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***ROMANIAN CAROLLING IN TRANSYLVANIA AREA***

**PhD thesis Abstract**

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## KEYWORDS

Carol, carolling, Christmas, Nativity of Christ, collections of carols, research in the field of carols, representative areas for carols, institutionalization of folklore research, Archive of Folklore, the Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania, group of young men, laic carols, religious carols, carolling forms, types of carollers, reversing the carolling, similarities and differences between areas, theological significance of carols, sacred space within carols, carols like preaching.

## ABSTRACT

*Carols*, within the traditions of winter holidays, concentrate a great wealth of musical and literary productions. The tradition begins on Christmas Eve and lasts until Epiphany or even until Saint John's day. Scientists have different opinions about the etymology of the term *carol*. They seem to tilt the balance towards the opinions regarding the Latin origin. Nowadays, the term *carol* and its derivatives circulate in different phonetic variants, practically with identical or really close sense, within a vast south-eastern European geocultural area. Not the same can be confirmed about the terminology of the singing carols tradition practiced on the occasion of winter holidays, among other peoples (including those of Latin origin) that differ substantially (for the French = *chançon de Noël*, for the Italians = *cantico di Natale*, and for the Germans = *Weihnachtslieder*). Etymologically, the term *carol* derives from Latin, *calindae*, and preserving the consonant *l*, in intervocalic position, which, in normal conditions, should have become *r*, is due, as shown by Alexandru Rosetti, "to the influence of the Slavic term *koleda*". The source of the genesis of carols was the Roman celebrations that marked the ending of a year and the beginning of a new one. "At its origins, carolling was an agrarian custom... and only later was transfigured, widening its framing and covering all the aspects of country life", as Petru Caraman said in his famous work "Carolling at the Romanians, Slavs and other people". Dealing with the origin of carols, in the *Etymological Dictionary of the Romanian Language*, Ovidiu Densusianu shows that the *carol* term should be included in the category of Latin origin words, taken over by the Slavs and subsequently borrowed by Romanians, along with their Slav phonetics. Church assimilated during time the ancient tradition of carolling, with its archaic meaning, which was referring to the winter solstice and the beginning of a new year, connecting it with Christmas, as the Feast of the Holy Son's birth. In this way, it was revealed a syncretism between pre-Christian

and Christian forms, in the deployment of the custom as in its repertoire. From another perspective, carolling appears as a Christian custom, as a manifestation of an uninterrupted Christian tradition. The practice of carolling custom at the Romanian people has close ties with the big Christian holidays during winter time, such as Birth and Baptism. Therefore, Romanian carols can be seen as an important chapter of Christianity in the Romanian rural area, conserving rural community rites and beliefs throughout ages.

**In chapter I**, entitled “Carol and carolling- historic landmarks”, we have shown that the concern for studying folklore was imposed only from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Europe, the interest in folklore arises along with the establishment of national states. Therefore, in Romania, the interest in traditional musical values and in their research increases after the Revolution of 1848. Among the first Romanians who appreciated the importance of traditional art and used it in a creative way there were the following writers: Gheorghe Asachi, Alexandru and Boleslav Hâjdeu, Mihail Kogălniceanu, Constantin Negruzzi. These writers prepared the ground while Vasile Alecsandri and Alecu Russo compiled the first folklore collections. With all these concerns, the basis of scientific Romanian folklore was set later by Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu, who in the preface of Ion Constantin Fundescu's collection “Romanian folk-tales” (1867) defines very clearly the purpose and methods of folklore research. The encouragement for “collecting folk poetry, ballads or old songs”, it is made by the poet Andrei Mureșanu in the *Romanian Telegraph* newspaper from 1953, in the article *The Romanian and his poetry*. Towards the crystallization of the scientific method of collecting and interpreting people's spiritual productions contributed several factors: the influence of the folk activity of D. Kiriac and O. Densusianu, continuity of publications initiated by the Romanian Academy, after competitions that during discussions for the awards were cleared and spread guiding ideas for a scientific method, the appearance of the first method of musical folklore of C. Brăiloiu (Bucharest-Paris, 1931), the intense collecting activity of Densusianu's followers, the activities of Bartók, Brediceanu, Drăgoi among others and the establishment of the two Folklore Archives: Phonogramic Archive of the Ministry of Cultures and Arts, led by G. Breazul (1927) and Archive of Folklore, led by C. Brăiloiu (1928), the gathering of voluminous material during the competitions of Romanian Composers' Society (1925 and 1928), proposing a systematic collection all across the country with the help of specialized staff formed by Brăiloiu at the Music Conservatory of Bucharest. After a journey of documentation at the folklore archives of the nordic countries, in 1929, Ion Muslim sent a memoir to the Romanian Academy, in which he

