

## WEDDING TRADITIONS IN DÂMBOVIȚA COUNTY

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*Abstract: Romanian folklore has imposed itself through its originality, richness and variety. From its birth up to its demise, people's artistic and spiritual creation intertwines, at every turn, with life and its multiple manifestations. Folk genres are in constant transformation, changing not only in looks but also in functions in accordance with people's mentality, which is in permanent evolution. Customs, which are engrained in people's life and which sometimes are expressed in identical forms and, some other times, in a different manner throughout history, are of great value and still require exhaustive research. They accompany man's life and, once in a while, extend even after death covering various and multiple aspects. Many of these aspects appear as interesting folk holidays and comprise a spectacular, dramatic characteristic. Folklorists define custom as a way of acting passed on through tradition that is necessarily connected to a community and repeated in the same circumstances.*

*In our study, we shall deal with some wedding customs in villages from Dâmbovița County: the proposal, the marriage offer, going with the plosca 'hip flask', the wedding, the dressing of the bride, wedding duration, the geavrele, all in all customs that have been kept since very old times.*

*Keywords: dowry, dressing of the bride, hip flask walking, geavrele, wedding.*

Romanian folklore has imposed itself through its originality, its remarkable richness and variety, in each and every place that its most gifted messengers have taken it.

Throughout the centuries, folk creation has expressed itself in a variety of categories, genres and repertoires, characteristic forms meant to answer various circumstances.

From cradle to grave, folklore, people's artistic and spiritual creation, intertwines, at every turn, with life and its multiple manifestations, "being like a fir tree forest which, seen from above, gives the impression of an everlasting season, or, from down below, from the roots, gives the impression of permanent renewal, when fallen leaves are being replaced by others in a dynamics that is hard to capture"<sup>1</sup>.

Folklore genres are in constant transformation, changing not only their appearance but also their function, in accordance with people's mentality that is in permanent evolution. Obsolete folklore genres, which are no longer fitting, are forgotten or undergo various transformations. A number of creations, disburdened of their magical meaning of

<sup>1</sup> Constantin, Manolescu. *Plai domnesc*. Târgoviște: Editura Bibliotheca, 2003, p. 7.

yore, turn, before our very eyes, into festive artistic manifestations. Folklore changes endlessly, just like the very life, which, in its own way, it expresses: “*Eu cânt că ştiu să cânt dar m-apucă câte-un gând / Eu nu cânt că ştiu cânta / Cânt să-mi stâmpăr inima / Mie, şi cui m-o asculta*” [“*I sing for I know how to sing but once in a while a thought comes to my head / I do not sing because I can / I sing to appease my heart / Mine and of whomever might listen*”<sup>2</sup>].

Each people has built its own national artistic treasure, resting upon olden native elements.

As regards folklore in Dâmboviţa County, a brief presentation of this area, located in the geographical space of the former *plai domnesc* (“princely land”) bordered by the Dâmboviţa, Ialomiţa and Cricovul Dulce rivers, is required. The Dâmboviţa and Ialomiţa Valleys, gates to Transylvania, travelled as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century, had each a road for pilgrims (*Drumul Mare* “High Road” – which ran mostly through villages) and one for animals (*Drumul mocanilor* “Shepherds’ Road” – which passed through open areas). These roads crossed the mountains through the ravine of the two waters, passed through the *Uliţa Vămii* “Customs Street” reaching as far as the square of the city of Braşov.

Passing through these valleys in times long ago, a lot of foreign travellers recorded ethno-folkloric testimonies on them.

“*Anton Maria del Chiaro gives certain details on fabrics and embroideries, naturally popular in style, that were manufactured in the basements of the Princely Court: kerchiefs, head dresses with silk flowers, silk floral shirts, etc. He also mentions the various folk beliefs and customs such as that of decorating eggs [for Easter] ‘with bizarre flowers and patterns’, which denotes a certain degree of abstraction*”<sup>3</sup>.

Details on clothing are revealed by votive paintings in Dâmboviţa churches. The church of Săcuieni (built in 1667) presents the founding boyar Ştefan Logofătul and his wife Stana, who wears, under her cloak, an *ie* (“Romanian blouse”) embroidered with national motifs.

The votive painting in the church of Runcu, painted in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, shows the wives of founding villagers wearing long head scarves (*marama*) touching the ground.

Another aspect of the artistic creativity of the people of Dâmboviţa lands is recorded by the enamelled pottery, a craft and art that flourished in the 12<sup>th</sup> up to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, which turned the city of Târgovişte into one of the centres of highest cultural dissemination, as regards both household and decorative ceramics.

