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Hunedoara county is a main Romanian region judging it from historical, cultural and folk - ethnic perspective, representing the hearth of the Romanian people formation. Over the time, the inhabitants of the Hunedoara county have known how to preserve and transmit the inherited traditions from their forefathers, the Dacians, to the new generations. Being proud of their dowry and eager to publicize it, the inhabitants offer further information to any of those who are interested in acknowledging it, in order for it not to be lost, but to last in time.

Since carol singing represents an active phenomena, very well-organized in the area, I have decided to present a comparative research of this habit, both from synchronic and diachronic perspective.

Out of the three geographical areas chosen to be analyzed, The Mureș River Valley, The Region of Orăștie and The Hațeg Country, I have studied in more detail a village from each one: Tătăraști, Boșorod and Densuș, conducting an investigation in this respect.

The work in itself is intended to be a reference point for any scientific researchers, as it includes exhaustive corpus of genuine texts, as well as descriptions of some of the traditions present within the winter holidays: carol singing using a drum, or accompanied by traditional Romanian dancers, the stag tradition, minstrel shows, pițărăii – groups of people who come to people's houses and announce Jesus Christ's birth.

This research, *Traditional and actual in carol singing in Hunedoara county*, is organized in 15 chapters, including the bibliography and a number of 35 appendices.

The first chapter comprises information about the Christmas holiday, which is the appropriate moment for carol singing, as well as evidence of the Christian feature of carols. This chapter is divided in 6 subchapters.

Carols contributed to preservation and defense of the orthodox belief, at a time when the other Christian cults were trying to disunite the orthodox Christian population. Since carols, as popular manifestations, preserve and transmit the main bible truths, they have represented the means of defending the orthodox belief over the Romanian territory as a whole. They contribute to the formation of the orthodox Christian individual in the sense of the moral principle, teaching Christian virtues absolutely compulsory for redemption: love for the fellows, helping the others, humility, kindness, honesty, heroism, the joy of holidays, peace. The ethic content of these virtues harmoniously joins the esthetic.

Christmas, also known as *The holiday of creation*, is the greatest feast of all, the first one among the twelve imperial feasts over the year. Due to the fact that carol singing is a habit which is performed especially at Christmas, it has a close connection with the month and the season when it is shown.

In the folk rural society, each season used to be joined by rituals and rites about fertility and wealth, which turned into a real popular calendar. In those villages where tradition had been intensely preserved, the customs involved the whole rural community.

Within the range of the holidays over the year, winter time traditions are the strongest and they classify the first, being well-preserved and having been survived in various forms until nowadays.

Winter solstice has always been the most important moment in the life of the traditional community, having a deep magical-ceremonious character, with practices some forgotten, some lost for good. However, there are still some practices, which can be found even today, because carol singing is yet an active phenomenon of nowadays.

The etymology of the term *Christmas* is an issue that has arisen numerous controversies and it is still unsolved. Each time when it has come to this issue, its Latin or Slav origin was discussed, much rarely the Romanian genuine one and that makes this word to be considered an inherited and not a borrowed one. This term had also remained in use after the appearance of Christianity, from where the name of the holiday also originates, because it had existed before the Romans arrival. The Romans did nothing else but praising the holiday itself. The term had not been replaced because it belonged to the whole archaic world. Onto the old holiday did the Roman one superpose, but it kept the meaning of the old one, thus Christmas has continued to wear mythic garment.

Neither the Latin origin, nor the Slav one seems to be convincing enough, because the term is not present at all the Slav peoples, it only appears sporadically in some regions, but, on the other hand, it is present in Romanian dialects.

The term *Christmas*, together with all its magical-ceremonious facets, has Thraco-Dacian roots, even if those who have claimed its Latin and Slav origin have never admitted this possibility.

In the Christian calendar, Christmas is not a saint, but simply a generous person, who brings presents to children, the same as the magi did for the Child Jesus.

