

Prolonged continuity and hybridization of Pre- and Proto-Indo-European elements visible in Romanian ritual folklore

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Cuvinte-cheie: *kurgan, Vechea Europă, continuitate, hibridizare, reprezentări tracice, folclor românesc.*

Rezumat: *Ca unul care crede în „continuitate prelungită” (în special în forța inerției culturii populare din Sud-Estul Europei), autorul prezentului articol are ca scop să arate cum anumite aspecte ale mentalității Vechi Europene și Proto-Indo-Europene se reflectă încă (separat sau în forme „hibride”) în colinde. Exemple ilustrative reprezintă versurile unor asemenea cântece, care încă funcționează drept „colinde” în multe sate din România de azi. Conținutul multor colinde poate să se refere direct la reprezentări specifice ale artei plastice traco-geto-dacice, ca strămoși de substrat ai românilor.*

Keywords: *Kurgan, Old Europe, continuity, hybridization, Thracian representations, Romanian folklore.*

Abstract: *As one who believes in „prolonged continuity” (more specifically in the inertial force of Southeast European peasant culture), the author of the present article aims to show how certain aspects of Old European and Proto-Indo-European mentality are still reflected (separately, or in „hybridized” forms) in Romanian ritual songs (colinde). The illustrative examples represent lyrics of such songs, which still function as “carols” in many villages of today’s Romania. The contents of many colinde may be directly referred to representations specific to the plastic art of Thracio-Geto-Dacians, as substratal ancestors of the Romanians.*

If we take into consideration opinions of authoritative specialists, it appears that European patriarchal mentality¹ has its deepest roots in the Eneolithic and the Bronze Age, more precisely in a process generally known as Indo-Europeanization (or „Kurganization”), by successive „waves” of pastoralists from the steppes of the East². The simplest image of that process would be that of patriarchal traditions and ideology imposed by immigrant

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¹ For general views on the roots of patriarchy and of androcentric mentality, see Biaggi 2005.

² See, for instance, Mallory 1989, p. 236, or Gimbutas 1991, p. 352.

horse-breeders on local Old European farmers of the 5th-3rd millennia BC³. According to the final chapter („The End of Old Europe”) of Marija Gimbutas 1991, the Kurgan tradition „represents a stark contrast to the civilization of Old Europe which was, in the main, peaceful, sedentary, matrifocal, matrilineal, and sex egalitarian. The Kurgans were a warlike, patriarchal, and hierarchical culture [...]”⁴. The same issue is also dealt with in chapter 8 of Mallory’s volume of 1989. Although Mallory is more cautious about the importance of Kurgan intruders for the transformation of Southeast and Central Europe, he does admit that archaeological evidence for the period under discussion „does suggest an intrusive population”⁵.

Prolonged continuity

In regard to historical Romanians, it may be said that they, like most other European peoples, have a traditional culture dominated by a male-oriented spirit. Quite many Romanian ritual songs and folktales have heroic young men as central characters. However, even those songs and tales show signs of a very early mixture of gynecentric and androcentric mentalities; and such mixture (and fusion) cannot possibly have been produced in recent times.

It is worth observing that today’s Romanians inhabit territories very close to the Black Sea (the Pontos of the Greeks) and to the Lower Danube. The latter area appears to have been the earliest Gate for the penetration of North Pontic horsemen into the Balkans⁶ and, along the Danube, into Central Europe⁷. To a great extent, the demic composition of today’s Southeast Europe still reflects the result of what happened in those prehistoric times. As for the traditional culture of the same part of Europe, the fundamental syncretism of Old European and Kurgan elements are not just dimly visible in it, but even more conspicuous than what was added to that culture by the Greek-Roman literate civilization and by Christianity.

For a general theoretical background, I will first quote from the final page of Cristina Biaggi’s book on Old European „*habitations of the Great Goddess*”⁸:

³ Much later, the already millennia-old androcentric traditions of historical Europe were to be reinforced by the Abrahamic patriarchal mentality that has a dominant position within the Judeo-Christian system of values.

⁴ Gimbutas 1991, p. 352.

⁵ Mallory 1989, p. 236.

⁶ See chapter 9 of Haarmann 2011, with minute references to the imposition of *Steppennomaden* as an elite of the Varna culture of prehistoric Bulgaria (mid-fifth millennium BC).

⁷ Archaeological and chronological details regarding those motions and circumstances are given in the first part of Poruciuc 1992.

⁸ Biaggi 1994, p. 153.

In order to arrive at the most balanced and complete vision of a society, one must pay at least as much attention to the archaeological record and its context, and to the mythological, anthropological, folkloric and linguistic record as to the contemporary written record. In preliterate societies, where no written records assist the researcher, even greater sensitivity must be brought to the interpretation of other forms of evidence.

It so happens that, of the whole of Europe, certain regions of the Balkans remained in a „preliterate” state longest. And it is in those parts that the „folkloric record” of recent times shows amazing preservation of archaic features.

