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SERICICULTURE IN ROMANIA BETWEEN TRADITION AND AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE (III) SERICULTURE IN 20TH CENTURY ROMANIA

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Abstract

An industry with tradition in the Romanian area, the sericulture of the 20th century follows a descending route from a boom period in the first half of the century, emphasized and supported during the Communist period, to the loss of interest in its development and expansion. Nowadays, the Romanian sericultural industry is virtually nonexistent, the encouragement, promotion, development and improvement from a technical, scientific and economic standpoint of sericulture and its related branches may be a priority. A policy meant to promote the undisputed qualities of natural silk fibre may lead to the revival of natural silk industry and to the increase of accessibility for the general population, targeting the psycho-physiological aspect of the wearer of silk garment in agreement with the perspectives of sustainable development.

Key words: sericulture, mulberry tree, silkworm, silk production

INTRODUCTION

The development known by sericulture in Romania, from its earliest recorded manifestations and to the early 20th century (Urdea, 2009), define it as an industry with tradition in the matrix of international interest in obtaining the natural silk thread for production of clothing. The evolution of this industry faces major fluctuations during the 20th century. In full swing at the beginning of the century and supported during the Communist period, Romanian sericulture lost the interest of those who were most likely to sustain it so that what was once a tradition for centuries now becomes a forgotten history in a few years.

REFERENCES ON SERICULTURE BETWEEN 1900-1947

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the sericultural industry was still alive in Romania. In 1906, as a result of the program of measures taken by the Zootechnical Service within the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry, Commerce and Public Domains, the sericultural station and mulberry trees nursery was established in Cotroceni and was moved to Băneasa in 1916, changing its name to Băneasa Sericultural Station. By means of this station, imported mulberry trees seedlings and silkworm eggs were distributed for free for the sole purpose of reviving the interest in this branch, an interest lost after the farmers were discouraged by the European pebrine. In the first decade of the twentieth century, they organised experimental growths of small mulberry tree plantations, followed by the microscopic selection of silkworms (Cetățeanu et al., 1988). The high prices after World War I made the women from the villages sow hemp and breed silkworms (Cuvântul, 1922).

In 1937 the Central Sericultural Station, previously known as Băneasa Sericultural Station, became part of the heritage of the Romanian Agricultural Research Institute (I.C.A.R.). They made experiments by rearing silkworms, by increasing silk productivity in worms and they were spinning cocoons to make thread for sale. In the following years research on obtaining a quality thread and increasing worm productivity led to the development of other silkworm rearing centres. Significant quantities of worm eggs were produced around Băneasa, in the centres of Orşova, Cislău, and Cazaci.

SERICULTURE IN THE ECONOMY OF SOCIALIST ROMANIA

Among the branches of socialist economy, sericulture continued to be a profitable industry, being supported by the economic policy of the state. The support of its development in rural area continued the secular sericultural tradition by expanding the mulberry tree plantations needed for silkworm rearing.

A sericultural centre specialised in producing mulberry seedlings was founded in Sacoşul de Jos, Timiş County in 1963. Sericultural concerns aimed not only the production but also the research to genetically improve silkworms (Cetățeanu et al., 1988). The awareness on the results that sericulture could bring to Romanian economy, both in terms of labour and cost of natural silk as an exceptional fibre for the wearer's comfort and the benefits brought to national economy by the export possibilities of this quality fibre, explain the concerns for this branch development.

DISCUSSION

During communism, the main producer of silk cocoons was represented by the individual breeder, yet the silkworm rearing began to expand in agricultural production cooperatives and schools as well. Sericulture was a branch of interest, the mulberry tree being very well acclimatised in Romania. Mulberry trees were cultivated and silkworms were reared in experimental stations, agricultural production cooperatives, schools, cultural centres and organisations for women and in rural households (Cetățeanu et.al., 1988) (Fig.1).

It is worth noticing the emphasis on increasing the production of silk cocoons especially in peasant households subjected to pressure especially in 1987.



last years of Communism in Romania for the production of silk cocoons on activity sectors

Fig. 2 Dynamics planned for silk cocoons, cumulatively, for five-year period of 1986-1990



Fig. 3 Planned dynamics for mulberry trees seedlings for the five-year period of 1986-1990

I represented the plans intended for the sericultural aspects of the fiveyear period of 1986-1990 in Fig. 2 şi Fig. 3, as a result of the data provided by the previously mentioned paper.



