



ROMANIAN TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS – MAJOR POTENTIAL FOR INTANGIBLE WORLD HERITAGE

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Abstract: Romania is a country rich in traditions and customs, a country that attracts and astonishes tourists everywhere, whenever it is visited. Whether it is religious holidays, seasons or special events in human life, Romania has managed to preserve and transmit from generation to generation an immaterial cultural heritage of remarkable value, and lesser known, unique and living habits. It is a worthwhile contender to be proposed for inclusion in the List of Immaterial World Cultural Heritage.

Key words: Romanian Tradition and Customs, Potential for Intangible World Heritage, Immaterial Heritage, UNESCO

1. INTRODUCTION

Romania is a country rich in traditions and customs. It is a country that attracts and astonishes tourists from everywhere, whenever it is visited. Whether it is religious holidays, seasons or special events in human life, Romania has managed to preserve and transmit from generation to generation an immaterial cultural heritage of remarkable value, and lesser known, unique and living habits. It is a worthwhile contender to be proposed for inclusion in the List of Immaterial World Cultural Heritage. What is meant by Intangible Cultural Heritage and, how does Romania fit within it? An Intangible Cultural Heritage is determined as a set of practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, abilities - together with the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated with them - which communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as an integral part of their cultural heritage. A good part of the intangible cultural heritage must be created in an abstract manner, mainly to be transmitted community or a group of its inhabitants to be territorially, ethnically, religiously defined by age and gender and to be maintained and transmitted further in accordance with



traditional techniques "(UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003). A proposed objective for the Immaterial Cultural Heritage List must be to associate it with events or living traditions, with ideas or beliefs, with artistic and literary works of universal significance" - according to the selection criteria imposed by the World Heritage Convention Implementation Procedure (Operational Guide). The process of including a site in the UNESCO World Heritage List is a rather complicated process, involving several steps by the State party to the Convention, namely:

1. Making a Tentative List (an inventory of properties that the State deems fit for World Heritage List nomination);
2. Presentation of a World Heritage List nomination (The Tentative List is sent for registration to the World Heritage Center (WHC), a post-review registration and compliance check. Subsequent to registration, the tentative list is sent by the WHC advisory bodies for information);
3. Issuance of the Appointment Document (represents the main element on which the Committee considers the listing of properties in the World Heritage List. "Protection", "Management" and "Monitoring" are important sections of the nomination document);
4. The assessment of ownership is done independently by two mandated advisory bodies: the International Council for Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN);
5. After the nomination and evaluation, the final decision is taken by the World Heritage Committee (which meets once a year to decide which sites will be listed on the World Heritage List, it may postpone the decision on a nomination or request additional information with on this);
6. Any objective, in order to be included in the World Heritage List, must be of exceptional universal value and fulfill at least one of the ten selection criteria.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research methodology and data collection have been varied and involved bibliographic documentation (bibliographic research), quantitative methods (statistical analysis), qualitative methods (observation, case study and interview) and exploration of online networks. The qualitative research method is a collection of observational information (participative or non-participatory), interviews and case studies. Observation involved engaging in a variety of activities that allowed me to observe the daily lives of certain people, including the traditions and habits of the place, and also to participate in their activities to facilitate a better understanding of their behaviors. This process involved accessing the community, selecting key information, participating in various activities, conducting formal interviews and informal conversations. We conducted a case study in 2018 in the following locations: April 1st - 30th in the Greci, Luncași, Smârdan and Jijila communes in Tulcea County.

3. ROMANIA'S PRESENCE ON THE INTANGIBLE HERITAGE LIST

Regarding the presence of Romania on the List of Immaterial Cultural Heritage, we can discuss 7 living elements, namely:

- *Căluș ritual (2008)*;
- *Doina (2009)*;
- *Craftsmanship of Horezu ceramics (2012)*;
- *Men's group Colindat, Christmas-time ritual (2013)* - multinational nomination of Romania and the Republic of Moldova;
- *Lad's dances in Romania (2015)*;
- *Traditional wall-carpet craftsmanship in Romania and the Republic of Moldova (2016)* –Republic of Moldova – Romania;
- *Cultural practices associated to the 1st of March (2017)* a multinational file coordinated by Romania and elaborated jointly with the Republic of Moldova, the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria.

