

Folkloric Aspects of the Romanian Imaginary and Myth

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By

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FOREWORD

Anchored to the by no means easy and simultaneously thorny route of globalization, the human society of the twenty-first century seems to be more preoccupied with the idea of an identity than that circumscribed to the relationship between the national and European/Western identities.

For the former communist states from the southeastern and Eastern European area, the legitimization of the national and implicitly cultural identity reveals, through the mediums of tradition, collective memory, and intercultural communication, a unity in the grand diversity, and presents this diversity as an ontological dimension through which values are expressed and the differences of the Other are augmented.

Any national/ethnic identity is grafted onto a customary code of norms, values, symbols, and principles that are agreed upon and recognized by the members of that collectivity, all of which shed light on what is specific and unique in comparison with the other national entities. It is known that:

The nation and its identity are expressed and revealed in authentic memories, in symbols and myths, in the vernacular inheritance and culture of the people that forms a historical community and destiny, but the intellectuals and the specialists of this community have to authenticate, save and incorporate this culture and inheritance in and through educational institutions in an autonomous homeland.¹

From this standpoint, the conceptual articulations of Otherness no longer subscribe to hostility, but to tolerance and comprehension. And, after all, what is this Otherness in the big mirror of the plurality of the worlds? Is it “diversity interpreted as difference,”² the “litmus test of our existence”³ when meeting with the Other, “the inevitable curse of the human condition,” or the “individual’s chance for self-assertion?”⁴

Located in the southeast of Europe, at the crossroads of the pathways to the West and the East, on the outskirts of ever-expanding empires (the

¹ John Naisbitt, Patricia Abudeme, *Anul 2000—Megatendințe. Zece noi direcții pentru anii 90* (București: Humanitas, 1993), 126.

² Vintilă Mihăilescu, *Antropologie. Cinci introduceri* (Iași: Polirom, 2007), 18.

³ Ștefan Aug. Doinaș, “Eu și celălalt,” *Secolul XXI*, 1–7 (2002), 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, “Fragmente despre alteritate,” *Secolul XXI*, 1–7 (2002), 6.

Ottoman Empire, the Tsarist Empire, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire), Romania has remained for the most part a keeper of cultural traditions and values that have been forwarded and inherited throughout the centuries. What characterizes it the most, apart from the area it is a part of—the Balkans—is its ethnic and implicitly cultural diversity, which is reflected in popular culture (music, dances, gastronomy, fairy tales, specific ritualistic sequences at weddings, etc.).

The tradition-bearing folkloric elements, as well as those with new innovations, best reflect the aspects of identity by emphasizing the inner, spiritual structure of any given people, subsequently that of the Romanian people which has resulted from the merger of the Dacians who lived north of the Danube, and the romans who, during the reign of Emperor Trajan, conquered them in AD 106.

Various elements belonging to the cultures of the neighbouring peoples (Bulgarians, Serbians, Magyars, Ukrainians) or the communities that migrated from other spaces other than the Romanian (Székelys and Saxons in Transylvania, Poles, Hutsuls, and Ukrainians in Bukovina, Ukrainians in Maramureş, Turks and Tatars in Dobrudja) were inserted into the ancient cultural background inherited from the Thracian-Dacian and Roman ancestors, with the stipulation that only those in line with the spiritual structure, with the *forma mentis* that was specific to the Romanians, were accepted and assimilated.

There is a vast amount of Romanian folkloric and mythological and it is lesser known in the Western area because just an infinitesimal part of it was translated in international languages, with this aspect being a shortcoming for the research in ethnology and compared mythology. This is why I took it to be necessary to shed light on some aspects from the Romanian folklore and mythology. But since this book addresses more than just specialists but people from all walks of life, it can be seen as a “bridge” between cultures, between people willing to discover, beyond the elements that reveal identity and aspects that configure or reconfigure the similarities in the grand diversity.

I have chosen the elements I consider to be significant and even topical on account of the interrogations they generate and their always-challenging universe of symbols.

An important chapter in the exegesis of the Romanian folklore from the second half of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century was represented by the calendar holydays. Connected to religious holydays or significant moments from the agricultural activities during spring and summer, many customs disappeared as society evolved or after the establishment of communism in the 1950s. The reasons why they have

disappeared are diverse and were generated by mutations that took place in the collective mentality which, although conservative, could not remain uninfluenced by the modernization of the world after the Second World War. On the other hand, the communist system that was established in Romania after 1947 compelled the youth from the rural environment to migrate to the cities, where they became industrial workers. As a consequence, practicing customs was no longer possible anymore, and in fact the peasants were not allowed to respect their traditions since the communists saw them as being obsolete. Most of the customs became reminiscences, since they survived only in the memories of the older peasants; we could mention the *Paparuda* and *Caloianul* (customs intended to summon the rain during droughts), the *Crown of the Wheat* (practiced when the wheat was harvested and a form of solidarity between the youth of a community with the purpose of harvesting all the wheat from the land of a fellow villager), and *Equinoctial Fires* (on March 9 the peasants burned all the weeds that resulted from cleaning the land around the household in courtyards and gardens; when the fire died down the members of the family jumped over the flames so that the smoke would permeate their clothes—they took this as a sign that they were going to be healthy for the next year; also, in certain villages, the peasants used to hit the fire with clubs in a gesture that had a magical-ritualistic valence, because they thought this practice could reconcile the weather, so it would get warmer sooner).

The custom entitled *Howling over the Village* ought to be mentioned as well, due to the fact that it had a redeeming, judicious character in the ancient world of the Romanian village. A boy was chosen to “howl” and was called the *Leader of the Gypsies* [*Voevoda țiganilor*]. The other young boys from the village would tell him what social and behavioural norms were violated by the other villagers in the period of fasting before Easter. On the Saturday of Easter, after dusk, all the peasants gathered in front of the church of that particular village. As the bell rang and the *toaca* was played, the *Leader of the Gypsies* climbed a tall tree. Meanwhile, a heavy silence fell as he called out the names of the members of the community and pointed out the digressions from the norms they had made (sloth, drunkenness, lying, and the incapacity to do certain agricultural activities or domestic tasks). The ones who were not called out the night of the Saturday of the Easter were lucky because they did not have to face the irony and scorn of the villagers.

