

Traditional Instruments of Foreign Origin within the Instrumental Music Tradition of the Megleno-Romanians in Cerna

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Abstract: *The Megleno-Romanians represent a particular part of the Romance-Language-speaking ethnography of the Eastern areas of Europe. Originating in northern Greece, they moved to Romania in the early twentieth century, hoping for a life free from the struggles and shortages of requirements that they had faced on their native territories.*

Currently, in the village of Cerna, the Megleno-Romanians boast a musical repertoire that is predominantly in their own language. This has led me to the premise that, within the context of the family, there has always existed there a pure Megleno-Romanian repertoire that has circulated orally until today.

However their cohesiveness as an ethnic group in the village of Cerna has resulted in repertorial uniformity, since their songs are sung and their games played by all residents, regardless of their place of origin. Not only has the repertoire suffered from a lack of creative input, but it has also suffered from a lack of players of the instruments they consider traditional.

The repertoire was attenuated by having to be adapted to the technical specifics of the performers on the țigulcă, whistle, large pipe, and tambura for whom the songs were not written. Thus those songs and game melodies which could only be performed on the Gaida were lost.

Key words: *Megleno-Romanians, traditional repertoire, țigulcă, flute, pipe, drum*

1. Introduction

At the end of the tenth century, across virtually the whole of Europe the processes of ethnic formation came to a halt. References to older or newer peoples of European ethnicity, including Romanians, began to appear in our historical sources.¹

Initially the sources referred to Romanians under the term 'Vlach'. Romanians were first mentioned in the south Danube area, followed by the Carpatho-Danubian zone. We may conclude that in the minds of most of the authors of our medieval sources - whether their cultural milieu was Byzantine, Western, or Ottoman - there was no difference between the ethnic identity of Romanians and Vlachs on either side of the Danube. Where Romanians are mentioned, they are always assigned a Latin-speaking origin, being considered survivors and successors of the Eastern Roman world.²

The large family of Romanians south of the Danube includes Aromanians, Megleno- and Istro-Romanians. Besides the Romanians from the Balkans, known today as the Aromanians, there is also a small settled population with their dwellings situated north of the Salonic bay who are of the same origin as Romanians of all provenances. These are known as Megleno-Romanians or Romanians from Meglen".³

¹ Cf. G. Zbucnea, „O istorie a românilor din peninsula Balcanică sec. XVIII-XX”, Ed. Biblioteca Bucureștilor, București, 1999, p. 13.

² Cf. G. Zbucnea, op. cit. p. 6.

³ T. Capidan, „Meglenoromânii”, Fundația Scrisul Românesc, Craiova, 2007, p. 33.

2. Content

I wish to highlight some aspects of the traditional music of the Megleno-Romanians in Cerna because according to research conducted in this community in 2000-2008, we have found previously undisclosed evidence suggesting their success in establishing themselves within a different and sometimes hostile ethnic milieu. Through selflessly preserving and transmitting to younger generations their traditional music, the Megleno-Romanian community in Cerna has preserved an individual cultural fingerprint, so necessary in the multiethnic context of Dobrogea. In the light of these considerations I will try to trace the processes that brought about the attenuation of its cultural heritage and how its repertoire became constricted owing to the times through which it passed.

The Megleno-Romanians represent a particular part of the Romance-Language-speaking ethnography of the Eastern areas of Europe. Originating from northern Greece, they moved to Romania in the early twentieth century, hoping for a life free from the struggles and shortages of requirements that they had faced on their native territories. They emigrated in two stages: from Greece to Cadrilater and from Cadrilater to Cerna in the county of Tulcea.

Lacking the infrastructure with which to create their own cultural footprint (schools, religious services in the mother tongue), they preserved within the family structure all those elements capable of ensuring their cultural distinctiveness viz-a-viz other ethnic groups inhabiting the area.

They are predominantly termed Macedonians but in other dialects south of the Danube the term Vlachi is used.

Cultural differences between the Megleno-Romanians and ethnic groups who live alongside them find expression in dialect, religion and history.

The Megleno-Romanians' creative instincts have produced works of no little originality and merit. These products of their spirituality have carved out a niche within the wider national cultural heritage.

Cerna is situated in the western part of the county of Tulcea, in a hilly area, 55 kilometers from the city of Tulcea, where there is the largest existing Megleno-Romanian community in the country. There are other smaller communities in the county of Timis, in Varias and Biled.

