

## GABRIELA BOANGIU<sup>1</sup>, ROMÂNIA

**Cuvinte-cheie:** pețit, zestre, tradiție, folclor, nuntă.

### Etapele ceremonialului nupțial în Oltenia

#### Rezumat

În cazul nunții este interesantă pentru tematica noastră și etapa peșitului și a fixării zestrei și tot ansamblul de reprezentări și practici simbolice ce fac referire la zestre. Peșitul reprezintă o etapă foarte importantă în cadrul acestor uniuni familiale. Era momentul când se întâlneau familiile mirilor și se luau hotărâri referitoare la viitorul familiei, se cunoșteau mai bine tinerii, se făceau schimburi de daruri între ei, se stabilea zestrea.

Etapa peșitului reprezintă o parte constitutivă a spectacolului nunții, „dacă tinerii hotărâsc să se ia, fata se duce și spune mamei ei că băiatul vrea s-o ia, s-o peșească și se înțelege în ascuns cu maicăsa ce și cum să facă nunta.

Pregătirile pentru nuntă încep, în Oltenia, cam cu o săptămână înainte, iar nunta ținea cam trei zile: trei zile se serbează nunta, sâmbătă, duminică și luni. De vineri încep cu pregătirile. Pe timpuri se tăiau animale, acum nu se mai întâmplă așa. Bradul miresei îl făceau tinerii sâmbătă, când venea muzica.

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<sup>1</sup> Institute for Socio-Human Researches „C.S. Nicolaescu-Ploșor”, Craiova, of the Romanian Academy.

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## **Stages of the Wedding Ceremony in Oltenia**

### **Summary**

When it comes to weddings, it is interesting for our theme, the wooing stage (matchmaking), the settling of the dowry, with all the symbolic representations and practices referring to the dowry. The wooing (matchmaking) was a very important step within these family unions. It was the moment when the families of the bride and groom met and decisions were made regarding the future of the new family, the young couple got to know each other better, they exchanged gifts with each other, and the dowry was established.

The stage of wooing (matchmaking) represents a constitutive part of the wedding ceremony, “if the young couple decides to get married, the girl tells her mother that a certain boy wants to make her his bride, to woo her, and she secretly advises with her mother how to prepare the wedding“.

The wedding preparations in Oltenia started about a week before, and the wedding lasted about three days: Wedding celebrations last for three days, on Saturday, Sunday and Monday. Preparations begin on Friday. In the past, animals were slaughtered, but that is no longer the case. The bridal fir tree was decorated by young people on Saturdays when the musicians arrived.

## The Concept of Beauty in Folklore

When it comes to weddings, it is interesting for our theme, the wooing stage (matchmaking), the settling of the dowry, with all the symbolic representations and practices referring to the dowry. “In its traditional forms, the marriage cannot take place randomly: the young couple attend certain social events of the village, do some specific works together, help each other, work in groups, attend evening sittings, parties or *hora* dances. On the occasion of New Year, for example, the lads who wander from house to house, carolling, have specific wishes for the young boys and girls that have reached the age when they can get married. In allegorical forms, these wishes speak about happy a marriage and the duties of both spouses in marriage.” (Pop 1966 *apud* Meïtoiu 1969:18). Therefore, weddings were preceded by a series of social practices that represented a foundation for the young people to know each other better, choosing the wedding date, the godparents etc. The wooing (matchmaking) represented a very important stage within these family unions. It was the moment when the families of the bride and groom met and decisions were made regarding the future of the new family, the young couple got to know each other better, they exchanged gifts with each other, and the dowry was established. “The wedding in Maramureș, as Timiș Nicoară from Baia Mare informs us, represents a special event, not only for the young people who join their lives and efforts to build a home, or for their parents, but also the whole village. Two young people – the bride and the groom – are in the attention of the entire village from the moment they “hold hands” (got engaged) until the wedding is over. In the past, there were frequent situations in Maramureș, when some marriages were arranged by the parents of the young people, marriages conditioned by wealth or “the noble kin” (...). Especially the girl’s parents had to ensure the boy’s parents how much land and cattle they would give as dowry.” (Meïtoiu 1969:20-21).

