

Parting Songs of the Dobruja Aromanians and Tatars

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Abstract: *Dobruja, a consequence of numerous overlapping cultures and civilisations, is an actual example of cohabitation and each ancestry keeping its identity. Adapted and accepted in the compact mass of the majority, minority ethnics from Dobruja's culture and lifestyle is asserted both as part of the community, and outside of it. In geographical areas characterised by multiculturalism, such as Dobruja, traditions are performed in diverse forms, thus contributing to the assertion of identity of the group who practices them.*

This paper aims at introducing the songs accompanying a major moment in the Dobruja Aromanians' and Tatars' nuptial ritual. The bride parting with her family environment is distinct in the case of both communities. Parting Songs are both vocal, and instrumental. In the Aromanians' case, they are played when the bride is taken by the groom from her parents' house, to go to the religious ceremony. In the case of Tatars, the actual wedding starts with this song, in the moment when the bride and the groom leave the parents' house and join the guests. These community practices prove the existence of a homogenous ritually background in the Dobruja area, currently deemed to be the native land by all referenced community members.

Key-words: *wedding, ritual, Aromanians, Tatars, ethno-musicology, traditions, folklore*

1. Introduction

This paper aims at introducing the nuptial scene of the bride parting with her family, and the related music repertoire of this occasion. Reference will be made to Aromanians and Tatars, two ethnic groups from Dobruja, with different mentalities and cultures. *Parting songs* performed at the bride's home are a lyrical amplification of the ceremonial sequence which points to the young woman's parting with her old self.

As part of the field research carried out in the case of the two ethnic groups, I found that the performance in the nuptial ritual of the moments which are considered important was preserved both in villages and in the urban areas, and new ones became permanent. Translation and adjustment of the nuptial ritual to the evolution of society favoured taking over and integration of foreign elements in its performance. The influences occurring through contamination also took place as a result of the proximity of ethnic groups with similar or different traditions.

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Dobruja may be deemed a model of cohabitation and assertion of the identity of all ethnic groups it contains, irrespective of the demographic factor or the place of origin. For hundreds of years, the multitudes of cultures and civilisations settled in this geographical area have preserved their national characteristic. In time, these peoples have made mutual borrowings which are currently deemed identity cultural assets. A close look reveals the similitudes of community practices.

Ethnic groups have adapted to the geographical and social conditions of the Dobruja land, thus expressing their culture and lifestyle both inside, and outside the group. In time, as society evolved and lifestyle became urbanised, traditional manifestations of peoples in the Dobruja land have lost some of the magic and ritualistic characteristic, the exoticism of primal cultures. This loss was mitigated by way of amplifying ceremonial and performance aspects.

Specific life cycle customs in Dobruja ethnics – birth, marriage, death, reveal ancient practices preserved by these remote and relatively closed groups, such as those established by gatherer communities. “From primal customs they moved to complex systems, integrated in the ethnic traditions of each ancestry, thus acquiring social, ceremonial and performance significations. The level of organisation in sustainable patterns has gradually impregnated customs in traditional environments with an institutional characteristic” (Oprea 2002, 298).

Weddings are social acts meant to provide continuity of the species and social progress, “they are the celebration conferring the unification of two individuals social and general importance” (Oprea 2002, 299). To all ethnic groups from Dobruja, irrespective of their characteristic, whether majority or minorities, this ceremonial represents the sum of all ritualistic and performance acts taking place to ensure that destiny favours the new couple. Marriage triggers a change of social status and domicile. The passing rites are still included in weddings nowadays, preserved according to community tradition. We are currently witnesses of an intertwining of traditional elements, which are deemed compulsory, with modern elements of foreign origin. The re-enactment of the nuptial spectacle in ethnic groups subject to research is made within the limitations allowed by modernity and the uniformization trends of the current Dobruja society.

Transition from virgin implies passing rituals and adaptation to a new social category as a wife. The brutal form of renunciation to the lifestyle prior to marriage is improved by the compulsory fulfilment of rituals facilitating the young woman’s inclusion in the adult, married people’s world, hence from responsible for the perpetuation of the species.

Aromanians and Tatars are confined societies numerically speaking, extremely conservative who, by living in a different-language-speaking environment, have carefully preserved everything pertaining to their ethnic identity, by adapting the coexisting ethnics’ borrowings to their own cultural characteristics.

2. Aromanians from Dobruja – historical and ethnographical references

The Southern branch of the Romanian ancestry is the first known in history as structured in state organisations. In Pind, Thessalia, Acarnania and Aetolia “the first Romania of Macedo-Romanians – known by the Greeks as Vlachia.” is established (Capidan 2000, 12).

