

Romanian Media Coverage of the Bringing of the Holy Fire from Jerusalem. Tradition, Rituals and Media Events

Dana HUMOREANU

Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava

dana.humoreanu@usm.ro

Abstract: This study analyses how the media covered the event of bringing the Holy Light from Jerusalem for the first time to Romania during the Orthodox Easter in 2009, and how the ritual and tradition associated with this fact were constructed. The paper is structured on two intertwining axes. One analyses the bringing of the Holy Light from Jerusalem from the perspective of the media event (Daniel Dayan, Elihu Katz, 1992; 1980; Coman, 2011; 2008), and the second follows the description and analysis of the ritual of bringing the Holy Light from Jerusalem from the perspective of the phenomenology of religions developed by Mircea Eliade – the concept of heterotopia, formulated by Alexei Lidov, and the construction of tradition from the perspective of Catherine Bell. To identify major themes and dominant symbols, I used content analysis, and for ritual analysis, the interpretive method. The concepts “holy light”, “charitable light” and “holy fire” define the fire that miraculously ignites on the Saturday before Orthodox Easter in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. “Bukovina” is a historical region divided between Romania and Ukraine, the southern area forming most of Suceava County. Here the concept is used to illustrate the whole Suceava county. “Jerusalem of the Romanian people” refers to the Putna Monastery, where the tomb of Stephen the Great was canonised in 1992 as “Righteous Voivode Stephen the Great and the Holy”.

The results show that bringing the Holy Light from Jerusalem to Romania meets the characteristics of a media event, in the Dayan-Katz paradigm. The initiative to complete a religious holiday with a new ritual came from political power, taken over by the religious authority, which later ruled out political interference.

Keywords: *Holy Light, symbol, sacred space, tradition, media event.*

Introduction

In 2009, in Romania, the Christian-Orthodox feast of the Resurrection was completed with a new ritual: bringing the Holy Light by plane from the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. The initiative came from a political leader, Gheorghe Flutur, who at the time was president of the Suceava County Council and vice-president of one of the two governing parties. In February 2009, the local press in Suceava reported that at Easter Flutur will bring “The Light of the Resurrection to be lit in the churches and monasteries of Suceava County” and “directly from the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem” as part of a program promotion entitled “Easter in Bukovina”. The program also included the bringing of a flag to Suceava donated to the Athos Monastery by Stephen the Great. (*Monitorul de Suceava*, February 3, 2009)

Three months later, two days before Easter, the press agency of the Romanian Patriarchate transmitted that the Patriarchate will also bring the Light from Jerusalem to the country's capital, Bucharest, independent of Flutur's action. "It is for the first time that a delegation of the Romanian Patriarchate organises such an action". Daniel the Blessed wanted the Holy Light to be brought from Jerusalem this year to increase the joy of the clergy and of the believers of Easter. (*Basilica*, April 16, 2009)

The introduction, in Romania, of a new ritual, during the most important celebration of Orthodox Christians, the way in which the event was covered by the media, as well as the controversy regarding whether the Grace Light brought by a political leader is as sacred as the one brought by the Patriarchate delegation, together with the rapid social validation of the ritual, are arguments within this area of focus that are worth investigating.

The research questions are as follows: 1) How did the media cover the event? 2) How was the ritual built around this event in relation to tradition? 3) What are the dominant symbols in local and national media articles?

Through these questions, I tried to identify, on the one hand, whether the bringing of the Holy Light to Romania was treated by the media as news or as a media event, and on the other hand, how the ritual was constructed, both from a religious point of view as well as a political one.

Theoretical framework:

The study is structured on two intertwining axes. The first axis includes the description and analysis of the ritual of bringing the Holy Light from Jerusalem, from the perspective of the phenomenology of religions developed by Mircea Eliade, and the concepts of hierotopia and spatial icon, formulated by Art Historian Alexei Lidov.

Lidov's hierotopia differs from Mircea Eliade's phenomenology of the sacred, by focusing on projects that establish an environment of communication between the worldly and the sacred. In Alexei Lidov's approach, hierotopic projects are not limited to churches and shrines; the "new Jerusalem" are such projects meant to establish a connection with the space of the Holy Land.

I also analyse the inclusion of a profane element (bringing the Holy Fire by plane) within the realm of the sacred and how a new tradition was built in the light of the theory formulated by Catherine Bell.

On the second axis, I analyse the bringing of the Holy Light from the perspective of media events, formulated by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (1992; 1980). Within this paradigm, the necessary conditions for qualifying it as a media event are: (1) live broadcast, (2) a pre-planned event, (3) framed in time and space, (4) presenting a heroic personality or group, (5) having a high level of drama or ritual significance; and (6) the force of a social norm that makes viewing mandatory. (Katz, 1980)

As Mihai Coman (2011) points out, the opposition between common media situations and discourse, as well as "unusual" situations and discourse "resumes the Durkheimian opposition between sacred and profane," i.e. "media

events are for the normal press what the holiday is for everyday work". The regime change is manifested in both the behaviour of journalists and the public. (Coman 2011: 18)

From the point of view of journalistic discourse, media events generate "processes of emotional fusion of actors – event heroes, journalists and spectators – with those events", canceling the "objective distance" between journalist and event, while transforming the public into an "active partner": "People inform each other, gather to receive mass media messages, celebrate the event as if they lived it in situ, comment on it and interpret it together (which leads to the activation of social ties and maintaining order, cohesion and collective identity)". (Coman 2011: 19-20)

The Study Corpus consists of 18 news items from 2009: local media – 5 articles (*Monitorul de Suceava*; *News Bucovina*); national media – 10 articles (*HotNews* news sites; *Ziare.Com*; *ProTV* and *Realitatea* television web pages;); 3 articles from the news agency of the Romanian Patriarchate (*Basilica*).

