

## ETHNOGRAPHIC AND MEDICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE 'CALUS' (MORRIS DANCE)

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*A very ancient custom formerly spread on the whole Romanian folkloric area, the 'Calus' is practiced today in the Danube plane of Oltenia and Muntenia and sporadically in the west and south-west of Transylvania. The 'Calus' is a part of the Whitsuntide customs. It is practiced by an esoteric group of 7-9 men, group is constituted in the 'Saturday of the Whitsuntide', at half time between Easter and Whitsuntide and which takes a vow. Beginning from this date until Whitsuntide they practice the dances belonging to this custom and become accustomed with their dancing. From Whitsuntide till the Thursday 8 days after it, the group goes from one house to another in its own village or in the neighboring ones and dances the 'Calus' dances. The dances which are practiced in our time have some spurs of initiation acts of phallic dances for fecundity and fertility. But their meaning is now blotted in the conscience of the 'Calusari' and in that of collectivity where the 'Calus' is danced. Not very long ago, were cured by this dance those who were 'taken from Calus', from the 'iele' ( malevolent spirits ), as they violated the interdiction of not working on some days between the 'Saturday of the Whitsuntide' and the Whitsuntide. The diagnosis of those 'taken from the Calus' is made by the aid of music. This study intends to introduce some data about this old dance called the 'Calus. Practiced today sporadically in the south of Oltenia and also in connection with the curing through the 'Calus'.*

*The direct observation made on the spot tries to detach the background of ancient beliefs of this practice, its magical valences and in parallel with these elements of psychological pressure and convention of this custom. It contains interesting clear observations of the 'calusari' themselves, but also of the collectivity concerning the meaning of the dance, that of the curing act and of other aspects formerly wrapped in mystery.*

**Keywords:** rite, myth, ritual, tradition

Turner (1974:35) considers that rituals are social dramas performed at a determined time and place, with a fixed form. The determined time, for the *Căluș* ( the dance of roundabout) ritual, is the period of Whitsuntide which occurs forty days after Orthodox Easter, and lasted for seven to nine days. This transitional period from spring to summer is when, according to Romanian and Slav folklore, malevolent fairies, known as Iele were at their most active. The calus'(morris dance) is described for the first time by Dimitrie Cantemir. The dance stirred the interest of ethnographers and folklorists for old magic rites that they contain and whose signification and origin they tried to explain them and also for spectacular development, for the beauty of dances and melodies under artistic mastery. Beyond traditional implications, being removed superstitious beliefs and magic practices, the calus' (morris dance) is a virtuous playing. On (Duminica Rusaliilor) Saturday, bands of boys are made up and swear and on Tuesday, a week after Pentecost they are disbanded.

Usually, about 7-9 boys, 20-60 aged belong to the roundabout(Calus) band. It is lead by the head of the band and he has a boy who helps him. The head of the band never is chosen , he has initiatives of practicing tradition, only he can set up the band and decides on accepting beginner dancers. The band is accompanied by a small fiddlers folk music band which contains violin, second violin and dulcimer. Those who want to enter in the band had to pay for learning the folk dances. The dancers obeyed to the head of the dancing band. The head should be both a good leader, virtuosity dancer and dramatization performer. Having best features, he had to provide an upward on the dancing band and on the audience. He had good knowledge about the dance development and he knew secrets of witch practices. Many years before leaving the dancing band, the head chose a future head who gained new dancing knowledge and was called the assistant head.

### Description and features

In old *times*, this practice contained esoteric rites. Two weeks forward Pentecost, the roundabout used to visit an experienced witch who gave them a kerchief which belonged to a bad and dead woman. She tucked garlic in a charmed clove of garlic in the corner kerchief. People said that the garlic had strong smell after the charming act. The kerchief was set up on the top of the roundabout( later this is replaced by a towel on which there is a piece of absinthe and a thread of red wool), the flag flew above the heads of the roundabout. That man, who was provoked to dance, started to dance faster and faster and then he collapsed on the earth. At dawn, they visited the witch again and continued to dance .The witch revolved around the circle of players telling a spell. When the game reached a climax, she passed the flag over the heads of roundabout again and shot down one of the beginners. Shooting down was a proof that incantation made its effect and the flag got magic power. Then, the witch gave the flag dancers saying' go in peace'. They answered' no fear and much good luck' Many people of the village thought that it is better to respect tradition and they felt fear to God. Also, they have strong believes in the game around the clod of salt and of flock of wool as they would bring abundance, fecundity to herd.