Mircea Eliade⁹ has a special subchapter on „*the spiritual edifice of the Neolithic*” and on the orally perpetuated traditions of „*peasant societies*”. On the same page, he assumes that „*certain mythical scenarios, still in use among the peasants of central and southeastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, preserve mythological fragments and rituals that had disappeared, in ancient Greece, before Homer*”. Somewhere else, Eliade¹⁰ returns to the same issue, in more general terms: „*On the level of rural societies, the tradition inherited from the Neolithic constitutes a unity that was to be maintained for millennia, despite influences from urban centers*”.

The pieces of Romanian folklore which I will present below are good arguments in favor of Eliade’s opinions, as well as of the ones expressed by Gimbutas in a conclusive subchapter (on „*continuity and transformation*”¹¹), which includes the following statement:

This transformation [of Old Europe], however, was not a replacement of one culture by another, but a gradual hybridization of two different symbolic systems. Because the androcentric ideology of the Indo-Europeans was that of the new ruling class, it has come to us as the “official” belief system of ancient Europe. But the Old European sacred images and symbols were never totally uprooted ...

I believe that most of the Romanian ritual songs known as *colinde* („carols”)¹², and especially those which are obviously pre-Christian in contents,

⁹ Eliade 1978, p. 52.

¹⁰ Eliade 1982, p. 209.

¹¹ Gimbutas 1989, p. 318.

¹² Romanian *colindă* (plural *colinde* – cf. Latin *calendae*) is usually translated as „Christmas carol”. Such well-wishing songs are sung by groups of carollers during the Christmas and New Year celebrations. In spirit, many of the *colinde* are Christian (since they evoke events of the New Testament), but as many are obviously pre-Christian. Whole cycles of the latter kind are classified according to categories of addressees: „maidens’ carols”, „lads’ carols”, „young couples’ carols”, „fishermen’s carols”, etc. As manifest in the examples given below, the human (or half-divine) characters of such carols are either nameless, or they are given the personal names of particular addressees (see Teodorescu 1985, I, p. 60, notes 2 and 3). That participative aspect directly reflects the ritual function of Romanian carolling.

best reflect what Gimbutas meant by „hybridization”. But, before illustrating that aspect, I will show that besides manifestations of hybridization (or syncretism) Romanian folklore also preserved „unmixed” samples that contain either Old European or Kurgan elements. For a first example, here is a southern Romanian „maidens’ carol” (that is, a carol sung under the windows of a house where an unmarried young woman lives), which I translated after the version included in Teodorescu’s nineteenth-century collection¹³:

Ler-oi Leo -

[A girl’s name], of black eyes,
Worked all summer long.
What did she work at?
She worked at a garden,
Flowers did she plant,
Flowers did she graft,
Flowers of all kinds,
More basil
Than strawflower,
More rosemary
Than costmary.

Ler-oi Leo,
That fish of the sea
Jumps out of the water,
Jumps into her garden,
Grazes on her flowers,
He grazes on some,
On many more he tramples.

Ler-oi Leo,
[Her name], of black eyes,
Walks into her garden,
Sees flowers grazed on,
Some grazed on,
Many more trampled.
She turns and goes home,
And begins to spin,
To make up a net
That people may like,
A net of silk strings,
Six together twisted.

¹³ See Teodorescu 1985, I, p. 80f.

Ler-oi leo,
[Her name], of black eyes,
Goes back to her garden,
Hangs her net high up,
Stretches it around,
All around her garden.

Ler-oi Leo,
The fish of the sea
Jumps out of the water,
Jumps into her garden,
He gets into the net
And it catches him.

Ler-oi Leo,
[Her name], of black eyes,
Goes back to her garden,
Stands and looks at him,
As he writhes and writhes.
The fish speaks to her:
“Why stand you like that
And look at my torment?
Just come and take me,
For you’ll cook my flesh
As food for your wedding,
And you’ll use my bones
As posts for your house;
Of my dear scales,
So broad and so shiny,
You will make a roof;
With my blood you’ll paint
The walls of your house,
And you’ll place my head
As an arch o’er the gate,
The gate to your garden.”
May [her name], of black eyes,
Remain in good health,
With brothers and sisters,
With her dear old parents,
And with all of us.