I. Holy Light – sacred, ritual, tradition

I.1. Sacred spaces

The miraculous lighting of the fire in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem is the most famous event in the church service of the Orthodox Easter and, at the same time, the oldest miracle being recorded for the first time at the end of the 4th century. Not only aimed at Christians, but intended for Jews and Muslims, Jerusalem, like all holy cities and shrines, represents "each and everyone together as the image of the Universe and the Center of the World". (Eliade 2005: 32) These holy places are both places of pilgrimage for believers because, as Eliade states, "the man of premodern societies wants to be as close as possible to the Center of the World" (Eliade 2005: 35), and as sources for the emergence of new holy spaces.

Mircea Eliade states that "the religious man wishes with all his soul to dwell in a 'divine world', to have a house similar to the 'House of the Gods', as it was later imagined through temples and sanctuaries" (Eliade 2005: 53) and believes that this "religious nostalgia" actually mirrors "the desire to live in a pure and holy cosmos, as it was at the beginning of the beginnings, when it came out of the hands of the Creator". (Eliade 2005: 53)

The new sacred spaces are built through rituals that "reproduce the work of the Gods" (Eliade 2005: 25), but, as Mihai Coman suggests, the process of consecrating a place as a sacred "centre" is "intimately linked to the existence and organisational and promotional abilities of a group of officials of magical-religious ceremonies". (Coman 2008: 206)

Alexei Lidov, who defines the creation of sacred spaces as "a special form of human creativity", asserts about the "Holy Fire of Jerusalem" that it is the "main Orthodox miracle" "promising the resurrection from the dead". (Lidov 2009: 291) Lidov points out that in the Middle Ages the Holy Fire of Jerusalem was venerated "as the most important relic that could be preserved and transferred from Jerusalem to any other place" and thus "the divine fire created the space of the New Jerusalem". (Lidov 2009: 281-282)

If we look at the construction of sacred places from a functional perspective, we might say that a seed from a consecrated sacred place is sufficient because, as Durkheim says, in religious thought “the part is worth the whole, has the same power and the same efficiency”; “a fragment of a relic possesses the virtues of an intact relic”. (Durkheim 1995: 212) In this paradigm, “if the virtues conferred are not intrinsic, if they come from the feelings which are recalled and symbolised, although their origin is external, and if, in order to play such an evocative role, he does not need any definite dimension, he will have that same value, whether fragment or whole. And as the part recalls the whole, it evokes the feelings that the whole determines”. (Durkheim 1995:)

The Modern Orthodox practice of spreading “divine substance”, the Holy Light of Jerusalem, reflects, according to Lidov, the “great mediaeval tradition” and has become “ideally a source of light for all the lights of Christian churches, which thus sanctified and mystically connected the spaces of the ‘New Jerusalem’ with the original source”, both in heaven and on Earth. (Lidov 2009: 285) At the same time, the author claims that the “miracle of Holy Fire” influences the “formation of sacred spaces”. (Lidov 2009: 292)

The Holy Light played the most important role in the creation of sacred spaces that embodied the image of the ‘New Jerusalem’ throughout the Christian world. (Lidov 2009: 292)

In the contemporary world, the attraction to the holy places “is enhanced” by bringing to the fore “their historical prestige” and religious practices through media coverage: “services at the holy places are broadcast live on television and radio, print media reproduces exciting moments, documentary films provide images and arguments that motivate pilgrims to head to the religious centres still unexplored (...). The religious universe permanently produces other miracles and generates the emergence of new pilgrimage centres.”. (Coman 2008: 207-208)

The custom of lighting a lamp and bringing it to the community is “one of the oldest elements of evening worship in the Christian tradition”, which originated in the Jewish tradition, according to Russian theologian Aleksei Pentkovsky. (2013: 203)

He quotes written testimonies of pilgrims from 381-384, which show that the original source of the fire was not external, but “the lamp which cannot be put out, on the Holy Sepulcher was the source of fire for lighting a lamp at every evening service in the Church of the Resurrection”. (Pentkovsky 2013: 203-204)

Pentkovsky mentions that the first information about the miraculous lighting of light in lamps at the Holy Sepulcher on Holy Saturday appears in non-liturgical sources, both Christian and non-Christian, from the years 870-1000. “The miraculous ‘apparition of light’ was not associated with any worship of the daily cycle and took place around noon, that is, after the end of Matins and before the beginning of Vespers. (Pentkovsky 2013: 207). The author noted the emergence of specific terms associated with the ignition of Light: “Light”, “Divine Light”, “New and Heavenly Light” and “Holy Light”, the latter being the

most widespread since the 11th century. In the 12th century, under the Crusaders, the Latin term “Holy fire” was used in Jerusalem, and in the second half of the 19th century, “blessed fire”. (Pentkovsky 2013: 213)

1.2. Building the tradition

Most theoretical approaches to the notion of “tradition”, especially regarding the ritual activities, refer to continuity and change. Author Catherine Bell (2009) points out that some things “remain consistent enough over time to give people a sense of continuity with what is thought to be precedent”, but at the same time traditions change “structurally, detail and interpretation”, even if the changes are not always fully recognized by those who experience them. (Bell 2009: 118)

In the author’s opinion, tradition exists because “it is constantly produced and reproduced, tailored to a clear profile and shaped to absorb the revitalising elements”, a combination of continuity with change. (Bell 2009: 123)

Tradition involves ritual and ritualization, the prestige of tradition being in the “fixity of the structure of the ritual”, a prestige which in turn “gives tradition its power”. (Bell 2009: 120) Under certain circumstances, however, according to Catherine Bell, a “stray element” can enter ritualised acts and environments and can remain part of the rite forever, with the mention that “the appropriation of any profane element that enters the realms of the sacred, no matter how accidental, are not particularly common for most ritual traditions”. (Bell 2009: 120)

