

ARCHAIC ELEMENTS IN THE ROMANIAN SPRING-SUMMER TRADITIONS. LANDMARKS FOR DÂMBOVIȚA COUNTY

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Abstract: *Although enjoying less diversity, frequency and appreciation than winter traditions, spring-summer traditions represent important moments in the work and life of the rural communities. Due to the cultural stratifications occurred along the centuries, in the spring-summer traditions, certain magical acts and practices disappeared or their function changed, so that their spectacular character and social meanings prevailed over the predominantly ritual functions originating in the ancient practices of our Getho-Dacian ancestors. Old writings (Herodotus of Halicarnassus, Xenophon, Hesychius of Alexandria, Pomponius Mela, etc.) describe in detail the practice of certain rituals in the areas inhabited by Thracians and Dacians. The Carpathia ritual (related to land cultivation), the celebration of Dionysus (expressing the joy at the renewal of nature and the gathering of the crops), the rituals in honour of Apollo and Artemis (the earth was purified of bad charms before gathering the crops), the bacchic festivals and the messengers sent to Zamolxis are considered by the researchers as lying at the basis of the spring-summer traditions and rituals.*

Key words: *tradition, ritual, archaic, fertility, function.*

1. Origin, evolution and meanings of these traditions

The folklore traditions practiced in the spring-summer period symbolize the main stages of the rural traditional life in which agriculture and animal breeding represent the main occupations. They preserve elements reminding of old rituals that would take place at the beginning of the New Year, which, until not so long ago, used to coincide with the beginning of spring. They celebrate the joy of nature's renewal or fertility. Nowadays, these traditions have restrained their presence in the Romanian folklore, but in the not very

remote past, they used to be largely spread, according to the testimonies of different Romanian scholars. Dimitrie Cantemir, in his work *Descriptio Moldaviae*, presents the practice, at the beginning of the 18th century, of the *Drăgaica* (crop dance, a celebration bearing the name of the plant *Galium Verum*) and of the *Căluş* (*little horse dance*), in Moldova, area in which they are no longer encountered today.

Going back to the remote history, we can notice that *Căluşarii* (the tradition of the dance of the little horse riders) was present in the life of our ancestors, the Thracians, being described by the Greek historian Xenophon, who refers to the warriors'

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dance called *Kolavrismos* – “which some folklore specialists consider as the predecessor of the *Căluşari*” [1, p. 18].

In the Romanian area, the *Călusari* are mentioned in Braşov (1536) and at the end of the 16th century, during the period of the reign of Michael the Brave (Bistrita) [1, p. 29]. The meaning of the *Călusari* and of the *Cuci* (masked dancers mentioned by the Romanian literature of the 17th century) [1, p. 40] refers to the rebirth of nature at the coming of spring and the joy generated by the future crop. The dance called *Căluşari* “represents a stratification of rituals (...) transmitted by tradition even since the time of the tribal society” [1, p. 11].

Another tradition of Thracian origin is the *Rosalia* – the feast of the roses (today, *Rusaliele*). While initially the celebration honoured the memory of the deceased, in time, it acquired a new meaning, namely that of “celebrating the rebirth of nature, which is considered dead during winter, based on an archaic and universal myth” [1, p. 158].

2. Spring – summer traditions. Description.

The traditions corresponding to these seasons are practiced on certain days (*Alimori*, *Cucii*, *Sîngeorzul*, *Armindeni*, *Călusul*, *Drăgaica*) or depending on the necessities determined by the agricultural works (*Paparuda*, *Scaloianul*, *Cununa*); their great majority has an agrarian meaning (*Gurbanul*, *Alimori*, *Cucii*, *Plugarul*, *Lăzărelul*, *Paparuda*, *Scaloianul*, *Drăgaica*, *Cununa*), others are related to animal breeding (*Arietul* / *ruptul sterpelor* / *Sîmbra oilor*, *Răvăşitul oilor*) or have different meanings (*Strigarea peste sat*, *Armindeni*, *Hăulitul*, *Homanul*, *Lioara*, *Călusul*): “Modern research has highlighted the existence of certain archaic remains in the unfolding of some fertility

rites that lead to the certainty that the Getho-Dacian people were farmers and their material and spiritual existence depended on the earth matrix and on the solar influence” [2, p. 159].

Almost all the spring traditions keep, to a certain extent, combinations of attributes of the natural or celestial forces (*Scaloian* / *Muma Ploii*, *Căluş*).

The selection and description of certain traditions that are part of the calendar cycle will be made taking into account the place and the role of music in them, and also the elements suggesting the ancientness of some Romanian traditions.