[Ler-oi Leo,/ (Cutare), ochi negri,/ Munca-i d-astă vară,/ Muncă ce a muncit?/ Grădin-a făcut,/ Flori și-a presădit,/ Flori și-a altoit,/ Flori din toate flori,/ Mai mult busuioc/ Decît siminoc,/ Mai mult rozmarin/ Decît calomfir./ Leroi- Leo,/ Cel pește de mare,/ Din mare/ Că sare,/ În grădină-i intră,/ Florile îi paște:/ Cîte paște,/ Paște,/ Mai multe dîraște./ Ler-oi Leo,/ (Cutare), ochi negri,/ La grădină merge,/ Vede flori păscute,/ Mai multe dîrîte:/ Acasă se-ntoarce,/ Se pune și toarce,/ O mreajă să facă/ La lume să placă,/ Mreajă de mătase,/ Împletită-n șase./ Ler-oi Leo,/ (Cutare), ochi negri,/ Merge la grădină,/ Mreaja își anină,/ Mreaja își întinde,/ Grădina coprinde./ Ler-oi Leo,/ Peștele de mare,/ Din mare/ Că sare,/ În grădină intră,/ Prin mreajă se-ntinde,/ Și-ntr-însa se prinde./ Ler-oi Leo,/ (Cutare), ochi negri./ La grădină merge,/ Șade de-l privește/ Cum se chinuiește./ Peștele-i grăiește:/ – Ce mă chinuiești/ Și stai de privești?/ Vino de mă ia,/ Căci cu carnea mea/ Nunta-ți-ei nunti/ Ș-o vei potoli;/ Cu ale mele oase/ Țe-i ridică case/ Mîndre și frumoase;/ Ai mei solzișori,/ Mari și sclipitori,/ Le-or fi de-nveliș/ Și de-acoperiș;/ Cu singele meu/ Casa-ți-ei vâpsi/ Ș-o vei poiei,/ Iară capul meu/ Pune-l-vei bolțiță,/ Bolțiță-n porțiță/ Despre grădiniță./ (Cutare), ochi negri,/ Fie-mi sănătoasă/ Cu frați, cu surori,/ Cu bătrîni păriți/ Și cu noi cu toți.]

In certain Romanian villages, such a ritual song may still be used as a well-wishing song on Christmas; but its contents hardly has anything to do with Christianity. In an introductory note, a specialist in Romanian *colinde*¹⁴ considered that Romanian ritual songs of this type contain „*striking images of a (medieval) world long dead*”. For all his cautious parenthesis, Herțea is, chronologically, not exactly right: although certain Romanian *colinde* do contain references to medieval life, the most important mythical substance of those songs is much older, and much of that substance comes from Old Europe, as proved by the carol about the magic fisherwoman.

I translated the text above mainly because, after having read Gimbutas 1989, I could draw the conclusion that all the symbolic elements of the fisherwoman’s song correspond to what Gimbutas regarded as „*language of the Goddess*”. Maybe a psychoanalyst would be attracted by the genital female symbolism of the garden. But, for archaeomythologists, the fish-in-the-net combination is most archaic and most significant of all. References to – and illustrations of – the „*fish-uterus-moisture symbolism*” are to be found especially in the paragraphs on „*Net Motif*” and on „*Fish*” in Gimbutas 1989¹⁵. In my opinion, what symbolically happens to the enmeshed fish in the song above recalls, for instance, the symbolic meaning of the “so-called pine-cones [found in 3rd millennium BC graves of Portugal], possibly related to phalli, decorated with a net design”¹⁶.

The numerous illustrations of Gimbutas 1989 reveal an incredible continuity of the net motif, from the Magdalenian epoch of the Upper

¹⁴ Herțea 2000, p. 7.

¹⁵ Gimbutas 1989, p. 81-87, 258-262.

¹⁶ Gimbutas 1991, p. 203, fig. 6-22.

Paleolithic¹⁷ to the „sub-geometric” period of what was to become ancient Greece. But continuity went even further, into our own times, as proved by the Romanian *colindă* above. Its text may very well be placed as a legend under the image of a divine female figure „whose body is a net-patterned fish”, painted on a 7th century BC Boeotian amphora¹⁸. Another remarkable fact is that the fish-sacrifice described (by the fish itself!) in the final part of the song is far from being just a singular fossilized motif. Such episodes, whether they imply sacrifices of fish, of bulls¹⁹, or of stags, are commonplace in Romanian ritual songs associated with winter-solstice celebrations. In fact, Gimbutas herself quotes from a Romanian *colindă* that presents a stag-sacrifice²⁰ in terms quite similar to the ones of the fish-sacrifice episode above.

It is also with New Year well-wishing that other Romanian ritual songs, of almost pure Proto-Indo-European substance, are associated. I will translate a part of such a *colindă* (from southern Romania)²¹, which could very well be used as an illustration of the main socio-economic points of Benveniste’s book on the „*Indo-European language and society*” (1973). The song has four unequal stanzas, each urging the addressees – flatteringly called *boieri bogăți* ‘rich boyars’ – to admire a manifestation of supreme wealth: herds of domestic animals and carts full of salt, barley, and wheat. The interesting thing is that both the beginning and the end of the song present horses. The first stanza dynamically describes herds of neighing steeds and jumping colts, all moving around a „*plump young mare, all covered with gold*”. The last stanza contains a true horse-icon:

Wake up, wake up,
You rich boyars,
Wake up and behold
The dark-bay stallion
Coming all adorned,
With a silver saddle,
A trimmed rug beneath,
Lined with cotton tassels,
And tassels of silk
Braided of six threads;
With a knotted tail,

¹⁷ Gimbutas 1989, fig. 130.

¹⁸ Gimbutas 1989, fig. 405.