The stage of wooing (matchmaking) represents a constitutive part of the wedding ceremony, “if the young couple decides to get married, the girl tells her mother that a certain boy wants to make her his bride, to woo her, and she secretly advises with her mother how to prepare the wedding. The lad also tells his father about his intentions. If the father also liked the girl, because he usually knows her too, he advised his son: Good, let’s send the matchmakers” (Meïtoiu 1969:97). As an example, at Ivești, Vaslui county, some time ago, at weddings, they would send the matchmakers “with a leader heading them, all riding horses and neatly dressed, wearing their best clothes, they would stop next to the girl’s house and say the following wedding ovation or speech:

*“Good morning,  
Good morning honest householders!”  
“We thank you  
Great hunters  
But why are you wandering  
And what are you seeking”  
“Why we are wandering  
And what we are seeking  
We do not have to  
Account for  
Because we have crossed countries  
And we have crossed seas  
And through towns and villages, we have passed  
But we haven’t accounted for  
But if you are asking us,  
Allow us a few moments  
To tell you our true reason...  
Our young emperor  
George the praised by all  
Woke up early in the morning  
Combed his raven hair  
Put on his new clothes  
Saddled his horse  
Blew his trumpet  
And called for us all  
And at dawn break  
We went hunting  
Into the Upper land  
The western one  
Till our horses rested  
Because they lost their horseshoes  
And we descended  
A beautiful hill  
And we saw the mountains and their fir-trees  
The sky above with the stars  
The glens with the violets  
And we spied the trace of a beast  
Some said it was a fairy  
A good wife for George...  
Other hunters  
Much more clever*

Said it was the trace of a deer  
A spouse for George  
But our George,  
Who is your guest,  
Riding a horse  
As great as Bucephalus  
Stood on his feet  
Breathed deeply  
Gazed around him  
All over the fields  
And witnessed how the deer  
Transformed into a beautiful  
And lovely flower as well...  
And seeing that it neither blooms  
Nor bears fruit  
Nor likes the place  
But it only parches,  
Sent us the messengers  
Riding nice horses  
With braided manes  
And tinned hoofs  
And he gave us silver pickaxes  
To pull up the flower  
By the root  
And plant it in our George's garden  
The flower to like the place  
To not parch  
To bloom there and to bear fruit,  
But on our way here  
Our flower transformed again  
Into a beautiful deer  
Delightful and fair-haired...  
And we traced her  
Drinking and cheering  
Shooting our pistols...  
Until we saw  
A lovely bright star  
Falling over  
Straight to your house  
And we followed the star  
And stopped at your house

To ask for the deer:  
To give it to us  
Otherwise, we won't leave..."

(Now they all take out the bottles and put them on the table. The girl's father steps forward and says something like this: *Maybe, you, honest hunters, might have mixed up the traces and arrived at our house by mistake because we know nothing about your game.* Then, the matchmakers pretend they want to leave. But the host stops them.) The master of ceremonies pretends to be upset and says: *Then if this is your wish, let's leave at once!* The bride's father, because he doesn't want the matchmakers to leave his house, lures them to stay: *Because our forefathers' tradition says to welcome you as our guests for this night, maybe the game will come any moment from now...*" (Meițoiu 1969:100)

This wedding ovation, because its form is kept for the beginning of the wedding, not only for the wooing, reminds us of an ancient mental horizon, which includes old symbolic representations. The girl is suggestively imagined as a "beast", a "fairy", "a deer/spouse to be for George", a "lovely flower", and "a lovely bright star". All these metamorphoses talk about old symbols. The hunting is in itself a symbolic one. The taming of the beast, the bringing of the "flower", with its roots, into the garden of the wooer, "The flower to like the place/ Not to parch/ To bloom there and to bear fruit" depict a miraculous wedding, the continuity of some families that are about to become related. The replanting of the flower into the groom's garden to bear fruit speaks of an aggregation rite (Van Gennep 1996: 22), a post-liminal rite of integration of the bride into a new family, that of the groom.