Other category of people considered that this folk dance had prophylactic roles and this is one of reasons that children danced it. Being religious people, they tried to follow straightly both those Thursdays of Pentecost and Tuesdays, Sundays after Pentecost as being forbidden days : if someone works, he makes a sin. *Liz Mellish* (2008) mentioned that they broke these

interdictions they could become possessed by the Iele which resulted in a mysterious form of nervous illness which could only be cured by being 'danced' by the roundabout (dancers), the main ritual actors of the Căluș tradition.

Roundabout danced in a circle. The circle means a magic old circle over which either those, who do not have strong knowledge and trust in God, could not cross it or evil forces.

The falling procedures can help us to understand the haggish substrate and the healing simulation items of the dance. During the falling dance, the head of the dancing band shares them garlic and they were chewing it all the time as the garlic can protect them from bad spirits. The falling dance is performed by breaking the wizard water small jug: the head of the roundabout puts a small jug with water combined with wormwood and garlic in the middle of the circle. The music and the roundabout start the folk dance. The head of the roundabout chooses the victim, a dancer and comes near him, stares and plays both around and next to him. The rhythm of dance tunes becomes faster and faster and the head of the roundabout splashes the victim with water from the small jug. As a result, the victim dances erratically and shows some signs of dizziness. When the game touches paroxysm, the head of the roundabout splashes the victim with chewed garlic, hit with a stick the small jug and sprinkles the victim with bewitched water and finally, he falls down by snookering. The dance stops, two roundabout raise the victim and clean his face with an handkerchief and beat his back and he recovers. The head of the roundabout parodies wailings for the fallen man and from this behavior, fun results. When the cure was successful the patient was lifted up by two folk dancers. In some cases a ritual enactment of death and resurrection took place with one of the folk dancers falling to the ground in a trance (doborâre) at the exact moment of the healing, symbolically taking on the illness (Mellish, 2008). On the final day of Pentecost (Rusalii) ,the flag was ceremonially taken down and buried ready for the next year, at the place where the oath had been taken. This ceremony was a reversal of the initiation ceremony and signaled that the The folk dancers were released from their oath until next year and could return to their previous roles within the village (Mellish, 2008).

## Conclusion

The Căluș ritual had three distinct stages. The oath taking formed the preliminary stage, the period of Rusalii itself being the liminal period, and the unbinding of Căluș at the end of Rusalii, the post liminal stage (Mellish, 2008). This tradition has lost the superstitious feature and now it is only a folk show. The old tradition gets both new content qualities and greater perfection of form. The dance *Calusul* expressed a human spiritual necessity and it offers symbolical solutions to social and individual life. This kind of practices are performed to give sense to life, to have a better background adaptation, and especially to prevent or overcome what they perceived as a periodical time crisis. In a primitive society, like in that which appears the habit of roundabout, and repressed energies were unleashed by dancing. Due to the elimination or temporary denial of rigid rules of cohabitation, in these periods, uninhibited behavior is revealed. Violence was controlled in this way at the ceremony dedicated to divinities or supreme deity. Culianu (2003:33) noticed, this company has established social safety valves, some moments in which ritual rules are reversed rules and they allow individuals to accomplish that power whose exercise was forbidden by culture. Kligman

(1988:10) considers that rituals are not a static preservation of culture at a fixed point in history, instead they 'produce a structure of relations in time and space sensitive to historical transformation' For this reason many rituals have continued to hold their place in the modern world, albeit in a form moulded to suit the circumstances in which their existence is perpetuated. Romanian Căluș is one such ritual. As a process of interaction between people and being seen as an agreement in words, pictures, gestures, symbols or signs, this ritual dance in recent decades has become an important research topic (Biriș, 2011:57). This dramatic choreographic form confirms and justifies the double, even triple existence of the Romanian phenomenon as artistic manifestation, as tradition of a still performed magical ritual, preserved and studied by ethnologic and anthropologic means and, at the same time, as still vivid folk tradition, performed in the spirit of its primordial functions: defence, purification, initiation and fertilization. This is the reason for which the Romanian Căluș became a passport of the Romanian national cultural patrimony and an "identity symbol" of the Romanian kin everywhere in the world, being also included on the UNESCO list of the intangible universal patrimony.

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