

КУЛЬТ СОНЦЯ, КОНЯ ТА ЗБРОЇ В РУМУНСЬКОМУ РИТУАЛІ "КЕЛУШАРИ"**Іонуц СЕМУК,**Институту етнографії та фольклору ім. Костянтина Бреїлою
Румунської академії наук, Бухарест (Румунія)
ivsemuc@yahoo.com,**THE CULT OF THE SUN, HORSE AND WEAPONS IN CĂLUȘARII ROMANIAN CUSTOM****Ionuț SEMUC,**"Constantin Brăiloiu" Institute of Ethnography and Folklore of the
Romanian Academy, Bucharest (Romania),
ORCID: 0000-0002-4927-3857

Семук Іонуц. Культ сонця, коня та зброї в румунському ритуалі "Келушари". Серед румунських ритуальних танців "Келушари" неодмінно займає одну з центральних позицій. Це і танець, й прадавній ритуал, що належить до одного ритуального комплексу, що зумовлює **актуальність** пропонованої статті. Більш ніж будь-які інші румунські язичницькі звичаї, в основі ритуалу "Келушари" проглядаються досить різні, іноді суперечливі елементи. Дослідженню витоків даного ритуалу були присвячені наукові роботи декількох поколінь фахівців у галузі соціо-історичних дисциплін, особливо етнографів та фольклористів. **Новизна** роботи полягає у першій сучасній спробі переглянути ці культурні прояви у більш широкому міждисциплінарному дослідженні. Ми розглянемо це питання з двох точок зору: розшифровуючи значення елементів, з яких складається танець; даючи нове пояснення походження цього культурного прояву. Серед поставлених завдань - виявлення культурних та історичних прошарків всього комплексу ритуалів та обрядів, відновлених на основі наявної етнографічної інформації. **Висновки.** У ритуалі "Келушари" ми маємо справу з культурними реліктами, старшими, ніж поява та поширення християнства, засвідченими різними формами магічних дійств у попередні епохи, на великій території, де мешкали фракійці. Те, що ми сьогодні називаємо "Келушари", - це дуже давній танець сонця та воїна, який виконувався на ритуалах смерті та відродження верховного бога - Сонця.

Ключові слова: ритуал "Келушари", витoki ритуалу "Келушари", культ сонця, культ коня, культ зброї.

Introduction. Among the Romanian ritual dances, Călușarii undoubtedly holds the most important position. It is both a dance and a custom performed in one and the same act. More than any other Romanian custom, the Călușarii appears as putting together rather different, sometimes contradictory elements. Through its archaic and prehistorical origin, the dance proved sometimes to have been more relevant than the language in preserving and transmitting certain most ancient beliefs¹. Nevertheless, during the different historical periods, the custom has acquired new interpretations which did not modify, however, its initial significance (the ritual practices as a whole). It has also preserved its essence unaltered.

In what follows, we will tackle the matter from two viewpoints: *deciphering* the significance of the elements composing the dance; *giving* a new explanation as to the origin of this cultural manifestation. Therefore this approach is rather difficult. Yet, the identification of the cultural and historical strata out of the whole ensemble of rituals and ceremonies reconstructed on the basis of the available information is not certain. But, in this case, it is the only way we can study the primitive cultural forms.

Historiography of the problem. The Călușarii dance was and still is a widespread custom over the territories inhabited by the Romanians. In south-eastern Europe and Europe in general, the Călușarii are known as a distinctive

symbol of the Romanians, even since the Middle Ages².

The origin of the Călușarii was a favourite subject for several generations of specialists in the field, especially for ethnographers and folklorists. Nowadays, reanalyzing all this cultural manifestations is most needed to be done in a wider interdisciplinary frame. Frequently, with no conclusive evidence, the Călușarii custom has been given different origins: Roman, Thraco-Dacian, Indo-Iranian or Turanic. A Roman origin has been figured out for the dance without any documentary support. Some analogies with the Roman *collisalia* as well as the ethymology of the word are however sufficient enough to consider it very ancient.

"No matter what its origin is, Călușul, in its attested forms of the last centuries, is known in Romania only and can be considered a creation of the Romanian folklore. What characterizes it, is both archaic and its open structure, a proof of that being the elements pertaining to other scenarios"³.