drew attention to the danger of local extinction of the monuments of civilization and proposed the foundation of a Folklore Archive. In 1930, Romanian Academy responded favorably to Muslim's pleading, establishing under his heading the Archive from Cluj, in addition to the Romanian Language Museum, which was conducted by Sextil Pușcariu. Nowadays this institution is called the "Folklore Archives of the Romanian Academy" Institute of Cluj-Napoca. After the sudden disappearance of Ion Muslim, in 1966, in the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore from Cluj the intern edification continued through the efforts of research teams led by his successors: Dumitru Pop (1966-1969), Ion Talos (1969-1985) and Ion Cuceu, from 1985 until present. The objectives of this second period of existence of the Archive are remarkable, especially towards concentration, systematization and encyclopaedic capitalization of undiscovered information from Cluj, estimated at 750,000 documents organized in databases or archive collections of national interest. Researches regarding carols were also done within the Ethnographic Museum. Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania was founded on June 16th, 1922, under the direction of Professor Romulus Vuia, initiator and founder of this institution. Since 1958 within the museum is published the *Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania Yearbook* which includes studies, researches, collections and reviews. The first issue of the *Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania Yearbook* represented an important moment in capitalization of researches regarding Romanian folk culture and civilization, being the first publication issued by an ethnographic museum and the third Romanian publication during the communist period, after *Studies and Researches in Literary History and Folklore* (1952) and the *Magazine of Folklore* (1956). One of the first serious works dedicated to carolling was Bârlea Ovidiu's work *Carolling in Transylvania* published in the Ethnographic Museum Yearbook of 1965-1967. Due to the fact that the professional education of the authors of these collections was different, the results were also unequal. Therefore, some of the collections are voluminous, others have a modest scale. Relatively just a few of them present the melody of carols, most contain only with poetic text.

**In the second chapter** I dealt with carolling in representative areas of Transylvania. From the beginning we would like to note that by Transylvania we mean an ethnographic area beyond geographical boundaries of the region, here we include also Bihor, Crișana and Maramureș. The traditional form of carolling involves the participation of the whole community: one part of it in the posture of carollers, the other part as the receivers of the carols. The protagonists of the custom are children, boys and men up to a certain age (rarely women), organized in groups (organized and uniform groups), in certain areas sometimes accompanied by

small instrumental ensembles. Usually, children begin to carol in the afternoon of Christmas Eve, and boys, girls and married men go carolling in the evening and during the night of Christmas. In many Transylvanian villages there is one group of each village, sometimes two or even more. The groups carol until late in the night, sometimes even until morning. Children and young men go from house to house in order to obtain more pretzels, made especially for this purpose, and money also, while grownups often go carolling most often the relatives and family friends. There are two forms of carolling: a) the proper form of carolling (children and adults) with religious or auspicious message (the prediction) of congratulation and wishes and b) carolling with masks (with the meaning of invoking divinities of vegetation and fertility, in order to ensure the health and welfare of the community). From Christmas until Saint Basil's day, it is customary that young men present the goat tradition. In some places, the group repeats carols at the leader's home or at one of the group. The carolling repertoire varies from one locality to another. All over the territory the costume of the carollers was the one used for celebrations. Christmas custom required that peoples wore new clothes, especially those who went carolling.

The phenomenon of reversing the carolling contains a wide range of rituals and practices, which are in close connection with carolling custom. Therefore we will also deal with this aspect. The refusal of the host to receive carollers was a gesture with harmful effects on the entire community, so carollers reversed the good wishes and turned them into formulas and practices with negative effects. The one who did not respect the tradition had to be punished. So this is a reversed rite that seeks to repeal the effect of carols, of the wishing well. Greetings turn in this case, in an anti-greeting, songs in disenchantment and carols in parodies.

A first classification of poetic repertoire of carolling was made by Atanasie Marienescu in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This will influence the next generations of folklorists. "The carols are religious and mundane." Among the experts of carols, nowadays classics, only Petru Caraman dealt with a proper classification of poetic repertoire of the rite. He divides carols, depending on where they were sang, in two groups: I. Carols sung outside, at the window, which have a general character and II. Carols sung inside, "holy", "special". As carols dominate Christmas celebrations, masks and plough ritual dominates New Year's celebration.

**In the third chapter** we showed the significance of Transylvanian regional repertoires compared with the extra Carpathians ones – the regions of Muntenia, Banat, Moldova, Bucovina and Basarabia, presenting an overview of similarities and differences between areas. In Muntenia (Oltenia and Dobrogea) we have presented several features: the braided traditional bread rite of