Many theories emerged about the origin of Aromanians. Based on documents, researchers allow that the Romanian spirit occurred in the entire Balkan Peninsula and was extended from the Danube to Continental Greece, the Aegean Sea, the Adriatic and Istria. These Romanians were the result and, at the same time, the promoters of an ample evolution process of Oriental Romanity (Zbuchea 1999, 14).

In patriarchal communities, such as the Aromanians’, the family is the only form of social organisation. Life cycle-related customs reveal ancient practices in the case of Aromanians, with such practices being preserved by remote and relatively closed groups, such as the ones of shepherds’ communities.

The founding of a new family is very important in the Aromanians’ case, which is why the family, relatives and community members alike attend this event.

A re-enactment of the nuptial scenario in the case of Dobruja Aromanians starts with a re-enacted pattern including the sequential structure of the ceremonial poetic sequence, as perpetuated in the Dobruja adoption land:

- a) Matchmaking and its two comprising moments: small and big betrothal;
- b) The exchange of gifts;
- c) The “hlambura” – the flag prepared at the groom’s home;
- d) The dressing of the bride and groom – singing at the groom’s shaving and the bride’s song (parting songs);
- e) Leaving for the religious wedding – the graces;
- f) The big dinner – the calling out of gifts.

As aforementioned, the wedding proper is preceded by the engagement. Nowadays, when the young couple like each other and decide to get married, the young man goes to the girl’s home with his parents, to ask for her hand in marriage. Usually, the two sets of parents meet and get to know each other, and there are no objections as to the performance of the reunion. Then follows the matchmaking (small engagement) and next the big engagement (engagement proper).

Matchmaking or little engagement is made in the presence of both young people’s families, and it is the stage when the details of the big engagement are decided. The big betrothal (engagement proper) takes place at the young woman’s house as well and reunites the young man’s (suitor’s) family and the future godparent. The matchmaker helps move to the exchange of gifts. The young woman receives a jewel or items of clothing from the young man. Through the agent also, the young woman gives the young man a present consisting in items of clothing or a jewel. The young woman also endows the other guests with gifts of various types.

The long expected, central event is the wedding, currently organized on Sundays. On the morning of the wedding, the groom's entourage comprised of family and friends, go to the godparent's house. Afterwards, they all go to the bride's house, in front of which they are welcomed by a young woman, a friend or relative of the bride. At this point, in the bride's home takes place the *toll* ritual, this needs to be paid by the groom so that he can take the bride with him. Her lady friends contend in presenting the qualities of the future wife, and request a sum of money (*the toll*) from the groom, to allow him to enter the room where the bride awaits. Negotiations are merry, and the groom and his entourage attempt to get a smaller price to pay, and thus visibly lessen the presented qualities. Following the negotiations' success, he can finally take his wife and they can all join wedding attendants.

3. *V'a las cu ghini* // *Bid you farewell* – a formal and structural analysis

An emotional picture of the nuptial performance is the bride's leaving her parents' house, when they play the song "*V'a las cu ghini*" – "*Bid You Farewell*". It is a particularly lyrical song of separation, expressing the bride's hope that she would soon have the chance to see her family again. The poetic text expresses the fear of the unknown, as well as the hope that she will be able to welcome the loved ones in her new home, as the wife of that whom she chose as her husband. Below is an analysis of this song, which I collected in May 2015 from Mrs. Anagnosti Ana Maria, an Aromanian from Constanța.

V'a las cu ghini // I *Bid You Farewell*

Moderato ♩ = 108

V'a las cu ghi - ni

vruți pă - ri - n - ți

So - ia, ș'tuți oa - minii a - mei

V'a v'aș - tep - tu _____ zi - niți oas - piți

A - ca - să _____ la noi

V'alas cu ghini, vruți părinți,
Soia, ș'tuți oaminiî'a mei.
V'a v'asteptu ziniț oaspiți
Acasă la noi.

I bid farewell, my parents, dear,
All family members, all those near,
Hope that you will be my guests
In our house, our future nest.

Câlcai praglu, s'ies nafoară,
Ah, ți bună'i dada mea.
Cuscârii grescu nafoară,
Viniră s'mi ia.

Now I step over the lintel,
My mother's so good and little
Oh, my in-laws' cry for me out
They're outside and for me shout.

Ni'arcai ochii nghios, tu'avlii,
Anvârliga di ubor.
Cum s'ni' alas nâ vâsâlie,
Iu criscui cu dor?

Looking down at our old yard
All around it, looking behind
How can I leave my whole world
Where with love I was brought up?