In the first place we make specific the fact that in the analysis which follows, we will especially envisage the Călușul from the Oltenian and Wallachian plains because it contains the oldest detected cultural elements⁴. We will also try to identify in the dance the elements coming from the cultural substratum. In our approach we will also take into account the new associations, the changes in the meaning and the thematical inversions that appeared as a result of the

¹ Ovidiu Bârlea, *Eseu despre dansul popular românesc* [Essay on Romanian folk dance], Editura Cartea Românească, București, 1982, p. 12 [in Romanian].

² Ion Ghinoiu, *Obiceiuri populare de peste an. Dicționar* [Annual folk ceremonies. Directory], Editura Fundației culturale române, București, 1997, p. 40 [in Romanian].

³ Mircea Eliade, *Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase* [History of Beliefs and Religious Ideas], vol. III, Editura Stiințifică, București, 1992, p. 238 [in Romanian].

⁴ Anca Giurcescu, *Unitatea călușului în spațiul cultural carpato-dunărean* [The unity of the "kelushcha" in the Carpathian-Danube cultural space], in "Datini" [The Rites], N. 1-2 (14-15), 1995, p. 20-21 [in Romanian].

superposition of some heterogenous elements.

The main body of the article. The călușarii dance, existing, in all probability, in the rites of the prehistoric populations in the Carpathian-Danubian area, continued to develop as a part of the ancient civilization of the Thracian and Geto-Dacian tribes, undergoing continuous changes under the influence of Greek and Roman civilizations⁵. The today form preserved by the Romanian people, got inevitable and natural modifications. The analogy and parallels, made with the Roman feasts (Rosalia, Saturnalia, Parentalia) cannot be a solid basis in sustaining the idea of the circulation and effective borrowing of these spectacular manifestations. These archaic manifestations did not evolved isolated however, but under the influence of others, coming from the classical cultures of the Antiquity.

In what follows we shall point out some elements from the substratum as a result of the aspects analysis of the custom.

The crucial element accompanying the călușarii custom is the horse image.

The name of the dance itself proves a close relationship with the horse, the custom preserving the name of a supposed ancient Indo-European deity, Călușul⁶. The name of the dance (călușean in Moldavia and Banat, căluțul in Banat and Transylvania, căluș and călușar in Oltenia and Wallachia) derives from the Romanian cal (lat. caballus)⁷. Using diminutives for sacred characters is a frequently device in the Romanian pantheon: Căluș for cal, Sfântuleț for Sfânt, Lăzărel for Lazăr etc⁸. Moreover, the Călușarii from Banat used to wear "a small wooden horse-head fixed in a lid" as Șofronie Liuba pointed out in the last century⁹. The banner of the călușarii band is called căluș in the Vâlcea county. In the Teleorman county another ritual instrument, a wooden phalus, tightened on the waist is also called "cal"¹⁰.

After the Călușul is born and the oath is sworn in ezoteric conditions, Călușarii become sacred persons¹¹. Through everything they do and act they want to confound themselves with horses. The Christian name is replaced with the horse name (Călușar, Călușean, Călușer, Căluț)¹². They wear spurs on both feet, small bells or bell girdle, crossed ribbons on the chests under the form of the harness¹³. They are imitating in the "Calul" (com. Bârca, Dolj) and

"Căluțul" (com. Gurarâului, Sibiu)¹⁴ dances, the slow walking, the trampling, the gallop and the neghing of the horses. They perform acrobatic mounting (the călușul jumping over), or shoeing (the instep tapping or the bridle of the horse) through replacing the usual club with a whip or "gârbaci".

The above mentioned details show a close dependence upon the horse and one's willingness to be integrated in the caballine species¹⁵. It seems that we face some remains of a totemic cult, but the features have been so much attenuated so that the hypothesis is highly doubtful.

Because of the oldness of the taming, because of the intelligence, beauty and the elegance of its body, the horse has a privileged place in the world mythologies. Dumezil states that the horse is the most important animal as far as the disguise is concerned, and in the beliefs of many peoples, it is the bearer of certain "sacred forces", in connection with numerous "rites of popular medicine"¹⁶. Given the tight link between the duration of the reproduction cycle and the one of the tropic year, the horse has been considered a symbol of time which is born and dies together with the New Year¹⁷. The horse seems to be even the appearance of an old God of the year¹⁸.

In most of the customs the horse is considered as a protector of the vegetation, animals and even people, an apothropaical symbol against of "iele" (the bad fairies)¹⁹. Therefore the custom would combine the frightening mythological beings with their strongest antidote²⁰. It is considered that this divine animal, the horse, influences the growth of the crops, protects the vegetation and even the people against the diseases²¹.