What characterises the organisation of the ritual system are the binary oppositions, three of which are considered by Bell to be predominant: (1) the vertical opposition between the upper and lower, which generates hierarchical structures; (2) the horizontal opposition between *here* and *there*, or *us* and *them*, which generates lateral or relatively egalitarian relations; and (3) the opposition between central and local, which frequently incorporates and dominates previous oppositions. (Bell 2009: 125)

The higher positions are temporarily occupied “by those who own the most valuable items”. Bell considers ritualization to be “a strategic arena for the embodiment of power relations”. (Bell 2009: 170) It shows that in some ritual systems, central rites were built from local rites, and in others, local rites were built from the simplification of central ones, which highlights the role of ritual in building the centre and periphery. (Bell 2009: 129)

Another important dimension of the constructed tradition refers to the delimitation of the group’s identity, which is based both on “generating a common consensus on an authoritarian past” and on “a set of distinctions, seen as rooted in the past, which differentiates this group from other groups”. (Bell 2009: 121)

Thus, building tradition or traditionalizing “can effectively maximise a high-profile identity for a group” and can also “challenge and renegotiate the very basis of tradition to the point of changing much of what has been seen as previously fixed or by other groups”. The attempt to create new rituals considered more appropriate symbolically and representative involves “renegotiating a repertoire of recognized ways of acting ritually”. (Bell 2009: 123-124)

1.3. Discussions

In Romania, the theme of bringing the Holy Light from Jerusalem was not a concern for the Orthodox Church, nor did the Romanian media show a major interest in the event itself, until 2009. Then the subject came to public attention after the politician Gheorghe Flutur announced in the local press in Suceava the intention of bringing the Holy Light “directly from the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem” during the celebration of the Resurrection: „Light in Bukovina”, part of a larger program, “Easter in Bukovina”. (*Monitorul de Suceava*, February 6, 2009)

The exceptionalism of Suceava and Bukovina is a recurring theme in the discourse of politicians and religious leaders, the term being associated with the province as part of an empire and not with foreign occupation, although Bukovina has a distinct identity from Moldavia since 1774, when the area was annexed to the Habsburg Empire. In the centre of this construction is the Putna Monastery and the Tomb of Voivode Stephen the Great, seen as a defender of Christendom and with the attributes of the Saviour: “Christ succeeded with the Golden Letter of truth and love; Stephen, with the flaming sword of truth. One was freedom, the other the defender of its gospel” (Serbarea 2021: 7); „Stephen the Great is the first national hero. (...) The search of his tomb should be the Mecca of every Romanian”. (Serbarea 2021: 35)

Contemporary religious literature mentions that, at the Putna celebration, the poet Mihai Eminescu allegedly said about the monastery where the ruler’s tomb is located, that it is “the Jerusalem of the Romanian people”, but we did not find the documentary attestation of this statement.

“Holy Bukovina”, “the Jerusalem of the Romanian people” are part of the common repertoire, of the collective social memory in the northern part of Romania. In this context, the representations in the local press about bringing the light from Jerusalem were circumscribed in the same register and there were no negative reactions to the ‘phagocytic’ of a religious ritual by the politician and orienting it “in the direction of the creation and establishing political order”. (Coman 2008: 246)

By bringing the Holy Light by plane to Suceava, the liturgical microcosm from the church space was moved to the airport. In the first scenario announced by the politician Flutur in February 2009, he was to go to Jerusalem with the abbot of the Putna Monastery and an Exarch priest, and upon returning to Suceava at the airport they would have been expected by a council of priests. A religious service was to be held in the airport space, after which the representatives of churches and monasteries and the parishioners present could light their candles from the light brought from Jerusalem.

Faced with the “risk” of parishioners getting light from a politician and not from priests, according to the consecrated ritual, a few days before Easter, the Archdiocese of Suceava and Radauti said that parishioners and ordinary priests will not be able to get light at the airport. The local religious authority announced that the ritual will be as follows: The Holy Light will be deposited at the “Holy Resurrection” Church in Suceava; the first to receive the light will be the archpriests, the abbots and the abbesses of the monasteries in the county;

only from them will the parish priests receive light, who will share it with the faithful, at 24:00, on the Night of the Resurrection, “not before the previously mentioned moment”. (*Monitorul de Suceava*, April 7, 2009)

The interference of politics in a ritual of a religious holiday was seen as inappropriate at the highest level of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Two days before Easter, the Patriarchate’s news agency headlined that “at Easter, the Holy Light from Jerusalem will be brought to Bucharest” by a delegation from the Patriarchate. (*Basilica*, April 16, 2009)

The action of the Patriarch falls within what Mihai Coman called “ritual mastery”, when “ritualization is not only a mechanism that creates specific differences (such as those between current practices and those with symbolic significance), but also one that can be used in battles to gain and impose power, because it generates hierarchies and defines the hegemonic order”. (Coman 2003, *apud* Coman 2008: 66). The author states that “at the end of the ritualization process there is a special form of social control”. (Coman 2003, *apud* Coman 2008: 66)

From the moment when the Patriarchate announced that it would send a delegation to Jerusalem to bring the Holy Light, a competition was launched between the two Light providers to win the validation of sacredness from the public, a competition covered rather differently, than similarly, by the local and national media. Through positive representations, the local press gave Flutur the “right” to bring the Light from Jerusalem and share it with the faithful.