The first folklore collections in Dâmboviţa appeared and were compiled in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the poet and playwright Nicolae Scurtescu, a native of Valea Lungă-Ogreă. Under the pseudonym Niţă Vintilă Stroe, he published folklore in *Ali* magazines. Some of the items collected by N. Scurtescu were included in G. Dem. Teodorescu’s great collection.

<sup>2</sup> *Antologia poeziei româneşti*, vol. I, Bucureşti: Editura de Stat pentru Literatură şi Artă, 1957, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Constantin, Manolescu. *op. cit.*, p. 11.

Grigore Tocilescu published Dâmbovița folklore around 1900, in his corpus entitled *Materiale folclorice*. The pieces were collected from our area by his collaborator, Ion Ionescu.

In *Răspunsuri la chestionarul istoric*, Nicolae Densușianu offered the teachers of Dâmbovița (Stan Negoescu from Răciu – who left the first text of the ballad *Radu Anghel*; M. Teodorescu from Pietrari, Andrei Popescu from Șotânga, Jan Demetrescu from Voinești etc., who enriched the folkloric corpus with such works as *Marcu*, *Ghiță Cătănuță*, *Jianu Corbea*, *Soarele și luna*, *Chira Chiralina*, *Radu Anghel*, *Miorița* etc.) the chance to pass on items of great value to us.

B. P. Hasdeu's *Chestionarul lingvistic* (1885) provides descriptions of customs, folk beliefs, data on the choreographic repertory, gathered and transmitted by passionate collectors of Dâmbovița folklore.

A special part in promoting the folklore of Dâmbovița both in the country and abroad was played by the work of the poetess Elena Văcărescu, *Le rapsode de la Dâmbovitza*. Even if it cannot be considered a collection of folklore proper, the presence of the local folkloric universe is to be noted.

The songs were collected by the poetess in the villages where her family had some domains: Văcărești, Șotânga, Moțăieni, Pietroșița, Moroieni, Bezdead, Ulmi, Pitaru, Lucieni. Due to her genius, the Dâmbovița folklore was shown to foreigners as a picture of essences of the Romanian people's spiritual life.

Between the two world wars, outstanding intellectuals such as professor Ion Negoescu or composer Vasile Popovici (who was, at the time, a teacher at the Military High School of Dealu Monastery, Târgoviște) published carols and folk songs accompanied by musical notations in the pages of Dâmbovița newspapers (*Graiul Dâmboviței*, *Ancheta*).

Many music informants (recorded before the war and by Constantin Brăiloiu) like Vasile Bursuc (Teiș), Ion Șerban (Râul Alb), Oprescu Vasile (Moțăieni), Grigore Grancea (Pucioasa), etc. provided folk pieces for *Comoara neamului* compilation, published by Gh. I. Tăsloanu in 1943.

It was in Târgoviște that the musicologist and folklorist George Breazul worked before World War II. And it is also here that the remarkable educator Iancu Stroescu, author of the well-known song *Tărășelul* (composed for 4 voices by Nicolae Lungu) and of numerous folklore collections from Dâmbovița, lived.

The foundation of the *Dâmbovița Folklorists' Association*, the creation of "Nicolae Scurtescu" award or of "Elena Văcărescu" folklore circle encouraged the discovery and exploitation of folk creation of Dâmbovița County.

Folkloric works we absorb today represent only the contemporaneous age of the oldest stratum of our culture. They add up to older collections, news from chronicles, documents of the epoch, notes of foreign travellers and highlight the successive ages of our folklore.

*The Ballad of Miorița* circulated in several variants in this geographical area which is specific to the transhumance from Muntenia to Ardeal and vice versa. This epic song relating to the shepherd profession lies somewhere “midway, as if it were building a bridge between epos and ballad...”<sup>4</sup>.

The differences of artistic expression do not change the poetic message of this ballad. In the Dâmbovița version of the ballad of *Miorița* the ordinary language of the people living in these places may be noted.

The ballad of *Miorița* represents, in any of its variants, a cluster of metaphors, epithets, comparisons and parables, allegories, which point to man’s merging into nature in life and in death.

The creative genius of the dwellers of these lands gave birth to a treasure of folk spiritual culture, refining it, over the centuries, with the innermost urge, inasmuch as it has reached artistic perfection.

The folklore of Dâmbovița was brought to the fore last century by Anton Pann’s collections and came to the attention of V. Alecsandri, who wrote that “... the Romanian folkloric universe was heralded to the world by the Country of Dâmbovița”. There were eulogies upon the Dâmbovița folklore which was made famous by *Le Rapsode de la Dâmbovitza* published by poetess Elena Văcărescu (granddaughter of Iancu Văcărescu) in Paris in 1892 (Alphonse Lemerre Publishing House).