¹⁹ See my presentation of the bull-sacrifice motif and the proto-Europa type of Romanian carols in Poruciu 2010, p. 22.

²⁰ In her volume of 1989 (p. 115), Marija Gimbutas refers to the stag-sacrifice carol that I had sent her in a letter of 1985.

²¹ That piece of ritual folklore (originally published by Nicolae Păsculescu in 1910) is included in the selection of Ilin 1985, p. 107-109.

All covered with gold.²²
He's so well adorned,
And so well arrayed,
Well bridled
And girthed,
Ready to be mounted,
And to drive around.

[Ia sculați, sculați,/ Voi boieri bogați,/ De voi vă uitați,/ Că vouă vă vine/ Murgu-mpodobit,/ Cu șea de argint,/ Cu țolul rotat,/ Ciucuri de bumbac,/ Ciucuri de mătase,/ Împlețiți în șease./ Cu coada-nnodată/ Tot aur suflată./ Așa de-mi gătit/ Și de împodobit,/ Înfrînat, înstrunat,/ Bun de încălecat,/ Și bun de mînat.]

Romanian *colinde* (and fairy tales) abound in heroic horsemen, armed with bow and arrow, spear and mace. They will go hunting, with hawks and hounds, or they will ride over mountains in search of fierce lions²³. And they do not appear to know much about gentle wooing. The Indo-European customary exogamy has a well-known manifestation: abduction. That custom has not had only ritual-mythological implications (which may be referred, for instance, to the legendary abduction of the Sabine maidens). At a rather profane level, many of today's Romanian wedding parties – including those of my (urban) students – include a mock-abduction: a group of young men wait for a suitable moment (when the bridegroom's attention is distracted), and they take the bride (as if „by force”) to some secret place; then one of them comes back to the party and starts bargaining with the bridegroom (the ransom usually consisting in numerous bottles of wine and brandy). At a much more serious level, there are cycles of Romanian carols in which abduction is presented as a ritual action. In some texts a young horseman may sweep away the sun's own sister (*Sora Soarelui*), whom he “hurls on his horse” and takes „to his parents”²⁴. In other cases there are no allusions to a (typically Indo-European) solar cult, but they display an androcentric mentality that we may regard as ultimately deriving from the traditional culture of pre-Kurgan horsemen²⁵:

²² Such grand horse-imagery recalls the one to be found in the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* (a poetic creation meant to please the Germanic warlike elite). Among the gifts offered by King Hrothgar to victorious Beowulf, there were: „Eight steeds with golden bridles. One stood/ With a jeweled saddle on its back, carved / Like the king's war-seat it was; it had carried/ Hrothgar when the great son of Healfdane rode/ To war...” (Raffel's Modern English translation, 1963, lines 1036-1040).

²³ See Romanian lion-carols presented in Poruciu 2003 and Poruciu 2010; see also one such carol presented below.

²⁴ I specifically refer to what is presented in carol 57 of the collection Caraman 1982, p. 63f.

²⁵ The translation is after the Romanian original, in broad dialect, rendered in Herțea 2000, p. 177.

O dear Lord –
This way and that,
A great round dance went on,
With lasses and lads.
But what did Ion²⁶ do?
He entered the stone stable,
He teaseled his dark-bay horse,
He rubbed him well with oil,
He brushed him with a brush,
He put his foot in the stirrup,
And went to the dance.
As he came up there,
He bound his horse to a twig,
A twig of sweet apple,
Then he joined the dance,
By a tall, slender maid.
They danced around three times,
Three times, and nine times.
When it was close to night,
He grabbed her by the belt,
And he threw her on his horse.
The horse went at a trot,
The maiden went on sobbing.
But what did Ion tell her?
“Be quiet, maid, stop crying,
I won’t take you as my servant,
I will take you as my mistress,
A mistress over my hired hands,
And a keeper of my money.”
May you, Ion, stay in good health,
Out of Christ’s good tidings,
Together with your brothers,
Your sisters and parents.

*[Drag Doamnele/ Pă dîncolo, pă dîncoaș’e/ Mare uoră mi se fa/ Dă fete și dă băieți/
Dară luon ș’e-m fiș’ea?/ ‘N graj’ dă piatră că intra/ Și pă murgu țăsăla/ Cu undălemn*

²⁶ *Ion* is not a character’s name proper, but it just happened to be (when the carol was recorded) the name of the addressee, as the final well-wishing formula proves.

că-l unjea/ Cu peria-l peria/ Pișioru-n scară puneă/ Și la uoră că-m pleca/ Acolo cîn mi-ajunjea/ Lega calu dă mlădiță/ Dă mlăd'iță dă măr dulș'e/ Și în uoră că să pringea/ Lîng-o fată naltă, zmlătă./ "Nvîrcea uora dă trei ori,/ Dă trei uori, dă nouă uor'./ Cîn fusă pă lîngă sară/ Mîna-n cola' îi băgară/ Și pă murgu-o aruncară./ Merjea murgu boieștrînd/ Fată mare suspinîndi,/ Dar Iuoan ș'e mi-i spunea:/ Taș'i fată, nu mai plînjea/ Nu t'e duc slugă să-m fii/ \T'e duc stăpîna să-m fii,/ Stăpîna argașilor/ Telăreasa banilor./ Să fii, Iuoane, sînătos,/ Dîn vestea lui Iristos,/ Cu fraș', cu părinț' cu toș'.]

