

General and particular features of the traditional dances in Dâmboviţa county

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The wealth, diversity and beauty of the Romanian folklore are richly represented by a very spectacular and various genre, such as the traditional dance. Its syncretism (music, choreography, rhythm, extempore songs, clapping of the hands / stamping of the feet) makes the Romanian traditional dance one of the most beloved genres, both in the country and worldwide. While originally the dance had a major role, the social development and progress have gradually changed the initial destination of some dances (căluş, cununa), into one of entertainment, of fun. Though unevenly disseminated in its area of circulation, the Romanian traditional dance has generally preserved the same musical features: a construction in fixed cycles, a variety of rhythms, the correlation between melody and steps and extempore songs etc. The songs sung by peasants, accompanied by traditional instruments, are characterized by stylistic unity, archaic musical scales, motif structure (in general), motor and rhythm combinations, a simple melodic line enriched with accents on the unaccented beats or on quarter notes.

The most frequent dances of Wallachia (and of Dâmboviţa County) are: hora, sârba, brâu, breaza, ciuleandra, căluş etc., which sometimes have local names (sârba cu cap and coadă, Hora ceasului, Floricica, Hora Nunţii, Sârba dogarilor etc.)

Key-words: *dance, music, rhythm, choreography, role.*

1. Origin, role, documented mentions

The dance is one of the oldest genres of the Romanian people's culture, dating back to the oldest times, the prehistoric man addressing the forces of nature / deities, in order to tame them and to become friends with them. A piece of evidence in this respect are the iconographic documents discovered, which date back 40,000 years ago and illustrate dancers playing some primitive musical instruments. Later on, the dance is illustrated by the Babylonian-Assyrian and Egyptian monuments or mentioned in religious writings.

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In time, the role of the dance has changed “first, people danced for gods, then for princes and, finally, for themselves”². It is well-known that the Romanian traditional dances originate from ritual dances, even though nowadays most of them have a markedly entertaining character. However, there are some dances that have been preserved, which have not lost their ritual roles or are part of the ritual of some traditions: *Căluș*, *Chiper*, *Lazăr*, *Cununa*, *Drăgaica*.

The absence of any historical or iconographic documents makes it impossible to know their ancientness, yet when it comes to the ritual dances we can say that they date back from times out of mind. The first records regarding the existence of the dance in the Romanian people’s life appear beginning with the 15th century. The chronicler Grigore Ureche notes in his writings that ruler Aron Vodă “just could not get enough dancing and listening to the bagpipe players”³ and the fact that the first melodies written down in these documents are dances indicates the importance of the (entertainment) dance in the social medieval life. Beginning with the 19th century, folklore collections have been put together, in which the dance melodies are the most numerous, and after the foundation of the two Romanian phonographic archives, the wealth and variety of this repertory became evident.

2. Terminology, classification

Nowadays, the dance is the best known and most appreciated Romanian folklore genre throughout the world.

The terminology is represented by three terms: *hora* (known as *Joacă la horă* - for the regions of Muntenia and Oltenia or as *dans* (*dant*); *joc* (*gioc*) in the other regions of the country.

The dances take place in a close connection to certain extraordinary occasions: Sunday dance (*Hora de duminică*), wedding, a pastoral holiday (*nedeia*); ordinary occasions: the carol singers’ party, death watch, a meeting of the village people where they do some handwork together (*șezătoare*), the departure of the young men to the army, spring traditions.

Regarding their role in the life of the rural community, the dances can be classified into: current dances - practiced at the *hora* or on other occasions; special dances – practiced at certain moments and danced by a limited number of people (festivity dances, entertainment dances, ceremonial or ritual dances).

² Chailley, Jacques – *40.000 de ani de muzică* (40,000 Years of Music), p.201

³ Quotation from Oprea, Gh., Agapie, L., *Folclor muzical românesc* (Romanian Musical Folklore), E.D.P., Bucuresti, 1983, p391

3. The great classes of dances met in Muntenia are: *hora mare*, *brâu*, *hora mică*.

The group of dancers (according to their number) may be: a big group (unlimited number); a small group (4-12 people); pairs.

The dancers may stand: in a close or open circle; in an irregular line (semicircle, row).

The dancers' positions are: a chain with hands down; a chain with hands up, at the shoulder; arms on the shoulder; arms folded behind; hands on the hips.

Except for the mountain shepherds' *brâu* dances (*Căluș*, *Brâu mocănesc*, *Ciobănaș*, *Mugurica* etc.), predominant in the pastoral repertory, which are danced only by men (*mocani*), all the other dances are for men and women.

4. Syncretic character

In all the situations, the dances are accompanied by music, and in Muntenia (the area of Dâmbovița) they are accompanied only by instrumental music, very many times adorned with extempore songs or vocal onomatopoeia (*țârâturi*). During the dance, the dancers declaim lyrics, which are usually octosyllabic, with an accentuated satirical character and take place as a dialogue. Other lyrics may have the character of commands meant to change some rules of the dance.

Another hypostasis of the syncretism of the Romanian traditional dance may take two forms: visual - it refers to some movements (simple steps, crossed steps, balancing of the legs, arms, movements of the body), with sound effects – which give a special effect to the rhythm of the steps, and combine with the melody and the accentuation of certain syllables of the extempore songs, with the snapping of the fingers, clapping of the hands, stumping of the feet in a very speedy rhythm, extempore songs etc.)

The rhythm of the dances in Muntenia is predominantly asymmetric and binary (in beats of 5/8, 7/8 or 10/8). The archaic dances found in the villages of Dâmbovița County can be classified into old structures: diatonic, pentatonic (fig.1, 2), hexachordic (fig.4) and purely heptatonic scales (fig. 3, 4, 5)

The sound systems used in the dances of Dâmbovița County are: diatonic, acoustic, chromatic modes and modern major - minor modes based on tonal features.