Romanian folklore, an expression of man’s wisdom and inward experiences, reflects, in the most direct way, the spiritual profile of our people and is, at the same time, a document, an element of education and source of inexhaustible inspiration just like a river that is continually nurtured by its own springs.

#### **Wedding customs.**

The marriage proposal, the courtship, was done in the past by sending someone with the hip flask, “trimiterea cu plosca”. This implied that a person, whom the boy had faith in, would go with the *ploska*, a flask containing *țuică* (plum brandy), to the girl’s family, who had been previously informed. Although this practice was always performed in the evening, the wooer who entered the house would say “good morning”. Introductions having been made, he would put down the flask in the middle of the house; after the appropriate whims and grimaces, the girl, if she was willing, would pick it up, kiss the wooer’s, her mother’s and her father’s hand and take a sip. Then the flask would pass from hand to hand to all those present and they would get to talking as they kept on drinking. If they agreed upon the marriage, they would arrange the dowry of the boy and the girl and even set a wedding date.

Sometimes, very rarely though, when the girl’s parents did not approve of the marriage, the girl was kidnapped<sup>5</sup>. The groom, helped by a few friends with a curricule

<sup>4</sup> Al.I. Amzulescu. Preface to *Toma Alimoș. Balade populare românești*, București: Editura Biblioteca pentru toți, 1967, p. XIV.

<sup>5</sup> Gr. Tocilescu, *Un simbol juridic la români*, “Foaia Soc. Renașterea”, I, 1874, pp.113-116.

drawn by fine horses, would meet her in the street, especially on holidays, while going to the *hora* ‘dance’, seize her by force and put her in the curricule and would whirl away and vanish, the girl screaming and all, but it was often for show only. Faced with a fait accompli, the girl’s parents were forced, with very rare exceptions, to give their consent. Some other times, the two youths would simply leave, arm in arm, and hide somewhere for a while; they eloped. In most of the cases, marriages occurred not as a result of the youths’ will, but of their parents’, and the eligibility criteria were not the feelings of the spouses-to-be, but material interests, their land in particular; as a local saying goes, “pământul mărită urâtul” (the land would marry the ugly)<sup>6</sup>.

Nowadays, this both poetic and tragic custom is nothing but a museum item. Sometimes, if the boy and the girl come to an understanding, he takes her by the hand and takes her to his place; at other times, the boy’s parents go the girl’s family and, if they concur, often return home with their daughter-in-law.

On the wedding day – usually on Sunday – the groom would send his bride a pair of fiddlers he had paid, as the wedding would take place at both the girl’s and the boy’s parents. However, all wedding gifts or money would go to the groom’s parents who had paid for the wedding, as practised today.

The fiddlers arrived at the groom’s house on Saturday afternoon. Someone holding the flask, accompanied by the musicians, would go from door to door, to relatives and friends, to invite them to the wedding. The bride personally did the same with her next of kin.

Today, the flask is still used in wedding invitations, but without the fiddlers, who come on Sunday morning, for the wedding lasts only one day, not three as it did once. Saturday night, *fedeleşul* took place. At the groom’s, the table was laid for *alergători* (errand boys, those who helped), in-laws and closest relatives and everyone would party with fiddlers; at the bride’s house, girls, in particular, but also boys would gather and also party. In the morning, the groom would send his bride the fir tree with *plocon* ‘gifts’ and a pair of fiddlers who would stay there until the end. The bride, accompanied by boys and girls, with fiddlers and the always-present flask, would bring water from a farther well. She gave a drink from the flask to whomever she met.

Starting with 11 o’clock in the morning, gifts would begin to arrive to the groom from his people: baskets with bread, eggs, cheese, sugar, fruit, etc.

At noon, the table was laid at the groom’s and the bride’s house, for *alergători* and for those who were bringing gifts.

In the afternoon, the groom would send the *plocon* with the musicians to bring the godparents. The latter and a few of the close relatives would go fetch the bride in several curricles. Before the curricles, there were 5-6 wedding guests riding the best horses with braided crests and knotted tails, with traditional woven towels hanging from

<sup>6</sup> Marin, Paţac. *Monografia dâmboviţene – Morteni*, Târgovişte:: Muzeul Judeţean de Istorie, Dâmboviţa, 1973, p.150.

bridles, fir branches and ribbons. The curricle horses were adorned in the same way. They would all race to the bride's house. Gunfire was released on leaving from the groom's and at arrival at the bride's.<sup>7</sup>

Once the group arrived at the bride's, "orations"<sup>8</sup> were delivered, a beautiful epic narrative in verse. Basically, there were two crowds (or armies) facing each other: the groom's and that of the parents of the bride. After wishing all the best, the purpose of the arrival was revealed and, addressing the generals leading the opposing army, the groom, who was the head of his army, would send one of his commanders to warn the adversaries that they had come to take the bride and that they should give her to them willingly if they wanted peace, if not, they would take her by force for they were ready, they had many armies and the best generals, but, should that happen, those who would stand in their way would suffer; in any case, they – the groom's men – would not leave without the bride. The bride's people did oppose, for they had a larger army. A brawl followed; meanwhile, the groom would stand waiting, while the bride would take shelter behind her people.