The local news site *News Bucovina* reported that “President of the Suceava County Council, Gheorghe Flutur, is going to Jerusalem to bring the Holy Light” (April 15, 2009); “the Holy Light from Jerusalem reached Suceava and from here throughout Bukovina”, “brought by the President of the Suceava County Council, Gheorghe Flutur together with the abbot of the Putna Monastery, Velnic Melchisedec”.

In Suceava, the light was brought with the “Lamp of David”, “a special lantern for the transport of light from Jerusalem”. While he got off the plane, Flutur, with a traditional bag from Bukovina, carried in his hand “David’s lantern” and a bunch of 33 candles, just like the priests who officiate the resurrection service. The name given to the lantern refers to King David of Jerusalem, from whom Jesus would also descend, according to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The 33 candles symbolise the age of Jesus at the time of the crucifixion.

Although according to the protocol established by the Archdiocese of Suceava the light should not have been shared at the airport, the images from that time show that the priests themselves took the light from Flutur.

At the airport a council of priests officiated a short service, after which the abbot of Putna Monastery, Velnic Melchisedec, distributed the Holy Light to the representatives of the dioceses from Constanta, Iasi, and Maramures who came to the airport in Suceava, especially for this moment. The Holy Light was then taken by the President of the Suceava County Council to the Church of Resurrection in Suceava, where it was shared by the Archbishop of Suceava and Radauti, His Eminence Pimen Suceveanul, to parishes and monasteries, so that at midnight in all parishes in the county to be handed to the faithful. (*News Bucovina*, April 18, 2009)



**Photo 1: the abbot of the Putna Monastery, Vlenic Melchisedec and the president of the Suceava County Council, Gheorghe Flutur, April 18, 2009.
(Source: *Monitorul de Suceava*)**



**Photo 2: at Suceava Airport, priests take light from Gheorghe Flutur.
(Source: *Monitorul de Suceava*)**



**Photo 3: a religious service was held at the airport in Suceava. In the image, the mayor of Suceava, Ion Lungu, the abbot of the Putna Monastery, Vlenic Melchisedec, and the President of the Suceava County Council, Gheorghe Flutur.
(Source: *Monitorul de Suceava*)**

In the local media, the political leader is at the forefront, he is “the one who brings the light from Jerusalem” and takes it to the church to hand it over to the local Archbishop. The abbot of Putna and the Archbishop are rather represented as dispatchers of light, with a secondary role in a ritual of an eminently religious celebration. The only voice quoted is of the political leader, who describes the action as “emotional”. (*News Bucovina*, April 18, 2009)

The same site, in an opinion article entitled *Christ Is Risen!*, emphasises the “special moment” for the public at the airport and “for those who had the idea of bringing it (the light) to Suceava”. Flutur was “truly transposed”, “distracted and eager to share his experience with others”, and called the two priests “fellow travellers”, the ones who were with him on the mission in Jerusalem “. (*News Bucovina*, April 18, 2009)

For the journalist, bringing light maximises Bukovina’s identity; it is equivalent to a declaration of independence of the province from Bucharest and an opportunity for the locals to be proud that they are from “Suceava and Bukovina”:

Bringing the Holy Fire to Suceava made me feel good”. It is the first time when Suceava did not have to <worship> those from Bucharest to receive anything. We were no longer <the ones where the map hangs>. Gheorghe Flutur made an <arrogance > and allowed himself, together with the Archdiocese of Suceava and Radauti, to be the equal to those in Bucharest. I don’t know how much it will cost Flutur to be equal to the <capitalists> but I know that I felt proud for a few seconds that I was from Suceava and Bukovina. After all, the Light of the Resurrection night is worth it, and many will probably be glad to know that what burned in Jerusalem in front of thousands of priests will be in their homes, too. (*News Bucovina*, April 18, 2009)

The media discourse of the central press focused on the confrontation between the two entities bringing light: political power and religious power, and on the costs of bringing light to Romania. The titles of the articles are edifying: “the Holy Light from Jerusalem has reached Bukovina” (*Ziare.Com*, April 19, 2009); “who gave his income for a year so that the Holy Light could reach Romania faster than the plane of the Patriarchate” (*HotNews*, April 21, 2009); “the Patriarchate States: the Holy Fire is brought only by us” (*Ziare.Com*, April 23, 2009); “the war of the Holy Fire: the Patriarchate and PD party member Gheorghe Flutur argued which is the holiest light brought from Jerusalem” (*Realitatea.Net*, April 21, 2009); “priests playing with fire” (*Ziare.Com*, April 22, 2009); “Patriarch Daniel and Flutur ‘fought’ on the light” (*Ziare.Com*, April 21, 2009).

The journalists pointed out that other churches in the country also took the light from the flame brought to Bukovina and mentioned Constanta, where the reception ritual also took place at the airport and was performed by the Archbishop of Tomis and the Minister of Tourism. If in Suceava the Resurrection services were performed at churches, in Constanta the service was held at the seaside, on the beach. (*Ziare.Com*, April 19, 2009)

The costs of bringing the light from Jerusalem and the political side of the event were also addressed by the press.

HotNews wrote that “in order to bring the Holy Light a few hours before the Patriarchate “ a parliamentarian from Suceava paid 22 thousand euros, the cost of traveling to Jerusalem. “The PSD members led by the mayor Radu Mazăre and the Ministry of Tourism led by Elena Udrea also clung to the Holy Light brought on the PDL deputy’s money. They sent a separate plane, paid for by the Ministry of Tourism, to transport the Holy Light from Suceava to Constanta”.

An important factor in validating the light brought by Flutur is that the president of Romania, since that time, spent Easter in Bukovina and described Flutur’s initiative as “extraordinary”. (*HotNews*, April 21, 2009)

The press has shown that, although both the Patriarchate and the political power have publicly rejected the idea that there is a conflict over light, in reality this is not the case.

