

The traditional Dobrudjan costume

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Abstract: This paper tackles a less common (perhaps even unusual) topic of scientific meetings with a musical character: the traditional costume. This endeavor is justified by the belief that traditional clothing represents - like folk music and dance - one of the specific expressions of the type of territory, traditions, customs, beliefs, collective sensibilities in any region to which reference is made. The material below focuses on elements representative of the traditional costumes in the Northern, Central and Southern regions of Dobrudja, noting the similarities and differences generated in time, due to climate, customs and, last but not least, influences determined by the long coexistence with various (and not a few) ethnicities.

Key-words: regions; components; characteristic elements; ornamentation

1. Introduction

Despite the fact that Dobrudja has been poor and its land has been dry, the native Romanians of these lands have been unshaken in their grueling work and life from the mists of time to the present day and just as open has their heart been to all those who, throughout time, settled here in order to share like brothers with the natives needs and joys, traditions and renewal.

About the traditional Dobrudjan clothing as a whole one can say that it makes one think of some characteristics of the entire plain region on the left bank of the Danube, but it is impossible to overlook the artistry with which those general lines were adorned with specific elements determined by the mixture of numerous ethnicities during centuries - Lipovans, Bulgarians, Turks, Tatars, Macedonians, Germans, Jews, Greeks - with the Romanian population with roots in the expansive region between the Danube and the sea: "Like any cultural fact, traditional clothing has undergone a continuous evolution, along with the social and historical development of the community it represents. The evolution of traditional clothes has always involved the specific elements of a community, but also the interference with other neighboring communities or with other ethnic groups, which have coexisted in the same area"². In making up the traditional Dobrudjan costume, we recognize elements due both to conditions related to the permanence of the local element (elements common to the traditional Romanian clothing throughout the territory of the country), and to circumstances determined by the conditions of the social and historical development of the region (elements specific to Dobrudja's clothing, by which it is defined and individualized, differentiating itself from that of the neighboring regions).

In terms of fundamental types of clothing, regardless of the new elements' infiltration process and the evolution of the costume, the stylistic or chromatic differences from village to village, we take into account the costume with *double catrințe/Romanian peasant homespun skirt*³ and the costume with *androc/flannel or linen skirt worn in the country especially by old women*⁴ and *catrință*. Both types of costumes have in their composition as common parts the

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² Cristina Gelan, Lelia Rus-Pirvan (coord.). 2016. "Straie și vestimentație specifice comunităților etnice". In *Manual pentru educație interculturală* [Handbook for Intercultural Education]. . București: Editura Eikon, p. 115.

³ Women's coat instead of skirt, not sewn on the sides, tied with sticks, home woven, made of wool of different colors, predominating red and black.

⁴ Homemade woolen skirt (at loom), with colored stripes, worn (especially) by old women

white cotton cloth or the *tulpan/linen with very thin fabric*, the *marama/head covering* and the long shirt.

2. Women's costume

The women's shirt from Southern Dobruja belongs to the category of lap long shirts, also known as the "full shirt". In determining the typology of the women's shirt, the decisive criterion is the cut of the shirt (of its components) and the ornamental system, according to which two types of shirts are distinguished: straight and yoke.

The research shows the existence mainly of the yoke shirt, being a type of old shirt. This one, having a straight cut of four strips of fabric, with yoke, sleeves fastened to it and round neckline, has the following characteristics:

- the body of the shirt is made up of four rectangular and equal strips: front, back and sides;
- the yoke - "lining" - which wraps the shoulders is cut from a single strip, serving as support for fastening the body of the shirt, made of four creased strips;
- the straight sleeve is cut from a width of cloth and fixed onto the yoke.

The type of straight shirt, a less common shirt, has been documented as being the oldest. In fact, however, the specialists do not consider it a traditional clothing piece, as it had another purpose: nightgown or bedgown for sons-in-law or a gift for godfathers.