Two of the calendar holydays that were practiced in the ancient Romanian world and are kept to this day, albeit sequentially or with changes determined by the civilizing dimension, are the *Dragobete* and the

Mărțișorul. The Dragobete, a young god of love from the Romanian pantheon, an autochthonous Cupid, is still celebrated on February 24, which is considered to be the date when birds mate and start to build their nests. This mythical representation was imagined as being a protector of the youths' true, sincere love. The youth used to go in singing, gleeful groups to the forest where they picked the first flowers of spring. The saying "the Dragobete kisses the girls" could be heard everywhere. Today, the youngsters that remember the Dragobete give each other presents and exchange declarations of love. However, the holiday of the Dragobete became obscure because, after 1990, Saint Valentine's, held on February 14, became much more important and was more mediatized than the traditional day. On one hand this emphasizes the tolerance of the Romanians for novelty and, on the other hand, the increasingly bigger and more pronounced dimension of the consumer culture that dominates contemporary society. The Mărțișorul (loosely translated as "the March trinket"), an ancient custom still practiced on March 1, consists of offering a symbolic object to women and children. This object can be shaped as a flower, horseshoe, bird, butterfly, or zodiac sign, and is typically made out of metal. It is tied with a braid of red and white threads. The trinket is worn on one's chest, around the wrist or the neck. Many moons ago, a silver or gold coin used to be tied to the braid. In the traditional society, the trinket was given with the purpose of preserving beauty and ensuring health and prosperity. The trinket, a well-known symbol of spring in Romania, Bulgaria, and the Moldavian Republic, was recently accepted in the representative list of the UNESCO patrimony.

Other complex calendar customs have been reduced to only their spectacular dimensions, with their ritualistic sequences, laden with mythical-magical valences, becoming a beautiful story only for the contemporary person. This is the case of the custom known as Căluș or Călușari which, in past centuries, rounded up an uneven number of men for ten days during spring. This group was invested with miraculous powers by the collective imaginary. The peasants believed that the Călușarii were granted, through rituals and incantations known only by them, the power to ward off evil spirits (the Iele, in particular) and cure ill people. This custom, whose origin is still very much unknown, has not ceased to amaze various ethnologists through the complexity that it draws from the ritualistic sequences, the magical elements it contained, and the diversity of the melodies and dances executed by the members of the group. The whole ceremony was reduced after 1950 to the spectacular element that is known today as the Dance of the Călușarii and is part of the UNESCO patrimony. Perhaps the Călușarii was a complex rite of initiation for the young men,

just like the custom known as the Junii Braşovului [The Lads of Braşov]. This, too, had certain complex ritualistic sequences removed from it on account of not being topical anymore or simply because they don't make any sense to today's youth, given that they are not acquainted with its mythical-magical signification. Time, this unbeatable enemy, does not allow the members of the group to reiterate these sequences in a world that is on fast-forward and ignorant to the necessity of having a close relationship with nature and the sacred. Nowadays, if the weather allows it, the streets of Braşov become the scene of a unique show that consists of the parade and the dance of the boys on the first Sunday after Easter.

The mythical dimension has disappeared from the customs of the Căluşarii and the Lads, probably forever. The spectacular dimension has however remained, and was even augmented after the fall of the communist regime. This does not fail to amaze and captivate people of the twenty-first century. It is precisely this connection to the present that I consider to be challenging in making the dialectics of some folkloric facts known to the wide public, concerning what they used to be and what they have become.

The Sânzieni, another custom presented in the first chapter of this book, had the same fate as the previous ones: there is nobody left to practice it in the contemporary rural universe that is now inhabited mostly by elders, since the youth are abroad in the West for better pay and higher standards of living. The ritualistic scenario of yore has been diluted to a frail note of playfulness and show. In Bukovina, a legendary Romanian region that attracts numerous foreign tourists with its landscapes, hospitality, and ethnographic authenticity, the young girls who possess folkloric information passed down from their parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents get together on June 24 and make crowns from yellow sânzieni flowers. The women fill their houses with these nicely-scented flowers and wear the gorgeous traditional shirt (the *ia*), which is passed proudly from generation to generation.

It is not by accident that I considered it to be necessary to dedicate a chapter of this book to presenting three customs in the chronological order of their practice: the Lads of Braşov, the Căluşarii, and the Sânzieni.

Also, I think that the woman had a role in the folkloric Romanian universe that was by no means negligible. She has been marginalized for centuries because she has been seen as an inferior being not worthy of attention and respect and subsequently looked at suspiciously due to the misconception that she made pacts with the Devil and was not a "human" like the man, and consequently with different rights.

A truth must be told *viva voce*: in the traditional society, the woman was not only a housekeeper, wife, mother, and preoccupied with solving

all the family issues, but also a creator of beauty and a keeper of the customs, beliefs, and knowledge of folk medicine. Her beauty, hardworking character, and active, innovative, and beauty-creating spirit were all emphasized especially by the foreigners who travelled in Romania during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and confirmed her dignity and true status of a human being.

Through disenchantments, charms, incantations, lullabies, stories, magical practices focused on warding off diseases, and summoning or fulfilling love, and through her quality as an artisan and expert in weaving carpets and sowing popular costumes, the woman has enriched the existential universe that was almost permanently under the auspices of the “terror of history” [Mircea Eliade]. The Romanian imaginary was contoured, resized, forwarded, and preserved because she, the woman of the archaic Romanian world, has kept watch over it tirelessly.

But because she was, as mentioned previously, always suspected of collaborating with the Devil and other evil forces, we can easily understand why most of the representations of evil that can be found in the Romanian lore are feminine. In a mythology that does not own a pantheon of very important deities, demonology has gained a significant role. Thus, the Iele, the Știma Apei, the Woodwoman, the Rusalii, Strigoi, and Strigoaicele, the Samca, Zmeii, and Zmeoaicele, the Pricolici, Tricolici, and Moroi, the Marțolea, and the Joimărița are mythical demonic beings that work against the human being. Everything that was unknown or irrepressible was transformed by the imagination of the archaic human into hyperbolized dimensions. As the mythologist Romulus Vulcănescu opines, “In the crude but fiery imagination of the prehistoric man, life grows to the proportion of the fierce battle with the obscure, gigantic and nefarious forces that were considered to be permanently hostile.”⁵ What characterizes these demonic beings is their physiognomy, their typical structure (morphological) and their mythical-ethical function (found in the Woodwoman, Știma Apei, the Iele, Rusalii, Pricolici, Tricolici, and Moroi) or magical-religious function (the Strigoi, Samca, Marțolea, and Joimărița).