The Megleno-Romanians arrived over 60 years ago in Cerna. From locals now aged between 80 and 90 years old, I have learned that in 1961 there existed a folk-band 'The Meadow of Cerna' consisting of four players of the caval (large wooden flute) and three whistle-players. Between 1965-1966, with this ensemble and with other Megleno-Romanian instrumentalists, G. Marcu and G. Habenicht recorded for the first time Megleno-Romanian songs. Folk dances were filmed by N. Bucșani. All recordings are held at archives of the Institute of Folklore.

In 1979 Professor Gheorghe Oprea, wrote a work entitled 'The Music of the Megleno-Romanians', which he published in the journal *Studii de muzicologie*, Vol. XIV (1981). Since 1990 many articles and studies have been written by Romanian and foreign researchers about the Megleno-Romanians in Cerna (Virgil Coman, Emil Țîrcomnicu, Thede Khal etc.).

Currently, in the village of Cerna, the repertoire is mostly in the language of the Megleno-Romanians. This led me to the premise that within the family structure there has always existed a pure Megleno-Romanian repertoire that has circulated orally until today. The resilience and strength of this repertoire served to preserve the ethnic identity of the Megleno-Romanians, regardless of the oppression and de-ethnicization to which they were subjected over time. I learned from sources in the villages on the Megleno plain that their songs had once been predominantly in Bulgarian, but with the arrival of Megleno-Romanians in Cadrilater and later Cerna the majority of the repertoire came to be sung in Megleno-Romania over time.

During their time in Cadrilater, the Megleno-Romanians had already been subjected to a process of deethnicization which was carried out at all levels. Their predominantly oral culture made them vulnerable to external influences from neighbouring ethnic groups leading to the natural absorption into their repertoire of free-standing songs and dances in Bulgarian and Turkish. It is precisely these cultural products, both indigenous and imported from others during their time in Cadrilater, that would ensure their uniqueness and provide the Megleno-Romanians in Cerna with a distinctive identity over the ensuing 70 years.

From the most elderly I learned that in the homelands of the Meglen, songs from the repertoires of Bulgarian, Greek, Turk and Aromanian nationalities used to be sung. Is it not hard to imagine this phenomenon, given that the conditions of life imposed bilingualism or sometimes tri-lingualism on all speakers of a Romanian dialect.

Resistance to the dominant cultures (Greek, Turkish, Bulgarian, Dacoromanians) made the communalty of Megleno-Romanians, regardless of their Megleno-Romanian provenance, engage in the process of cultural self-identification. A repertoire of songs and games constitutes a very important element in a community's self-identification.

The repertoire of songs and dances practised today keeps the community in touch with Meglen, their place of origin, with Cadrilater, their adopted home after leaving their homeland, and with Cerna, which has guaranteed their survival and which everyone considers home.

In their dance music, besides traditional dances I also came across Bulgarian, Greek and Turkish folk games.

The influence of the folk music of other ethnic groups upon the folk music of the Megleno-Romanians was mediated through the acceptance of only those songs which had the same structure or similar structure to Megleno-Romanian music. Where the difference of musicality was so great that integration was impossible, the folk songs of other neighbouring ethnic groups were preserved as separate items within the Megleno repertoire. These songs are still being passed on from generation to generation.

Another aspect that should be mentioned is that fresh lyrics either in their dialect or in Romanian were adapted to the preexisting melodies in their repertoire. A lack of composers, the creators of folk culture, has led to stagnation in terms of the number of pure Megleno songs in the repertoire.

However their very cohesiveness as an ethnic group in the village of Cerna has resulted in repertorial uniformity, since their songs are sung and their games played by all residents, regardless of their place of origin. Not only has the repertoire suffered from a lack of creative input, but it has also suffered, as we have said, from a lack of performers on instruments which they consider traditional.

On arrival in Cadrilater and then later in Cerna, the number of those who played specific Megleno-Romanian folklore instruments (bagpipes, țigulcă, drum, pipe and flute) was considerable: 6-7 players of the bagpipes, 20 of the țigulcă, 6-7 of the tambura, 5-6 on the large pipe, 7-8 on the whistle. Gradually, their numbers decreased, such that currently in Cerna there is one single performer each of the tambura (Otti Ion, Megleno-Romanian), whistle (George Jordan, of Bulgarian father, Megleno-Romanian mother), kaval [large pipe] (Bulutu George, of Bulgarian father, Megleno-Romanian mother) țigulcă (Rizu Ionel-Nelu, țigulcaru, Megleno-Romanian), along with vocalist Rizu Anastasia (Megleno-Romanian).