*Christmas* symbolizes the time of creation, when everything was done and undone; it is the sacred time of the winter solstice, the beginning of the year. Thus, the word *moș*, in the syntagm *Moș Crăciun*, shows the age of the god who is celebrated and who has to die in order to revive on the New Year, at the same time with the calendar time. There is the need for the old Christmas to die, just to leave his place to the young Jesus who was to be born.

With the time passing, the celebration of the Birth of Jesus has been the subject for a lot of legends. These short stories originate in the unwritten laws of the traditional village, which used to promote the respect for the elderly and for the forefathers, a duty that continued after their death as well and that is why some of them have become famous characters, whose remembrance has remained indelible in the collective memory. The same was the case of Christmas, whose story superposed perfectly onto the myth of the Birth of Jesus.

The church claimed the pagan character of the celebration of the martyrs' and of Jesus' birthdays, when, in fact, the saints and the martyrs had to be celebrated, according to the representatives of the church, on the day of their self-sacrifice, which is the date of their revival for humanity.

During the first centuries of the Christianity, many of its followers were disgusted at the joy and the extent of the Christmas holiday, which they yet considered a trace of the Paganism, especially of the Romans Saturnalia.

During the reign of Aurelian, the celebration in which Mithra, a solar god, was worshiped, *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti*, taken from the Orient by the Roman legionnaires, is included into the religion, and at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD it appears in the Roman calendar set on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December; yet, the existence of a cult of the sun had been present long before in Dacia.

Until the XIV<sup>th</sup> century, the holiday of the Birth of Jesus was celebrated on the same day with the Christening, namely on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January, because it was considered degrading to celebrate the Birth of Jesus on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December, the same as Pagans did regarding the god they had embraced, Mithra. During time, there happened the separation, because a period of twelve days has been settled between Christmas and Epiphany.

Because of the desire to renounce at the habit of celebrating the Pagans deities, the early Christianity introduced the celebration of the Birth of Jesus on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December, at a time when Mithra was celebrated, but there also existed the celebration called Calendele in January. That superpose led to the assimilation of a lot of the practices of the corresponding celebrations.

With the spread of the new monotheist religion in the Roman Empire, some compromises were negotiated regarding the Pagans celebrations and thus they had recurred to some tacit understanding about holidays. Consequently, during the IV<sup>th</sup> century, the representatives of the church chose the date of the 25<sup>th</sup> of December for the celebration of the Birth of Jesus. That meant that they silently accepted to equal Mithra to Jesus Christ.

Christmas is celebrated for the first time in Rome, in 354, then at Constantinople, in 375. During the period of 380-439 the celebration is settled over the entire Roman Empire as the moment of the birth of Jesus.

More than one thousand of years, the Romanians took the Julian calendar as a guide and they celebrated the New Year at Christmas. That is why even today, there are some regions in our country where the day of January the 1<sup>st</sup> is called The Small Christmas.

According to the Thraco-Dacian path, Christmas is a solar god, a Dacian one, similar to the Roman god Saturn and to the Asian god Mithra and the celebration dedicated to him corresponded to the Dacian New Year. As a conclusion, this moment existed at Dacians, and the Roman conquest influenced it in a Pagan way.

Carolling can be considered a Romanian tradition. Carols are related to this custom, which has been preserved since the pre-Christian period. They mark the birth of Jesus Christ and they infer both religious concepts and old practices, their function being ritual. Carols are perceived as a sort of greeting addressed to the hosts for prosperity, fertility, health, long life, harmony, peace and understanding.

The origins of the word *carol* haven't been clearly stated yet, even if there were hypotheses claiming that this word is of Latin or Slavic origin. As long as Christmas existed to the Geto- Dacians, we can admit that this word comes from the Dacian language.

The church was critical to carolling because it claimed that carols had pagan influences and it despised the free way of celebrating this holiday. The church's numerous representatives tried to replace old pagan carols with religious carols, both poetic categories being, therefore, altered.

We cannot divide carols into two main categories, pagan and Christian carols, due to the fact that their existent motifs mix altogether and there is just a tiny boundary between them.