The violence of the forces of nature, but also the near-death experiences lived by the people of the archaic world in eerie, isolated places late at night and the inexplicable dangers that lurked in the dark, fuelled the imaginary and preserved it for our modern society. Since the Romanian has always proved to be more conservative than their neighbours (Serbians, Croatians, Hungarians, and Bulgarians), they have respected the

⁵ Romulus Vulcănescu, *Mitologie română* (București: Academia Română, 1985), 294.

unwritten laws to a greater extent and used the mythical function of these supernatural beings they have created as a pretext for imposing ethical norms and a common behavioural code that had to be respected by all the members of the community in order to stay safe from all sorts of dangers. It is surprising that, in the Romanian space, the fierce evolution of sciences and technology has not managed to remove the belief in such beings. We are talking about the belief in *strigoi*, which is alive and well even in the century we live in, particularly in a southwestern region of Romania called Oltenia where, in 2005, the peasants from a village near the city of Craiova performed the ritual of “de-vampirization,” exhuming the corpse of a man they suspected of having become a “strigoi” and driving a stake through his heart so that the villagers could go on with their lives. Behold, then, how superstitions, ancient beliefs, and mythical memories strongly anchored in the collective mentality can determine an atypical behaviour in our contemporary society. This aspect proves that there is a mysterious, unseen “thread” in the human being that connects them to the world of myths.

The demonic representations from the Romanian mythology, through symbolic images of evil, reveal the ancient person’s way of being, thinking, and knowing themselves, and understanding that the lack of responsibility towards the ideal behavioural model can lead to dramatic effects.

The mythological vision and concepts regarding life, the world, the role of the person in the universe, the genesis, the sacrifice that has to be made in order to create something, the attempt of the human being to overcome their condition—all of these are reflected in the intimate structure of the folk literary creations of fairy tales and legends. The mythical theme of how the world and everything in it was built by a limited, tired God in need of helpers, the theme of having a human being sacrificed so that a construction can be finalized and stand the test of time, and the theme of pursuing “life without death” have found their artistic expression in the texts of Romanian literary folklore. Perhaps the talented, anonymous creator through narration granted the myth a certain force in his attempt at escaping—as Bo Carpelan put it—from “the harassments of alienation.” Without a doubt, the cosmogonic myth that was detached from the biblical vision and substantialized by the folk Romanian Christianity would not have survived the journey through the darkness of the ages if it had not worn the charming clothing of the legends we know today from the anthologies of folk texts collected from the peasants in various regions of the country by Simion Florea Marian and Tudor Pamfile. The same thing happened to the myth of the sacrifice with the purpose of creation—

the most well-known myth after the genesis and eschatological ones, spread among almost all the peoples of the world—which, in the Romanian cultural space, has known superior artistic valorization in the ballad of the *Master Manole*, also known as the *Ballad of the Argeș Monastery*. In what regards the myth of pursuing immortality, which also exists in the mythology of the Celts, the Chinese, and the Japanese, it found its endurance to the inexorable flow of time through the folk fairy tale *Youth without Caducity and Life without Death*, collected in the nineteenth century by Petre Ispirescu, a fairy tale that could possibly be the remnant of a larger mythological fragment that has been lost.

All these aspects pertaining to the mythology and the folklore of the Romanian people that make up this book shed light on the way of thinking and living, on the identity, moral and spiritual elements, and on the specific cultural code of the people who have lived and still live north of the Danube, at the crossroads of East and West.

The book will follow its own path, but its entrance into the literary world is not solely the reflection of my own work, but also that of its translator, Sebastian Priotese, whom I thank for his effort and struggle to prevent the significance of the message from being lost in translation.

CHAPTER ONE

CALENDAR HOLYDAYS: THE MYTHICAL DIMENSION AND THE SPECTACULAR

The Custom of the Lads from Șcheii Brașovului: Mythical Reminiscences and Symbolical Valences

The cultural elements people have created throughout the centuries, be they literary creations, songs, dances or customs, and ceremonial rites or superstitions, endow them, in space in time, with a certain particularity and individuality within a large diversity. Understanding this helps us to fathom the psychological and spiritual structure of such people, as well as their mental paradigms.

Romanians have through the ages created their own traditions against the Roman and Thracian-Dacian background that can be considered the “solid and stable component of the social being” [Eugeniu Sperantia]. These traditions, which have been concretized in customs, dances, rites, and ceremonies inherited and transmitted from generation to generation, and which have been simplified or enriched, depending on the influence of the social-cultural evolution, generate the idea that the Romanian people have perceived certain “schemes” or mythological patterns only by transposing them in a material existential universe.

The collective heroes of a mythical-magical nature who recall ancestors and hark back to the ancestral beings with which people have struggled to maintain an unaltered essential spiritual connection have held a worthwhile place in the collective memory. To a certain extent, modern folklore has tried and is still trying to restore a “typology” of the “collective mythical-magical heroes,” starting from the customs known as Călușarii, the Lads from Șcheii Brașovului, Borița, and Turca, whose impact on the mentality of the Romanians from the regions where they are still practiced cannot be denied.

Several mythological representations pertaining to the solar and Mithraic cults, the Dionysian and Orphic cults, and the cult of the Danubian Knights were merged into the complex and probably prehistoric custom practiced in Braşov. The custom encompasses practices, dances and magical formulas, and ritual acts practiced by a group of men strictly hierarchized—just like in the case of the Căluşari—into “vătaf,” “armaşul mare,” “armaşul mic,” “sutaşul,” and the “lads.” The Lads from Braşov is nowadays a highly exquisite and entertaining ceremony for the inhabitants of the city of Poalele Tâmppei. We ought to mention that this custom was initially practiced for a long time by a single group only, but from the second half of the nineteenth century, other groups, “somewhat parasitic”¹ as Ion Muşlea called them, started to form. They were known as the “Old Lads,” “White Lads,” “The Turkey-Lads,” “Red Lads,” “the Lads from Dorobanţi,” and the “Lads from Braşov.” Because this custom is inherently connected to the Young Lads (the Lads from Şcheii Braşovului), and given that the other groups ruined the name of the Lads,² our attention is directed towards the former.