The straight shirt has the following structure:

- the body of the shirt, with the back and the front cut from a single length of cloth on the normal width of the processed material (50 - 60 cm), dresses the body passing over the shoulders, without stitching;
- to complete the body of the shirt there are two gussets placed symmetrically at the sides; their shape is trapezoidal, with the oblique side under the sleeve and a straight one at the base;
- the sleeve, cut from a single strip of cloth, has the joint on the upper part of the arm, fastened at the shoulder's level;
- in front of the neck, the shirt has a cut, representing the "shirt's mouth", executed by a simple neckline.



Fig.1. *Traditional women costume from the Southern region of Dobrudja (Ostrov)*

Considered an archaic type of shirt with the simplest cut, it is widespread in the country, but also in other parts of the world; the material is used judiciously, “with measure”, without incurring losses.

In establishing the typology of the shirt, the material from which the piece is made and the layout of the ornaments play an important role. The cloth used is homespun, in two threads, with the warp and the brush of cotton and raw silk. Its width varies between 40 and 50 cm. There are three types of cloth: plain cloth, cloth woven on the entire surface of the fabric with alternating groups of stripes and cloth woven at the edges, on both sides, on the length of the cloth; thus, an ornamental system is shaped, having the stripe as the decorative element, with a width of 4 - 5 cm. This weaving system is done differently, depending on the purpose of the object: ordinary, holiday, ceremonial shirt, each shirt involving specific techniques.

Four weaving systems are recorded:

1. red or black cotton weave, sometimes in combination, the procedure applied being known as “marni/edges on cloth”;
2. thick white cotton weave - “tiriplic/twisted mercerized cotton or silk, white or colored” - which determines as a result of the difference in the thickness of the threads the creasing of the material; the cloth is called “with the swollen edge”;
3. white cotton weave, the cloth being known as the “cloth with an edge”;
4. white cotton weave on raw silk warp.

From an ethnic point of view, the weave consists of groups of 3-4 stripes of different thickness, which, by the arrangement on the edge of the fabric and the cut, follow the shirt’s line of cut. Joined at the edge of the strips, the two (woven) sides create a surface with a wide linear ornamental decoration, constituting in fact the first ornamental system of the shirt. The ending of the strips is executed by means of different stitching systems:

- with the needle “on the brim”, the joining of the strips taking place on the back of the cloth, over the “brims of the edges”;
- with the crochet, with red or black cotton, from the upper part of the shirt to the middle - “embroidery ending”;
- with the crochet in the “cheiță/zigzag (colored) stitch, which ends the edges of a peasant shirt” system for joining the sleeve with the body of the shirt.

As far as the straight shirt is concerned, the ornaments are arranged along the stitching for joining the strips, on the edges of the sleeves, the lap, as well as around the neck, marking the ending. The ingenuity of the peasant woman and the variety in the system of union of the strips acquires valuable aesthetic attributes, considering that the ornamentation of the straight shirt is limited to this. For special occasions, the material from which the shirt is made (the part that covers the body up to the middle, including the sleeves, so “what one can see”) has the warp and the brush of raw silk.

From an artistic point of view, the weave and the strips’ ending constitute the first ornamental system specific to the shirt from Southern Dobrudja. The rest of the motifs are placed, according to the principle of balance and ornamental harmony, on the chest (in our case, on the yoke), the edges of the sleeves, shoulders and lap, underlining the lines of the cut.

The yoke or the lining, rectangular in shape, represent the ornamental composition, which is either simple - applied laterally and consisting of ornamental vegetal elements (vine, grape), or complex - framing the central ornament in an angle with a downwards tip (hence the name of yoke with a corner). The central ornament - the “ruja” or the rose -, typical on the holiday shirts, is framed on both sides by two lions or two birds, which give specificity to the shirt. The “rose and chicken shirt” has attached to the yoke, at shoulders’ level, a piece of cloth – a support for applying small ornaments, made with the crochet. The sleeves and the lap have, besides the various ornamental motifs - “vines”, “small flowers”, “small snails”,

“small trees”, “streams” – which enrich the artistic value of the piece of clothing, a “sprinkle” or “small tufts”⁵ crocheted lace made of white cotton. To these are added, at the beginning of the century, factory materials (sequins, metallic wire), which are part of the traditional costume, giving it a glow.