For all the final Christian updating, the dominant spirit is Kurgan, and the basic reference is to Indo-European exogamy; however, the ritual round dance, *horă* (dialectal *uoră*)²⁷, is an element that most probably had existed in the Aegeo-Balkan world in pre-Kurgan (or pre-Varna) times.

Hybridization illustrated

In Romanian carols, as well as in folktales, the commonly mentioned ritual dance is the fairies' *hora*, which daring lads try hard to join, not to abduct any divine maiden, but rather in the hope of being chosen by one of them. That motif is visible in two southern Romanian „lads' carols” included in Teodorescu's collection²⁸. In both we see a well-armed horseman, who, in response to a challenge (uttered by the sea!), crosses it on horseback (sword and spear in hand), and reaches the opposite shore. There, „in the shade of apple trees”, he sees the round dance of the fairies (*hora zânelor*). He respectfully greets them and asks for permission to join the dance. Only one of the fairies answers, and she is the one who, in fact, chooses him to become her husband²⁹.

In the same collection³⁰, immediately after the two above-mentioned South Romanian carols, there is another, to which (rather unusually) Teodorescu attached the name of a young man, Radul, as a title. However, far from being an androcentric creation, the long song under discussion (of which I translated only the most significant passages) shows a complicated combination of motifs, and it also shows signs of hybridization, with an obvious dominance of the feminine element:

²⁷ Details on the prehistoric origin of ritual round dance called *hora* in Romania and *horo* in other Balkan countries are to be found in Poruciuc 1992, p. 17f.

²⁸ Teodorescu 1985, I, p. 55-58.

²⁹ In a very direct way, a folktale included in Opreșan 2003 (II: 48) is about a fairy, *zână*, who (while flying around in the shape of a bird) catches sight of a handsome shepherd and falls in love with him. She goes to him (in the shape of a fair maiden) and bluntly tells him: „It's time we should mate”. Then, since the lad has no father, she goes with him to his mother and practically asks for his hand in marriage.

³⁰ Teodorescu 1985, I, p. 58.

In the Black Sea's shingle,
 – *Two winds, O bird-cherry* –³¹
 There were bred,
 There spread
 Herds of sorrel geldings.
 Whoever's head of all?
 The crazy black steed,
 Its mane
 In the wind,
 Its tail
 Lashing wild.
 Toward its tail,
 Toward its mane
 There swings a little swing,
 A green swing of silk strings
 Twisted six together.
 Whoever's seated in the swing?
 It's (...) of black eyes,
 She's sewing and stitching [...]

A collar for her brother,
 A kerchief for her betrothed.³²
 She won't sew and keep quiet,
 But she speaks out and says:
 "Is there anyone in the world,
 Is there anyone indeed,
 To ride my black steed,
 With no saddle,
 Nor girth,
 With no bridle,
 And no whip at all" [...]

Whereupon Radul, handsome lad,³³
 Woke up in the morning,

³¹ Though Teodorescu did not mark it as such, I consider the second line of the carol to be a chorus.

³² In many variants the young man I present as „betrothed” is called *mire* (a substratal Romanian term for ‘bridegroom’); in others, like this one, the term used in the original is *voiniu*, whose Slavic correspondents suggest the meaning of ‘warrior’.

³³ Handsome-Lad is my translation of *Făt-Frumos*, the name (or, rather, the title) of the most common heroic horseman of Romanian folktales.

Washed his black eyes,
 Combed his black hair,
 And he presently set forth;
 As he reached there,
 He went up to the steed;
 He crossed himself
 With his right hand;
 He put his left hand
 On the steed's mane,
 His right hand
 On its withers,
 He jumped on its back.
 But what did the black steed do?
 It jumped in the wind,
 It jumped back to the ground,
 It jumped into the sea
 To drown the handsome lad.
 Whereupon (...) of black eyes spoke out:
 "Hold it, hold it, you black steed,
 For he is not a thief,
 But he is my betrothed (*voiniu*)
 My betrothed and your master,
 A son-in-law to my parents,
 A brother-in-law to my brothers [...]
 So may Radul of black eyes
 Stay in good health,
 With his father and mother,
 With his brothers and sisters,
 And with all together.
 A Happy New Year!