Within the custom, the horse has several magical functions:

In connection with the solar cult it is the companion of the sun god or is sacrificed to him²². It is remarkable that the dance is executed only in daylight and sun to which special dances were dedicated (the Floricica round)²³. The Călușarii are part of a cycle of customs consecrated to the solstitial and equinoxial feasts having as a central theme the solar horses which are opposed to the infernal horses²⁴. One can notice the survival of some ritual aspects proceeding from a very old native solar cult which suffered slow repeated

⁵ *Istoria teatrului în România* [Historian of the theater in Romania], Vol. 1, Editura Academiei, București, 1965, p. 41 [in Romanian].

⁶ Ion Ghinoiu, *Op. cit.*, p. 197 [in Romanian].

⁷ Mircea Eliade, *History of Religions and "Popular" Cultures*, H.R., vol. 20, 1980, p. 13 [in Romanian].

⁸ Ion Ghinoiu, *Tainele călușului* [The secret of "kelushka"], in "Datini" [The Rites], N. 1-2 (14-15), 1995, p. 4 [in Romanian].

⁹ Șofronie Liuba, *Material folkloristic* [Folk material], in "Tinerimea Română" [The Romanian youth], N. I, 1898, p. 128-149 [in Romanian].

¹⁰ Adrian Fochi, *Datini și eresuri populare la sfârșitul sec. al XIX-lea. Răspunsuri la chestionarele lui N. Densușianu* [Rites and national heresies at the end of the nineteenth century. Answers to N. Densușianu questionnaires], Editura Minerva, București, 1976, p. 38-54 [in Romanian].

¹¹ Ion Ghinoiu, *Obiceiuri populare ..., op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Andrei Bucșan, *Contribuții la studiul jocurilor călușărești* [Contribution to the study of dance "kelushary"], in "Revista de etnografie și folclor" [Journal of Ethnography and Folklore], T. 21, N. 1, București, 1976, p. 3-20 [in Romanian].

¹⁵ Ion Ghinoiu, *op. cit.*, p. 197-198.

¹⁶ H.H. Stahl, *Les anciennes communautés villageoises roumaines: asservissement et pénétration capitaliste*, București-Paris, 1969.

¹⁷ Ion Ghinoiu, *Op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹⁸ Traian Herseni, *Forme străvechi de cultură populară românească, Studii de paleoetnografie a cetelor de feciori din Țara Oltului* [Ancient forms of Romanian folk culture. Paleo ethnography studios of the Oltu countries youth groups], Editura Dacia, Cluj, 1977, p. 323 [in Romanian].

¹⁹ Romulus Vuia, *Originea jocului de călușari* [The origins of the "kalushar" dance], in "Dacoromania" [The Dacoromania], 1922, p. 250 [in Romanian].

²⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Ocultism, vrăjitorie și mode culturale* [Occult, magic and cultural mods], Editura Humanitas, București, 1997, p. 104 [in Romanian].

²¹ Romulus Vuia, *Op. cit.*, p. 242.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 250.

²³ Ion Ghinoiu, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

²⁴ Romulus Vulcănescu, *Mitologia română* [Romanian mythology], Editura Academiei, București, 1985, p. 234 [in Romanian].

acculturations in its mythical history. This fact is pointed out by the mythical customs linking the solar cult with the horse. Therefore, the connection between the two elements is a very old and universal conception of the Indo-European peoples²⁵. In their mythology the sun resembles to a horse, and the horse is the sacrificed animal to the solar God²⁶.

As far as the agrarian cult is concerned, the horse is considered the spirit of the fecundity upon which the fate of the harvest and the security of the animals depends²⁷. In this respect, closely related to the horse is the Mars cult to which the horse is brought as a sacrifice every year; the horse also belonged to the cult of Mars²⁸. "The horse is the totem of the God Mars, the God of the sun, the God of the creative forces of the nature, the protector of the household, the cattle breeder".

In connection to the belief in fairies the horse appears as a demon of the sanity. Mircea Eliade pointed out on the apothropaical virtues of the horse, the fact that the "iele" (feminine spirits) are afraid of its presence. The very high jumps of the Călușarii which accompanied their dances were imitating the flight of the Rusalias, as well as the hopped walking of the horse²⁹. The custom would therefore combine the frightening mythical beings with their strongest antidote also of mythological nature but in a caballine form³⁰.