Fig.2. Traditional women costume
from the Central region of Dobruja (Babadag)

Analyzing the ornaments of the women's shirt, we notice 3 elements: a colored one (red and black, highlighted from the white background of the fabric), a technical one (making ornaments on the loom - weaving, with the needle – *în puncte* or *musca* embroidery, the crochet, the crochet hook - at the ending of the gussets) and one consisting of the addition of distinct elements (lace on the lap and sleeves, the “circlets” on the yoke).

The shirts worn by the older women were more sober, with the “small tufts”, “cheițe/zigzag (colored) stitches” and motifs on the lining made of black cotton.

The ordinary shirt was simple, made of a simple woven cloth - the so-called “plain cloth” - and had a cut similar to the holiday shirt, but it lacked ornaments.

As for the little girls' shirt, it respected the patterns of the girls and women's shirt, the difference being made by the miniature dimensions, this also being true for the other pieces of clothing, as in the village of Dobruja, just like in the rest of the country, the traditional costume for children is a replica of the adult costume (the particularities are insignificant).

The traditional Dobrudjan shirts are still found today in the dowry chests of the old women in the villages, the only purpose being to be buried in them, which is why they are also called “death shirts”.

The second component of the *catrințe/Rumanian peasant homespun skirt* costume is the *pestelca* or *pristelca/a richly ornamented wrap-around skirt made out of a rectangular piece of woolen fabric worn at the waist or it is made of two pieces of woven material that cover the front of the body (like an apron) and the back* - the local name of the *catrințe*.

Of rectangular shape, composed of two strips of fabric, it has a horizontal stitching “behind the needle”, corresponding to “strip by strip, stripe by stripe”. Woven into four threads, with cotton warp and wool brush and fabric, the *pestelca* has a length between 80 and 90 cm and a width between 60 and 70 cm.

⁵ Variants related to crochet technique / art

From a compositional point of view, the surface of the *catrința* comprises two parts: the “field” or the middle, also called the body of the *pestelca* (*catrință*) and the tags, two of them, on one side and the other, as lateral ornamental displays.

Pestelca is the piece with the most decorative elements, being the one that sits over the shirt and covers the body from the waist down. The rich ornamentation and the colors used are evidenced by the contrast with the simple background of the shirt (hence, the saying “I put the *pestelca* on and I become a noble”).

The predominant motifs which decorate the *pestelca* are geometric (rhombuses, rectangles, squares, broken lines), plastically called “chickens”, “turned over grass”, “furrow”, “rabbit’s trace”, “turtle”, “one hundred reeds”, expressing the matrix of the universe in which the woman lives and works.

The width of the displays is between 15 and 20 cm. The central part of the *pestelca* is usually woven (stripes varying in width) or with beads (dots chosen by hand in the loom). The edges are hemmed, “so that the whiskers do not come out” and a row of the “small tufts” made with the crochet is applied all around.

The right *catrințe* coexisted in parallel with those wrinkled at the top, with “*băieri*” (a string with which they were fixed on the waist).

The *catrința* belonging to the costume with *androc* and *catrință* keeps the cut and the arrangement of the displays of the double *catrințe* costume, but also presents a series of specific elements:

- it is wider, with more frequent creases;
- the lateral displays are reduced to 10 - 12 cm;
- the simple ornamental motifs are a combination of geometric elements which the peasant woman interprets through the notions known to her (“clothes pins”, “winding points”).