['N prundurile Mării Negre,/ Două vînturi maline,/ Faptu-mi-s-au,/ Ruptu-mi-s-au/ Tot stave de jugani galbeni./ Stavele cine le bate?/ Bate-le negrul nebun/ Ce-i cu coama/ Vişorîtă/ Şi cu coada/ Bici făcută./ Cam în coadă,/ Cam în coamă/ Leagănă-se-un legănel,/ Leagăn verde de mătase/ Cu viţa-mpletită-n şase,/ Iar în leagăn cine-mi şade?/ Şade (...), d-ochii-şi negri,/ Şi-mi coase şi-mi chindiseşte/[...] Guleraş lui frate-său./ Batistă lui voiniu-său./ Dar nu coase şi să-mi tacă,/ Ci mi-şi rupe d-a vorbă:/ – Cine-n lume s-ar d-afla,/ S-ar afla, s-ar devăra/ Pe negrul d-a-ncălica/ Fără şea,/ Fără oblînci,/ Fără frîu,/ Fără căpăstru,/ Fără fir de bici în mînă? [...] Iarăşi Radul făt-frumos,/ De dimineaţă se scula,/ Pe ochi negri se spăla,/ Chică neagră-şi pieptăna,/ Şi-

nainte că-mi pleca;/ Acolo de-mi ajungea,/ De negrul s-apropia;/ Cruce cu dreapta-și făcea./ Stînga-n coamă că-i punea,/ Cu dreapta spata-i bătea,/ Pe negrul se d-arunca./ Dar și negrul ce-mi făcea?/ Sărea-n vînt,/ Sărea-n pămînt,/ Sărea-n mare să-l înece./ Grăi-și (...), d-ochii-și negri:/ – Dur, dur, dur, negrule, dur./ Că nu-i fur ca să te fure,/ Ci îmi este voiniul meu./ Voiniul meu, stăpînul tău., Ginerel părinților,/ Cumnățelul fraților [...]/ Iară Radul d-ochii-și negri/ El să-mi fie sănătos/ Cam cu mumă, cam cu tată,/ Cam cu frați, cam cu părinți/ Și cu toții d-a-mpreună./ La anul și la mulți ani!]

Only people who know enough about Romanian folklore (and about Aegeo-Balkan archaeology and mythology) can observe that the first part of this ritual song already contains some unusual elements. For instance, horses appear to be more recent intruders in Romanian ritual songs dedicated to maidens during winter-solstice celebrations. Certainly older are the carols in which a troubled sea is crossed by a half-divine maiden (of a Proto-Europa type) seated in a „swing of silk” balanced not on a horse’s back, but between the horns of a wild bull (or aurochs, or ox, or stag). The maiden is in total control, and even warns her „vehicle” that it may be sacrificed, unless the crossing is done smoothly enough. The typical maiden-and-bull carols contain no male participants (except the bull, and possibly the maiden’s brothers, only mentioned by her as virtual slayers of the bull³⁴).

In regard to the *colindă* above, I have already hinted at the fact that the title under which that ritual song appears (in Teodorescu’s collection) is rather misleading. First of all, *Radul* (like *Ion* in another carol presented in this article) should be regarded not as a hero’s name proper, but just as a chance name, that is, the name of a historical young man who happened to be the addressee when the carol was recorded. Second, the fictional lad who plays the hero in that carol may seem to be brave, but he is not really successful in the riding test. The personage who actually provokes and controls the action is the black-eyed maiden, who eventually decides to accept the lad as her warrior-bridegroom. Under such circumstances, the carol-collector’s choice of *Radul* as a title might be interpreted as a modern manifestation of patriarchal bias. Nevertheless, the general aspect that is most significant for the present discussion is that – under the windows of their brides-to-be – Romanian country lads still sing ritual-marital songs about powerful maidens who swing over waters and do magic stitching and sewing.

From Proto-Indo-European to Romanian via Thracian

Horse symbolism may rightly be considered to be part of a Proto-Indo-European (or Kurgan) stock of religious beliefs³⁵. If prolonged continuity of

³⁴ See Poruciuc 1995, p. 41.

³⁵ See Gimbutas 1991: 382, on some of the earliest signs of horse symbolism of a Kurgan type (5th-3rd millennia BC).

such prehistoric beliefs may seem too hard to accept, then at least continuity of Thracian (or, rather, Thraco-Geto-Dacian) traditions should be accepted in Romanian folklore. In that respect, echoes of the ritual-cultural implications of the divine figure known as „Thracian Horseman” (or „Thracian Knight”, as many historians and archaeologists will have it)³⁶, can hardly be denied. Nevertheless, in the absence of ancient Thraco-Geto-Dacian texts, the actual meanings of that kind of *Heros* can only be surmised. So much the more important are certain lingering traditions recorded in modern times in regions that once belonged to Thrace and/or to Dacia. Among other things, in both Bulgarian and Romanian villages Saint Theodore’s celebrations (which may last as long as a whole week) center mainly on horses. Nicov³⁷ gives the following description (in English) of Saint Theodore’s Day in Bulgarian villages:

Toudoritza or Horse Easter is a holiday for the health of horses and young brides [...]. The culmination of the holiday is the horse race, “koushia.” At its end, the horseman who comes first in the competition leads the horo dance in the village square.