The matchmaking represents an essential stage in the wedding imaginary, when the young couple's parents meet, "first the parents were laying heads together (without the young couple), along with some close relatives, and then the children met too and exchanged handkerchiefs (today wedding rings)" (Ghinoiu 2001:64), "with the father, or other relatives. They have to haggle with" (Ghinoiu 2001: 64), "they were haggling about what to give to the girl. Of great importance was the land" (Ghinoiu 2001: 65), "they were usually going only on holidays, and only in the evening. They don't go on fasting days, this is a bad omen" (Ghinoiu 2001: 65), "just the well-off were making a marriage contract" (Ghinoiu 2001:65), "the dowry was bargained" (Ghinoiu 2001:65). "They were discussing the dowry and the wedding. Sometimes a document was drawn-up" (Ghinoiu 2001:67). The discussion about the dowry was a necessary step in the economy of the wedding, "after they agreed, a dowry contract was drawn-up, written by a person from the family, both for the groom and the bride, they exchanged them and were kept by the in-laws. This was called the agreement" (Ghinoiu 2001: 70), "often, a dowry certificate was concluded" (Ghinoiu 2001:70), "a dowry sheet was made in the presence of two witnesses" (Ghinoiu 2001:70). Land, cattle, gold coins, a place to build a house on, clothes, carpets and a dowry chest were given as dowries, "the chest was usually taken on Sunday when the wedding processional was heading towards the church. The chest contained traditional shirts. On the chest, there were rugs, counterpanes made of oakum and wool, pillows, and towels. After

the dowry items were brought home, the bride distributed gifts to the relatives of the groom: towels, shirts (nowadays, as well, items bought at the fair). After that, they would come out of the house with the gifts and start dancing *Aidea – doiu* (the bride's hora). They circled the house dancing, three times, with the groom and once without him, and a bucket of wine in the middle. Afterwards, the bride invited her relatives and guests to the table. They served lamb soup and mutton steak. After the dance and cheerfulness, the bride's guests would step aside and the groom's guests are invited to the table. Today, they do the same, or the items are bought in the week before the wedding: furniture, gas stove, blankets and carpets" (Ghinoiu 2001:72).

"The dowry chest (with the chest's box – a small box placed in the trunk, where the necklaces were kept) was taken once with the bride. In the chest were all her garments. It was loaded on a cart pulled by oxen to the groom's house" "a woman called *pochinzel* (guardian) – loaded the chest into the cart and then unloaded it and guard it during the transport. A *pochinzel* was a young, unmarried woman, whom the groom and the bride would trust" (Ghinoiu 2001: 74).

The engagement or the entrustment of the bride (Florea Marian 2009:119) is the next stage in the economy of the wedding: "Few days after *settlement* or *association*, that is, after the young couple's parents have fully agreed on the *dowry*, comes the conferring or the engagement" (Florea Marian 2009:119). The young man, together with his family and other guests and musicians, would go to the girl's parents to get engaged to her. The parents of the girl, also surrounded by guests, relatives and neighbours, either close the gates, to perform a special ceremony or open them widely to welcome the young man with all his companions. If the gates are closed, a *colăcar* (a messenger, a man who symbolically bears a loaf of round-shaped bread) says an ovation in which the symbolic hunting of the bride is mentioned – a fairy, a flower, a star, hunted by the emperor, which is the groom. After the ovation, the girl's parents open the gates wide and welcome the young man and the entire precession. Meanwhile, the girl hides and is replaced by an ugly old hag, or a lad dressed up as a woman, telling them that this is the empress. So, until the bride is brought out, the guests make a lot of jokes. Regarding these ceremonial moments, Van Gennep considered that: "The ritual substitution in which the bride or the groom is replaced can signify, in some cases, as Crawley believes, the substitution may be intended to remove the danger of «inoculation»; however, according to the detailed description, I think that most often, the rite represents an attempt to avoid the weakening of the interested groups (the age and sex group, family etc.) by relinquishing or uniting only individuals who are least valuable socially and especially economically (e.g. little girl, old woman or a little boy etc.), indicated by the mockery made of the replacements and the furious protests of friends and relatives of the bride and groom." (Van Gennep 1996:119). These substitutions refer to the preliminary rite of separation (Van Gennep 1996: 119). After these ritual elements, the young man goes to the girl, takes her hand and they sit at the head of the table, next to the godparents.