Vini oara, t'as'ni fug
Di la casa iu criscui.
Va'ni mi duc tu altă avlii,
La gionli ți'l vruî.

Oh, now is the time to leave
From my childhood home, and grieve
I'll go to another home
To the boy I'll call my own.

The parting song has 4 stanzas and is played in tempo Moderato, the eighth note at 108 M.M.. The configuration of the song dictates the character of its performance. Through the frequent fermatas which the performer must sing, the ornaments of the musical discourse, the pedal on the perfect quinte and perfect octave – predominant intervals played out by the bagpipe, the lyrical atmosphere characteristic of this musical genre is created.

Upon speaking of the intimate interval of performing this song, account must be taken of two aspects. The first one refers to its performance in the private, small

group of the young woman's family, who is directly affected by the separation. The second aspect refers to the manner of performance, almost by improvisation of the melodic line. The improvisation-like aspect reveals the inclusion of the song in the *doina* category, an improvisatory lyrical genre of the pastoral repertoire. It is well-known that in time, many of the old songs were provided with new lyrics, thus moving the songs from one genre to another, as is this case. The evolution in time of the *parting song* triggered its sliding to the song proper area. This process provided a new appearance to the melodic line and triggered the transformation of the initial parlando-rubato rhythm into a giusto-syllabic one. This metamorphosis allowed the verse to become isometric, on an octo-syllabic pattern, and the rhythm to agree with the measure.

Each stanza is made of four verses, grouped two by two. The poetic-musical stanza is created by repetition of the last two verses. The rhyme of verses results from the symmetric combinations of the last peduncles connecting the verses according to the following pattern: 1+3 and 2+4. The verse-musical row relation determines the coincidence of the melodic row size and the octo-syllabic verse.

The melody is structured in identical and varied rhythmic-melodic cells. The rhythm is giusto-syllabic, and the stanza form is fixed, AB binary.

The sound system is a diatonic heptachord of the minor sub-tone manner (sib): C1-D1-E♭1-F1-G1♭-A-B♭1. From the very beginning, the sounds of minor diatonic pentathony which were at the origin of the song's sound system stand out: C1-D1-E♭1-F1-G1.

Placed at the beginning and the middle of the melodic rows, the sounds F1, G1, and B♭1 are dominant in the song by perfect tetrachord, major third and perfect quinte leaps. They provide the song with stability and become pillar sounds. The sounds A♭1 and B♭1 only appear in the song once, which make us consider them to have originated and emancipated from tone-lowering. The B♭ note at the end of melodic rows, either as a note in grace-notes, or as a constituent sound of the heptachord, is in fact the sub-tone of the sound system. The richness of ornamental notes, simple, double and multiple posterior grace-notes, reveal the improvisational characteristic of the melodic line originally, highlighting again the origin of the song as a *doina*.

The ambitus, the perfect octave bb-B♭1, defines the song structure. The melodic structures composing the phrases are included in perfect tetrachord and quinte big third, just like those intervals agreed by the Romanian language.

The profile of all melodic rows is crenulated. The sounds F1 and G1, at the beginning of the two phrases, playing the role of reciting chord, were once in the structure of the doina's recto-tono recitative.

The inner beat is made on the third level of the sound system, through the big second relation. The final beat on the first system's level, is made also through the big second relation with the sub-tone.

4. Tatars from Dobruja – historical and ethnographical references

The second ethnic group subject to research is the Tatars' from Dobruja. The first members of the future Turk-Tatar community were mentioned in the historical sources starting with the 7th century, as traders in the Balkan Peninsula. With the settlement in the Dobruja land of nomad Turks – yzouruk, in Babadag, Teckirghiol, and Hârşova, the Romanian population feels compelled to withdraw from the "limitary areas of the province" (Stancu, 2008, 356).

In the 13th century, the Golden Hoard Tatars incursions takes place in Dobruja, as part of expeditions. In the case of the Romanian territories, and, therefore, in the case of Dobruja, the Mongol-Tatar supremacy triggered progress as a result of the "direct and fast contact between Europe and the Pacific Ocean." (Glodarenco 2008, 35).

Later on, as of 1853-1854, the Tatars from Crimea undergo mass migrations, and settle in Southern and Northern Dobruja. "As a result of their numbers and the fact that they were better organised in their native area, the Crimean Tatars introduce to Dobruja their forms of organisation. In each village, they built a mosque, and in towns such as: Măcin, Sulina, Mangalia, Isaccea, Medgidia, and Constanța, they established the Mohammedan (religious) Tribunals" (Stancu, 2008, 357).