In Romanian colloquial usage, the ironic phrase „on Horses’ Easter” (*la paștele cailor*) means „never”. But, especially in southern Romania, there still are solemn celebrations similar to the above-mentioned Bulgarian ones. Moreover, „Saint Theodore’s Horses” (*Caii lui Sân Toader*) are remembered as impressive and dangerous mythical figures, as described in Taloş³⁸:

Those are young men with horse hooves and with long horse tails [...], or they are angels in shapes of horses. They appear in the village on the first Tuesday of Lent, and they stay a whole week [...]. Women who dare work on the day of Saint Theodore’s Horses will be killed by the latter³⁹.

Besides such lingering mythical traditions, there are whole collections of Romanian *colinde* whose central figure is a heroic young man, called *june* (< Latin *iuuenis*); his Bulgarian counterpart is known as *junak*, the two terms actually being etymological cognates (on an Indo-European plane).

The Romanian *june* rides a magic-and-talking horse, and he is usually helped (in ritual hunts) by his hound and his hawk. Such a group perfectly corresponds with many ancient representations of the Thracian Horseman. Since

³⁶ For Thracian mythical horsemen, see the chapter on „*Thracian Religion*” in Fol/Marazov 1977. See also Oppermann 1988, on Rhesos as horse-breeder (p. 229), on the „Thracian Knight” (p. 231f.), and on the „Danubian Knights” (p. 233f.).

³⁷ Nicov 2004, p. 29.

³⁸ Taloş 2001, p. 26 (my translation).

³⁹ In fact, „horse tails” and „shapes of horses” (more precisely, representations of horse heads carved in wood and elaborately adorned) are basic elements of the costumes worn by Romanian young men who dance the ritual dance of „Little Horses” (*Căiuți*) during the New-Year celebrations, especially in today’s Moldavia.

most of those representations are mute (that is, they are not attended by any explanatory inscriptions), so much the more important are the above-mentioned Romanian ritual songs, transmitted orally through centuries, and recorded only in recent times. Those *colinde* (as imperfectly preserved as they may be) should be regarded as genuine „subtitles” that can be applied to ancient images of divine horsemen found in the area under discussion. One can hardly imagine anything more typically Thracian, in spirit, than the lines of certain Romanian *colinde* in which a magic horse (after having won a race against the hawk) expresses its own wishes for the future: „*Master, master mine,/ Do not maim the hawk,/ Do not punish it,/ For you'll look just great/ On your wedding day/, Riding on my back,/ The hound after you,/ The bluish-gray hawk/ In flight above you*”⁴⁰.

Speaking of Thracian spirit, it was probably what Ivan Marazov had in mind when he wrote his *Thracian Warrior*⁴¹, in which he pointed out some of the most significant features of the Thracian warrior's ideology, as in the following fragment:

It is obvious that the frequency of the dog's appearance in the iconography reflects its important place in the ideological programme of Thracian art. In order to reveal this place, it is necessary to seek a comparison for the iconographic formula "hunter-horse-dog" in the vocabulary of the infinitely better studied mythological traditions of other Indo-European peoples. Even a cursory analysis shows that only two animals – the horse and the dog – acquire human features in the myth and epic tradition. They are not only magic helpers of the hero [...], in many cases they even substitute him in the heroic exploits [...]. These are the only animals gifted with human speech [...]. For the Indo-Europeans, the dog – together with the horse – is a permanent animal hypostasis/metamorphosis of the hero.

What I want to add here is that, besides horse and dog, a symbolic bird of prey (be it eagle, falcon, or hawk) could also appear as attendant (and/or hypostasis) of the hero. In fact, Marazov himself, in the same book, presents a scene of „royal investiture” on a 5th century BC coin that shows a „ruler” guided by „an eagle – a royal bird”⁴². Even closer to the spirit of the Thracian warrior is what we can see on a 7th century BC bronze *situla* of Certosa⁴³, where a „horseman is accompanied by an eagle – the hero's ornithomorphic incarnation”. Last but not least, on a 2nd-1st century BC *phalera*⁴⁴ we can see a horseman, a dog „running under the horse's legs”, and an eagle „flying above

⁴⁰ Here is the fragment in the original (after Şandru 1987, p. 436): *Stăpîne, stăpîne,/ Şoim să nu sluţeşti,/ Să nu-l pedepseşti,/ Că la nunta ta/ Bine îţi va sta/ Călare pe mine,/ Ogar după tine,/ Şoimu vineciior/ Va merge în zbor.*

⁴¹ Marazov 2005, p. 98.

⁴² Marazov 2005, p. 38.

⁴³ Marazov 2005, p. 80.

⁴⁴ Marazov 2005, p. 50.

his head”⁴⁵. The *phalera* under discussion was found in Romania (at Surcea, Covasna County), in an area very close to the one where recent folklorists have recorded ritual songs in which not only horses, but also hawks are „gifted with human speech”.