In the Strehaia area, Mehedinți County, the engagement took place 2-3 weeks after

the matchmaking, on Sunday or another holiday. They brought food, unleavened bread and drinks, but if they were wealthier, they would bring earrings for the girl or bracelets, the wedding rings, and an occasion for setting the wedding date. (Chicet 2010: 39).

The wedding preparations in Oltenia began about a week before, and the wedding lasted about three days: “the wedding is celebrated for three days, on Saturday, Sunday and Monday. The preparations begin on Friday. In the past, they used to slaughter animals, but this is no longer the case. The bride’s adorned fir tree was decorated by the young people on Saturday when the musicians arrived. They poured water into a bucket in which a fir tree was placed, and the youngsters would start to decorate it and then dance around it” . Another field informant tells us: “on Saturday, the wedding tent is installed, preparations start, the musicians play in the yard, the girls and the boys decorate the fir tree, and after that, the table is set, they eat, and the musicians along with the best man go through the village to invite people to the wedding. They lay the table on Saturday and dance until two or three in the morning” . The decoration of the fir tree is part of a preliminary ritual of separating the bride from the community of unmarried young people.

Roman Ioana, a woman from the village of Bărboi, Grecești commune, Dolj County, told us that “on Sunday morning after the wedding, the guests and the bride go to get water from a fountain. The bride puts on her wedding dress and walks with the best man by her side and an unenameled bucket hanging on a stick and pieces of cloth made of floss-silk nowadays they put towels on it, and they go to a well with the musicians and other people following them. At the well, the bride [in other versions, the best man] takes out three buckets of water to splash them in four places – towards the East, West, South and North. The fourth bucket is filled with water and they take it home. After that, they go and get the godfather, they go to the church and get married. The table is set, then, after the meal, the wedding presents are given. Back in my time,<sup>4</sup> when I was a child, they used to give food too as a present, now they only give money.”

In the past, the wedding ceremony was much more extensive. The groom’s preparation implied a ritual shaving, and in Mehedinți County, the groom was helped either by the bride, if she moved into the groom’s house during the engagement, or by a maiden, known by the groom’s family who would help him shave. (Chicet 2010: 61). The bride was accompanied by her mother, the godmother and other young women, who helped her get dressed and put the bridal veil and the wrath on her head. The shaving of the beard and covering with a veil are also rites of separation, as mentioned by Van Gennep. (Van Gennep 1996:107-130). In Mehedinți, after putting on her veil, the bride performs some sympathetic and fertility rites: she gazes through the chimney to have beautiful black-eyed children, or

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<sup>2</sup> Field informant Florea Maria, 66 years old, from the village of Bărboi, Grecești commune, Dolj County, field research March 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Field informant Maria Victoria, 87 years old, from the village of Bărboi, Grecești commune, Dolj County, field research March 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Field informant Roman Ioana, 55 years old, from the village of Bărboi, Grecești commune, Dolj County, field research March 2016.



she blows through the fire to have as many children as the hot ashes (Chicet 2010: 63). At the end of the wedding, the godmother will take off the bride's veil, replacing it with a scarf specific for a wife, her new status, a ritual of aggregation, of integration among young wives.