Ex. 1: The Patriarchate States: the Holy Fire is brought only by us/ After Gheorghe Flutur became the bearer of the holy light from Jerusalem and thus two “sacred” torches arrived on the Romanian territory, the Patriarchate requested that, in the future, such actions to be done only with the consent of the BOR management. (*Ziare.Com*, April 23, 2009)

Ex.2: Holy Light war: Patriarchate and PD MP Gheorghe Flutur argued which is the holiest light brought from Jerusalem/ The war of the Holy Light in Romania, between the church and the political world. For the first time, the Romanian believers received the holy light of resurrection directly from Jerusalem, the Patriarchate said that the flame brought by Gheorghe Flutur was not consecrated by His Eminence Daniel and, therefore, the good light would be the one brought by the Church. In his turn, Flutur claimed that he is the one who brought the first Holy Light to Romania. (*Realitatea.Net*, April 21, 2009)

Ex.3: Patriarch Daniel and Flutur ‘fought’ for the light/ A delegation of the Patriarchate, led by Bishop Varsanufie Prahoveanul, left for Jerusalem on Saturday with the mission to officially bring the Light for the first time, which miraculously lights up on Holy Saturday at the Holy Sepulcher, at 14.00.(...) In order to be spared from the torment of road traffic, the priests sought the help of the traffic police, but were refused. ‘We received a request from the Patriarchate to provide them with a companion, but we refused them. It may be the Holy Light, but the law does not allow me to give a companion for the Holy Light’, Chief Commissioner Lucian Dinita, head of the Traffic Police, told *Cotidianul* newspaper. An operation separate from the mission organised by Patriarch Daniel triggered the Archbishop of Suceava, IPS Pimen. (...) ‘Everything costs 20,700 euros, including David’s lamp (the special lantern carrying the fire from Jerusalem - Ed.). We wanted to be the first to bring the Holy Fire to Romania’, Flutur explained. Priest Stoica, however, pointed out that the light brought by the Patriarchate delegation is the only one officially brought, the one blessed by IPS Pimen being unofficially introduced into the country. (*Ziare.Com*, April 21, 2009)

Ex. 4: Priests playing with fire/ On the occasion of the Easter holidays, the Romanian Patriarchate entered into direct competition with the Archdiocese of Suceava, in the marathon of bringing the Light from Jerusalem to the Romanian land. (...) Both institutions brought arguments in favour of their own Light, each showing that one is more justified than the other in the act of spreading the Light, each investing money, resources and people to make the journey to Jerusalem and back. (...) If you look from the perspective of the Flame brought from Jerusalem, with all its religious significance and all the tradition that accompanies it, the high prelates of Romania look like pygmies who are literally playing with fire. The Light of the Flame casts at best funny shadows

from the twisted movements of the prelates through heaven and on Earth, by various means of transportation. On the other hand, if you look at it from the perspective of hierarchs, the whole discussion becomes one of legal detail, of primacy in the holy place, of priority before God by virtue of the function held and the garment that represents the office. It turns, that is, into a problem of hypocrisy, of petty hypocrisy of some officials in the pursuit of public sympathy and institutional records. The Flame of Jerusalem remains only as a random object of competition, which could be replaced at any time by anything else: the number of believers, for example, or the Saints painted in churches. (*Ziare.Com*, April 22, 2009)

II. Religion & media events

II.1. Features of media events

The transfer of the Holy Fire from Jerusalem to other spaces has, in addition to the theological and political dimension, the character of a media event. The defining characteristics associated with media events are, according to Elihu Katz (1980), that, first of all, they are live events. Second, there are events that are not usually initiated by the media; the organiser can also be a political leader. Third, “the element of high drama or high ritual is essential: the process must be loaded with emotions or symbols, and the result must be full of consequences”. (Katz 1980) Also, such events are „neither spontaneous nor unexpected”, but „must be planned in advance”; they are framed in time and space, and each such event “has a hero”. (Katz 1980)

Katz states that it is useful to think of media events as “great feasts” because „they have a sacred air, a reverential character that differs both from the everyday world of public affairs and the minor feasts of daily conflict or merriment” and “as if trying to tell us something about human nobility and the unity of society”. (Katz 1980)

From the point of view of the media event typology, Katz identifies three distinct forms: 1. heroic mission; 2. the occasion of state, but only when it „marks the beginning or end of an era”, when there is „a feeling of a new beginning”; 3. competition/ contestation, “but only when the confrontation has an important symbolic meaning”. On such occasions, “people identify with the heroes and celebrate them and their achievements”, emotionality being the “central effect”.

The author emphasizes that “the media has much to gain from the magic of its own presentation of events”, “legitimacy, power, glory” going to the press „in fulfilling its role”. (Katz 1980)

Starting from the media events model proposed by D. Dayan and E. Katz, Coman states that some events become major events, “by a double packing”: in ceremonial forms “due to the political intention of those who plan them” and in media event form “due to the expressive intentions of journalists”. “In this way, the status of media events appears as the result of the meeting of two projects (involving a certain manipulative intention), conceived and implemented by two large categories of actors: the political class and the journalistic guild”. (Coman 2011: 22)

The media thus assumes the role of “creating and legitimising meanings, hitherto difficult to accept on a large scale in a society” and becomes “an

instrument of social change”, which “takes over the functions, the way of meaning and, even, the structures of some families of rites – those of passage or transformation”, which create “liminal intervals, of reflection and acceptance of change”. (Coman 2011: 24)

II.2. Discussions

The lighting of the Graceful Light at the Holy Sepulcher, despite its repetitive character, qualifies for classification as a media event. The transfer of the Light from Jerusalem to the Christian-Orthodox countries can be either a media event or just news.