In contrast with what had been planned, the real evolution of local production of silkworm cocoons was very different, according to some data provided by some researchers in the field (Ifrim, 1998). The graph in Fig. 4 proves the lack of interest shown after 1989 in a profitable, ethical and especially ecological industry, an industry with a tradition and a favourable ground for development in the Romanian area.

The studied data which I presented in the previous graphs show radically different levels in the production of silkworm cocoons, limiting the comparison of graphs to the years 1986 and 1989. Knowing that during Communism the reports went far beyond the real situation, by comparing the data presented in graphs, the evidence of exaggeration does not leave room for interpretation. Even though the graphs in Fig.1, Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 do not present a real situation, I have considered that such a comparison between a desired, hypothetical situation and a real one is worth mentioning.

The newspaper *Gândul* published in 2007 an article on the last bastion of mulberry tree plantations and of silkworm rearing, Sericarom Society, making a tragic balance of the disaster reached by this industry.

The interest in sericultural industry, and hence in obtaining the silk thread necessary for sericultural industry, has suffered fluctuations worldwide, the decrease in production being the result of the request for artificial and synthetic fibres. We have noticed, however, a slight recovery and an increasing interest in using natural fibres in textile industry, and silk implicitly, in the recent years. (Ifrim, 1998).



Fig. 5 Comparative analysis of the evolution of world consumption, the types of fibres from 1975 to 1990

The world production of cocoons and raw silk between 1999-2001, places Romania at level "0", the world leaders of sericultural production still being China and India (Datta, Mahensh, 2005).

The loss in interest may be interpreted by taking into account the continuous decrease in the price of raw silk in the world in the decade 1990-1999, from \$51 / kg. to \$21,10 / kg. In 2000 there was a slight increase in the price in question to \$22,20 / kg (Curie, 2001).

There have been some attempts to revive sericulture in Romania even after 2000. Such a project, aimed at using all possible resources resulted from sericultural industry and entitled "Sericicultura - de la traditie la biotehnologie de varf in fp7" ("Sericulture - from tradition to leading biotechnology in FP7"), was contracted by CNMP under the leadership of the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Science Cluj-Napoca (http://www.cnmp.ro/ceex/comp3 2006/oferta.php?id=12552), and MADR published on-line an Impact study regarding the sericulture activity at European standards (http://www.madr.ro/pages/cercetare/ps-415-faza-7sem1.pdf), offering a few solutions to recover sericulture in Romania and a mirror of the socio-economic and environmental impact generated by this recovery. The self-assessment report, Sericarom - Research branch, for the period 30.06.2004-30.09.2007, published on-line on the site of the Academy of Agricultural Sciences and Forestry, is a proof of the concern shown by researchers from the area (Romania, Bulgaria) for the recovery of sericultural industry (http://www.asas.ro/RA/Raport SERICAROM.pdf)

CONCLUSIONS

The 7th International Sericultural Congress was organised in Alès in 1948, in order to revive sericulture worldwide, during which the participants decided to create the Permanent Commission of International Sericultural Congresses. In 1955 the International Technical Sericultural Conference, organised in Alès as well, adopted the project by which the commission formed in 1948 was turned into an intergovernmental body, the International Sericultural Commission (ISC), which currently operates in order to relaunch sericulture worldwide and to promote its finished products: textile, electronics, bakery industry, aeronautics, surgery, etc. The objectives stated through the ISC Status aim at encouraging cooperation between Member States for the development, promotion and improvement on technical, scientific and economic level of sericulture and its related industries. On 24 November 2006, José Manuel Barroso, the president of European Commission, signed the Regulation 1744/2006 by which the member countries - among which Romania as well - can benefit from financial support for silkworm rearing. In 1996 the Council of Europe created the European Foundation for the heritage crafts, one of the objectives being to raise general public awareness and to value the handicrafts and artistic profession by the youngsters, as well as their employment potential (European Yearbook, 2000). Romania, a country with tradition both in silkworm rearing with a favourable ground for culture here and also in natural silk processing, may have the chance to develop a prosperous industry, according to all principles of sustainable development.

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