The festive atmosphere is also created by the groom's guests, who come to take the bride, the godparents and other guests. Isidor Chicet considers that the wedding procession has a protective role as well, for the young couple, they are cheering and loudly manifest their joy, not letting the evil spirits come near the bride and groom (Chicet 2010:77). In Oltenia, when the wedding procession arrives at the bride's house, the wedding ovals are recited by the *colăcer*, the messenger. "The first messenger (says): "Good day to you!" The bride's father answers: "Thank you for your wishes!, and asks them: "But what's the great matter/ For which you are in a hurry? The messenger answers: "What sort of question is this/ about our quick arrival? / and these bunch of people/ Why are they looking as if we were wolves? / What's with all these youngsters? And the crowd/And all the girls, as if they saw bears/ And gaping at us/ Haven't they seen people before/ And are they afraid of us eating them?/ (...) Or you might think that if you frighten us/ We will answer to you?/ (...) ) We aren't afraid of crowds/ We bear names of brave people,/ We aren't afraid of masses/ Because we know what to tell you./ And if you want, and it pleases you/ To answer to you peacefully,/ Take us easily/ To talk calmly,/ (...) That's why, without jesting/ Listen to what we say:/ The young emperor of ours/ He who wants only the best for you/ One early morning, / As it is his habit/ Around the daybreak/ Wishing to go hunting, / He woke up, he dressed nicely, / Took his weapons, as he should have/ And grabbing his horn suddenly/ Blew it once/ And gathered a lot of his soldiers/ All of them on horses/ All sharp and skilful/ Shooting their rifles: / To go hunting on the hills/ And over the mountains (...)/ Riding a while/ with rifles in their hands/ They got to a well,/ And spied the trace of a beast,/ Where all of them dismounted,/ To look around, to better gaze,/ What kind of trace is that? To take a guess,/ (...) Some said that's a trace of a fairy,/ To hold our emperor daily,/ Others said it was made by a flower queen,/ To be the bride for him// So as much as they talked,/ The emperor began to think/ That he would like to know/ Where was the fairy coming from/ to the well?/ And he left at once,/ Following her a long way/ Until he reached your yard/ Along with our party,/ Where he saw a flower/ As a bright star shining,/ Which would just grow up/ And would just bloom nicely, / But wouldn't bear fruits/ Because the earth is not good// Therefore the emperor/ Called a meeting/ That the beautiful flower/ That smells so sweet/ To be moved from here/ And taken to his highness court/ Where she will like the place,/ To grow and to bloom,/ To sprout with children/ To show her fruit/ And everyone to love her dearly (...)/ And to give us the flower at once/ That shiny star,/ Along with your answer,/ We kindly ask you (...)"(Moanță 1974:45-53). This wedding oval speaks of the symbolism of a royal wedding, as mentioned by Van Gennep, in which the bride and the groom are *princes* and *princesses* (Van Gennep 1996: 107-130), it is a text that uses a symbolic foundation for aggregation rites, of integration of the bride into her new family (...)



Costum popular din Mehedinți;  
Foto: Mitruț Burghină

There is another custom that when the wedding attendants leave with the bride and the dowry to stop the groom together with the bride's guests and not let him go until he gives his mother-in-law a significant gift (Chicet 2010:77), this custom was documented in the village of Busulețul, today's Grecești commune, Dolj County.

The young couple says their *Requests for Forgiveness* at the doorstep to their parents, a ritual of limitation, to receive the blessing of their parents and godparents, for example: "Good morning, honest guests/ Honest godparents,/ Honest in-laws/ In a few words,/ Asking for permission/ Your daughter is requesting/ With great humility/ To give her your blessing/ And on Friday/ To give her your forgiveness/ To excuse and bless her/ Because the parents' blessing/ Makes a children's house stronger." (Chicet 2010:240)

After the religious ceremony, the wedding procession arrives at the groom's house, where the mother-in-law welcomes her daughter-in-law with a teaspoon of jam, a sympathetic rite, to ensure the bride that living together will be sweet, then she spins her around three times so that she becomes a good wife (Chicet 2010:86). After this, the bride and groom are tied around their heads with a floss-silk towel, to enter the house together, a ritual of aggregation, of integration of the new family.



Costum popular din Mehedinți;  
Foto: Mitruț Burghină

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<sup>5</sup> Field informant Bumbăcescu Cornelia Daniela from the village of Busu, 43 years old, Grecești commune, Dolj County, field research March 2016.

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