For example, in Russia, one of the first Orthodox countries to introduce this ritual, authors such as Alexander Musin, doctor of historical sciences at the Russian Academy of Sciences, and Alexander Dedyukhin, priest of the canonical Orthodox Church of Ukraine, quoted by the Russian news agency Znak, refer to the media involvement in the event. Musin stated that by the end of the 19th century, “the myth of the Holy Fire was not widespread”, that by 1970 there was „no such massive agitation in the Russian Church”, and there was not “so many political, mercantile speculations” around a liturgical rite turned “into a pseudo miracle”. (Znak 2019) “Probably, the interest and the unhealthy love for the blessed fire are related to the fact that an era of stagnation came, and the human soul asked for something wonderful. And then, in the 90s, unscrupulous shepherds and politicians, businessmen who use it, decided to take advantage of it. This gives rise to a type of Orthodox piety that has nothing to do with the true Christian tradition, there is a degeneration of Orthodox spirituality, and this is the worst thing that is associated with this pseudo-miracle, with the myth of the supernatural origin of the Blessed fire”, said Musin. (Znak 2019)

In the same register, the priest Dedyukhin showed that, if until 2002 the Light was lit on the Holy Sepulcher at different times of the day, pilgrims waiting “for hours or even all day”, since 2002 the Russian television channel NTV became the first television company in the world to buy the rights to broadcast live from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, “and since then the ‘Blessed Fire’ has always been broadcast live on NTV”. “Either in the news or in a special issue, but not later than 15:00, Jerusalem time, because at 17:00 a pre-ordered plane leaves Ben Gurion Airport for Moscow. ‘The Holy Fire’ cannot come down later, because then it will not be on time for the plane. And the money has already been paid for it”. (Znak 2019) The same source states that in 2018 the audience of for broadcasting the Holy Light doubled and that “over 190 million people found out about this event from the media”.

In Romania, bringing the light from Jerusalem in 2009 met the necessary conditions for a media event.

The journalists sent by the newsrooms to the spot reported that “the specially rented plane landed with the Holy Light at the Henri Coanda airport in Bucharest, at 18.30. The sacred fire was brought right from the Tomb of Jesus Christ, by a council of priests led by Bishop Varsanufie Prahoveanul”; “On Saturday evening, at 20:30, the plane with which the abbot of Putna Monastery, Velnic Melchisedec, and the president of the Suceava County Council, Gheorghe

Flutur, brought the Holy Light from Jerusalem, landed in Suceava”. (*Pro TV*, April 18, 2009)

The *Pro TV* television station and the local televisions broadcast live the event both from Suceava, as well as from Bucharest and from other areas of the country: “the presidential family took the Holy Light from the Humor Monastery”. “The Holy Sacrament of the Resurrection was received with piety at the monasteries of splendid Bukovina”; “the gift of the Easter Patriarchate: the Holy Light from the Tomb of Jesus”, “magic night in Constanta! Believers have received the Light from the sea!”. (*Pro TV*, April 18, 2009)

The light-bringing event was a planned one, framed in time and space - on the evening of April 18, 2009, at the airports in Suceava and Bucharest, then in the Orthodox churches in the country. The heroes of the event were politician Gheorghe Flutur and Patriarch Daniel, the competition between them having both drama and ritual significance. Also, bringing the Light from Jerusalem to Romania has the force of a social norm “that makes viewing mandatory”. (Katz 1980) The Light from the Patriarchate was distributed to the churches in Bucharest and Ilfov, and the one from Suceava, in the counties of Moldavia and Constanta.

Since 2010, only the Patriarchate has brought Light from Jerusalem to Romania. In 2010, 2011 and 2012, Gheorghe Flutur was also part of the delegation. Since 2015, the television channel of the Patriarchate, *Trinitas*, broadcasts live both the lighting of the fire at the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem and its bringing to Romania.

The ritual of bringing light was not interrupted even by the Covid-19 pandemic and the strict rules of travel, from 2020-2021.

A noteworthy aspect is that, until 2019, in the news regarding the bringing of Light from Jerusalem, the *Basilica* news agency of the Romanian Patriarchate included this paragraph: “the tradition was established by His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel in 2009. Since then, every year, a delegation of the Romanian Patriarchate participates in the ceremony at the Tomb of the Lord and brings the Holy Light to Romania”. (*Basilica*, April 15, 2019)

In 2020, in the agency’s communiqué “the establishment of tradition” was moved a year earlier, as if to forget any association with Gheorghe Flutur’s action, for the first time in 2009: “the delegation of the Romanian Patriarchate received the Holy Light that will arrive on Saturday night in all parishes in the country, thus continuing the tradition started in 2008, even if the distribution will be made under special conditions”. (*Basilica*, April 18, 2020)



Photo 4. Bringing the Holy Light to Romania, 2020. (Source: *Basilica*)

In 2021, in the news regarding the bringing of light, there was no reference to “tradition”: „the Holy Light will be brought from Jerusalem to our country, on the evening of May 1, 2021, by Archimandrite Father Teofil Anastasoae, the Superior of the Romanian Patriarchate’s settlements at the Holy Places. The Holy Light will be offered to the delegates of the dioceses of the Romanian Patriarchate at the Otopeni International Airport”. (*Basilica*, May 1, 2021)

Conclusions

The media played a significant role in shaping and directing public opinion towards the event of bringing the light from Jerusalem to Romania in 2009. In the local press in Suceava the dominant theme was Bukovina’s exceptionalism, which gave a sense of separation or distance between Bukovina and the rest of the country. Bukovina was presented both as an identity space with a special spiritual charge, a sacred space, but also as an actor who can play an important role at national level, even beyond Romania’s borders.