These folk epic-lyrical creations symbolise Christmas and they are not interpreted on the occasion of any other holidays. Carols appeared before the birth of Jesus Christ, but they gained a religious symbolism when the new religion appeared. They infer the whole Christian significance: the creation of the world, the ancient sin, the birth of Jesus Christ, the saint miracles of the church, Jesus Christ's followers, the end of the world. When Christmas is celebrated, carollers substitute the role of Christ's followers, they become God's missionaries and they convey moral and Christian thoughts to people.

The second chapter aims at presenting the village, as the perfect environment for carolling. The village can be perceived as a space which is rich in traditions, songs and

customs; it marks honesty, hard work, moral and spiritual truth. The traditional man had a remarkable artistic vision, and his creations were collective constructions, which revealed the popular genius. Carollers are connected with the rural environment; they preserve and convey the content of the carols in the best way possible.

The four-week period before Christmas focuses on Christians' preparation and anticipation of this holiday; Christians wait for the arrival of Jesus Christ who was born in the poor cave in Bethlehem, that is why the next chapter deals with the analysis of some ways of soul purification. Christians are invited, through advent, prayers, confession and eucharis, to purify their soul and participate, together with magi, shepherds, angels and Saint Mary, in the great event of Jesus Christ's birth. The Advent lasts for forty days, this period reminding us of the advent respected by Moses who was waiting for the laws of the Old Testament on the Sinai Mountain.

Chapters IV and V focus on the holiday itself as a way of facing humans to God and time, as an agent organizing their whole life.

Due to the existential quest, humans have the possibility of reflecting on religious matters. Through this holiday, the traditional man tries to shape his own existence and make of the passing of time a valuable experience. These religious reflections make people aware of their short life on earth and encourage them to purify their soul for God's judgement.

For the traditional man, time is used rationally, nothing comes as an occurrence. He knows exactly how to organize his time, because everything that is not done on valuable time will bring about disasters and shortcomings. This is related to human calendars; however, there is another calendar that is used for farming, house chores and breeding animals.

The Advent of Christmas is punctuated by some important holidays, marked both in the religious calendar with a red or black cross and in the popular calendar.

Every day is blessed, protected and purified through martyrs or is connected with a monk or a saint; when man doesn't feel protected in front of the temptation, the saint of the day or the guardian saint of his name intervenes, talking to God, all days being the saints of people.

Paying honour to saints brings blessings and help to people. In this religious atmosphere, Christian holidays are symbols of salvation; they are bridges where man and God meet.

The importance of the holidays, keeping tradition alive as a national identity, knowing your traditional village and the local folklore must be promoted through school and press. School is the place where this education can be inferred, because every child was born to be

happy, he can be easily educated in the spirit of the holidays. The press activates our national conscience, informing us on the events that take place just before holidays, stimulating our creative spirit. These two entities are basic elements in the promotion and the conveyance of the Romanian customs, and the sixth chapter, *School and press- education in the spirit of holidays*, focuses on the argumentation of this idea.

All the places that preserve carolling have their own school with their own organization rules, with inherited practices, with laws and members who strictly respect the pattern imposed by a leader, and this institution is presented in detail in the next chapter- *Carolling- a traditional institution*.

During the winter holidays, the carollers are the most common figures. They are outstanding representatives of the village, who wish on behalf of the villagers, prosperity, health, luck and gains to every person. This group organizes carolling and tries to develop this event according to tradition, following and coordinating the necessary order in the society. Carollers' duty is to preserve and convey tradition in an untainted way, passing by every house and announcing the birth of Jesus Christ.

This tradition fell upon hard times between 1948 and 1964 due to the severe principles imposed by the communist doctrine. This doctrine aimed at prohibiting religious movements. Meanwhile, this tradition has seen its decline, due to the fact that the security imposed a professional surveillance system, and those who dared to promote it were afraid of the consequences. From 1965 onwards, there was a new interest for the revival of traditions, which proved that the harshness of the communist regime hadn't succeeded in cancelling Romanian identity. Chapter VIII reproduces several pages from the diary of a prisoner in the communist jails and focuses on souvenirs related to Christmas in those times.