Equally, in the Dobruja Tatars' community, the wedding is also the celebration by which the act of union of two individuals is conferred social and general importance. Tatars, who are better represented numerically in Dobruja, have practiced endogamy. My sources told me that, 50-60 years ago, young Tatars were getting married without having met first. Parents would determine who would be best fit for their children. Information was requested about the potential spouses from relatives, neighbours, and the spirit of these young people, whether good or bad, was of importance to their selection a future partners. Most definitely, there were young people who were not happy with their parents' choices, particularly when they were already in love with someone else. They would decide to just *kidnap* the girl or decided to *elope*.

In time, the parents' choice became less important so that young people currently choose their partners themselves. If the youth's choice is in agreement with their parents' expectations, then the young man's family goes to the girl's house and ask her hand in their son's marriage, and decide marriage details.

The first step in preparing the event is deciding on the date of the religious wedding. After the engagement is decided, both families get involved in the good performance of the event, and start sending out invitations, organising parties at the future bride and groom's houses, and hire the fiddlers. On a Sunday morning, the bride, dressed by women (friends and family), waits for the groom and his entourage to arrive. In the meantime, guests are served with sweets, coffee, and compote.

After his arrival, the groom is made to pay a *toll* to the bride's entourage young ladies. When the groom knocks on the door and announces that he wishes to take his bride and join the wedding attendants, her friends keep the door locked and

ask for money (the *toll*) in exchange for allowing him access to the room. Various jokes are made and finally, in this generally merry atmosphere by the wedding attendants, the groom, after paying a symbolic sum, enters the house. All wedding attendants and the bride alike are invited to have something to eat. Upon the groom's arrival, the song proper "*Mîna selam alekîm*" is played. With this song, the wedding proper begins. We can consider it to be a *parting song*, since it is included in the repertoire of songs played during the transition period of the bride from a bachelorette to a married woman. It is a song proper which has acquired new values by being included in the nuptial repertoire. The time and purpose of its performance have put it in the *parting songs* class.

5. *Mîna selam alekîm* – a formal and structural analysis

This song was sung to me by Mrs. Filis Emin, in 2015, when I collected traditional music from the Dobruja Tatars.

Mîna selam alekîm // Farewell,

Tempo de vals ♩ = 120 MM

Mî-na se-lam a - le - kîm, Men-de kel-dîm, a - lay.

Qart-nă, caş-nă tok - ta - tîp Sel-am ber-dîk, a - lay.

Qart-nă caş-nă sai - qă-man, Se-lam ber-dîm, a - lay.

A-le-kîm se-lam, qoş - kel-dîn, Sen e - ke-sîn, a - lay.



A-le-kîm se-lam, qoş - kel-dîn, Sen e - ke-sîn, a - lay.



Baq - şa-lar-da a - şîl - gan, gul e - ke - sîn, a - lay.



Baq - şa-lar-da a - şîl - gan, gul e - ke - sîn, a - lay.

Mîna selam alekîm,
Mende keldîm, alay.
Qartnâm, çaşnâ toktatîp
Selam berdîk, alay.
Qartnâm çaşnâ saiqâman,
Selam berdîm, alay.
Ale-kîm selam, qoşkeldîn,
Sen ekesîn, alay.
Başalarda aşîlgan, gul ekesîn, alay.

I now must bid you farewell,
Here I am, alay.
With youth and old,
I must say goodbye to you all, alay.
May peace be with you,
Be welcome, alay.
It was you, alay.
The rose, alay.
Blossom of the gardens, alay.

The original verses include the salutation formulas characteristic of the Muslim tradition, and the listener is taken to the bright spirits of such an important event. The respect due to the bride's guests is shown to all participants, irrespective of their age.

The poetic text resorts to various compositional and expression procedures (the metaphor, the epithet) aiming at evoking the atmosphere and the purpose of the performance as best as possible. The song was played to me both vocally and instrumentally.

The "*Mîna selam alekîm*" parting song is in ternary rhythm. It is played in waltz tempo, with the eighth at 120 M.M.

The verses' pattern is hexasyllabic, which is proof of the poetic text archaism. The second and the fourth verse of each stanza are tetra syllabic. By adding the disyllabic *alay* ornament chorus, tetra syllabic verses are amplified and become

isometric on a hexasyllabic pattern. The verse – musical row relation triggers the coincidence between the melodic row and that of the hexasyllabic verse.

Grouping of the pseudo-stanza is eight-verse, obtained by repeating two by two verses of the melodic stanza. In the traditional creation, repetition ensures the fixation of the told text in the listeners' memory and, therefore, the transmission of the repertoire to future generations.

