Bulletin of the *Transilvania* University of Braşov Series VIII: Performing Arts • Vol. 15(64) SPECIAL ISSUE – 2022 https://doi.org/10.31926/but.pa.2022.15.64.3.21

The Dobrudjan Traditional Ballad

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Abstract: Among the countless categories of works entitled "ballad", we have structured this paper - for both objective and subjective reasons - around the one which distinctly represents the epic creation to which we are referring, from a certain area of the Romanian territory, i.e., Dobrudja. On the one hand, the subject is too generous in terms of the number and value of the information it entails so as to approach it by referencing a larger area than the one between the Danube and the Black Sea, and on the other hand, as a Dobrudjan, we have naturally considered the references to field recordings, which allowed the creation of collections of texts and the production of melody transcriptions of these pearls of Romanian millenary traditional genre.

Key-words: folklore, tradition, structure, poetic text, melodics.

1. Introduction

The dictionary defines the ballad as "Narration in verse that relates a heroic action, a legend, a historical event, etc.", or as "Musical composition with an epic feature" (DEXI, 2016 p.94). However, the term ballad also appeared in France and Italy where it defined a certain fixed form of the medieval lyric poetry, as well as in England and later in the rest of Europe (the romantic ballad) for lively supernatural stories in verses. From a strictly musical point of view, but which cannot be framed within folklore, the term refers either to "the (vocal) composition with piano accompaniment, typical of the Romantic period, with a slow rhythm and a descriptive epic character", or to "the rhapsodic interpretation of a piece by a soloist accompanied by an orchestra through soft chords", in jazz music. (DEXI, 2016 p. 94)

From archaeological research, as well as from the writings of ancient Greek authors, it is known that since before the 6th century BC, Dobrudja was populated by numerous Getic tribes with a remarkable culture, who preserved throughout the ages their traditional customs with an ancient background, no matter how fundamental/permanent or temporary the historical events have been unfolding

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over the centuries. This last statement refers primarily to the conquest by the Romans, but also to the movements within time and space of various populations for various reasons - or of the migratory tribes from different parts of the world who remained here partially, temporarily, or permanently. It is natural to deduce and understand that the mix of populations over the centuries has led to interferences in current customs, but it is equally easy to deduce, understand and verify that each has preserved 'sacredly', we might say, its own traditional folkloric elements.

Ballads are performed on an epic recitative, on a doina melody or on a folk song melody and rhythmics. The number of verses is often very large, even reaching up to 1,000, narrating events or happenings that shed light on the physical and moral portrait of the characters and revealing the relationships between the heroes and their environment. In terms of subject matter, heroic deeds and acts of bravery predominate.

In order to understand what the traditional Dobrudjan ballad meant and means, we have proposed, in the following, a synthetic analytical presentation of this type of folkloric creation, by grouping the examples collected according to the thematic categories in which they fall, noting in the tables below the titles, the number of verses and the place (village/commune/small town) from which they were collected and making brief comments corresponding to each category, including for the musical examples of transcriptions in the cases where the recordings allowed transcriptions.

2. An analytical and synthetic presentation of the types of ballads

2.1. Supernatural

No.	Titles	No. of lyrics	Origin
1.	The Sun and the Moon	298	Harsova City
2.	The Snake	210	Com. Ciobanu
3.	The Snake	197	Dunareni Village
5.			Alimanu Commune
1	The Snake	248	Dunareni Village
4.			Alimanu Commune
5.	The Snake	57	Gîrliciu Commune
6.	The Snake	138	Niculițel Commune
7.	At the Fountain of Frost	183	Niculițel Commune
8.	Letinel bogat (Letinu bogat)	290	Niculițel Commune

Table 1. Fantasy Ballads

Supernatural ballads are part of the oldest folkloric layer, and they are poetic transpositions of myths, legends, supernatural stories.

In Dobrudja, one of the legends with the greatest value and widest circulation is *Şarpele/The Snake*, with multiple versions, but essentially having the same idea of content and the same pretext: the "curse", a symbol of a tragic end. The cursed serpent or the cursed dragon - present in all ballads of this category, but with different stories, texts and musical interpretations, depending on the area and the performer (bard, rhapsode) - represents the zoomorphisation of all the forces of nature that are hostile to man in his actions and lead to a fatal outcome.