As things stand with regards to the inclusion of the Romanian immaterial patrimony on the UNESCO lists, things are moving slowly. A lot of values from the Romanian national patrimony which meet the criteria required for inclusion in the universal patrimony, remain unknown and the effort of enrolling Romanian values in the universal circuit seems to have diminished. Mircea Eliade (a historian of religions who lived between 1907 and 1986) said that I should understand how important it is not only to be born and educated in the Carpatho - Danubian area of Romania, but especially to understand the importance of our folk tradition, our rural culture and traditional folklore, that we still live by in the Southeast of our European country. Even though we have become more homogenised within western Europe we should ensure our culture does not disappear, even though it has been in a somewhat state of drowsiness. We have discovered that within ourselves in and around the Carpathians, the roots of our culture are much deeper than I thought, deeper even than in the Greek or Roman or Mediterranean world. These statements point to the traditions and customs that have been preserved today in Romania. They are very much alive even though some of them are no longer practiced in the world. Being original and novel, they thus present real potential for the Imaterial World Heritage, and their exceptional value can be transformed into universal values. Although the list of Romanian customs and traditions includes many elements such as traditions related to human life (birth, marriage, funeral), household habits, faith, superstitions, rituals, ceremonies, they are not the same throughout the country. There are also popular calendars, including folkloric events, rituals or beliefs, seasonal agrarian customs, which are true encyclopedias, effective in times when people could not read or write. In fact the one who learnt the whole calendar from the outside (hence the saying "*Make the calendar head!*") became the wisest farmer of the village. "*The People's Calendar gives - in the context of archaic feasts and customs - the measure of the old age and drama of the Romanian cuisine, of its ritual and sacred traditions*" (Ghinoiu, 1997).

4. TRADITIONS FROM THE LESS WELL KNOWN TO THOSE THAT HAVE FURTHER DEVELOPED

Caloianul is a very old custom of invoking beneficial rains, bringing wealth. It is located in Oltenia, Muntenia and Dobrogea, where droughts are frequent, but mostly in the communes of Greci, Luncavița, Smârdan and Jijila, in Tulcea County, where the hydrographic network is very poor, with the rivers Jijila, Luncavița, Plopilar, Cerna and Taița. Because of the arid climate, characterized by very hot and dry summers, long autumn droughts and cold winters and low snow, the water flow is reduced and river courses are temporary, influenced by the underground food supply of the valleys. The valleys are very wide, some with only temporary water. Droughts are common (Fig. 1).

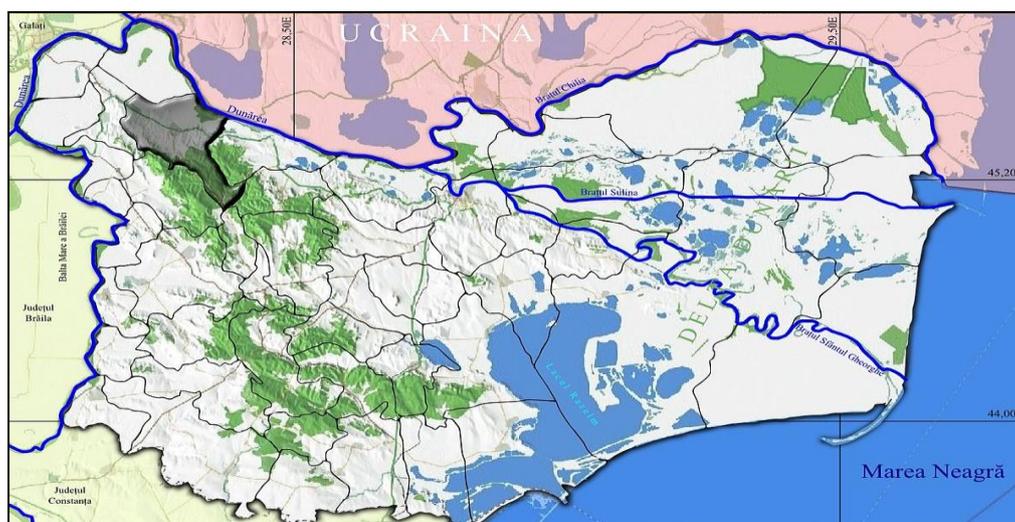


Figure 1. Luncavița commune, Tulcea county
(Source: Google Maps)