The songs and melodies I have chosen are actually variations resulting from the originals being adapted to the small number of instruments that proved capable of replacing the authentic Megleno-Romanian instrument, namely the bagpipes (Gaida).

In fact, the entire folk-music output of the Meglenoromanians, from the production of the sounds to the voice emission was based on this instrument. The bagpipers represented the generation which had arrived from the Meglen. Gradually, their numbers had fallen to the

level of extinction, so that in 1979 when Professor Gh. Oprea produced the ethnographic study mentioned above, only one bagpiper, Nicholas Tanura was still alive in Cerna.

The repertoire was adapted to the technical specifics of the current performers on the țigulcă, whistle, large pipe, and tambura for whom the songs were not written. Thus those songs and game melodies which could only be performed on the Gaida were lost. Ionel Rizu refused to play the songs from the repertoire of bagpiper Tanura Nicholas on the țigulcă. The explanation was simple: "Songs played on the Gaida cannot be played on țigulcă. The Gaida prolongs the notes but I can't do that because I've got a short bow".

The Megleno-Romanian repertoire of songs depended, in fact, on the technical capabilities and skills of the instrumentalists and vocalists and on their personal style of interpretation.

The bare minimum number of instrumentalists and vocalists surviving (one performer on each instrument) did not permit me a choice of performer based on the qualities of the performance.

The folk instruments on which the contemporary Megleno-Romanian repertoire is played are either the same as those used in folk music contexts by all speakers of the Romanian dialect or are specific to ethnic Megleno-Romanians. Apart from the flute and large pipe, which are found in Daco-Roman folk traditions, the other instruments are mainly found in the folk traditions of the peoples who were the former neighbours of the Megleno-Romanians in the Balkans.

Tambura (in Megleno-Romanian ,tămbură') is a plucked string instrument of Arabo-Persian origin, from the lute family. It can have from 2 to 12 metal strings plucked with the aid of a plastic plectrum. It is typically used as an accompaniment to vocal or instrumental performance, being found in the folk culture of the countries of the Balkan peninsula or Pakistan. Ion Otti's țigulca, made of walnut with inlays of mother-of-pearl, has 4 strings tuned to each other: the lowest is do-sol-DO1-DO1.

This originally Megleno-Romanian instrument entered the Romanian musical culture of the Romanian Principalities during the period in which the Ottoman Empire was bringing both Balkan countries and those to the north of the Danube into its area of influence. Theodor T. Burada, the man who was to be the first in our country to study contemporary folk instruments, believes that tambura was introduced into Romania in the late nineteenth century.

Franz Joseph Sulzer, writing in the eighteenth century, in mentioning Turkish chamber instruments in our country, alludes also to the tambura.

The ethnomusicologist Tiberiu Alexandru believes that the tambura entered Romania in the eighteenth century, specifically in the second half of the century.

C. Bobulescu in his work ,*Lăutari and hori in our church paintings*', published in Bucharest in 1940, believes that this instrument had been known to Romanians since the early eighteenth century.

Gr. Poslușnicu maintains that this instrument came into the country a century earlier. Based on the annals of Neculai Costin he informs us that tambura was the preferred instrument of Prince Dimitrie Cantemir. In his youth, being a guest-hostage in Constantinople, Cantemir became very proficient on this instrument.

Elizabeth Dolinescu gives us the earliest date for the use of this instrument "comparing the picture of the medieval instrument *Collascioni con tre corde* seen by an Italian traveler in Moldova in 1633, with that of the Arabo-Persian tambura she concludes that it is one and the same instrument."⁴

⁴ Revista de etnografie și folclor, Tomul 10, Nr. 2, București, 1965, Ed. Academiei Republicii Populare România, p. 206.

Also in the seventeenth century, in 1679 the Turkish traveler Evliya Çelebi visited the fair in Focsani, where among other instruments he heard the *saz*. "Saz: Persian and Turkish generic term that defines plucked string instruments, type of tambura. Saz occupies an important place in the folk music of Islamic countries between Iran and the Balkans."⁵ Saz is the Transcaucasian equivalent of the tambura of Megleno-Romanian folk traditions.

A detailed description of an ensemble of instruments encountered in Romania in 1848 is given by Ion Heliade Radulescu. He published an article in 1848 in which he describes the the tambura along with other instruments of Turkish origin.

Among researchers who studied the tambura and its performance on Romanian territory opinions are divided. Even if there were few native players of the instrument, it formed part of the musical ensembles that were common in the Middle Ages in the Romanian Principalities.

