against the backdrop of increased yields, corn production was 45-40% higher than wheat.

7. Animal breeding

In small Romania, the cerealization of agriculture caused the main species of animals to register a period of numerical regression (the decrease in the areas of hay and pastures, and part of them, along with the forests, returned, after the agrarian reform of 1864, to the landlords). A gradual recovery was observed so that, in 1900, the herds were 95% in cattle and 108% in sheep, 159.9% in pigs and 170.8% in horses, compared to 1860.

8. Endowment of the land cultivation sector (agricultural inventory)

The introduction of modern equipment represented the most characteristic indicator in the field of production. Compared to 1868, in 1905 the number of sowing and reaping machines had increased more than tenfold (15,521 and 18,451, respectively), mowing machines had

appeared (1,169), all being drawn by animals, and iron harrows had spread (about 130,000). . As for the cars themselves, only the great estate had the necessary resources to procure them. In this sense, in 1905 there were 55 steam plows, while locomotives and threshing machines had reached about 4,500 each. The increase was even more intense in the next stage: in 1913, the number of tractors was 144, and threshing machines 5,934 (Mureşan, 1995)

In contrast to this aspect, for plowing, the peasants still used 167,000 wooden plows (out of a total of 535,668. At the beginning of the 20th century, they owned over 95% of the number of carts and wagons, over 92% of that of plows, 92-95% of draft animals. In Transylvania, the number of threshing machines (5,700, in 1915) was comparable to that of Romania. Fewer plows (390,653) were used on a significantly smaller cultivable surface (Oţetea et al, 1967)

Overall, the provision of live and dead agricultural inventory (animals, machines, tools and utensils) of the rural economy remained precarious, the pace of changes created large gaps compared to economically advanced countries. The capitalist component of the organization of production, through the use of salaried labor and modern equipment, has progressively entered the landscape of Romanian agrarian life.

9. The development of commercial agriculture

It represents a reality in the capitalist evolution of the Romanian economy, which increasingly oriented agricultural production towards the market, with the aim of commercializing it. This tendency gained momentum, after 1829, but it could take place much more widely, only after the abolition of the feudal system, through the agrarian reforms of 1853-1854 and 1864.

The increase in the level of the internal market of agricultural products was driven by the development of industries based on agricultural raw materials and the growth of the urbanization process. Regarding the external one, first of all, cereals occupied the largest share throughout the period 1878-1914. Quantitatively, they provided in the interval 1879-1886 - on annual average - 86.7% of the export volume, and in terms of value - 76.3%; in the interval 1909-1914, these weights decreased, but remained predominant: 68% - quantitative and 73.1% - value. (Bozga et al., 1996)

In the areas of developed commercial agriculture, wage labor was exclusively used, and the process of differentiation of the peasantry, through frequent and binding contracts with the market, took place much more intensively.

10. Production relations

The concession regime left its characteristic mark on agrarian life in Romania, between the reform of 1864 and the First World War. In addition, the large parasitic and speculative tenancy was grafted onto the skeleton of the latifundia and the freehold regime. As a system, the great tenancy reached its apogee through the "deep agreement" between the spirit that guided it and the possibilities opened up by the regime of wills, through the great profits it made, through the levers it could use it has, after all the transformations produced in economic life, significant capitals placed in banks, outlets, transport routes - relatively profitable, high turnover figures. In 1905, for example, of the entire cultivable surface, greater than 100 ha, about 60% was exploited by 3,332 tenants.

11. The agrarian crisis of the last quarter of the 19th century

In the last quarter of a century of the 19th century, the European markets were invaded and oversaturated with large quantities of grain, at cheap prices, coming from North America, Argentina, India and Russia

The special fertilization of cultivated lands, especially of the countries of the New World, the sale of grain by producers in Russia and India, at very low prices - without taking into account the costs of production, the low level of the land in these countries, the expansion of the maritime network and railways that made it easier and cheaper to transport agricultural products to Western European markets, are the explanation of this "invasion".

With all the stimulating influence of the foreign market, Romania, which was increasingly engaged in the international circuit of trade with agricultural products, felt the fluctuations on the international market and especially, the effects of the agrarian crisis that covered the central and western European regions, between 1873 and 1895 .

Under these conditions, the continent's agriculture, with higher production costs, was forced to lower prices, rents and the price of land, recording significant losses for two decades. Seeking to protect themselves, European countries raised their customs tariffs on grain imports, but this measure was insufficient. In parallel, European agriculture had to modernize, to become more profitable because only the application of new techniques and technologies could reduce production costs and face competition. (Puia, 1991) The crisis was an effect, but also a cause that forced European producers to look for ways out through technical progress.

The main manifestation of the agrarian crisis, but with numerous implications, was the drop in prices for cereals and, to a lesser extent, for animals, which was felt from the beginning of the agrarian crisis and intensified, especially after 1880. Thus, if we take as a basis (=100) the prices of the main cereals, in 1880, in 1895, the price levels per quintal were as follows: 46.1% for wheat, 48.1% for rye, 58.4% for corn, 60% for barley and oat. In 1902, these levels had risen to 62-65% in rye and wheat and about 80% in corn, barley and oats. Returning to the initial levels was no longer possible, due to external competition.

As far as the Romanian economy is concerned, it felt the influence and effects of the agrarian crisis which, on the one hand, stimulated the industrialization of agricultural products, a certain specialization of agriculture, the wider use of machines, as well as salaried farmers. On the other hand, the crisis also caused losses, especially in exports, the trade balance being, between 1878-1899, passive. As a result, unlike in western countries, there was an increase in tithes, rents, the price of land, an increase in work and a decrease in payment to the peasant, while the income of owners and tenants increased. (Bozga et al., 1996)

Conclusions

The great tenant meant, practically, only to a small extent, an innovative element in the forms of production, in the economic organization of the exploitation of the land. The relations between him and the small producer were similar to those between the latter and the landlord. On a social level, the large tenancy constituted a factor of aggravation of the dissatisfactions and its relations with the village world.

Due to the agrarian conditions in our country, itself becoming a characteristic component of them, the large tenancy became individualized in structure, economic content and size, in relation to the situation in other countries.

The latifundi, the pulverization of small property, the great parasitic tenancy and the regime of concessions were the distinctive signs of agriculture in small Romania, between the two structural reforms of 1864 and 1918/1921. (Mureşan, 1995)

The impact of Western capitalism was felt all the more strongly and stressfully, as our agrarian system was more complexly involved in the exchange of products of the capitalist world, and in economic terms, technical progress contributed, only to a limited extent, to the development of production and emancipation cultures.

The negative effects of the crisis led Romania to conclude, in 1875, the unfortunate commercial convention with Austria-Hungary (CRIM, 1987), for multiple reasons, but also from the desire to find in the center of Europe, an area where goods could be sold easily and

on a large scale, given the conditions in which the difficulties of selling agricultural products on other markets have become more and more difficult.

Although the rate of evolution of agriculture was slower than that of other branches, it consolidated, until the first world war, the capitalist character of its development continued to occupy the largest share in the entire Romanian economy.

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