Caloianul (the habit) takes place as follows: The children decorate a clay doll with flowers, basil and colored eggs preserved from Easter. The doll is buried in the field, on a river bank or at a crossroads. Depending on the custom in the area, “Caloianul” is dug up in the days after Easter (first or third) or on drought days and made to ride on flowing water on a wooden plank with the aim of “watering up the waters and clouds”. Within the ritual appear different characters: The parents of the “Caloian”, the priest, the teacher, the grave, the gypsy and the “Paparudele” or the mourners, the children being dressed as such. The cortege then proceeds to the home of the host, where the “Caloian” was made, or home to another child in the group, where they are greeted by parents and family with pies (see Figure 2). The children in the villages of Luncavița, Greci, Smârdan and Jijila (Tulcea County) appreciate this habit and repeat it according to the old rules, reconstituting it with the teachers and librarians of the schools they are learning in.

Recoltatul mierii known as “retezatul” sau “tunsul stupilor” is practiced in Moldova and Bucovina on the celebrations of *Sfântului Ilie* and *Schimbarea la față*. The day is divided into two: In the morning, the harvest of honey and in the afternoon follows the feast, “Retezatul stupilor”. This is a true celebration when families, friends and neighbors taste honeycombs and drink brandy and wine with their honey. “The festive meal, with ritual elements is meant to bring prosperity to the “prisăcii”. It turns into a

beautiful party with songs and and games that last and last until late evening or even the next day (Ghinoiu, 1997). Since the area boasts the most limestone massifs in Europe (especially in the Iasi county), the lime honey takes over from the exceptional qualities of the flowers from which it comes, making it unique in the world by its composition, which brings joy and is celebrated fast by locals of those areas.



Figure 2. „Caloianul”, Greci commune, Tulcea county
(Source: Google Maps)

Sâmbăta Plăcintelor is also an old tradition in Romania. It meets "Saturday before the White Week", that is to say "Moșii de Iarnă", when it provides food for the soul of the dead. Hot pie filled with cheese, accompanied by a cup of sweet milk. It is shared with neighbors, and especially with "poor" people, so that they can remember that they had a good day (Radu Anton Roman, "Bucate, vinuri și obiceiuri românești"/Romanian wines and customs). The habit extends to Transylvania, Banat and Bucovina, having strong religious and social connotations.

Another old and preserved tradition practices throughout Romania that is worthy of being proposed for the Imaterial World Patrimony (outside the engraved egg habit), is *Ciocnitul Ouălor de Paște* (to knock easter eggs). Eggs painted in various colors (red, yellow, green, blue), using different vessels for this purpose, so that they do not interfere with each other and remain clean and are made to collide. This starts at the Resurrection Night, immediately after the service at the core of night. The faith says that all those who collide with eggs will meet "On the other world". The parts with which the eggs collide are popularly called "head" (sharpened part) and "dos" (round part). It is also believed that the egg that breaks first is weaker and therefore may die more quickly. In some areas the person whose egg is broken is obliged to "give to the one who has broken it with the stronger egg". The order of collision is also respected. The painted eggs collide first between their parents (husbands), than the parents collide with the children, then with their relatives and friends. Dyed eggs are generally chicken eggs, but duck eggs, goose or turkey eggs are also died, and some also use snake eggs that are much harder than chicken eggs in order to cheat (Roman, 1998). The egg is accompanied by the formulas "Hristos a Înviat" and "Adevărat a înviat!", representing a symbol of the "sacrifice of the *Domnul* Jesus". Custom is an ancient spring custom, encountered from the Persians (who celebrated the renewal of the season with their colorful eggs) and the Romans (they sent red eggs to each other at the ceremonies of the Ianus god). The egg is sacrificed (crushed

and consumed) by Easter as a sign of rebirth. The painted eggs (painted, written, dripped, beads, etc.) represent a popular religious and Romanian custom, high on the rank of art in Moldavia and Bucovina. The above-described ones represent only a small part of the beauty and uniqueness of Romanian customs, the present research being underway.

5. CONCLUSIONS

"It is imperative to intensify efforts to expand and update the Indicative List, which is currently anachronistic and exceeded at the level of proposal, criteria and methodology", I found on the website of the National Heritage Institute. Romania has so much to offer, and by highlighting the natural and cultural resources it has, it may be time to show it.

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