The following illustrative examples are from the collection of the outstanding Romanian ethnologist Petru Caraman (1898-1980)⁴⁶. The first song I chose, from that collection⁴⁷ is a „lads’ carol” (*de flăcău*). The latter label indicates that Romanian carolers will sing such a song, on New Year’s Eve, under the windows of a house in which an unmarried young man lives (whose name actually becomes the name of the hero in the song). As such songs are usually quite long (and they are even longer when sung, with a chorus repeated after each line), I translated⁴⁸ only the most important passages (with my footnotes):

*Leroi, leroi Doamne!*⁴⁹
And (a lad’s name), our brother,
He feeds a good horse [...],
And he went⁵⁰ out for a hunt,
He hunted from Thursday until Saturday,
He hunted until Holy Sunday.
When the sun was close to sunset [...],
He passed by these two apple-trees,⁵¹
And he found the lion asleep,
Lying on his back [...].

⁴⁵ According to Marazov, the three animals appear to be „*the zoomorphic signs of the warrior function*”.

⁴⁶ Due to Caraman’s troubles in Communist Romania, much of the folklore recorded by him before the Second World War was published posthumously.

⁴⁷ Caraman 1982, p. 16.

⁴⁸ Specific to such songs are rhymed couplets; each line has 5-6 syllables, most commonly arranged in trochees. In trying to render as much as I could of the original contents, I gave up the idea of finding English prosodic equivalents for the rhymed couplets of the original. However, I preserved much of the rhythm, and as much as I could of the archaic syntax and rhetoric.

⁴⁹ The italicized lines are choruses (many of which contain words, such as *ler*, or *leroi*, which actually no longer mean anything in today’s Romanian. For all the efforts of etymologists, *ler* remains an element of unknown origin, and of uncertain meaning. One important thing to take into account is that certain pieces of Romanian folklore refer to *Ler Împărat* „Emperor Ler”.

⁵⁰ Such jumps from one verbal tense to another are quite common in Romanian folk songs.

⁵¹ The frequent occurrence of apple trees, apple blossom and red apples in Romanian ritual songs reflects a very archaic element of dendrolatry in Southeast Europe. In fact, the most common chorus in Romanian Christmas carols is *Florile dalbe, flori de măr* („*Lily-white blossom, apple-tree blossom*”).

The stallion began to snort,
To snort and to sneeze [...].
The lion wakes up,
And he takes to flight.
The fallow hound chases him,
The hawk strikes him with its wing...

[*Leroi, leroi, Doamnele!/ Și (cutare), frate-al nostru,/ Mai bun cal că își hrănește [...].
Și-mi ieși la vânătoare,/ Vină joi și simbătă,/ Pină-n sfînta duminică./ Cînd fu soarele-n
deseară[...]/ Trecu pe la cești doi meri,/ Găsi leul adormit,/ D-adormit cu fața-n sus.
[...]/ Începe Murgul a străfîga./ A străfîga și-a strănuta [...];/ Leu din somn se
pomenește/ Și la fugă o tulește./ Ogar galben roată-l face./ Șoimul cu aripa-l bate...*]

The song above belongs to the archaic Romanian carols „of the lion”, which I discussed in detail elsewhere⁵². In such songs the main „talkers” are, usually, the young hero and his opponent, the lion (*leu*), whereas the horse (*cal*), the hound (*ogar*) and the hawk (*șoim*) remain mute. In regard to the „human features” Marazov referred to (see above), I have detected no significant example of a talking hound (or dog) in Romanian ritual songs, whereas horses and hawks often converse with their masters⁵³.

The numerous Romanian *colinde* of the type illustrated by the last text above are proof of the fact that the formula „hunter-horse-dog” observed by Marazov in Thracian iconography strikingly corresponds to certain motifs in Romanian folklore. Most interesting of those motifs is what appears to be an extended formula, of „the four H’s” (hunter-horse-hound-hawk)⁵⁴. The formula (or motif) under discussion is manifest in Romanian *colinde* which appear to have Kurgan roots, or, more specifically, to derive directly from Thraco-Geto-Dacian traditions of Proto-Indo-European origin. One important thing should be kept in mind: the texts of Romanian ritual song such as the ones presented above are not mere „lyrics” preserved in folklore collections. They still are of current use in (Christianized) winter-solstice celebrations, however obscure their original meanings may have become for today’s rural Romanians. The latter know only that they learned such songs from their parents or grandparents, and that they ought to transmit the same songs to their children.

⁵² See a whole chapter on such *colinde* in Poruciu 2010.

⁵³ Such “conversations” are to be found in a peculiar cycle of Romanian ritual songs, mainly from Wallachia (see the *colinde* whose lyrics are presented in Caraman 1982, p. 32-34 and in Șandru 1987, p. 435f., respectively).

⁵⁴ I discussed the symbolic-ritual combination of „the four H’s” (hunter-horse-hound-hawk) in a previous article, Poruciu 2009.

As for Romanian intellectuals preoccupied with the roots of their country's traditional culture, they ought to search for the primeval implications of what survived as Romanian ritual folklore. The search may lead back to Thracian antiquity, and even to the prehistoric times during which Proto-Indo-European traditions of North Pontic steppes came to fuse with traditions of Old European farmers.

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