Fig. 3. Costume with *marama*/head covering from Dobrudja

From a chromatic point of view, red, black, white prevail, to which more vibrant colors (yellow, green, blue) were added over time (with the appearance of chemical dyes). In Oltina and Satu Nou, the *pestelca* is called “*pestelca* chosen on the apple”. But also in Oltina, this decoration with netting on the edges (“on the apple”) was justifiable only when wearing a single *pestelca*, set in the front, over the skirt and tied at the waist with twisted “*băieri*/strings” made of wool. When the woman wore two *pestelci*, one in the front and one in the back, set over her lap long shirt, their decoration was distributed on the lap in a single display of floral motifs made of red, green, pink, yellow, blue wool and in this case the “body” of the *pestelca* was woven.

In Aliman, the *pestelca* was narrow and it had at the bottom two rows of flowers separated by stripes and it was tied up with two strings.

The *pastelca* worn in Dunăreni is described by the village older women as “a woven apron made of wool with special flowers at the bottom, followed by colored stripes up to the waist”.

The striped or ordinary *pestelca*, wider than the special one, is woven from wool, on a warp of cotton and it does not have netting, with a background that varies between brown, dark red and black.

In Rasova, the *pestelca* was known as an “apron made of cotton and wool, without a pattern, only with black, brown and violet-blue stripes, arranged transversely”.

In recent years, women have begun to wear a simple apron at work, made of woven cloth or purchased from shops.

An element of great fineness of the Dobrudjan women’ clothing was the raw silk *marama*, woven at the edges with stripes called “*vârste*/strips of another color” and adorned with different motifs; it gave a touch of great elegance to the costume.



Fig.4. Traditional women costume
from the Northern region of Dobrudja (Tulcea – Măcin)

When the industrial products started to be used, the *marama*/head covering was replaced with the *giar* or *castinca*⁶. Their elegance is given by the arrangement of the tassels, called “bells”, which were placed in 3 to 4 rows or by the presence of flowers arranged like a borderline.

As ornaments, one could notice golden earrings, a sign of rich girls and women; the less wealthy ones adorned their necks with “colored glass beads, bought from the fair”, and on their hands they wore *colbe*, i.e. “red or blue glass bracelets, bought from Silistra”. Such glass bracelets were found in Oltina, Satu Nou, Ostrov, Bugeac. In Dunăreni and Aliman, the older women were constantly wearing a silver cross or a “trinket” hanging from a piece of black thread.

All these adornments were always supplemented by “ornaments” taken from nature, i.e. basil sprig and garden flowers (roses, scarlet pimpernels, etc.) or from near the window

⁶ Wrap adorned on the edges with embroidered flowers and fringes

(geraniums), which the young girls and women put either in their hair (caught in their pigtails), or behind the ear or on the chest.

The peasant woman from Dobrudja, like all Romanian peasant women, used every occasion (holiday, Romanian round dance/*hora*, wedding) to adorn herself, both to highlight her beauty and to make her social status known.

3. Men's costume

If the costume of the Dobrudjan women is characterized by a balance of simplicity and ornamental and chromatic richness, by a bold congruence between the urban element and the one of the domestic industry, the Dobrudjan men's costume is highlighted by a reduced ornamentation both in terms of motifs, and in terms of their arrangement.



Fig.5.

The traditional men's costume has local notes in each of its compartments: age, civil status, work, holiday, occasions or customs over the years. The component elements (shirt, trousers, belt, cap, vest, thick woolen clothes, shoes) are characteristic of the different stages of life, from young man to married man and then to old man ("elder").

The cap in the traditional Dobrudjan costume is round, conic and made of lamb fur.



Fig. 6. *Traditional men's costume from the Northern region of Dobrudja (Tulcea – Măcin)*

The straight shirt, without a yoke, open in the front, with a wide sleeve was replaced at the beginning of the 19th century with the shirt with a yoke, straight collar, a “strip” in the front and with “bracelets” on the sleeve.