The first documentary attestation of the Lads from Şcheii Braşovului was made in 1728, and the first publication that mentioned their name was *The Transylvania Gazette* (March 26, 1839), when George Bariţiu wrote, in an article dedicated to them, that the custom, unpractised in other areas, is similar to the custom of the Căluşari from Ardeal, it’s just that it is “much more.”³ The custom is described from the nineteenth century to the present day by G. I. Pitiş (*Sărbătoarea Junilor la Paşti. Obicei particular al românilor din Şchei, Braşov*, 1889), Silvestru Moldovan (*Ţara Noastră, Sibiu, 1894*), Simion Florea Marian (*Sărbătorile la români*, vol. III, Bucureşti, 1901), Julius Teutsch, Ion Scurtu (“*Junii*” *din Braşov*, 1907), Constantin Lacea (1926), St. Stinghe (*Junii și originea lor*, 1926), I. Muslea (*Obiceiul Junilor braşoveni*, 1930), Mihai Pop (*Obiceiuri tradiţionale româneşti*, Bucureşti, 1976), Ion Ghinoiu (*Sărbători și obiceiuri româneşti*), and Vasile Oltean (*Junii din Şcheii Braşovului*—monografie istorică, Iaşi, 2005).

It was difficult for these researchers to pinpoint the origin of the custom due to its considerable age and polyvalence (but many hypotheses have been formulated in this regard). For instance, Julius Teutsch saw it as

¹ Ion Muşlea, *Cercetări etnografice și de folclor*, I (Bucureşti: Minerva, 1972), 106.

² Ion Muşlea opines that, barring the group of Young Lads, the others were formed much later in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. The group of the Old Lads is the second oldest, while the White Lads formed in 1870, the Turkey-Lads in 1879, the Red Lads in 1908, and the Lads from Dorobanţi in 1926.

³ Muşlea, *Cercetări etnografice și de folclor*, 37.

a “a celebration of the renewal of nature,”⁴ Adolf Schullerus saw the Lads and Călușari as guilds of youths with magical origins⁵ while Constantin Lacea saw them as the remains of a military organization that probably originated in Bulgaria,⁶ and for St. Stinghe the custom purportedly started during the reign of Michael the Brave.⁷ Ion Mușlea thought that the Lads from Brașov is a vestige of a complex ritual of initiation of the youths,⁸ whereas Ion Ghinoiu considered as plausible the “hypothesis according to which the Lads from Brașov preserved, up to the present day, elements from a ritual scenario of the New Year that was celebrated in spring, during the spring equinox.”⁹

From our point of view, the complexity of this custom, unique in the Romanian space and certainly born in what is Romanian territory today (so not south of the Danube, as was believed), during times that are difficult to pinpoint, the so-called legendary times, can be explained by the corroboration of certain mythic-ritualistic elements from cultures (Dionysian, Orphic, and Mithraic) that were practiced by forefathers, on top of which influences from Christianity overlapped throughout the ages. The ample process of the custom from which certain mythical-ritual valences were lost enlances precise sequences: forming the group of young men and assessing the leaders (vătaf, armaș mare, armaș mic, and sutaș—who fulfils the role of the treasurer and flag-bearer), the unfolding of the ceremonial acts in the same places each year (Țimăn’s garden, Piața Prundului, Coasta Prundului, Solomon’s Stones, Podu Dracului, and St. Nicholas’s Church from Șcheii Brașvolui), the dances and games (the “hora,” a traditional Romanian dance, and the “lady-dog”), and the ritual feasts and customs (the throwing of the mace, the burial of the vătaf/leader).

In order to reveal the preservation of some mythical-magical elements and symbolical valences in the practice of the custom, we need to consider those sequences we consider significant, which provide an invisible, mysterious connection of the being from the modern, contemporary society with the mythical universe that is laden with sacredness.

Of course, there is no novelty for the receptors in the fact that the participants interviewed could neither reveal the motivation behind practicing a certain ritual nor say what the role of a ritualistic object used within a “spectacle” offered by the lads at the onset of spring in the

⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁵ Ibid., 42.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 91–2.

⁹ Ion Ghinoiu, *Sărbători și obiceiuri românești* (București: Elion, 2002), 205.

picturesque Transylvanian town was. According to the paradigm of the collective mentality, a sequence, if not an entire ceremony, unfolds in virtue of common law and aesthetic value.

The Holyday of the Lads and Spring, as the custom is known today, lasts for ten days: one day during the Annunciation (Blagoveštenie), one day during Palm Sunday, and eight days starting from Easter Sunday and ending on the next Sunday, a day otherwise known as Duminica Tomii [the Easter of the Dead], thus encompassing the whole week that Christians call the Enlightened Week. The debut of the custom on March 25 (the Annunciation), very close to the spring equinox (March 21), is by no means accidental, for the Sunday of the Annunciation marks “the final point of all beings coming back to life and the decisive moment of the awakening of verdure,”¹⁰ and, according to the popular belief of the Romanians, “the first day of the year when the sun is gleeful.”¹¹ The group of Lads is formed before the Annunciation by assessing the new members (in other words, “who messes with the Lads”) and the “șerjele”¹² (vătaf, armaș mare, armaș mic, sutaș, and stegar). Until the first half of the nineteenth century, whoever wanted to be chosen as “vătaf,” i.e. the leader of the formation, had to “bid” for this role by offering a large quantity of wine to those who would vote for him. Because quarrels among the Lads were frequent, the archpriest Ion Popazu concluded in 1838 that the “șerje” had to be established in chronological order, so in concordance with how long each man had been a member of the Lads. Thereby, the Lad with the oldest membership was designated the leader, the second was designated “armaș mare,” and the third, “armaș mic.” Their role was, as it is to this day, that of ensuring the precise unfolding, without any incident, of all the ritualistic sequences.

On the Day of the Annunciation, the first ceremonial act of the Lads is “Going out with the Surla.” In this, some Lads accompany the trumpeter to the leader of the group and then to the other two. After they reunite, they go to Piața Prundului, where they blow the surla, then climb the Coasta Prundului, where the Lads from other formations and a large group of people with a thirst for entertainment are waiting for them. This is where

¹⁰ Antoaneta Olteanu, *Calendarele poporului roman* (București: Enciclopedică, 2000).

¹¹ Elena Niculiță Voronca, *Datinele și credințele poporului român adunate și așezate în ordine mitologică* (Iași: Polirom, 1998).

¹² “Șerje” comes from the French word for the NCO of the Austrian army. In Romania, the term was used to denominate the leaders of the group of lads: vătaf, armaș mare, and armaș mic.

they would dance, but nowadays, due to the influence of the church, they can only throw the mace because it is a period of fasting.

The leader, actually the president of the group of Lads, collects money from those outside the group who wish to throw the mace or from people who make donations so that those who practice the custom can pay for the expenses (horses, musicians, etc.).