2.1. Lazărul

Although practiced generally on the Eve of Palm Sunday, *Lazărul* (The feast of Lazarus) has a pagan character despite the attempts of the Romanian Orthodox Church to give it a Christian meaning (by the superposition with the religious celebration). *Lazăr* (Lazarus) – the main character – who had left for the woods to provide food for the sheep, fell from a tree and died. His sisters find him, cry for him, and bathe him in sweet milk that they throw in a clean place afterwards. Paradoxical is the role of this tradition nowadays (augural) given by the functional, content but also structural elements (*Pleacă Lazăr la pădure/Cu bardă şi cu secure/ Să taie frunză la oi/Si muguri la mieluşei/Am venit acum un an/V-am găsit cu grâu pe lan/Iar la anul când venim /Sănătoşi să vă găsim/Si cu mesele întinse/Si cu porţile deschise* / Lazarus leaves for the woods, / With axe and hatchet / To cut leaves for the sheep / And buds for the lambs. / When we came a year ago, / we found you with wheat in the field / When we come next year again / May we find you well and healthy / And with tables laid / And open gates). Both the poetical content and the way how the

tradition unfolds highlights its similarities with the carol; girls aged between 4-5 years of age and the age of marriage go from house to house singing a ceremonial melody (Figure 1), (and sometimes dancing/ whistling), addressing wishes of good health and prosperity to their hosts, which in turn reward them with presents (Figure 2). Today, this practice can still be encountered here and there in the Romanian villages. A few sequences were caught in Băleni Village, Dâmbovița County.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

The researchers who studied this interesting custom make a parallel between Lazarus's legend and the Mediterranean myths related to vegetation, through certain agrarian gods: Adonis, with the Syrian-Phoenicians and Greeks, Attis with the Phrygians, Osiris with the Egyptians, Dumuz with the Sumerians, Tammuz with the Assyro-Babylonians [2, p. 158]. *Lazărul* may be considered a folkloric tradition with its own genesis, probably springing from a mentality analogous (...) to that of the legends of the Adonis type [2, p. 160]. It may also be considered an evidence of the ancientness of the farming preoccupations in the Carpathian-Pontic-Danubian area.

The transformation of the initial function given by the death of the hero in one of congratulation (or celebration) could find an explanation by an analysis of the literary text. Reading it attentively, we can

notice that, after the fourth verse, a radical breakup occurs between the initial message of the poetic content and the subsequent verses, which no longer suggest the death of the hero, but suddenly turn to the wishes of health and prosperity specific for carols. Here we might deal, in our opinion, with a situation of disappearance of the poetic text from the collective memory during history and the taking over of the contents of some carols, as the borrowing of some texts or melodies from one genre to another being frequent in the Romanian musical folklore.

2.2. *Paparuda*

Another spring tradition mentioned by the reigning prince and scholar Dimitrie Cantemir in his work mentioned above is *Paparuda*, which has different local names: *papalugă*, *băbălugă*, *băbărută*, *mămărută*, *dodoloi* [2, p. 161] etc. Like all the old folklore-related phenomena, it was intensely practiced in the Romanian villages until 30-40 years ago, after which its frequency was less regular. The whole ceremony (unfolding, song, verse, rhythmic elements) suggests that rain is invoked in order to assure rich crops. It is practiced both preventively, beginning with the month of April until June, and during the dry periods. *Paparuda* is embodied by a young girl [3] covered in plant leaves or tree branches on whose head a wreath of green leaves is placed. Accompanied by her mother / a group of old ladies, the *paparuda* goes through the village, from gate to gate, singing, dancing, while the ladies accompanying her are clapping their hands. The lady of each house where the *paparuda* goes waters her with a mug of water, offering her gifts or money. In her turn, the *paparuda* sprinkles with water any person she meets on her way, and especially pregnant ladies,

characters that are present in most agrarian rituals, symbolizing fertility.

As melody, *paperuda* has different local aspects, in agreement to the character of the dance; the song starts with the word *paperudă* and the last two syllables (*ru-dă*) are repeated, making up a hexasyllabic, and sometimes octosyllabic verse.

The sound structures corresponding to these melodies have a limited number of sounds, from three pitch classes to pentachords or hexachords, scales that confirm as well the archaic stratum of the *paperuda*. In the villages of Dâmboviţa we met two melody types related to this tradition, both presenting the general features of this species, and a diatonic hexachord (figure 3) and heptachord (figure 4), both major, as sound material [4, p. 195].