All these facettes of one and the same mythical being, the demon of the health and fecundity represented in the horse appearance are subordinated to the solar cult. The horse as a demon of health represents the being causing the disease, but through its mediation one is in the same time cured. The diseases caused by "iele" bore the generic name of "taking out of the Căluș" because it was considered that they can be driven away by the Călușarii dance around the sick man. Because of its healing character, the Călușarii dance differs from the similar customs. This fact is not only its distinctive mark but also the most characteristic feature.

The Călușarii custom is inherited from the Thracian colabrismos³¹, the ritual dance with solar horses transmitted both in the Căiuți dance at the winter solstice (a solar rite influenced by the solar horses cult too, common in the Western Europe under the form of Pferd Ritters at the Germans, Cheval jupon at the French people and Hobby Horse in England). The Călușarii dance is mainly performed at the summer solstice perpetuating this way the role of the solar horses. In Oltenia, however, until recent times there was also even a winter căluș dance, performed on the banks of the Danube, on ice, at the winter solstice.

The Călușarii band was mostly a defence formation of the human communities against the bad feminine spirits (iele)³². The Männerbund elements of the călușarii are obvious: the banner, the sword, the wood horse head, the clubs³³.

In this direction it would be justified to consider that the călușarii belong to the large category of the masculine dances in arms (swords, clubs, bows with arrows etc.) existing in the cultural European area in different forms and at different levels of evolution (Călușarii and Rusalia in the Balkan region, Morris and Swords in Great Britain, the dances in the Basques country, Spain, Portugal, southern France, Italy, Central Europe)³⁴.

The historical roots of the male group dances with objects/weapons can be found even in the initializing rituals from India, Asia Minor and Ancient Greece where the youngsters were initiated with the capacity of protecting the community, to bring the rain and to stimulate the fertility of the earth. The small dramas mimicking life and death which they performed symbolized the common rhythm of the changes in nature and human life. They still exist nowadays in the Căluș dance, in the Transylvanian Călușer (Hunedoara) as well as in other passage rites³⁵.

Karl Mullenhoff³⁶ showed that the warrior character of the dances with swords is found at most of the European peoples and they were connected to the solar cult. This theory is based on the fact that these peoples worshipped the Solar God as a War God. Nevertheless, we must not forget the fact that the resemblance among the căluș dance and other European dances of ancient origin, such as the dances with swords, are caused by the historical process of the society evolution which generates analogous cultural forms in different conditions of time and space, but at the level of the same stage of economic and social development. Similarity of consciousness based on the similarity of the existence of the communities place us in the conjecture of other issues than those connected to the direct and effective relationships. The main cause of the existence of the analogy between these forms is its historical contents of their origin.

On such a war dance there is an information transmitted by Xenophon *Anabasis* who, accompanying the return march of the ten thousands of Greek mercenaries from the Cyrus expedition in 401 B.C., had stopped in Thrace. He describes the followings: "After libations were made and (the Greeks) sang the poem, Thracians appeared first and performed a dance in arms, accompanied by the flute sounds. They easily jumped in the air, threateningly brandishing their daggers, and in the end one of the dancers hit his partner. Everybody thought that he wounded his partner, for the man fell down skillfully. The Paphlagonians shouted all out. The winner, after he stripped his partner off the weapons, went out singing the song of Sitalkas, while other Thracians were carrying the would-be deceased, who, however, did not suffer any real injury."³⁷ The passage reveals both a choreographic ability related to that of the Călușarii and a genetical relation of the two cultural manifestations.

²⁵ Romulus Vuia, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ Romulus Vuia, *op. cit.* p. 250.

²⁸ Romulus Vulcănescu, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

²⁹ Mircea Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ Kolabrismosul is a solstitial, solar dance, with playful, medical, warrior, and cathartic ritual implications. The ritual is performed in daytime only, and the performers are exclusively males.

³² Mihai Pop, *Călușul* ["The Kelushary"], în "Revista de etnografie și folclor" [Journal of Ethnography and Folklore], T. 20, N. 1, Bucur-ești, 1975, p. 17 [in Romanian].

³³ Mircea Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

³⁴ Anca Giurchescu, *op. cit.* p. 21.

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ Karl Müllenhoff, *Über den Schwerttanz, Gaben für Homeyer*, Berlin, 1871.

³⁷ Xenophon, *Anabasis* VI, 1, 5.

