

VIEW ON THE BANATIAN BAROQUE CULTURE

Nicoleta Gumă, Ada D. Cruceanu

"Culture in the Banat is necessarily ethnographic, anonymous and it is a folk culture. (...) The profitable soil, copiousness of bread and wine, a self-conscious temperament of the people there met together under a continuous inspiration due to a wonderful landscape, in order to create a cultural area of a baroque richness (...)".

That's what the great poet Lucian Blaga used to say on the region he had lived in for a long time, in his wife's house in Lugoj.

The county of Caraș-Severin is situated in the south-western part of Romania, in a mountainous region. It may be considered a strong conservative area with regard to different ethnographic aspects, particularly if we have a look on its neighbours and frontiers: a natural and artificial border with Yugoslavia (south) and three Romanian strong ethnographic territories around it in the east, north and west. So the scientific research may have special opportunities and directions to catch the permanent cultural exchanges and circulation as well as the private cultural trends there, as an integrated part of the Romanian culture unity.

The area may be divided into more ethnographic zones and sub-zones. The Valley of Bistra and Caransebeș zone bordered by Poiana Ruscăi and Țarcu Mountains, near by Pădureni (Hațeg) is one of the most important, a plenty area of Romanian ethnographic traditions. Shepherdng, cattle growing, agriculture and fruit growing were for centuries the people's basic occupations in the region. The pre-capitalist moment registered a relative specialising of the villages along the Valley of Bistra, according to the main occupation for each of them (fur coats confection and wool processing, sheepskin coats confection or wood processing, for instance). There are special elements to make this area different from the other ones in the Banat, either on chromatics, on decorative art or even on structure.

The folk costume there keeps some common elements with that in Țara Hațegului, and the most relevant are the chemise's ornaments, the sheepskin singlet, hoods and peasant sandals. For the baroque features is important to underline the contrast between men's clothes and those of women in the valley, the sobriety and simplicity of the first one and the exuberance of the second one.

Even more rarely nowadays, the main piece in the women's clothes rests *ceapsa* or *conciul*, a specific Banatian way of covering the married women's head. We may add the other pieces, *ciupag* (embroidered blouse), *pieptar* (singlet), *opinci* (peasant sandals), *obiele vârgate* (striped wood leggings), and *șuba* (wool coat), or *brăcire* (wool belt) to complete the woman's wonderful clothes, apart from the more simple man's clothing (relative large hempen, cotton, or linen trousers, and singlets, all reminding the Transilvanian folk costumes). On winter times, men and women used to wear large hoods, folk elements that belong to Pădureni area traditions.

Another great ethnographic zone in the county is the Timiș Valley, going on to the Banatian Plain, as bordered by Țarcu and Semenice Mountains intermountain depression. It is probably one of the oldest populating region in Romania, and it was strongly marked by the Roman large way between Dierna (Orșova, today) and Tibiscum (Jupa). The main human occupations there were the cattle and trees growing, as the soil is not so productive and the region is mainly hilly. Regarding to the women's clothes we may underline the same two special pieces, *ceapsa* and *opregul* (peasant back shirt), and also *catrința* (peasant front shirt) which is entirely woven with golden or silver wires. The singlet, striped wood leggings, peasant sandals and white wood coat are to complete the elegant and so richly women's costumes all along the area. There are no special features for the men's clothes in change, except for some ornaments belonging to a late epoch.

The next very important area is the Valley (Depression) of Almăj, with closed villages on the superior part of the valley of Nera (the longest river in the county). The area was inhabited since the Bronze age, the main human occupations being those ones of a hilly region: shepherding, trees growing, agriculture and milling especially. There are few areas in Europe to keep so numerous water mills as Almăj is; those ones based on a kind of Kaplan system (*ciutura*) being of a distinct interest. The women's costume is partly different from that of Bistra area, as *ceapsa* is cut in the form of a triangle and the ornaments are compact. The old peasant blouse was a long one, the contemporary one is separated from the hem, and the two shirts (*oprege*) were similar (front and back), lately the front one being substituted by *catrința*. There are some differences in the men's clothes too, one of them being the wool knitted knee socks (*ciorap*) with ornaments on their superior part.

An interesting area is Carașova in the western part of the county, bordered by Anina, Semenice and Dognecea Mountains. The Romanians and Serbo-Croatians long co-inhabiting there made the area be a special ethnographic one, so charming by the floral and geometric ornaments' alternation. The women's head adornment is a special feature, and it differs from a village to another, from a social state to another, from a woman's age to another. Generally, it is based on

a special hairdo (cu *coarne*), with little pigtails to sustain the headkerchief. The long skirt with back folds and *cheța* (a kind o peasant shirt around the woman's waist) area also interesting and give the women a special port and amble.

Clisura Dunării (the Danube Gorge), from Baziaș to Orșova is perhaps the oldest inhabited area in this part of Europe as the archaeological traces show us. The people's main and oldest occupation was the shepherding, but they also practised a hilly agriculture, and fishing, naturally, milling, or trees and wine growing. The Romanians, Serbians, and Czech co-inhabiting gives the region its private charm, the Romanian costume belonging to a general old Oltenian type, by its ornaments and embroidery, or to Almăj and Cerna areas' type by its structure. We may underline the decorative harmony both for women's and men's clothes, as well as how they fit to Serbian more simple and sober costumes, or the Czech ones, based on industrial clothe.

Even a short view would always show the researcher or the simple traveller how the Banat culture is a baroque one, and what are the reasons of this feature: the oldest area's inhabiting, the multi-ethnic state of its population and their co-inhabiting, as well as the geographic state of the region permeable to people and information movement .