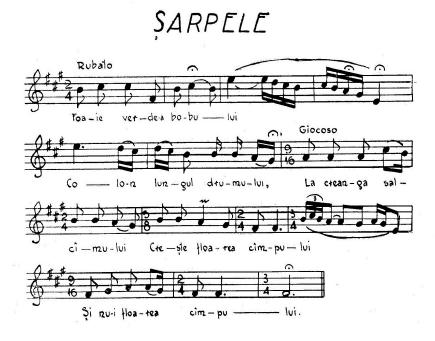


Fig. 1. Dumitru Galavu. From the popular tradition of Dobrudja, p. 165

SARPELE

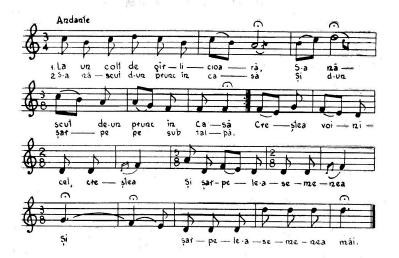


Fig. 2. Dumitru Galavu
From the popular tradition of Dobrudja, p. 165

The two examples of transcriptions are extremely significant in terms of the musical presentation of the ballad: the first one, in Tempo rubato, has a predominantly fluent melodics, with frequent indications of metrical changes from one measure to another in order to ensure that the narration has the fluency desired by the performer, with flourishings typical of the doina; the second one has the character of a song, with a steady tempo indication - Andante - with little metrical variability and uniform rhythmics, with the structure of a couplet - constructed in the high area of the Dorian mode on *D* - and a refrain, with the melodics in the lower half of the mode, except for the sounds marking the ending. The ornaments are few and in the form of brief slides of the voice at the attack or end of a few sounds, infusing those moments with a character close to the spoken one.

2.2. Heroic

Nr. Crt.	Titles	No. of lyrics	Origin
1.	At the Plough (Gruia)	152	Pecineaga Commune
2.	At the Plough	182	Valea Teilor Village Izvoarele Commune
3.	Gruia	156	Trestinic Village Nalbant Commune
4.	Novac's Vochita	802	Trestinic Village Nalbant Commune
5.	The Kidnapped Son	190	Trestinic Village Nalbant Commune
6.	Nita	201	Trestinic Village Nalbant Commune
7.	Brave Marc	242	Niculitel Commune
8.	Outlaw Miu	186	Dunareni Village Alimanu Commune

Table 2. Heroic Ballads

MARCU VITEAZU



Fig. 3. Dumitru Galavu From the popular tradition of Dobrudja, p. 168

Among the heroic ballads, the only transcription that could be carried out was Marcu Viteazu/Mark the Brave (the example above), the other collected ballads being presented by rhapsodes as epic recitatives. The characteristics of the above example are those of a song. The tempo – allegro– is indicated for the entire performance, the ambitus/range is an octave, the melodics is simple, with some slightly varied motifs' repetitions, but without ornaments; the metrics, although it shows changes, does not disturb the fluidity of the melody at all; however, depending on the text, it brings the sung interpretation closer to the narration of the facts described by the song.

The characters most often encountered in this category of ballads are Baba Novac/Starina Novak (one of the closest collaborators of Mihai Viteazul/Michael the Brave in the fight against the Ottomans) and his sons, Gruia and Vochita, with descriptions of impressive battles, cavalcades, kidnappings, etc. in which the three folk heroes are involved (in fact, the folk rhapsode dedicated the ballad with the largest number of verses, i.e., 802, to Novac's Vochita).

2.3. Historical

Nr. Crt.	Titles	No. of lyrics	Origin
1.	Negru Vodă	43	Saraiu Commune
2.	Burcel's Mound	132	Saraiu Commune
3.	Petru Maje	63	Saraiu Commune
4.	Tudor	123	Agighiol Village Valea Nucărilor Commune

Table 3. Historical Ballads

During the period in which the heroic ballads were made, the folk creators also created historical ballads, having at the center of the action the rulers (as "main" characters) and describing through verses events or facts from everyday life. Unfortunately, none of the four ballads collected and listed in the table benefits from a melodic transcription, their presentation being made by the rhapsodes from Saraiu and Agighiol in epic recitative.

