

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 rhythmic. 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 Alimanu Commune |
| 4. | The Snake | 248 | Dunareni Village 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 *Șarpele/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.

ȘARPELE

Rubato

Toa-ie vet-dea bo-bu — lui

Giocoso

Co — lo-ri lur-gul dru-mu-lui, La crean-ga sal-

ci-mu-lui Cte-șie floa-tea cim-pu-lui

Și ru-i floa-tea cim-pu — lui.

Fig. 1. Dumitru Galavă.

From the popular tradition of Dobrudja, p. 165

ȘARPELE

Andante

1. La un colț de gir-li cioa-ră, 5-a ră-
2. S-a ră-scul d-un pruc în ca-să Și d-un

scul de-un pruc în ca-să Cre-șlea voi-ti-
șaf-pe pe sub tal-pă.

cel, cre-șlea Și șaf-pe-le-a-se-me-nea

Și șaf-pe-le-a-se-me-nea măi.

Fig. 2. Dumitru Galavru
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 melodic, 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 flourishes 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 rhythmic, with the structure of a couplet - constructed in the high area of the Dorian mode on *D* - and a refrain, with the melodic 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

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

Table 2. Heroic Ballads

MARCU VITEAZU

Vioi

(și) foa-ie ver-de și-o la-lea, foa-ie
ver-de și-o la-lea, Tot la miz-dră
ca-fe-nea, Tot la miz-dră ca-fe-nea,
Ni-me-ti-1-a po-po-sit

Fig. 3. Dumitru Galavru
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 melodic 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 Viteazu/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

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

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 | <u>Dunăreni Village</u> |
| 2. | The stranger | 104 | <u>Niculitel Commune</u> |

Table 4. Social Ballads

VOINICEL STRĂIN

Allegretto

1. A măi si-uz pe li nu
2. Si hoz mă li nu

Voi ni cel stră i-nu-i Ca uz

măi din dru-mu.

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

STRĂINUL

Rubato

Toa-le ver-de si-uz li pan mă Ple-cai zi-le tol de-uz az

Dinz ho-tat pi-nă-n ho-tat, Sa fac dinz pe-lin za-hat.

Fig. 5. Dumitru Galavă
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

| <u>Nr.</u> <u>Crt.</u> | Titles | No. of lyrics | Origin |
|---------------------------|----------------|---------------|------------------------|
| 1. | <u>Miorita</u> | 135 | <u>Nalbant Commune</u> |
| 2. | <u>Macovei</u> | 160 | <u>Dăeni Commune</u> |

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 *Miorita*; 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 environment” which is why the ballad was included in this category.

2.6. Outlaw

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

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.

MIU HAIUCUL

Rubato

Hăi hăi hăi! Frun-ză ver-de lo-bo-dă
 La cur-tea lui Ște-fan Vo-dă, Ș-au știeș bo-țe-fii la vor-bă
 Și la vor-bă și la șfai Vor-ba dom-nu-lui și-au dăi,
 Și cu lo-șii ș-au ju-ra-lu, Pe Mi-u să-i dăa le-ga-tu
 Și mi-au fă-cu-l ju-ră-mi-ni, Să mi-i scoa-ță din pă-mi-ni,
 Din pă-mi-ni din iat-bă ver-de, Pe Mi-u să mi-i vi-ne-ze.

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

MIU HAIUCU

Frun-ză ver-de mu-ti-le Mi-u-le hăi -
 du-cu-le Ne-te-ze-șteți ȝ ge-ne-le,
 Ne-te-ze-șteți coa-le-le Ca și min-dra
 coap-se-le Mai ne-te-ze-șteți mu-șta-ța măi
 Cum ne-țea-ză min-dra ța-ța

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

TUDOR DANCU

Rubato

Ha-i pe cel deal, pe cel col-nic, Se i-vi-se
d-un voi-nic, Mult e nati ge-fu-mu-se-lu, De nu tre-ce jo-licu
e-lu, Um-blă cu mi-ni-le goa-le, La briu cu no-
vă pi-sloa-le, La briu cu no-vă pi-sloa-le.

Fig. 8. Dumitru Galavă

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. Crt. | Titles | No. of lyrics | Origin |
|-------------|---------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. | <u>Oleac</u> | 201 | Town of <u>Constanta</u> |
| 2. | <u>Gorjan</u> | 232 | <u>Valea Nucărilor</u> Commune |
| 3. | <u>Ilincuta Sandrului</u> | 179 | <u>Niculitel</u> Commune |
| 4. | Sisters | 273 | <u>Pecineaga</u> Commune |
| 5. | The old mother | 71 | <u>Ciobanu</u> Commune |
| 6. | The unhappy fiancés | 60 | <u>Gîrliciu</u> Commune |
| 7. | At the Edge of a Forrest | 54 | <u>Turcoaia</u> Commune |

Table 7. *Parenthood Ballads*

OLEAC

Vinde trei toi la-te Vinde trei gra-na-te
La bal-iă, la bal-iă, La mă-gu-to 'nal-iă

Fig. 9. Dumitru Galavă

From the popular tradition of Dobrudja, p. 176

La ceu — cea de pia — ță, Ceat — ță
mi se ceat — ță. Da ci — re se ceat — ță
Do — uă su — ra — te — le
Do — uă Cum — ră — te — le Viăj — bi —
te 'n tre e — le Ca niș — te că — te — le.

Fig. 10. Dumitru Galavă

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

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

Table 8. *Oral Journal*

PE ȘOSEAUA DE LA VALE

Rubato

foa-ie ver-de trei ma-ga-le în-tr-o zi de săt-bă-toa-te,
 în-tr-o zi de săt-bă-toa-te, Jal-nic tre-ce-o nun-tă ma-te,
 Jal-nic tre-ce-o nun-tă ma-te, Pe șo-se-a-u-a de la va-le.

Fig. 11. Dumitru Galavă
 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 melodic and rhythmic patterns 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*, *călușul*/the *căluș*, 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 Ballads | No. of lines | No. of ballads with less than 100 lines (verses) | Ballads with the largest no. of verses |
|-----|--------------|----------------|--------------|--|---|
| 1. | Supernatural | 8 | 1621 | 1 57v = Șarpele (Snake) | 238v = Soarele și Luna (Sun and Moon) |
| 2. | Heroic | 8 | 2111 | 0 | 802v = Vochița lui Novac |
| 3. | Historical | 4 | 361 | 2 43v = Negru Vodă 63v = Petru Maje | 132v = Movila lui Burcel (Burcel's Mound) |
| 4. | Social | 2 | 177 | 1 73v = Voinicel străin | 10v = Străinul (Foreigner) |
| 5. | Pastoral | 2 | 295 | 0 | 160v = Macovei |
| 6. | Outlaw | 11 | 1823 | 5 52v = Gherghișan 68v = Mantu 75v = Pe costița dealului 83v = Iancu Jianu 92v = Radu de la greci | 432v = Miu Haiducu |
| 7. | Parenthood | 7 | 1070 | 3 54v = Pe sub poale de pădure 60v = Logodnicii nefericiți 71v = Cea maică bătrână | 273v = Suratele |
| 8. | Oral Journal | 2 | 164 | 2 71v = Pe șoseaua de la vale 93v = A opta zi din șazeci 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 rhythmic and melodic of each piece.

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