Fig. 3

Sat Piersinari
 Inf. Vasile Costandina, 53 ani
 Culeg. Boghici Constantina, 2002

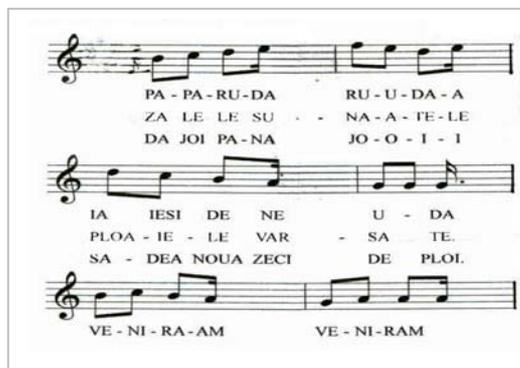


Fig. 4

2.3. In one of the folklore areas of the Valley of Dâmboviţa we have also collected an example of *Scaloian* called *Muma ploii* (The Rain's Mother) (Perşinari 1988) practiced by children until recently, having a fertilizing role and invoking the rain. The tradition consists in the manufacturing of a doll made of clay, wax or dough, prepared as for the funeral ritual, laid in a box together with candles and flowers, simulating a coffin. The group made up of children heads to the river, where the box is allowed to float down the river, like in the ritual of the liberation at the water (*Datul drumului apeii*) related to the soul of the deceased. On their way to the river, the children lament, singing a melody specific to their area, this funeral lamentation taking place according to certain fixed patterns. Where there is no river, the *Scaloian* is buried by a wheat field, respecting the same ceremony.

Very interesting is that in the village of Piersinari, the lament has an improvisational character, taking place using a sung prose [4, p. 134], while the *Muma Ploii* sample collected from the same locality uses a melody with a fixed pattern [4, p. 139]. (Figure 5).

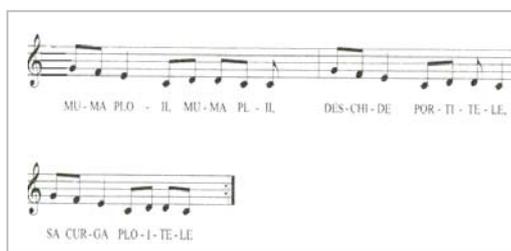


Fig. 5

The whole ceremony of this tradition reminds of old funeral practices, despite the fact that the poetic text has a totally different content (*Muma ploii/ Muma ploii/ Deschide portitele/ Să curgă ploitele;* namely, Mother of Rain, / Mother of Rain / Open the gates, / That good rains may

come down.) And the sound structure corresponding to a major pentachord, unaltered by Oriental influences, supports the idea that this tradition accompanied by a simple melody belongs to an old Romanian cultural stratum.

2.4. The moment when the crops are ready for harvest is marked by the rural community by means of an ancestral tradition called *Drăgaica*, mentioned for the first time by Dimitrie Cantemir in his work *Descriptio Moldaviae*. On the day of the celebration of this tradition (*de Sânziene*), the girls of the village choose the most beautiful one of them and call her *Drăgaică*; she goes with the whole group of girls and boys following her to the field of wheat and they make a wheat wreath, which they put on the head of the chosen girl.



Fig. 6

The young people in this group are accompanied by a *flag bearer* bringing along with him a flag, decorated with wheat spikes, garlic, flowers of *Galium Verum* (*drăgaică*) – which in the past had a magic significance –, by a whistle blower and rarely by a drum player. The group of six girls (the meaning of this number has been lost from the collective memory during the centuries) goes through the village and the neighbouring localities singing a ritual song, sometimes followed by dance songs (*Brâu*, *Geamparale*, *Cârligu'*, *Floronica*). When they arrive to the family of the *Drăgaică*, the wreath is

thrown on her house and, according to the popular tradition, if the wreath stays on the house, then the young lass shall get married during the current year [4, p. 140]. (Figure 7).



Fig. 7

In the locality of Băleni, Dâmbovița County, the group of girls is carried in chariots led by young lads.

These traditions related to ancient practices in connection to unmarried girls are frequently encountered in the Romanian folklore, in most music genres: spring-summer traditions, verses of some lass's carols, *Vergelul*, *Steagul/Geavrelele*, and even in some creations in verse accompanied by music belonging to children's folklore (*Gărgărită rea / Unde oi zbura / Acolo m-oi mărita*, namely *Bad ladybird, / Where you shall fly, / It is there that I shall marry.*) [4, p. 141].

The traditions of the *Drăgaica* can still be met here and there, in just a few places of Muntenia; the research carried out by great personalities who studied the Romanian folklore concluded that one can find no more traditions marking the beginning of the harvest as in the case of other peoples, and that the variant described by Dimitrie Cantemir would coincide with the moment of the harvest [2, p. 163].