Especially in the entire Southern Dobrudjan region, the shirt looks similar. Made of white cloth, woven at the end of the gussets with a white or painted with “trotyl” cotton, it has a straight cut, with a small yoke (*lining*) and a “ribbon” instead of a collar. The borders - the group of stripes - underline the lines of the cut and polarize the arrangement of the ornamental motifs embroidered or chosen in the loom. They are positioned in fixed spaces (a general characteristic, in fact, of the shirts in our country): on the chest, on both sides of the opening; the motifs are geometric, decorated with cream raw silk, chosen in the loom or embroidered using the needle, grouped into three vertical displays to which the skillets - “circlets”, “creases” are added – sewn on the loom.

The ornamental composition is repeated on the collar or “ribbon” and on the wristbands of the sleeves.

In order to gain breadth, the “body” of the shirt was creased, just below the yoke. This was the holiday shirt, but also the wedding shirt. In Oltina, Satu Nou, Aliman, the older girls wove such shirts which they gave to the groom at the wedding, the latter having the obligation to “give a tip for the shirt”, that is to pay a sum of money, thus rewarding the girl’s work.

After the wedding, the shirt was worn on the holidays or it became “the shirt of death”, being kept in the dowry chest for the man to be buried with it.

The ordinary shirt’s cut is identical, the only difference being that it is less ornate.

The groom’s shirt has a much richer ornamentation than the one for the holidays. The floral motifs positioned on the chest occupy a larger surface and are made with the needle (“shirt with hemstich in the gaps”).

The old men’s shirt was different from that of the young men in that it was less ornate, having on the chest only “circlets” without hemstiches, and on the sleeves, on the yoke and on the chest it was adorned with groups of stripes made with beige “tiriplic/twisted mercerized cotton or silk, white or colored”⁷.



Fig. 7. *Traditional old men’s costume from the Central region of Dobrudja (Babadag)*

⁷ Twisted or mercerized silk or cotton thread, used for embroidery or weaving

The shirt worn by the little boys was long (“cămășoi/long shirt”), made of homespun, it had a lining, wide sleeves and a collar like a ribbon, being devoid of ornaments. In Seimeni, Topalu and Capidava this shirt was called “*bercă*” and was worn especially during the summer, without pants.

Another type of shirt is the gift shirt, which was part of the dowry of the girls to be married, being given at the wedding, “at the big table”, to the godfather, the father-in-law or to the “*deavăr/a* lad chosen by the groom, usually his best friend”.

Derived from the straight shirt - whose cut it keeps, except for the turndown collar -, the gift shirt is decorated with floral motifs, placed at the “mouth” and on the edges of the “free” sleeves. The colors used in the ornamentation were red, black, blue and green.

The dominant note of the men’s shirt from Dobrudja is the white background color, which highlights the ornaments. The cut, the chromatics - differentiated only to a small extent from one region to another in terms of ornamentation - is practically the same for all stages of life.

In the traditional Dobrudjan men’s costume there are two types of trousers, different in terms of cut:

- wide at the top and narrow at the bottom, made of dark rough wool and
- straight-cut trousers, made of white or dark brown, sometimes black rough wool.

Trousers from the first category were frequently found in the old men’s clothing from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, being known in the Dobrudjan villages under several names: *ițari* (Satu Nou, Oltina, Băneasa, Ion Corvin), *pârpâți* (Topalu, Capidava, Seimeni, Dunăreni, Aliman), *târțari* (Dunăreni, Vlahi, Rasova, Cochirleni), *șalvari* (Ostrov, Bugeac, Lipnita).

Suitable for the warm climate which requires loose-bodied clothing, the “*pârpâți*” were cut from four sheets of rough wool, and from the point of view of the cut they resembled the *șalvarii*: narrow at the bottom, wide at the top and with a large, fallen part covering the dorsal region of the body, having on both sides a pocket with an oblique cut. In the waist they were tied with a *brăcinar*, a woolen string, placed in the hem (“waistband”) at the top of the pants. In the Dobrudjan villages mentioned above, these trousers were worn by “the old men well above 60 years”, which is why their color is dark: black, brown or violet-blue, obtained by painting the rough wool (“*dimie*”) with “lilac, walnut shell or danewort leaves”.