Theodor T. Burada, writing in 1877, in an article entitled 'Research on the Dances and Musical Instruments of Romanians' gives the names of Romanian instrumentalists, virtuosos on the tambura, who lived at the courts of the Princes of Moldova (Paharnicul Toader, Caminar Grigore Avram) and Wallachia (Serdarul Dionysius Fotino).

As a conclusion, we can say that tambura, the melodic instrument par excellence, was played in Romania both unaccompanied and in ensembles with various numbers of instrumentalists. It was an instrument of the courts of princes and barons, which were considered the elite social milieus, but also of town fairs and town festivals. In the Medieval period, this instrument alongside the Cheman, nei, bagpipes, trumpet, etc., stood at the forefront of the profession of music in the Romanian Principalities.

2.1. Țigulka

The țigulka is a stringed instrument played with a bow encountered throughout the Balkans as far as the "Dalmatian coast"⁶. It has many names, depending on the region of folk tradition where it is found.

Amongst the Turks the Kemence, as it is known, formed part of folk music ensembles. The Kemence was used by orchestras playing in the palaces of sultans, so it was not exclusive to folk music ensembles. For this instrument there was a cultured repertoire, with Turkish instrumentalists coming to be true virtuosos, as it was the case in the eighteenth century with Evliya Çelebi.

Amongst the Greeks it is known as the Cretan lyre, because it is the favorite instrument of the inhabitants of Crete. Constructed of mulberry, shaped like a pear, it has three strings (tuned to Re-La-RE2) supported by a bridge. There are little bells attached to the bow used on the Cretan lyre which start to ring when the instrumentalist executes movements.

This instrument is found in Bulgarian folk tradition under the name of gîdulka, gunilka, lirik. Unlike the Kemence or Cretan lyre, which have only three strings, the gîdulka despite its identical shape, its identical orientation for performance, and its identical instrumental technique, can have a greater number of strings, anything from 3-5 to 8-10. The role of these strings is to vibrate in sympathy with each other. They are not touched during performance.

The avenue by which this instrument entered Megleno-Romanian folk music is of course through Bulgaria. Megleno-Romanians lived for centuries side by side with Bulgarians along the foothills of the Rhodope Mountains, from where they spread down to the Plain of Caragiovei (of the Meglen), where there are still to be found today. We know from historical data that the elite of Megleno-Romanian society was represented by

⁵ V. Bărbuceanu, „Dicționar de instrumente muzicale”, Ed. Teora, București, 1999, p. 227

⁶ V. Bărbuceanu, op. cit. p. 113.

Bulgarians, the language of polite society being Bulgarian. Following mixed marriages between the Bulgarian and Megleno-Romanians, mutual borrowing took place between both cultures. In marrying into a different ethnic family, Bulgarian women brought with them Bulgarian language and customs, everything, that is, related to the spiritual culture of the Bulgarian people.

An instrument „like a Bulgarian *gîdulka*”⁷, the Megleno-Romanian *țigulca* has three strings and a bow. The strings are arranged from low to high, the first string being the thickest. The neck of the instrument is quite thick, short, and ends with a wider part where the strings are attached. The bow is arched, the musician holding it in the style of the double bass. The fingers are placed on the strings from the side, as in the *flageolet* technique. The sounds produced have a particular sonority of their own. The instrumentalist plays with the instrument supported upright on his or her knees, and in making the transition from one string to another, the instrumentalist moves the instrument itself, thus facilitating an otherwise rather awkward execution.

The *țigulca* played by Rizu Ionel (Nelu *țigulcaru*), has the strings tuned as follows: La1-to-MI1. He learned to play the *țigulkă* from an old Megleno-Romanian instrumentalist in Cerna. During his childhood there were many *țigulcari* in Cerna able to perform in ensembles or as soloists.

2.2. Whistle

The whistle, called *sfirchi* in the dialect, is named after the Bulgarian word *svirka*, which designates the same instrument. It was brought from their homeland by the ethnic Megleno-Romanians. It is not known exactly what kind of whistles accompanied them on their arrival in Cerna, but here they quickly acquired the Dobrogean whistle, with seven openings (six in the front and one on the opposite side of the tube). The whistle is semitransversal and has no mouthpiece, the fingers being placed at equal distances from one another as they cover the six holes placed along the front of the tube. Iorgu Jordan is the only Cernan who plays this type of flute nowadays.

2.3. Daireaua

During the research that I carried out in Cerna, I recorded Megleno-Romanian songs to the accompaniment of the *Dairea*⁸. This instrument is found in the folk traditions of all peoples in the Balkans, Asia and the Middle East. It arrived in the Megleno-Romanian folk tradition through borrowing from the Turkish folk tradition. The *Dairea* is present in dance music, where it is necessary to fill out the rhythm. Traian Otti, the son of John Otti, provided the rhythmic accompaniment on the *Dairea*.