Rhythm is giusto-syllabic, and the melodic stanza form is fixed, of the ABAvBv binary type.

The sound system is a diatonic hexachord (G-A-B-C1-D1-E1) which was developed from a sub-tone diatonic pentachord (A-B-C1-D1-E1) in the tone-lowering position (only heard in the B and B-varied phrases). This pentachord originates from a pre-pentachord scale which we can identify with the help of the dominant sounds in the song. The C1-D1-E1 notes which can be heard from the very onset form the pyknon of a diatonic B-C1-D1-E1 tetrachord (a Phrygian tetrachord). The pillar sounds C1-D1-E1 provide the song with stability, and the presence of the lower-tone **B** consolidates the **A** note, playing the role of the final note. By emancipation, the **B** lower-tone contributed to the evolution of the sound system to a hexachord. The musical line profile is crenulated.

The big sixth ambitus defines the song's structure. The placing of the song notes at the end of odd verses (each time, at the beginning of the second hemistich) is carried out by amplification of the melodic line. The melodic formulas are included in (big or small) third intervals, perfect tetrachord and perfect quinte.

Inner beats are made in the first level of the sound system, through second and third relations. After the leap of the third, the final sound is repeated in recto-tono. The final beat is achieved in the first level also, the relation of the third of the beat, thus proving the pre-pentachord substrate from which the system evolved.

6. Conclusions

This paper is a presentation of *parting songs* characteristic of the nuptial rituals of two of the best numerically represented communities in Dobruja: the Aromanians and the Tatars. Their existence in the nuptial repertoire of Aromanians and Tatars demonstrate a homogenous ritualistic background.

The analysis of *parting songs* highlighted the following characteristic features:

- the presence of the isometric octo-syllabic verse;
- the presence of the isometric hexasyllabic verse by addition of the *alay* disyllabic chorus at the end of melodic lines;
- the existence of the heterometric verses such as the Penta syllabic and heptasyllabic isometric verses in an octosyllabic pattern;
- the existence of diatonic sound systems;

- the presence of lower-tones determining the expansion of the style toward diatonic heptachord, and a diatonic hexachord, respectively;
- the importance of sub-tone in a song;
- expanded Ambitus of the songs (perfect octave and big sixth, respectively);
- the predominantly crenulated melodic profile;
- inner beats on the 3rd and 1st levels.
- the final first level beats;
- the fixed form of the two vocal songs;
- the giusto-syllabic rhythm system;
- the architectonic form of melodic stanzas in a binary pattern.

Note has been taken that transformations took place in what the rhythm is concerned as well. Aiming at measure and symmetry, the preference in the current performance style is giusto-syllabic. This was the case of the “*V’a las cu ghini*” – *I Bid You Farewell parting song*, which has the characteristics of the “doina” which, however, as a result of its development in time, is now in the song proper category, at constant bar.

The “*Mîna selam alekîm*” song proper has become a *parting song* in time, thus filling the vacant spot of the Dobruja Tatar nuptial repertoire with a ritualistic song. The enhancement of the song proper with ritualistic nuances comes as a necessity in the performance of compulsory ritualistic sequences.

One may say that the Dobruja Aromanians’ and Tatars’ traditional music is like a living body, which can adapt to everything which the evolution of society implies. In the case of both communities, the present is characterised by profound changes in terms of mindsets and lifestyles. To all interviewees, the Dobruja land is their land of origin. Manifested in the plane of creation and performance alike, all these transformations prove that tradition is not lost, rather it is adjusting to the progressing society.

The prevailing oral characteristic of traditional music in the practice of the two communities from Dobruja, the decline of the patriarchal society, the unsettlement nationality-wise, and the decline of the archaic rural civilisation are the main factors putting the preservation of the Dobruja Aromanians’ and Tatars’ identity.

Persistence of such unique popular creations greatly depends on the attention of all factors and organisms able to provide the necessary conditions for the ethnic and cultural assertion of Aromanians and Tatars in the country and of the world.

List of Aromanian sources:

Beca Agora, 61 years old, retired, born in Ceamurlia de Sus village, Tulcea county
 Beca Constantin, 64 years old, retired, born in Beidaud village, Tulcea county
 Anagnosti Ana Maria, 38 years old, a student, born in Babadag, Tulcea county

List of Tatar sources:

Abdula Culusi, 74 years old, retired, born in the town of Murfatlar
 Abdula Ervanie, 71 years old, retired, born in the village of Conacu (Beşoglu) –
 Cobadin commune
 Emin Filis, 45 years old, a student, born in the town of Murfatlar
 Emin Onur, 23 years old, a student, born in the city of Constanța

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