Since the two ritualistic objects—the “surla” and the mace—are among the props of the Lads even today, it is necessary to make a few comments on them. The Surla is a musical instrument shaped like a small trumpet, with six holes for digitation. It is thirty-five centimetres long and has a diameter of 11.5 centimetres. In line with the common law, only the young lads are allowed to carry this instrument which emits shrill, inharmonious sounds that only the trumpeter can harmonize with. The so-called “music” of the trumpeter is known only by him and is transmitted from generation to generation. The origin of the instrument is unknown, but most researchers agree with ethnographer Ion Muşlea’s theory that it is of Muntenian descent, since the trumpet may have been used in the orchestra from the court of the Muntenian voivodes (dukes). One thing is certain: that the melody:

of the surla is ancient and has a sacred character, an aspect that is confirmed by its ritualistic transmission and by the fact that the people from Şchei endowed it with the attribute of holiness because, on The Day of the Annunciation, when they heard its sound, they used to utter: “Thank you Lord for making me worthy of hearing the holy trumpet one more time!”¹³

We consider that the role of the surla was of announcing the commencement of the solemn, sacred ceremony occasioned by the renewal of nature. It is known that in antiquity, Greeks used the trumpet during the great processions brought about by Dionysus’s holydays; likewise, this musical instrument was an essential element in the Roman religious ceremonies.

The second ritualistic object, the mace, was not always shaped like it is today. In was once made of hardwood and then wrapped in wire. Starting from the twentieth century (after the Grand Union of 1918, to be more precise), the mace was made of brass; it is thirty centimetres in length and has a weight of up to 1.5 kilograms. Annually, the three leaders of the group received a mace as their own distinctive sign.

¹³ Vasile Oltean, *Junii din Şcheii Braşovului—monografie istorică* (Iaşi: Edict, 2005), 68.

Symbolically, the mace is associated with lightning. For a long time, it has been a symbol of the “confraternities of initiation in the army.”¹⁴

The mace has “obvious phallic connotations,”¹⁵ being similar to the cultic instrument worn by the Mute from the groups of Călușari. The lads hurled the mace whenever the “hora” was danced, the mythic-ritualistic gesture symbolizing the idea of fertilization of the space simultaneously with the moment of natural resurrection, and also served as a support for the sun so that it can “transcend the critical point of the spring equinox.”¹⁶

In the folklore of the European peoples, the mace is generally a symbol of the group/collective of the Lads who went through different levels of initiation.

Returning to the scenario of the ceremony, from March 25 until Easter the attention of the Lads is directed at the rigorous preparation of the ritualistic sequences they have to participate in during the “enlightened week.” There is one exception, however, generated by the evident influence of the church, which consists in the fix-up of memorial feasts for those who passed into the shadows, in line with the Christian ritual. These feasts are prepared by men. Women are only invited to them.

The period with the greatest manifestations is the one between Easter and the following Sunday, known in folklore as the Easter of the Dead or the Easter of the Gentle Ones. For Christians, this entire week is just an extension of the sacredness of Christ’s resurrection.

On the second day of Easter, the Monday, the Lads dressed in traditional costumes, wearing hats decorated with flowers (replacing the wreaths that were worn by those who participated in the feasts commended to Orpheus or Dionysus) with ruje [roses] or cocarde [ribbons] on their chests as insignia, would split in three groups, each accompanied by musicians. They would visit the houses of their acquaintances, in particular the girls who were old enough to marry, from whom they would collect eggs coated in red paint—the colour of the sun at sunrise and sunset. This aliment, endowed with powerful symbolical valences in universal mythology, a “substitute of the primordial divinity,”¹⁷ is sacramentally consumed during the Easter holydays. Accordingly, the gesture of the Lads of collecting coloured eggs is ritualistic. To this is added the splashing of the girls with water, a custom that is not practiced anymore

¹⁴ Ivan Evseev, *Enciclopedia semnelor și simbolurilor culturale* (Timișoara: Amarcord, 1999), 445.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ion Ghinoiu, *Panteonul românesc. Dicționar* (București: Enciclopedică, 2001), 33.

¹⁷ Ibid.

because the modern Lads usually use a can of spray. In former times, as in many other regions in Romania, the Lads from Braşov splashed the girls ritualistically with water from a well, or would even throw them in it, the gesture signifying the idea of purification. After finishing the visitation of all the houses from Şcheii Braşovului, where all the girls aspiring to wedlock lived, the group of Lads went to Țimăn's Garden, where all those present would revel. Food was laid on an elliptical table dug into the ground. This was one of the ritualistic meals of the Lads. Because the garden does not exist anymore, having been transformed into a graveyard, they party at the triptych by the Holy Trinity Church and at night time, when they return, the second leader cooks dinner for all of them at his house. The entertainment of the Lads and other members of the community is resumed the next day in Piața Prundului and then on Coasta Prundului, where they dance the hora, hurl the mace, and yet another ritualistic meal is organized, but this time by the girls who had danced the previous night.

Within the complex custom of the Lads, a rarely seen ritualistic sequence is the "throwing in the carpet" or the "throwing in the rug," which until around the second half of the last century took place at the leader's house, in private company, giving the impression that the practice is mysterious, and so has to be done under the rose, away from the eyes of the curious. Most probably, the "throwing in the rug" (done three times) is part of an initiation ritual that neophytes were subjected to in order to become members of the group of Lads. Also, many centuries ago this may have been a secret association of young men. This practice existed in multiple areas, in the dance of the Căluşari, in Muntenia, in Ardeal, and south of the Danube River in Bulgaria, or in other Romanian customs practiced on Whitsuntide, New Year, etc. As Ion Ghinoiu puts it, the gesture can be interpreted as "an instantaneous death and resurrection."¹⁸

Only the lads who were missing that certain Thursday night were "thrown in the rug" the next day, only this time it was done in public, possibly as a punishment for those Lads who, for various reasons (refusal, fear, absence), had removed themselves from a ritual that had to be respected religiously. In contemporary times, the mythical gesture became a "spectacular" one, practiced publicly on the Friday of the "enlightened week."

A significant place in the complex cultural phenomenon of the Lads from Braşov is held by the whole procession that is organized on the Easter of the Dead, the last holyday, and the most important one.

¹⁸ Ghinoiu, *Panteonul românesc*, 208.

Nowadays, this is known in Braşov as the “Sunday of the Lads.” We must mention that until the communist period, when many folkloric “practices” were forbidden, this ceremony was held during the week, on Wednesday. In the following years after the 1990s, the Lads postponed the ritual for a week or even more if the weather did not allow it.