The next chapter, *Sacred and Profane in Christmas Customs*, presents in three subchapters, the types of carolling seen in the three villages from Hunedoara county that we have analysed in our paper.

Carolling itself differs from the one accompanied by drums, dancers or stag, because these ones have another way of organization. The group of drummers have their drums as a symbol of carolling, this instrument with rhythmic cadence having the power of driving away bad spirits; the drums announce, at the same time, the host to open the door to let the carollers get in. The dancers and the stag have their own symbols, their specific dances, performed in every house.

There are some other specific groups of carollers, *stelarii*, *viflaimul* and *pizărăii*, which have their own features and are specific for children under 14.



They wander throughout the village in small groups (the *pizărăi* group being constituted of most of the children in the village), with a star made of carton, having several corners, adorned with coloured paper. Their songs are of cultured, religious origin, which differentiates them from the religious carols which are of popular origin. Carols and stars constitute a typical Christian repertory.

They can also accompany the group of *irozi*, who perform a play with characters from the Bible, marking the birth of Jesus Christ (Irod, the Magi, the angel, the shepherd, the soldiers). Most of the roles performed by these characters imitate Anton Pann's version.

In our research in the three villages from Hunedoara county, we analysed several traditions, with people of different ages and gender. The information we gathered differs mostly in gender and less in age and it is depicted in Chapter X.

On this occasion, the men described this custom and the women presented several dishes, the menu that they have got on the Advent days and throughout the holidays. The knot-shaped bread is not very common in this context and it doesn't have the same magical connotations. "Pizărăi" are still made in Boşorod and they are offered to children.

The traditional cheese pies are not offered anymore as they have been replaced by cakes. An interlocutor told me, reviving those moments: *I can't wait for the Christmas to come; I want to make some cheese pies because if I bake them in any other period of the year, they are less tasty. Don't laugh! Ask the other women and they will share my belief.*<sup>1</sup>

The instructions for carolling are a real school. We have noticed in our survey that the choice of the leader who organizes his groups by selecting the carollers is made at the beginning of the Christmas Advent, to make sure that the carollers have got the necessary time to learn the carols.

Every evening the carollers meet their leader in the village club where they learn the carols. Not only do they learn carols, but they also learn dances, how to play an instrument and any other aspect related to a successful carolling experience. Learning becomes a serious issue, each caroller has its own notebook where all the carols are neatly written; they learn the carols very well because, according to informers, the village will judge their performance, as the village represents the stage where the carollers illustrate the whole variety of practices that they have learnt throughout the previous period.

Carollers wait for Christmas impatiently because this holiday represents both for them and for their leader a difficult exam in front of the public opinion of the village and especially

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<sup>1</sup> Informer Tămăşoi Leonița, Boşorod.

in front of the girls. That's why they try to make of their preparatory classes a valuable and responsible experience.

The men were the most appropriate persons in offering details regarding the development of this ceremonial (the women do not go carolling in these villages, they just join the groups of carollers). In spite of this fact, the women know the carols as well, for some of them these carols being a hobby. In Tătăraști, the women and the girls play the drums just like men do.

The group gathers on a specific date every year. Those who can join the group are boys of at least fourteen years old who are good-looking: *they must have straight, nice legs, they must be good dancers, have wide shoulders, a strong back, and they must be attractive for the people, especially for girls*. If they don't apply to these rules, they cannot join the group even if they are fourteen.<sup>2</sup> In Tătăraști, married men can join the group, as well, on the condition they have previously passed it through the star.

All the carols must be well-known (the whole range of carols), the dance of "călușar" and the dance of the stag, the beat on the drums, because there might be some villagers who can surprise the group, asking them to sing a more difficult carol that is not frequently sung. If the carollers cannot manage very well, the host scolds them and pays less money for their performance.

The dance of the "călușar" is attentively watched and every mistake may induce a loss of money. Moreover, the dancers in Boșorod must invite the girls to dance and they must prepare a meal where they must invite the girls, too.