Eventually, despite the opposition of the bride's entourage, the groom would come out triumphant and manage to take his bride and all would get on carriages, standing. The godfather put a loaf bread and a glass of wine on the bride's head and tore the bread into four pieces which he threw into four corners and the wine as well; the youths' home should be thus plenty of wine and bread from the four corners of the world. The bride's things were loaded and, along with the godparents and the tree that was placed in the front carriage and the mounted guests, firing guns and yelling, they would go get married by a registrar, if they hadn't the day before, and, from here, to the church for the religious ceremony.<sup>9</sup>

After the religious ceremony, groom, bride, godparents and the entire suite would head for the groom's house. In the evening, a feast at the groom's where gifts were brought followed. The wisest fiddler would give away napkins, nicely sewn with *arnici*, to the godfather who sat at the head of the table and to all diners; if the man was accompanied by his wife, only the man received the napkin. Then they collected the gift.

At the bride's parents' house, a meal without gifts, but with her next of kin.

The next day, on Monday, the *pocânzei*, who were the bride's relations, that had attended the meal a night before, were now sent to the groom's feast, together with the musicians that were still at the bride's house; women carried gifts in baskets. A large feast followed and the gift was received.

The third day, on Tuesday, the *alergători* and the in-laws would join in the feast and bring a gift of their own; it was what they called "the bride's earrings", i.e. something

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p.151.

<sup>8</sup> *Orațiuni ținute la nuntele țărănesci sau binecuvântarea tinerilor ce se însor*, București, 1872, 1876, 1890 (three brochures containing old orations); I. Păunescu, *Orații populare care în unele sate obicinuesc a se zice la nunți*, București, 1848, 98 p.

<sup>9</sup> Marin, Pațac. op.cit., p.152.

additional, for the bride's jewellery. By noon, all was over and things would go back to normal.

The table for the guests was laid on bed boards, stretching from one corner of the room to the other; a board would serve as a collective chair and another, at the same level, as table, on which woven table cloths, specially made for this occasion, were laid.

The menu was generally very simple: meat and cabbage soup, with or without meat, *mămăligă*, rarely bread; meal was served in ordinary clay bowls, with wooden spoons, while the *țuica* flask was passed from hand to hand: each would take a sip and then give it to their neighbour and so on.<sup>10</sup>

The first Sunday after the wedding, the couple, accompanied by the groom's parents, would bring *plocon* to the bride's parents, eat and drink together. It was said that they "retraced their steps".

In the area there is another custom called *geavrele*.<sup>11</sup>

This is an ancient tradition passed on, year after year, by *iordănitōri* at winter time (*Boboteaza* "Epiphany").

The custom involves a flag, 14-m long, decorated with various *geavrele*. The *geavrele* are handkerchiefs girls sew manually. They are collected by *iordănitōri* over a period of 13-14 days who go from door to door to get them. Having gathered 2,000 *geavrele*, they start fastening them to the flag.

After the flag is thus decorated, it is brought to the centre of the village in order to be baptised alongside of the holy water, then it is taken to the houses of all people bearing the name of St. John the Baptist. This custom is practiced in every part of the commune, except the village of Neajlov.

Neajlov (Cacova) is represented differently by a star which is decorated with *geavrele* as well and is to be taken to the church to be baptised.

The *iordănitōri* wear clothes that are typical of this area, namely white wool pullovers and a traditional white sash over.

In conclusion, the first function of the folkloric creations interpreted within family life customs is to comply with the ceremonial, properly marking the important moments in the existence of a traditional family. The texts sung or recited during the folkloric wedding concentrate the meanings of each ritualistic stage it consists of, the transition from celibacy to marriage: the courtship oration refers to courtship, the fir tree moment is synthesised in the fir oration, the separation songs accompany the groom's and bride's dressing out, the gift exchange is accompanied by the gift oration, etc.

Folkloric wedding creation enhances and marks the ceremonial, preserving its structure by virtue of the traditional character of folk culture.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 153.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 154.

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