In the central press, the dominant concept of news about the event was the conflict, in the sense of clash of interests and misunderstandings between political power and religious authority.

The religious ritual has stability over time, but under political and / or commercial pressures it can change. No matter where the pressure for change is exerted, the religious power claims its authority to officiate the rite.

Bringing the light from Jerusalem met media event characteristics only in 2009, later it had the character of a regular news.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bell 2009: C. Bell, *Ritual, theory, ritual practice*, New York, Oxford University Press.
Coman 2011: Mihai Coman, *Media events – o paradigmă la granița dintre antropologie și științele comunicării*, in Mihai Coman (Eds.), *Media Events– perspective teoretice și studii de caz*, Bucharest, Bucharest University Press.
Coman 2008: M. Coman, *Introducere în antropologia culturală. Mitul și ritul*, Iași, Polirom.

- Durkheim 1995: E. Durkheim, *Formele elementare ale vieții religioase*, Iași, Polirom.
- Eliade 2005: M. Eliade, *Sacrul și profanul*, Bucharest, Humanitas.
- Katz 1980: E. Katz, "Media Events: The Sense of Occasion. Studies", in "Visual Communication", 6 (3), Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania, 1980, p. 84-89, available online: https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1271&context=asc_papers, accessed on January 2, 2022.
- Lidov 2009: A. Lidov, *The Holy Fire. Hierotopical and art-historical aspects of the creation of "New Jerusalem"*, in Aleksej M. Lidov, (Eds.), *Novye Ierusalimy: Ierotropija i ikonografija sakral'nych prostranstv*, Moskva, ART-Dok, pp. 277-312 (original in Russian: А. Лидов, 2009, *Святой Огонь. Иеротопические и искусствоведческие аспекты создания «Новых Иерусалимов»*)
- Pentkovski 2013: A. Pentkovski, "Holy Light" and Lighting of Fire on Holy Saturday in Jerusalem, in Aleksej Lidov (Eds.), *Hierotopy of Light and Fire in the byzantine world* Moskva, ООО Феория, pp. 201-217 (original in Russian: А.М. Пентковский, 2013, «Святой Свет» и возжжение огня в Великую Субботу в Иерусалиме)
- Serbarea 2021: *Serbarea de la Putna, 1871. Publicistică, documente, amintiri*, 2021, available online: <https://www.centrulstefancelmare.ro/ro/serbarea-de-la-putna-1871-publicistica-documente-amintiri-p45.html>, accessed on January 10, 2022.
- Znak 2019: *Znak*, 26 aprilie 2019, «Бог творит чудеса, но не на потеху людям». *Otkuda beretsya blagodatnyy ogon'?* *Mneniya veruyushchikh i skeptikov* (original in Russian: «Бог творит чудеса, но не на потеху людям». Откуда берется благодатный огонь? Мнения верующих и скептиков), available online: https://www.znak.com/2019-04-26/otkuda_beretsya_blagodatnyy_ogon_mneniya_veruyuchih_i_skeptikov, accessed on January 10, 2022.

Corpus:

2009:

- <https://www.monitorulsv.ro/Local/2009-02-06/De-Paste-sucevenii-vor-avea-lumina-sfanta-de-la-Ierusalim>, De Paste, sucevenii vor avea lumină sfântă de la Ierusalim, 6 februarie 2009
- <https://www.monitorulsv.ro/Ultima-ora-local/2009-04-07/Lumina-Sfanta-de-la-Ierusalim-impartita-pe-protopopiate>, În noaptea Învierii/ Lumina Sfântă de la Ierusalim, împărțită pe protopopiate, 7 aprilie 2009
- <https://www.newsbucovina.ro/actualitate/25658/pre-edintele-cj-suceava-gheorghe-flutur-pleaca-la-ierusalim-pentru-a-aduce-lumina-sfanta>, Președintele CJ Suceava, Gheorghe Flutur, pleacă la Ierusalim să aducă Lumina Sfântă, News Bucovina, 15 aprilie 2009
- <https://www.newsbucovina.ro/no-comment/25715/lumina-sfanta-de-la-ierusalim-a-ajuns-la-suceava>, Lumina Sfântă de la Ierusalim a ajuns la Suceava și de aici în toată Bucovina, News Bucovina, 18 aprilie 2009
- <https://www.newsbucovina.ro/editoriale/25716/hristos-a-inviat>, Hristos a Înviat!., News Bucovina, 18 aprilie 2009
- <https://basilica.ro/de-sfintele-pasti-lumina-sfanta-de-la-ierusalim-va-fi-adusa-la-bucuresti/>, De Sfintele Paști, Lumina Sfântă de la Ierusalim va fi adusă la București, 16 aprilie 2009
- <https://basilica.ro/preafericitul-parinte-patriarh-daniel-va-oferi-clerului-si-credinciosilor-prezenti-la-catedrala-patriarhala-lumina-sfanta-adusa-de-la-biserica-sfantului-mormant-din-ierusalim/>, Preafericitul părinte patriarh Daniel va oferi clerului și credincioșilor prezenți la Catedrala patriarhală Lumina Sfântă adusă de la Biserica Sfântului Mormânt din Ierusalim, 17 aprilie 2009
- <https://basilica.ro/comunicat-de-presa-lumina-sfanta-trebuie-sa-fie-izvor-de-pace-si-bucurie-nu-prilej-de-tulburare/>, Lumina Sfântă trebuie să fie izvor de pace și bucurie, nu prilej de tulburare, 23 aprilie 2009
- <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/eveniment/familia-prezidentiala-a-luat-lumina-sfanta-de-la-manastirea-humorului.html>, ProTv: Familia prezidentiala a luat Lumina Sfanta de la Manastirea Humorului, 18 aprilie 2009

<https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/social/cadoul-patriarhiei-de-paste-lumina-sfanta-de-la-mormantul-lui-iisus.html>, Cadoul Patriarhiei de Paste: lumina sfanta, de la mormantul lui Iisus, 18 aprilie 2009

<https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/social/noapte-magica-la-constant-a-credinciosii-au-primit-lumina-din-mare.html>, Noapte magică la Constanța Credinciosii au primit lumina din mare!