The group cannot avoid any house in the village because this act might be seen as offence and might bring about inconveniences.

From the above-mentioned aspects, we can notice that the group is a very united fusion, with severe regulations that must be closely respected. Carolling seems to be, in the villages that we analysed, a severe ceremonial, [...] *a practice that was preserved with enough vigour*<sup>3</sup>, a task that cannot be accomplished by anyone, the villages of Tătăraști and Boșorod offering a rich informative material in this respect.

The tendency of decadence regarding carolling can be noticed in Densuș, where this phenomenon disappeared, not being practised for more than thirteen years.

The groups in Tătăraști and Boșorod have been well- preserved, even if the old beliefs that generated them disappeared a long time ago. Traditions are preserved in a social group

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<sup>2</sup> Informer Toantă Ioviță, Boșorod.

<sup>3</sup> Monica Brătulescu, *Colinda românească*, Editura Minerva, București, 1981, p. 71.

through contamination, as long as the group lasts or it can be often reconstituted. It is necessary for the new-formed group to have permanent members from the previous groups in order to make sure that tradition is transmitted from one generation to another. In our case, the study of the ceremonial and of the carols. These ones, just like spells, are magic charms that must be spelled exactly, without any mistake, omissions, supplements or the elision of words because otherwise they lose their effect. Any mistake made by the carollers, while singing them, diminishes the positive effect of these carols on the person to whom they are addressed. That's why carollers make great efforts to learn them as accurately as they can, being totally aware of their importance.

Tradition is learnt from the old people, but especially, from the members of the group one joins. The youngster, who is no longer a child, leaves his playful universe and joins other worlds, already formed, that wait for him and let him in, the *neophyte* feeling obliged to give up his old customs and accept the ones of the new group. The youngster is submitted to initiation rites. At every group change, he will have to learn from his new fellows other linguistic skills, another repertoire, other clothes, other behavioural aspects which are specific marks of the group he joined. This group of boys is permanent and long-lasting, the youngster learns here tradition from the other members of the group.

Consequently, the folklore is preserved inside this group (the carollers), which is an institution with initiation functions, education and the preservation of tradition (the traditional repertoire and the one of the social behaviours). The group, as an organized social entity, receives its members without any change in structure, this one remaining untainted despite the changes that might occur. The structure is permanent in spite of the transiency of the human life. The group of carollers, "călușari", drummers is formed on a regular basis and it is long-lasting (it resists in time), keeping its formal structure and its own folk culture as well. The most important oral element related to this group is carolling.

Our comparative study of the texts in the three villages made us reproduce the lyrics of all identified carols, with the support of old informers. In addition, we made a parallel between the themes and motifs which appear in the carols from these three areas.

The repertoire of the carols in Tătăraști and Boșorod is rich and varied, but few of them are related to the birth of Jesus Christ, celebrated on Christmas Eve. They are divided according to the rank that the host has in his family, according to profession, age, gender and some other circumstances.

In our research in the three villages, we discovered that there are no carols sung near the window, all of them are sung inside the house.

The language of these carols is rich and varied, dialectic terms, archaisms, words that are not used anymore can be found altogether with common lexical forms, illustrating a great mobility and vitality of the language.

The penultimate chapter highlights the similarities and discrepancies between contemporary and traditional carolling, practised 30-40 years ago.

In our survey we did not use a questionnaire. We believe that standard questions would have discouraged informers to give details. Without this method, informers felt free to express themselves (they didn't consider me the teacher of Romanian, but they saw me as one of them). Our free discussions permitted the subjects to develop their imagination and express their inner thoughts and beliefs.

The rigour and seriousness of this ceremonial reinforces the idea that carolling is *a real school*.

*Carols have, therefore, made a long journey; they left behind mythological attributes, they have improved throughout time, but they took from the myth the opening towards the cosmos, the shiver of magic spells and the resonance of a hymn of faith to man's wishes, [...], carols truly belong to major poetry.*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Monica Brătulescu, *Colinda românească*, Editura Minerva, București, 1981, p.100.

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