I have not encountered the drum among the instruments used in folk performances amongst the Megleno-Romanians in Cerna. Named the *‘tompăni’* in their dialect, from the Bulgarian name *‘topan’*, the drum was an instrument of accompaniment in the dance music of the Megleno-Romanians of Meglen.

2.4. Pipe

If, on their arrival at Cadrilater, the only wind instrument considered as being particular to the music of the Megleno-Romanians was the bagpipes (*Gaida*), over time it disappeared, its place being taken by other contemporary folk instruments. As a result of living together in a multiethnic geographical space, it was natural that there should have been mutual borrowing of folk elements amongst communities of diverse ethnicity. Besides the *țigulkă*, the Megleno-Romanians also adopted the Bulgarian large flute. It consists of three tubes joined together, the actual flute tube itself being in the middle equipped with seven apertures, three above and four below, plus one opening on the opposite side of the pipe. The

⁷ V. Bărbuceanu, op. cit. p. 137.

⁸ V. Bărbuceanu, op. cit. p. 81.

third tube, at the bottom has four ports, grouped two by two.

It was natural that this instrument should also be found in the village of Cerna, where Bulgarians had been in the majority. Even when population exchange took place between the Romanians and Bulgarians, the connection between Megleno-Romanians and ethnic Bulgarians was not severed. Many Bulgarians refused to leave Cerna. Thus, they continued their coexistence with the Megleno-Romanians.

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, we can say that their repertoire of songs and games has been passed down through the Megleno-Romanians from generation to generation, either within the family, through the celebration of important events attended by all, or at the evening gatherings. The admixture of songs and dances from ethnic groups with whom they came into in contact led to a broadening of their repertoire, with these songs gradually being absorbed into the Megleno-Romanian repertoire. This pattern of evolution followed by their repertoire extended over the three historic stages of their existence. In Meglen they had very close relations with ethnic Bulgarians from whom they borrowed both words and songs and dances. Meanwhile some decorative elements from the Bulgarian women's traditional costume resurfaced in the Megleno-Romanian woman's outfit. On arriving in Cadrilater they adopted from the ethnic Bulgarians the *gădulka* a traditional Bulgarian instrument. This instrument bears the name *țigulca* and is found only amongst the Megleno-Romanians and not among the Aromanians. This is why I agree with the information received from those interviewed, according to which that they became familiar with and borrowed the *țigulca* from the Bulgarians during their time in Cadrilater.

On arriving in Cadrilater, the Megleno had a rich and well-contoured repertoire in which there were only a few wedding songs and dances of Bulgarian and Greek origin. During their period in Cadrilater innovations entered the repertoire as a result of the new ethnic milieu. They absorbed melodies from ethnic Turks as well as the instrument on which these melodies were performed, namely the *tambura* along with the *dairea* as percussion.

If the *țigulca* was mostly the preserve of less emancipated milieus, the *tambura* represented the instrument of the Megleno-Romanian elites.

Currently, items of cultural furniture, or what is commonly called *tradition*, are being destroyed at high speed. Generally they are protected, by, in most cases, the institutions charged with the collection, preservation and display of objects of historical scientific, artistic, interest,

Traditions - rituals, the practices of social life, traditional crafts - are most exposed to attenuation and disappearance being, as they are, exposed to dangers which the passage of time brings to the pricelessness of our spiritual cultural heritage.

The attenuation process suffered by this intangible treasure presupposes change. This change involves movement or a departure from a point of no movement. It does not involve either progress or regress, either evolution or in-volution. Researchers will be able to determine the difference in quality produced by this movement, but will not prevent its direction. It their responsibility to slow down or reverse the process of attenuation or even to reinvigorate an aspect of the repertoire of our intangible cultural heritage which is faced with the danger of extinction. This task is becoming more and more difficult, as the rate of change of the components that make up this intangible cultural heritage increases and as the cultural distance between generations widens apace.

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The main focus of her research is Romanian culture and folk music as an expression of culture of the Dacoromanians, Megleno-Romanians Aromanians, Lipovans, Turks, Tartars, with special emphasis on the musical repertoire of these communities. She aims to expand her scientific research in the direction of the Romanian community in Bulgaria and Serbia, the Romanians in Timok Valley and other ethnic communities in the Dobrogea area such as Armenians, Greeks, Jews, etc.