On this day, the Lads visit the şerje, then go to Piaţa Prundului, in front of St. Nicholas’s Church, where the parish priest sanctifies their flags. The traditional norms are respected with unwavering strictness, without any deviation from the fixed itinerary and the moments that constitute the scenario of the ceremony.

The Lads walk a long road up to Solomon’s Stones, an open-air amphitheatre guarded by five cliffs. This is where they dance to a special melody called the Hora of the Lads, followed by various other dances like sârba, breaza, brâul, etc., to which girls are invited. The throwing of the mace takes place during the hora. The throwing of the mace was initially a virility test, a ritual meant to initiate the pubescent boys who might have wanted to join a secret association of warriors or maybe become practitioners of a local cult like that of the Danubian Knights (first century BC to fourth century AD).

For a long time, the Lads never danced the hora without throwing the mace three times each—each time celebrating, in order, the renewal of nature, the triumph of light and warmth, and the conquest of demonic, chthonian forces. We can glimpse in this ritualistic sequence, in spite of all the mutations produced throughout the ages, a reminiscence of the cult of Dionysus, of the Dionysia, those ritualistic holydays of spring with a relatively long duration (six days), but also of the cult of Orpheus, known through the initiating character and the promotion of the idea of purification and the annulment of mistakes through the pleasures of dancing; we can see a recollection of the cult of the Danubian Knights as well, which considered that initiation is made in various phases, the final objective being acquiring immortality.

Solomon’s Stones is also where a feast is organized, In earlier times, lumps in the ground served as tables, whereas today the tables for the same occasion are manufactured from wood and metal.

This pastoral “holyday” of spring, which took place in a picturesque location in Braşov, in an open space where traces of a Dacian fortress were found, is a distinguished moment in the life of the city, just as the pastoral Dionysia were in ancient times, when the ancestors organized processions, sacrifices, contests, and a Komos (a banquet with dances and songs). Beyond the innate changes and simplifications determined by the evolution of society, a certain “monotypy” of some cultures and ancient

rituals was preserved in the vast majority of Romanian customs, including the Lads from Braşov. After a day of partying amidst Chetri (the local name for Solomon's Stones), the groups of Lads (all seven existing groups: Young, Old, Red, Dorobanţi, White, Turkeys, and Braşovecheni) are led by their leaders on the same path they climbed to the stones on. They go to the cemetery where the tomb of the poet Andrei Mureşanu is, and sing "the Christ has revived!" and a fragment from the national anthem, "Awaken thee, Romanian!" After this, the groups break up, and all those who are present say "May you live long!" to each of the leaders.

Congruous to the information that we find in a recent monograph (2005), published by a contemporary researcher of the custom, Vasile Oltean, the holyday of the Lads continues on the following Sundays, each group organizing, in a place established beforehand, the dances that are aimed at allowing them to invite unmarried girls to dance. It is likely that this was practiced before the communist period, as well as after 1990 when the "folkloric phenomenon" was updated in its entire amplitude and splendour.

Unfortunately, with the progressive departure of the human from the mythical universe, two mythic-ritualistic sequences with a powerful symbolic charge have been lost: "the burial of the leader" and the "lady-dog."

The climax of the custom of the Lads was "the burial of the leader," which occurred on Thursday at dusk, when the leader was strapped to a ladder, covered with a blanket, and carried by four Lads, two "disguised" as a priest and professor, parodying the religious texts customarily read at funerals and mimicking dirges. "Talanga" is also an item that can be found in the props of the Lads, so everything is practiced in lines with a genuine funeral ceremony. The retinue walked the streets from Şcheii Braşovului and stopped at drinking houses. If it rained, they placed the leader under the gutters of the houses to get him wet, saying that it was necessary for him to be "softened, for he was quite rough." At dawn, they reached the place called the Devil's Bridge, where the leader was thrown onto the waterless riverbed. He was taken out of the "grave" only after he promised a considerable amount of alcohol to the other Lads. The ritual ended with a party, usually at a drinking house, where they consumed the alcohol promised by the leader.

"The burial of the leader" is a funeral simulacrum that can also be found with other European peoples, habitually practiced during the Carnival. We can also find it in the dance of the Căluşari, only that the Mute is the one buried in this case rather than the leader. The burial and the resurrection, the temporary disappearance and the comeback, the

occultation, and the epiphany were frequent rituals for the peoples of antiquity, as part of a religious mystery/cult like the cult of Zamolxis for the Dacians, the Eleusinian mysteries for the Greeks, Dionysus for the Thracians, and Isis and Osiris for the Egyptians. The ritual was meant to symbolically underline the miracle of the renewal of nature, but also the reaching of another initiation phase in the great mysteries of life and death. The throwing of the Lad's leader signified the symbolic "death" of the one that had not yet reached full initiation, and getting out of the grave marked the symbolic resurrection, the completion of the initiation. The previous year faded with the ritualistic burial of the leader; a certain relationship of the human being with adverse natural forces was annulled, and once he was taken out of the (waterless) grave at the Devil's Bridge, a new beginning loomed under the zodiac of the sun, a resizing of the human's relation to the cosmos and the world which they parted with momentarily, being drawn out of its order. This mythic-ritualistic "scenario" of "the burial of the leader" is similar to "the burial of the Carnival," a custom practiced by the Saxons from Transylvania, described by James Frazer in *Creanga de aur* [*The Golden Bough*, III] and consisting of a scarecrow wrapped in white silk, symbolizing the Carnival. The procession was accompanied by local lads who rode horses and were gilded with boughs. The Carnival was sentenced to death for doing the villagers a lot of harm by damaging their footwear and making them tired and sleepy. Therefore, it all revolves around the myth of nature's death and rebirth, which existed for all peoples because the human has always been fascinated by these phenomena, and their wish to know and explain them has determined their staging and acting them out in rituals.¹⁹

The sequence of the "burial of the leader" was followed by the game called "the lady-dog." The dog was probably a totem of the Romanians from this area of the country, just like the wolf had been a totem of their Dacian ancestors. This ritualistic dance unfolded as follows: after the leader's "revival" and after all the alcohol he had promised was consumed, at the order of one of the Lads all the young people had to take their shirts off as quickly as possible in pitch-black darkness and then scourge each other with their belts. The game would come to a stop when one of the Lads said: "the lady-dog came back from the mill." The ritual, practiced by the youths at weddings when nobody could have seen them, can only be explained as a simplified, evolved reminiscence of the Dionysian orgiastic dances, whose aim was to consecrate the act of initiation and, at

¹⁹ James George Frazer, *Creanga de aur* III, trans. Octavian Nistor (București: Minerva, 1980), 30–1.

the same time, to consecrate a collective alliance which was in communion with the deity that awakened the nature. The ritualistic game “the lady-dog” can be viewed, in this light, as a reflection of the animistic mentality of a collectivity that believed in the miracle of nature’s eternal resurrection, which the collectivity expressed symbolically. This fact allowed the people who were anchored to the mythical universe to feel as if they were messengers of that god, to feel free and detached from the strict spatial and temporal coordinates, and to feel like conquerors of the maleficent forces of winter, equated with death.