At an other level during this critical period, the community passes from the daily life to the spiritual life. In this interval the community confers its defence attributes to the Călușarii band. Its actions are ritual ones, the whole development of the custom being organized as a ritual scenario, the band badges and its actions undergoing a symbolic value at the level of the rite³⁸. The armed Călușarii defended the supernatural positive forces, which they enchantered to come, unlike the aggression of the negative ones which they forced even physically to keep away from the community.

The rites from which developed the dances with weapons practised by the Ancient civilizations, is an original background, so that we can suppose that there were ritual scenarios in which the fight and the weapon wearing was a stimulating ritual of the genesis forces and of vegetative forces³⁹.

The ethnographic researches revealed, therefore, as a characteristic feature to all the dances with swords, the fertilizing feature also noticeable in the Călușarii custom. The apothropaic character is combined with the one ensuring the fertility. The significance related to the promotion of the fertility is deeply hidden in the peoples consciousness. Starting from this premise the theory of the Latin origin of the călușarii has been issued, according to which they are a folkloristical reminiscence of the old ritual performance executed on the Quirinal by the twelve Salian priests. The elements of the Călușarii band, its structure and ritual dance, the costumes and the auxiliary objects remind the ritual dance that the Salians performed under the supervision of a magister. The Salian priests were under the patronage of Mars (a god cumulating several attributes: god of the sun and war, but his qualities had a unifying feature, the fertility), performed athletic jumps in an archaic equipment, recited sacral verses whose meaning during Horace's time they did not know anymore⁴⁰.

Conclusions. All these elements do not bring enough arguments to prove the Salian origin of the Călușarii, but we can easily notice the close relationship of the two customs. More than that, we can suppose even the existence of a common archaic background, which suffered changes through adding specific elements to the people who developed it.

Therefore, as argued above, in the Călușarii custom we deal with cultural remains much more previous to the appearance and spreading of the Christianity, attested under various forms in Ancient epochs, on a large territory inhab-

ited by the Thracians⁴¹. What we today call Călușari is a very ancient solar and warrior dance performed at the feasts of the death and rebirth of the supreme God of the surrounding world⁴². The element of this manifestation are specific to the communities for which the dominant occupation was the cattle breeding (the Bronze and Iron ages). The eventual resemblance with other cultural manifestations cannot be explained but on the basis of a common ancient origin, most probable Indo-European and the contamination suffered in time⁴³.

Semuc Ionuț. The cult of the sun, horse and weapons in Călușarii Romanian custom. Among the Romanian ritual dances, Călușarii undoubtedly holds the most important position. It is both a dance and a custom performed in one and the same act. More than any other Romanian custom, the Călușarii appears as putting together rather different, sometimes contradictory elements. The origin of Călușarii was a favourite topic for several generations of specialists in the field, especially for ethnographers and folklorists. Nowadays, it is needed to reanalyze these cultural manifestations in a wider interdisciplinary view. We will tackle the matter from two viewpoints: *deciphering* the significance of the elements composing the dance; *giving* a new explanation to the origin of this cultural manifestation. There is a rather difficult approach. Yet, the identification of the cultural and historical strata out of the whole ensemble of rituals and ceremonies reconstructed on the basis of the available information is not certain. But, in this case, it is the only way we can study the primitive cultural forms. As you will see, in Călușarii custom we deal with cultural remains older than the appearance and spreading of the Christianity, attested under various forms in Ancient epochs, on a large territory inhabited by the Thracians. What we today call Călușari is a very ancient solar and warrior dance performed at the feasts of the death and rebirth of the supreme God, Sun.

Key words: Călușari custom, origins of Călușari, cult of the Sun, cult of the horse, cult of the weapons.

Semuc Ionuț, PhD. in Geography, Senior researcher, "Constantin Brăiloiu" Institute of Ethnography and Folklore of the Romanian Academy.

Семук Іонут - кандидат географічних наук, старший науковий співробітник Інституту етнології та фольклору ім. Костянтина Брейлою Румунської академії наук.

Received: 20.10.2018

Advance Access Published: December, 2018

© I. Semuc, 2018

³⁸ Mihai Pop, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

³⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Tratat de istorie a religiilor*, Editura Humanitas, București, 1995, p. 253 [in Romanian].

⁴⁰ Georges Dumézil, *La religion romain archaïque*, Payot, Paris, 1987, p. 581.

⁴¹ Ion Ghinoiu, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

⁴² Idem, *Tainele călușului*, "Datini", N. 1-2 (14-15), 1995, p. 4 [in Romanian].

⁴³ Idem, *Obiceiuri...*, p. 197.