2.4. Social

Nr. Crt.	Titles	No. of lyrics	Origin
1.	Strong Foreigner	73	Dunăreni Village
2.	The stranger	104	Niculitel Commune

Table 4. Social Ballads

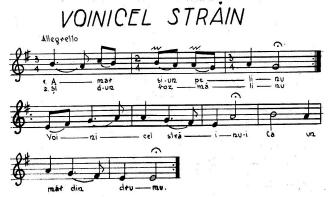


Fig. 4. Dumitru Galavu
From the popular tradition of Dobrudja, p. 169

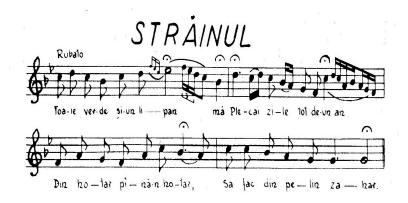


Fig. 5. Dumitru Galavu
From the popular tradition of Dobrudja, p. 169

The difficult life, troubles, bitterness led many to take the path of wandering, making them bear the pain of alienation from their beloved and those like them and to feel more deeply the social differences, through the inhumane, even aggressive treatment from the rich. In both examples, wandering through foreign countries proves to be so hard to bear that the "heroes" want nothing more than to return to their country: "Take me from the foreign country, / Take me to the Romanian homeland!"

"Voinicel străin/The Brave Stranger" has an Allegretto song structure with a six-measure couplet, made by repeating the first three, each with a different meter indication. The chorus, also made up of six measures but in an ambitus of fifths/quint, also built with a single type of descending cells of two sounds each, is overall an "arched", extremely expressive phrase.

"The stranger", from which the first four sung verses are transcribed, has an interesting structure. The tempo is Rubato, thus the interpretation is of the doina type, this character being evident also through the highly ornamented melodic writing of the first two measures covering an octave range; moreover, the two closing measures - on a fifth range, with equal values (only the syllables at the end of the verse are longer) – convey a conclusive character to the previous section.

2.5. Pastoral

Nr.	Titles	No. of	Origin
Crt.		lyrics	
1.	Miorita	135	Nalbant Commune
2.	Macovei	160	Dăeni Commune

Table 5. Pastoral Ballads

From the studies and writings carried out over time, it is known that in our area, shepherding and agriculture constituted the basic occupations of the inhabitants over the course of approximately two millennia. It was, we could say, impossible for shepherding not to find its place as a subject in the thousand-year-old Dobrudjan ballad. Unfortunately, however, we have no examples of either of the two mentioned in the table. Nevertheless, let us not forget that research over time has led to the inventory of over 1,600 versions of *Mioriţa*; even if the number is exaggerated, the real number would still be impressively large for someone to take the trouble to pick one, two or three to analyze and present to those interested in

seeing, reading, singing them. As for the *Macovei* ballad, having "revenge" as its thematic pretext, the whole action takes place in the pastoral env"ronment" which is why the ballad was included in this category.

2.6. Outlaw

Nr.	Titles	No. of	Origin
Crt.		lyrics	
1.	Outlaw Miu	432	Scărișoreanu Commune
2.	Ghiță Cătănuță	291	Scărișoreanu Commune
3.	Vidruta	203	Izvoarele Commune
4.	On the Hillside	75	Crucea Commune
5.	Radu from Greci	92	Ciobanu Commune
6.	Răducan	128	Niculitel Commune
7.	Iancu Jianu	83	Făgărașu Nou Commune
8.	Tudor Dancu	216	Dunăreni Commune
9.	Ciuciu	183	Niculitel Commune
10.	Mantu	68	Niculitel Commune
11.	Gherghisan	52	Niculitel Commune

Table 6. Outlaw Ballads

Many ballads were inspired by outlawry, a social phenomenon which appeared and intensified as a result of socio-political changes over centuries in the Balkan Peninsula and in Dobrudja. As a form of class struggle, it manifested as the armed struggle of rebellious bands made up mainly of peasants who were fighting against their oppressors. The people's love and appreciation for them determined the creation of ballad heroes endowed with unusual physical, mental and moral qualities, setting the dramatic conflicts in magical spaces, assigning grandiose elements to the action.



Fig. 6. Dumitru Galavu. From the popular tradition of Dobrudja, p. 172



Fig. 7. Dumitru Galavu. From the popular tradition of Dobrudja, p. 172

TUDOR DANCU



Fig. 8. Dumitru Galavu From the popular tradition of Dobrudja, p. 168

For the people, among the most celebrated outlaws from Northern Dobrudja were Cocos, Terente, Gherghisan, Virlan, Ciuciu, and in Southern Dobrudja Tudor Dancu was famous. We are presenting next two ballads on Miu Haiducu and one on Tudor Dancu. We consider that the writing of the last two is quite similar to that of the previously analyzed examples, so that the similarities and differences are easy to notice. The first example, however, differs from the others by the uniformity of the time value for the syllables and, melodically, by the recitative character of the process.