All of the ritualistic sequences that formed and are still forming, with some simplifications imposed by the evolution of society and the fifty years of communism, the complex custom of the Lads from Braşov—picking out the leader of the group, blowing the trumpet (*surla*), the ritualistic feasts, the dancing of the *hora* and the throwing of the mace, the procession on the streets of Braşov with a fixed itinerary, the burial and the revival of the leader, the “the lady-dog” game, the throwing of the Lads in the rug—reveal the preservation, in its essential data, of a mythical mentation and behaviour of the human being that carries, through time, the invisible, mysterious connections with the mythical universe in and *through* which it has tried to define itself.

As in all Christianized spaces, the influence of the church in the practice of this custom is natural. Because it could not remove some old, so-called “pagan practices,” the church assimilated them instead. Thereby, the Lads, from the nineteenth century, came under the wing of the church and were supervised by priests, singing “the Christ has risen!” whenever possible and with the fir trees they carry to Solomon’s Atones at the forefront of the suite, then drop in front of the gate of the leader, decorated with wooden crosses offered by the priests and lain at the triptychs from Braşov. Because the custom of the Lads is connected with the return of spring, it usually manifests on Easter, this holyday marking the renewal of the verdure, Christ’s—the solar hero—resurrection and life’s triumph.

However, the church could not transform the custom of the Lads in a religious ceremony, so the archaic mythic-ritualistic structures were preserved.

The custom of the Lads is relevant within the contemporary society for the way in which an entire community assimilates and integrates the sacred through and abreast a group of youths.

From Mythic-ritualistic Gesture to Popular Show: Călușarii

Through the literary creations they made and the games and customs they inherited and adapted in concordance with the evolution of society, the Romanian gives the impression that they can understand mythological “patterns” only if they transpose them onto their concrete, quotidian universe.

Moreover, the Romanian seems to be much more interested in the detail of the message that is transmitted than its trajectory.

In popular memory, the collective mythical-magical heroes have always had a significant place. In key-moments, the peasants’ mentality has imposed a certain connection with the collective character, in particular with the ancestors. Romanians had and still have an essential connection with their forefathers, a tie which people have always tried to maintain unaltered. There is a landmark of the Romanian mentality here, considering the individual as an entity that has been determined on the genetic line that can be traced back to the ancestors who provided the ancestral landmarks of the nation (even though there is no reference to their actions).

A typology of these collective mythical-magical heroes can be reformed through the well-known Romanian ritual-dance of the Călușari, a constant term of reference in our folk culture. Its impact on the mentality of the Romanians is undeniable.

The custom, also known as Căluș, formerly spread through most of Romania, but today is found only in the south of Oltenia and Muntenia (Olt, Teleorman, Dolj, Argeș, Ilfov, and Ialomița), and represents, as Mihai Popa opines: “the single most important folk manifestation in which, within the realm of customs, dance as a way of expression has a prevalent role.”²⁰

Valuable information with respect to the unfolding of the custom can be found in various studies from the eighteenth century to present day: Dimitrie Cantemir (*Descriptio Moldaviae*, 1714), F. I. Sulzer (1781, Viena), Lazăr Șăineanu (*Studii de Folclor*, 1896, București), Tudor Pamfile (*Sărbătorile de vară la români*, 1910, București), T. T. Burada (*Istoria Teatrului în Moldova*, 1915, Iași), Romulus Vuia (*Originea jocului călușarilor*, 1934), Horia Barbu Opreșan (*Călușarii*, 1969, București), Mircea Eliade (*Notes of the Călușarii*, 1973, S.U.A.), and Mihai Pop (*Călușul*, 1975, Revista de Etnografie și Folclor, București).

²⁰ Mihai Pop, *Obiceiuri tradiționale românești* (București: Univers, 1999), 109.

It was and still is quite difficult for researchers to assess the origin of this dance, which is certainly the memento of an ancient cult. It is possible that the dance originates from Coli Salii Romani²¹ (both appertain to the same group of customs—the dances with weapons, whose aim was that of driving away the demons that affected people's health). The name comes from the appearance of the horse ("căluș"), which was considered to be a daemon of good health and fecundity. Through its curative character, the dance of the Călușarii from Romania is different from the similar customs one can find in the south of Macedonia in Bulgaria. This is precisely its distinctive and most peculiar mark. One proof that this custom and the solar cult are not complete strangers to each other is the fact that both respect the two moments of the day—sunrise and sunset—because the participants do not dance before the sun rises or after it sets. In Banat, the Călușarii perform two dances: the dance of the sun at sunrise and the dance of the sun at dusk. This is the origin of the mythical-solar nature of this custom.

In the probably prehistoric dance of the Călușarii, two mythological representations were merged by overlapping two holydays celebrated on different dates: the veneration of the Iele (the Rusalii or the Vântoase, Romanian mythological beings similar to the harpies) and the cult of the horse. The Călușarii is a highly entertaining ceremony during which the equine god (Mutul Călușului), the protector of horses and summer, celebrates with the group of Călușari on Whitsuntide week. The dance embodies practices, magical formulas, and ritualistic acts that are carried out only by a group of men strictly hierarchized as mute, vâtaf (leader), ajutor de vâtaf (second-in-command), flag-bearer, and common Călușari.