<https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/social/noapte-magica-la-constant-a-credinciosii-au-primit-lumina-din-mare.html>, Noapte magica la Constanta! Credinciosii au primit Lumina din mare!, 18 aprilie 2009

<https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-5617987-cine-dat-venitul-lumina-sfanta-ajunga-romania-mai-repede-decat-avionul-patriarhiei.htm>, Cine și-a dat venitul pe un an ca Lumina Sfântă să ajungă în România mai repede decat avionul Patriarhiei, 21 aprilie 2009

https://www.realitatea.net/stiri/ultimele-stiri/razboiul-luminii-sfinte-patriarhia-si-pedelistul-gheorghe-flutur-s-au-certat-care-i-cea-mai-sfanta-lumina-adusa-de-la-ierusalim_5dcc91a1406af85273c9f947, Patriarhia și pedelistul Gheorghe Flutur s-au certat care-i cea mai sfântă lumină adusă de la Ierusalim, 21 aprilie 2009

<https://ziare.com/stiri/frauda/lumina-sfanta-de-la-ierusalim-a-ajuns-in-bucovina-724561>, Lumina Sfântă de la Ierusalim a ajuns în Bucovina, 18 aprilie 2009

<https://ziare.com/stiri/ancheta/patriarhul-daniel-si-flutur-s-au-batut-pe-lumina-725688>, Patriarhul Daniel și Flutur s-au bătut pe lumină, 21 aprilie 2009

<https://ziare.com/politica/stiri-politice/preoti-care-se-joaca-cu-focul-725884>, Preoți care se joacă cu focul, 22 aprilie 2009, Ștefan Brandusescu

<https://m.ziare.com/gheorghe-flutur/patriarhia-precizeaza-lumina-sfanta-o-aducem-doar-noi-728244>, Patriarhia precizează: Lumina sfanta o aducem doar noi! 23 aprilie 2009

2010- 2021:

<https://www.monitorulsv.ro/Local/2010-02-26/Flutur-merge-iar-dupa-Lumina-Sfanta-la-Ierusalim>, De Paște/ Flutur merge iar după Lumina Sfântă la Ierusalim, 26 februarie 2010

<https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-7095309-lumina-sfanta-ierusalim-fost-adusa-bucuresti.htm>, Lumina Sfântă de la ierusalim a fost adusă la București, 3 aprilie 2010

<https://www.svnews.ro/flutur-a-adus-lumina-sfanta-de-la-ierusalim/988/>, Flutur a adus Lumina Sfântă de la Ierusalim, 25 aprilie 2011

<https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-8537768-lumina-sfanta-ierusalim-ajuns-romania.htm>, Lumina Sfântă de la Ierusalim a ajuns în România, 23 aprilie 2011

<https://ziare.com/gheorghe-flutur/consiliul-judetean-suceava/gheorghe-flutur-aduce-si-in-acest-an-lumina-sfanta-de-la-ierusalim-1161582>, Gheorghe Flutur aduce și în acest an Lumina Sfântă de la Ierusalim, 13 aprilie 2012

<https://ziare.com/social/paste/lumina-sfanta-de-la-ierusalim-a-ajuns-in-romania-1233608>, Lumina Sfântă de la Ierusalim a ajuns în România, 4 mai 2013

<https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/evenimente/avionul-care-aduce-lumina-sfanta-in-romania-a-aterizat-la-bucuresti-231942>, Avionul care aduce Lumina Sfântă în România a aterizat la București, 19 aprilie 2014

<https://ziare.com/social/paste/lumina-sfanta-de-la-ierusalim-a-ajuns-in-romania-1357885>, Lumina Sfântă de la Ierusalim a ajuns în România, 11 aprilie 2015

<https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-international-19897268-lumina-sfanta-paste-aprins-ierusalim.htm>, Lumina Sfântă de Paste s-a aprins la Ierusalim, 11 aprilie 2015

<https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-20967984-lumina-sfanta-ierusalim-ajuns-romania-sarbatoarea-invierii-domnului.htm>, Lumina Sfântă de la Ierusalim a ajuns în România la sărbătoarea Învierii Domnului, 30 aprilie 2016

<https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-21717002-lumina-sfanta-ierusalim-fost-adusa-romania.htm>, Lumina Sfântă de la Ierusalim a fost adusă în România, 15 aprilie 2017

<https://basilica.ro/lumina-sfanta-a-ajuns-in-romania-2018/>, Lumina Sfântă a ajuns în România, 7 aprilie 2018

<https://basilica.ro/lumina-sfanta-va-fi-adusa-in-romania-pentru-al-unsprezecelea-an-consecutiv/>, Lumina Sfântă va fi adusă în România pentru al unsprezecelea an consecutiv, 15 aprilie 2019

<https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/video-lumina-sfanta-de-la-ierusalim-a-ajuns-in-romania-conditiile-speciale-in-care-a-fost-luata-1294032>, Lumina Sfântă de la Ierusalim a ajuns în România. Condițiile speciale în care a fost luată, 18 aprilie 2020

<https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/lumina-sfanta-a-ajuns-in-romania-de-la-ierusalim-1515251>, Lumina Sfântă de la Ierusalim a ajuns în România pe Aeroportul Otopeni, 1 mai 2021