The straight-cut trousers were made of white cloth for the holidays, and of black or dark brown for work.

In Seimeni, Topalu and Capidava, the trousers were also “from rough wool beaten at the bars”⁸, which ended with a “wristband” at the bottom.

An interesting aspect related to the making of the pants is the beating of the rough wool, a process by which the woolen fabric in four threads is thickened. The “bar” on which the material to be beaten was spread, made of sticks, was rectangular in shape and broad “about the size of a table”. Usually, the material was beaten all at once, after which “each cut his own part of rough wool”. Sometimes the rough wool pieces were beaten by a group of people, that is “one night one was beaten, the other night another one and each one helped the one who helped him”.

The operation to obtain the *dimie* (rough wool) proceeded as follows: after the woven material was stretched on the “bar”, boiling water was poured over it and four lads - two at each end of “bar” - began to beat the cloth with their hands, with their fists, they rubbed it on the bar until it became thick and it was no longer obvious in how many threads it was woven. However, this practice was not widespread, with the wealthy choosing to “give it to the *piua*/ a machine used for felting woolen fabrics in a warm and humid environment”, that is,

⁸ Twig trellis with square grids

transforming the fabric into a cloth (“dimie”, “aba”) by “beating” at the mechanical *pive* that operated in villages such as Ostrov, Oltina, Băneasa, Topalu, Cogealac, Hârșova.

If the pants made of rough wool were for the cool seasons, during summer and at work they were replaced with the “izmene” made of white cloth, having a cut similar to the *ițari*: wide at the top, narrow at the bottom, where they were tied with “a thread, like a string” Also at work, to keep their pants from getting dirty, the men in Dunăreni, Aliman, Viile, Ostrov used to wear a *pestelcă*⁹, wider than that of the women, “like a big woollen apron, woven into four threads with black, brown or blue stripes” and composed of two strips “transversely arranged”.

The men girt their waist with a four threads (“to the rib”) woven belt, three meters long (“five *colți*”), so as to be wrapped twice with it and two palms in width. In Oltina and Satu Nou, the red “*brânele*/belts” were the hallmark of young men, while in Dunăreni, Aliman, Topalu, the belt was worn by the old men. In villages such as Ostrov, Ion Corvin, Rasova, Cochirleni the red “*brânele*” were worn during the holidays, while at work men girt their waist with brown or gray brown *brâne*. In other villages (Saraiu, Gârliciu, Târgușor, Grădina, Seimeni) there were only white “*brâne*”, woven into four threads, “with three and four brown stripes at each end”. In Dunăreni, the young men - “grooms” - girt their waist with white belts, woven at the ends with black arnica, “with beads and little flowers”.

The “body” of the belt was always simple, devoid of ornaments, the decoration being displayed at the ends and consisting of groups of white, black or brown or black, red, and gray-brown stripes, depending on the color of the background. Sometimes these stripes were associated with small floral motifs, grouped into three (“pigweed”) or with point-like geometric motifs (“bean”, “bead netting”, “white bead”). Along with these motifs, narrow stripes appeared on some belts, grouped on the long edges of the belt. At the ends twisted fringes were left out of the warp, about 2 cm long.

The belt was worn “where one can see”, over the pants (the shirt being tucked into the pants), with one end left to hang on the right hip.

In general, the belt was turned over and the ply was low, so that inside one could keep the tobacco box, the pipe, the money or other objects.

In the middle of the twentieth century, leather belts with metal buckles appeared in the Dobrudjan men’s clothing, which resulted in the replacement of the “*brăcinar*” from the pants with “tags” which were meant to support the belt.



Fig. 8

⁹ Cloth or baize apron that women put on their dress and that is sometimes worn by men

4. Conclusion

Although, considering the title, the subject may not seem “worthy” of a scientific session, the content – even if condensed / simplified to the maximum - is sufficiently rich, interesting, complex and foreign to general knowledge so as to be able to materialize in a paper presented in a scientific symposium.

5. Referemces

Book

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