The so-called Mute has the most important role, because he is forbidden to talk during the days in which the custom is being carried out. The cause of his muteness is more of a psychological nature. He wears a mask, and probably according to a certain set of rules, masked figures had

²¹ Coli Salii Romani were the twelve priests of Mars, keepers of the holy shields. In March, during the holydays consecrated to this god, they participated in competitions and danced with the shields. Their jumps represented the rebirth and the prosperity of nature, as well as the banishing of evil spirits. Some philologists from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, fervent supporters of the latinity of the Romanian people, have opined that the custom of the Călușarii originated in the Roman practice. Since it is impossible to trace the true origin of the custom and taking into consideration the powerful influence exerted by the Romans on Dacia after the conquest in the year 106, we daresay it is not an exaggeration to see in the Călușari a reminiscence of the custom that was practiced by the aforementioned priest.

to be silent so they could not be recognized and augment the mystery that characterized the Călușari. His mask is grotesque and is customarily made out of leather or rags, and his costume is bicolored, recalling the harlequins from the carnival games. His prop is always a phallic object hanging from his belt, suggesting that he is the representative of the daemon of fecundity. He is also the one seen as the protector of the Călușari, because he drives the “Tele” away with whiplashes.

The euphoric state and the mystical cohesion between the Călușari, who are tied by an oath of allegiance, are obtained through performing, to physical and psychological exhaustion, the sacred dances to melodies that are sung by musicians who are not part of the group. In this way, the dances of the Călușarii have the same effect as the ritualistic debaucheries held on New Year’s Eve and also recall the orgiastic dances of the Bacchantes during the Dionysian holydays.

The first detailed description of this ritualistic dance is to be found in the eighteenth chapter of the monograph *Descriptio Moldaviae* by Dimitrie Cantemir:

Călușarii meet once a year, they dress in women’s attire, they wear wreaths of wormwood leaves and all sorts of flowers on their heads, they talk like women so they cannot be recognized and cover their faces with a white cloth. They carry swords with which they would stab any man from the crowd that would dare to snatch their masks off. This is a right that was given to them by an ancient custom and is so powerful that they cannot be held accountable for murder ... For ten days, between the celebration of Christ’s Ascension and Whitsuntide, they have no rest, but go dancing and running through all the cities and all villages. They only sleep under the roof of a church in all this time.²²

This is how the ritualistic dance was carried out at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when Cantemir wrote about it, underlining its nature as a custom used for curing some diseases. His remark regarding the acquittal of the Călușari who relied on murder to ensure the secrecy of the dance and that the ritual was respected with strictness is important for understanding the Romanian mentality regarding the magic spectrum. We find that the Romanian is not interested in probing the magic or the occult, or in the discovery of new modalities of penetrating the secrets of existence—they just have a tremendous respect for them. They accept that there are initiated persons (the group of Călușari, in this case) and offer

²² Dimitrie Cantemir, *Descrierea Moldovei* (București: Academia Română, 1973).

them their respect and total trust, considering that the initiates are the only ones who can be held accountable for their actions.

Starting with the second half of the twentieth century and thanks to research conducted by specialists in the villages from the South of Romania (Oltenia, Călărași, and others)—where the custom is still in practice, unlike in other areas of the country—it has been found that superstitious praxes and magical acts were eliminated and the Călușul became nothing but “a great dance of virtuosity.”²³

At the basis of the practice of this custom, which embodies numerous elements pertaining to the spectacular and which generates, even today, some question marks for the neophytes and specialists alike, is the group itself. It was formed by swearing an oath as secret as the behavioural rules of its members.

The group of the Căluș has a very rigorous arrangement, customarily formed only by men between twenty and sixty years old. Once, the group was formed by seven, nine, eleven, or thirteen men, for a period of three, five, seven, or nine years (the numbers are not as respected as they used to be). They wear the traditional costume (in earlier times it was the costume worn on holydays). They usually cover their heads with hats with large brims, beautifully decorated with multi-coloured marbles and ribbons. Their waists are gilded with multi-coloured baldrics; they also wear miniature baldrics placed diagonally on their chests. They wear braided ornaments and small bells behind the knees and around the ankles. While the custom is carried out, Călușarii wear the opinci (traditional Romanian shoes made of a rubber or leather rectangle and tied around the foot with thread). These shoes are equipped with pinteni (metal plates on the outer edges), and together with the bells they emphasize the rhythm of the melody and dance.

They always carry a white flag with them. This prop represents the most important element of the custom and is made during a special ceremony which takes place before swearing the oath. This is how the flag is made: they grab a wooden pole that is more than three metres long and tie a manually-woven towel, fresh garlic, and wormwood around its tip because, according to traditional belief, these have healing properties. The flag is held for as long as the custom is still in process by the first Călușar in the group, who is not allowed to let it fall since something bad is bound to happen if it does.

As mentioned previously, the person in the group named “the mute” is forbidden to utter as much as a single word for the entire duration of the

²³ Mihai Pop, *Obiceiuri tradiționale*, 117.

custom, and carries an oversized wooden phallus between his legs. The phallus symbolizes fecundity and fertility in this case, as well as “an ambiguous aggressiveness and insult towards the Iele.”²⁴ *Călușarii* hang garlic and wormwood around their waists and carry wooden swords, bows, and sticks. The role of these mandatory instruments among the props of the custom is that of serving as defence against evil spirits, the Iele in particular.

The *Călușarii* stayed together for ten days. This period was, for them as well as the collective they belonged to, an exit from everyday life and a penetration into the ritual, the transition from an ordinary dimension into the mythical-magical one, in which they had to respect certain interdictions because it was believed that violating them attracted the punishing wrath of the Iele. This was the interval in which the community engaged all of its attributes in the protection of the group.

The group was formed as follows: the members met in remote places (frequently at crossroads) so they were shielded from the indiscreet gaze of any intruder and drove the white flag into the ground. The mute sat on the ground right next to the flag, and each dancer had to jump over him and the sticks of the *Călușari* in two rows. In the aftermath, each *călușar* swore on the flag that he would respect the orders of the leader at all costs, that he would not divulge their secrets for three years, and that he would not touch any woman while the custom was being performed. If he broke the oath, he was at risk of going insane for the rest of his life. Here are a few oath formulas of the *Călușari*:

I swear on the souls of my ancestors and on my horses and cattle to respect the *Căluș* and its law until the unbinding of the flag (Argeș).

We bind ourselves to be united, to help each other, to stay with the *Căluș*, not to wish for money and not to touch women as long as we are in the *Căluș*. So help us God! (Teleorman)

In the name of God, the Holy One, we bind ourselves, swearing faith to the flag that we will dance in justice, without sorrow and quarrelling. (Muscel)

It can be seen that the text or the oath differs from area to area. It must be specified that the oath was renewed each year, especially when the group got another member. It is possible that this is the reason why it was divulged in the first place; it is also possible that it is precisely this

²⁴ Mihai Pop, “Călușul (Lectura unui text),” in *Folclor românesc*, II (București: Grai și Suflet—Cultura Națională, 1998), 273.