The architecture of the dance melodies takes on an improvisational character, on a fixed form. The dance melodies have an instrumental prevalence (and in this case, their technical possibilities influence the melody structure) or come from vocal melodies.

5. The main dances in Muntenia are: *hora, sârba, brâu*, executed in a circle, semicircle, in a row or in pairs. The dancers hold their hands or their shoulders, and their movements are quick, with many stumped steps and beats out of step.

In circle, they dance the following: *Hora, Roman, Hora ceasului, Fedeleș, Ciuleandra, Chindia, Floricica, Ofițereasca, Joiana*. In a row, the following are danced: *Sârba, Brâu, Alunel, Sârba cu cap si coadă*. In pairs they dance: *Breaza, Ciobănaș, Sultănică*.

The accompaniment of the dances in this region comes from one or more instruments: harmonica, dulcimer, pan-pipe, flute or bagpipe or violin.

To the above-mentioned, one can add the dances with a special character: *Hora miresei* (Hora of the bride), *Nuneasca, Mânioasa, Joc cu strigaturi satirice* (Dance with extempore songs) etc.

The sequence of the dances is not at random, each zone or village having an exact knowledge of the dance sequence, and the musicians and the dancers are familiar with that sequence. Mioara Vlad and Traian Bănulescu (the last being an appreciated singer and also a violin maker) have presented an “X-ray” of the dance melodies of Bezdead⁴:

Sârba is danced in a circle, or in a snail shape, with a beginning and an end. The leader (the beginning of the row) is a strong lad, skilled at dancing, who has the rhythm in his blood and is good at extempore songs;

Sârba dogarilor, collected from Traian Bănulescu, 76 years old, from Bezdead village is played in a tempo of *sârba*; the group of dancers stand in a circle and make alternative movements to the left and then to the right, reciting the lyrics: *Cine n-are doage / Să vie să roage, / Să vie la mine / Că le lucrez bine / Cercuri, nituri, doage / Sunt sculele mele / Păpuresc cu ele / Buti si putinele; Hora mare*, danced in a circle; *Ciobănașul*, a dance for pairs, where the girl is changed; *Sârbeasca*, a dance for pairs, also danced in a hora; *Mânioasa*, a dance for pairs, in a circle, where the girl is changed, at the command: *și mâna Mânioasa / Care ai fată frumoasă / Care nu să stai acasă!*

If the boy would dance with a beautiful girl whom he liked, he delayed the extempore song for dancing with her as long as possible. At the moment when the girl's dancing prolonged, the other lads restarted the extempore song, replacing the last verse with: *și mâna Mânioasa / Care ai fată frumoasă / Dacă nu din joc să iasă!*; *Ca la breaza*, a dance for pairs without the changing of the girl; *Jian*, a hora in circle; *Chindia*, in circle and in little groups; *Roman*, a hora in two parts, with a changing of the girl, but also of her position in relation to the boy (turned back); *Fedeleș*, a dance in a circle of three up to five dancers, in a rotation both around the group and around dance room; *Ațica*, a dance for pairs, where the dancers stand face to face, making opposite movements, as “in a weaving”; *Ofițereasca; Hora Nunții*,

⁴ Lying in the northern part of Dâmbovița County, village Bezdead has preserved, surprisingly well, the ancestral folklore heritage.

an energetic dance, in a tireless rhythm, with stumping of the feet and sudden turns around; *Petrișorul*, a dance for pairs, with the changing of the girl; *Brâu*, a dynamic dance, danced by men; sometimes, the restless girls also ventured to dance. *Brâu* would be played “*pe rămasă*”, namely it would last until only one dancer remained on the dancing floor; *Hora in două părți*.

I have selected for analysis some of the dances with specific local forms and names, for example: *Hora dogarilor I-auzi una*, *Tudorița*, *Lelea*, and *Mușamaua*.

6. Conclusions

The Romanian musical folklore contains a large number of dances, which differ from one another in point of choreography, melody, rhythm. We may find several melodies even within the same choreographic type, not only in a bigger folklore zone, but also in the same locality.⁵ In the same village, we may notice a variable number of names, which may amount to 40. From the perspective of their role, the ritual dances are beginning to lose ground, being practiced sporadically in the agricultural rituals (*Lăzărel*, *Căluș*, *Drăgaica*), as part of the wedding traditions (*Nuneasca*, *Jocul găinii*, *De trei ori pe după masă*, *Tîrna* etc.) or as part of the funeral traditions (vigil dances, dances around the fire). Throughout their evolutionary process, the great majority of the traditional dances have changed their initial ritual role, turning into an occasion of entertainment, and the radio, the television, or the festivity halls have had a certain contribution in this sense. The choreographic groups of the localities' cultural centers, clubs, town halls etc. have contributed to the promotion of our rich and spectacular folklore abroad. An eloquent example in this respect could be the groups of *căluș* dancers, unequalled, so far, in the whole world.

Sârba dogarilor

Sat Bezdead

Inf.: Traian Banulescu, 76 ani, Culeg. Constantina Boghici, 20004



Figure 1

⁵ Comișel, Em.-Folclor muzical, EDP, București, 1967, p. 380

I-auzi una

Sat Moroieni,

Inf. Aurel Tudor, 45 ani ; Culeg. Constantina Boghici, 2002



Figure 2

Tudorita

Sat Runcu, Inf. Traian Banulescu, 76 ani



Figure 3

Musamaua
Oras Pucioasa
Inf. Victor Oprea, 53ani
Culeg. Constantina Boghici, 2003



Figure 4

Lelea

Sat Moroieni

Inf. Aurel Tudor, 47 ani ; Culeg. Constantina Boghici, 2003



Figure 5

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