2.5. *Homanul/Popelnicul* is also a calendar-related tradition, accompanied by a ritual song; it can still be encountered as a practice in Oltenia, the area of

Hunedoara and here and there in the villages of Dâmboviţa. Girls and boys go into the fields or on the hill looking for healing plants and choose especially the *homan/ popelnic (Inula helenium)*, which they boil and then use the respective tea to wash their hair, so that it may grow healthy and beautiful. The remains are poured, along with some salt and bread, at the root of the first plant that they dig, while singing at the same time a typical melody. Beside this ritual, the tradition also foresees the manufacturing of some household objects (brackets) by the boys seated around a fire [4, p. 140].(Voinesti Village, Dâmboviţa County). Unfortunately, the melody could no longer be reconstituted in the area under analysis.

It is also in a village of Dâmboviţa County, Matei Voievod, today a neighbourhood of Târgoviste town – that the tradition called *homan* overlaps another local tradition, called *Tudoriţa/ Căii lui Toader*, practiced during the Lent, but not necessarily at the same time of the year (it may be the Saturday of Saint Toader, on the day of the deceased or during the first week of the Lent). According to the old popular beliefs “this week is charged with magical meanings; the person who works during this week shall get numb hands and feet; there is no partying, no eggs shall be laid under a hen to get chicken, no magic songs shall be sung, no walking during the night is advised (...); people can make friends for life becoming brethren /*cross brothers (fraţi de cruce)*”, women share bagels for the deceased (...) charms are chanted [4, p. 144].

Many of the data related to the unfolding of this tradition have been lost - an important element remained prevalent, namely the existence of the horses of Saint Toader/ Theodor (Sântoader), mentioned by many legends that highlight four main elements – the horse, the Sun, Saint Theodor and the coming of spring (the

season of the beginning of work on the farm). This comes in support of the idea that this tradition, as well as all the rituals related to farming, belong to an old cultural stratum, going back in time to the tribal type of organization.

2.6. Călusul is a complex tradition, with numerous meanings, in which dance plays a main role. Today, it is still practiced in Olt, Dolj, Teleorman, Arges, Ialomita, Călăraşi County and in the south of Dâmboviţa County. It was signalled and described by Dimitrie Cantemir in *Descriptio Moldaviae*, yet without highlighting its ritual function of fertility bringer.

Călusul is made up of 7, 9, 11 members (only an odd number), accomplishing different roles in this ritual: *vătaf* (group leader), *mut* (dumb person-Figure 8), *stegar* (flag bearer), *văduva* (widow), etc. The group is made up based on an oath pronounced during a ceremony that takes place at the margin of the village. Once accepted in the group, each member has the obligation to stay in it for nine years.



Fig.8

The dancers wear traditional peasant costumes, hats decorated with beads and ribbons, colourful belts (*bête /cingători*) on which embroidered napkins are attached (sewed with folk motifs) and a diagonal belt with other embroidered napkins on it; They also wear traditional leather footwear (*opanki*) with spurs. Dressed like this, they dance throughout the village and the neighbouring villages

for 3 days, and the people who see them reward them with gifts (food, fruits, drinks, money) stored at the house of one of the lads, where the group of *călusari* live for a while, disconnected from the community life throughout the period during which this tradition takes place.

Beside the belts worn by the *călusari* during their dance, which make us think about the war movements of our ancestors, certain sequences of the dance suggest ancient customs and traditions protecting the archaic communities from the evil forces (battering of the soles, healing using garlic, (Figure 9).



Fig.9

The researchers have made analogies between the tradition of the *călușari* and an old warriors' dance described by Xenophon, called *Kolavrismos* [5, p. 32], whose dancers mimed movements suggesting imaginary wars, a dance that may have inspired the *călușari*, according to Vasile Pîrvan.

Today, the *căluș*, with its picturesque costumes, its spectacular movements, the beauty of its music, remains a very beautiful dance, which "charmed" the national and international public, and has become a symbol of the specific features and value of the Romanian folk dance.

3. Conclusions

The literary and archaeological documents confirm the fact that the main occupations of our ancestors, the Getho-Dacians, located in the area of the Carpathians and of the Lower Danube, were farming and shepherding – they determined specific artistic practices [1, p. 4]. The writings of the Antiquity remind of the existence, occupations and culture of these peoples, considered "a culture of a superior type, compared to that of the primitive rural patriarchal tribes" [6].

Even though some traditions are no longer accompanied by music in certain Romanian folklore areas, the repertory pertaining to the spring-summer traditions includes melodies that give to the ceremony (just like its structure and poetic content), a solemn character; through their simplicity and the low number of pitch classes, these songs remind of the ancient origin of these traditions. Despite the fact that the magic substratum has grown dim in time, the music "preserves its archaic structures" (*Lazărul, Păparuda, Scaloianul, Drăgaica*), the traditional patterns and the place it was assigned by the community during the long and painstaking evolution of the Romanian cultural values" [4, p. 143].

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