the girls who had a caroller lover, the Epiphany rite, the group of carollers goes from house to house with a bucket full of holy water and basil, *Vasilca*, a unique carol practised on the eve and on the first day of the New Year. In Banat, being a multi-ethnic region, both New Christmas (December 25) and Old Christmas (January 7) are celebrated by Ukrainians and Serbs. On Christmas Eve, young men from the village dress up in traditional costumes, hundreds of years old, they form groups of 15 to 16 and go carolling through the village. They usually go to each house, but especially they go where there are girls living. Because modern Moldova is only part of the former Principality of Moldavia, which in 1775 lost the North West region, Bucovina, and in 1812 also the eastern one, Basarabia (now Republic of Moldova), many of the customs and traditions of the area coincide or are similar to those of Bucovina and Basarabia. The influence of Christianity and calendar changes, acted on one hand, on the carols and on the other hand on the repertoire of the carols. Since Moldova groups of carollers were mainly looting on other forms of carolling, as plough custom or folk theatre, perpetuating the tradition was taken over by girls and women. In Bucovina, traditional carols are preserved as in ancient time, it is not only a tradition but an institution with special laws and rules. Due to historical conditions (division of Bucovina into two parts: southern part in Romania and the north part in Ukraine), New Christmas is celebrated on December 25<sup>th</sup> and the old one on January the 7<sup>th</sup>. Carolling in Bucovina begins in the morning of Christmas Eve when groups of children go carolling from house to house. They are followed throughout the day by children of older age. Currently in Moldova and neighbouring regions of cultural and linguistic similarity, Christmas is celebrated on two different dates. Most localities meet old style celebrated it on January the 7<sup>th</sup>, another part of settlements, smaller in number, celebrates the new one on December 25<sup>th</sup>. In some villages there are no carols in the Christmas time, but on January 13<sup>th</sup> when the old New Year is celebrated.

If we compared the carols in Transylvania with the ones from other parts of Romania, it easily reveals its archaic form, best preserved and closer to its original purpose. Groups of singers also come together in Muntenia and Moldova, but they do not have the tight and rigorous organization of the Transylvanian group. The archaic character of carols from Transylvania it is also revealed by many ancient names of the carollers, the heads of the groups and their members.

**In the fourth chapter** I have tried to show the theological significance of Romanian carols. In lieu of savant theology, through carols we can find clear and reliable intuition about fundamental truths of Christianity. We do not find philosophical speculation, but elementary



early Christian experience, simple and authentic. Carols reflect the light of Romanian Orthodox realism and the joy of living of the true believers. They include important dogmatic teachings, draw a genuine Christian moral conduct (*Romanian, be good!*), reflect the saving power of the Holy Mysteries. The Birth of Christ represents the theological prologue of the book where is written the entire history of the salvation of humanity. As the icon was rightfully called a Bible in colors or *theology in images* the carol can be justifiably considered the *Holy Scripture portrayed through melody, a Bible transposed into a Melos that is enlightening the soul*. Carol means *koinonia* = communion, which means effective participation, involvement, out of passivity and formalism; it evokes an event or even a sequence of events - which took place two thousand years ago, but it makes us live and feel Nativity like it were in the present time - **Today Christ was born ... Today** are fulfilled into Christ the Old Testament prophecies, and it is also the time when passions and the Holy Sacraments from the Church of Salvation are marvelously envisaged. Christ, the Son of God, has united in the cave of Bethlehem the past with the present and future. He was glorified by angels and people, sowing joy and happiness into good souls, and anger and concern into evil ones. Nativity was prophesied in ancient time, and was announced to the Bethlehem shepherds by angels as a bearer of peace and good will event. At that time the first carol was sang with angelic voice, which reminds us of God's love and the love that we owe each other, as brothers, "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among people of good will". From this first carol we note that the *Christian era begins* with a declaration of peace. Generally, three categories of people get involved into the birth of Christ, the shepherds, the Magi and Herod together with his pharisees and scribes. Romanian carols give a local nuance to the Christ's Nativity event. Respecting the historical reality, Savior's Nativity is placed in its own Byzantine-Romanian space. In this sense, infant Christ came into the world in the royal city, at the gate of *Țarigrad*, and the nobles who were at *Ștefan Vodă's* gate spoke about Jesus born in a manger. Religious carols along with laic carols, songs of bravery, traditional song called *doina* and ballads are part of our rich thesaurus of Romanian culture. In Romania, the Feast of Christ's Nativity gets an early name, out of the church, Christmas, favorite in all popular media. Within Europe and United States atheist propaganda has never been stronger nor more efficient than today. In the name of religious tolerance and separation between church and state, many governments forbid public display of traditional Christian symbols, implicitly those for Christmas. The classic image of the Savior's birth is replaced by laic grounds. Representing the birth of the Savior was superseded by commercials with the new

megastar of December, Santa Claus. In the western world, Jesus Christ was replaced by Santa, but one quite different from the old mythical and generous character, offering gifts to children. We can find similarity between *carols* and western Christmas songs, but only regarding the season of the year and accidentally some thematic tangents. Unlike *carols*, orally perpetuated *Christmas carols* or *Noëls*, songs of Christian foundation and written by composers of that time, circulated as a printed or manuscript material, they were considered popular only through their dissemination by the public. Unfortunately, it is necessary to emphasize that nowadays, in the West, Christmas has turned into a celebration literally without Christ.

Let us all wish for a Christian celebration of Nativity of Christ, to live and feel Christmas with Christ, rejoicing and delighting ourselves through Him. Let us experience the joy of the Marvelous Birth, singing along with the angels “Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among people of good will!” (Luke, 2:14). And as a final exhortation “Christ is born, glorify Christ from the highest heaven, welcome Him on earth, lift up your hearts and sing to the Lord the entire earth and with joy praise Him, peoples, for He is glorified” (Katavasia, Nativity of Lord).