2.7. Parenthood

Nr.	Titles	No. of	Origin
Crt.		lyrics	99.0
1.	Oleac	201	Town of Constanta
2.	Gorjan	232	Valea Nucărilor Commune
3.	Ilincuța Şandrului	179	NIculitel Commune
4.	Sisters	273	Pecineaga Commune
5.	The old mother	71	Ciobanu Commune
6.	The unhappy fiancés	60	Gîrliciu Commune
7.	At the Edge of a Forrest	54	Turcoaia Commune

Table 7. Parenthood Ballads



Fig. 9. Dumitru Galavu
From the popular tradition of Dobrudja, p. 176



Fig. 10. Dumitru Galavu From the popular tradition of Dobrudja, p. 177

The last two series of ballads – Familial and Oral journals – are considered by some folklorists as forming a single category with a heterogeneous content, while having a common basic element: the family.

Therefore, family relationships, ordinary events from the daily life of the family members, as well as all kinds of unforeseen events which contribute to the coagulation of the actions narrated in the ballads, are presented.

We have attached to the "familial" category an example from *Oleac*, being interpreted somewhat differently by the bard; before starting its sung "narration", the ballad is provided with an instrumental introduction in ternary measure performed by violin with specific ornaments, in a very lively tempo: Presto. The long finale of the introduction is followed by the ballad song, with frequent metric changes, but with a fairly uniform sequence of time values overall. The highlighted conflict is the quarrel between two sisters-in-law.

2.8. Oral Journal

Nr. Crt.	Titles	No. of lyrics	Origin
1.	On the Road From the Valley	71	Dunăreni Village Alimanu Commune
2.	The Eighth Day of Sixty-two	93	Somova Commune

Table 8. Oral Journal



Fig. 11. Dumitru Galavu
From the popular tradition of Dobrudja, p. 177

The oral journal *Pe soseaua de la vale/On the road from the valley* is also connected to the idea of family. With specific melodics and rhythmics and in Tempo rubato, the ballad was sung like a doina, reproducing the pain of the family and of the villagers in the procession leading to the burial of a newly married young man from the village.

3. Conclusions

The ballad is one of the most valuable achievements of the folk genius, of monumental proportions (there are ballads whose dimensions reach 1,000 verses), with an amazing force of expression, with a unitary and well-coagulated action, capable today as it was in the past to educate and develop the heroic spirit. Along with the other traditional customs with an ancient background (paparuda/the Perperuna, caloianul/the Caloian, cucii/the Cuckoos, căluşul/the căluş, New Year's wishes and carols, disguising and masking accompanied by parades, etc., customs related to life and work), the ballad has traveled through space and time, being preserved even today with all the strength and vigor in the areas where the social changes produced over the years have favored its permanence. Such customs, which even today have a special appeal, being loved and cherished everywhere amongst the people, must have enjoyed special attention in ancient times - some of them with a magical function or having cult elements.

Synthetic presentation of the characteristics of the 44 ballads studied

No.	Categories	No. of	No. of	No. of ballads with less than	Ballads with the
		Ballads	lines	100 lines (verses)	largest no. of verses
1.	Supernatural	8	1621	1	238v =
				57v = Şarpele (Snake)	Soarele şi Luna
					(Sun and Moon)
2.	Heroic	8	2111	0	802v =
					Vochiţa lui Novac
3.	Historical	4	361	2	132v =
				43v = Negru Vodă	Movila lui Burcel
				63v = Petru Maje	(Burcel's Mound)
4.	Social	2	177	1	10v =
				73v = Voinicel străin	Străinul (Foreigner)
5.	Pastoral	2	295	0	160v = Macovei
6.	Outlaw	11	1823	5	432v = Miu Haiducu
				52v = Gherghişan	
				68v = Mantu	
				75v = Pe costiţa dealului	
				83v = Iancu Jianu	
				92v = Radu de la greci	
7.	Parenthood	7	1070	3	273v = Suratele
				54v = Pe sub poale de pădure	
				60v = Logodnicii nefericiţi	
				71v = Cea maică bătrână	
8.	Oral Journal	2	164	2	
				71v = Pe şoseaua de la vale	
				93v = A opta zi din şaizeci doi	
		44	7622	14	

Table 9

Note: The texts of the examples have not been enlarged since the language used in the ballads, being very old, cannot be translated in such a way as to preserve the exact meaning, the beauty and the originality of the expression being closely connected to the rhythmics and melodics of each piece.

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