

MIRELA KOZLOVSKY¹, ROMÂNIA

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Caracteristici ale muzicii tradiționale a meglenoromânilor din Cerna

Rezumat

Dacă, din punct de vedere lingvistic, dialectul meglenoromân a fost studiat de cercetători români și străini, muzica lor tradițională nu a beneficiat de un interes deosebit din partea etnomuzicologilor. Lipsa informațiilor despre fenomenul muzical actual al acestei comunități a fost motivul principal pentru care am dorit să studiez repertoriul lor inedit de cântece și jocuri.

Cercetarea pe care am realizat-o se bazează pe elementele din repertoriul muzical capabile să ofere o raportare diacronică, în conformitate cu etapele migrației din Meglen spre România. Acest demers a putut fi realizat doar pe genurile folclorice existente încă în repertoriul meglenoromânilor din comuna Cerna. Materialul cules acoperă, din punctul de vedere al categoriilor folclorice, trei genuri: baladă, cântece propriu-zise și jocuri. Studiul de față încearcă să evidențieze aspectele ce contribuie la afirmarea identității comunității de meglenoromâni prin intermediul creațiilor folclorice.

¹ "Ovidius" University of Constanța, România

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Characteristics of the Traditional Music of the Megleno-Romanians in Cerna

Summary

This essay deals with those elements of the musical repertoire of the Megleno-Romanians, which are capable of offering a diachronic perspective, according to the phases of their migration from the Meglen region to Romania.

This research could only take into account the folkloric genres still existing in the repertoire of the Megleno-Romanians in the village Cerna (Dobruja, Romania). The collected material covers three folkloric genres: ballad, proper songs and folk dances. The essay highlights some the aspects that contribute to the affirmation of the identity of the Megleno-Romanian community through folkloric creations.

Characteristics of the Traditional Music of the Megleno-Romanians in Cerna

Unlike other European cultures, which can document their artistic past starting as early as the 3rd century, Romanians can only retrace their artistic existence to the 18th century. Living on the border between East and West, surrounded by constantly changing neighbours, the Romanians (Daco-Romanians, Aromanians, Megleno-Romanians and Istro-Romanians) have not had the necessary time and peace to elaborate documents that would place them among other advanced cultures.

The musical tradition of all Romanians identifies both their own contribution and the influences that have merged with the specific cultural background. These cultural loans occurred in different historical periods, affecting equally the Romanized population on both sides of the Danube. Later, after the split caused by the settlement of the Bulgarians South of the Danube, all influences that have manifested itself in the Romanian culture have been filtered and adapted. Since then we can talk about different ethnic Romanian communities.

The existence of Romanian musical dialects, which have developed outside the Daco-Romanian territory, serve as testimony to Romanian traditional culture and spirituality. These traditional creations fall into various categories. While linguistic features of the Megleno-Romanian dialect have been studied by Romanian and foreign researchers², their traditional music has received little interest, which prompted me to study the original inventory of Megleno-Romanian songs and dances. To carry out the research, I went to the only Megleno-Romanian community in Romania, in the village Cerna in Tulcea county. The following information is based on this field study. Traditional Megleno-Romanian music today is robust, intense and able to provide community members with a self-identity mark in a foreign environment. The music develops and reflects external and internal changes, as well as economy and culture. Songs and dances have by now relinquished nasal emission and heterophonic singing. Through the musical repertoire, Megleno-Romanians in Cerna keep in touch with the Meglen region, their place of origin, with South Dobruja, their place of adoption after their first migration, and with Cerna, their survival territory, which they consider home.

By referring to the history of the community they belong to, Megleno-Romanians keep up memory of language, religion, original home, migration routes, some traditions and customs. My research focused on elements that provide a diachronic perspective, corresponding to the migration from Meglen to Romania.

In terms of folklore categories, the collected material covers three genres: improvisatory (*doina* and ballad), proper songs and dances. In their original home in Meglen, the repertoire included Bulgarian, Greek, Turkish and Aromanian songs, as life forced all speakers of the Megleno-Romanian dialect to be bilingual, even trilingual. As today's repertoire in Cerna is mostly in the Megleno-Romanian dialect, there has probably always been a purely Megleno-Romanian repertoire at family level, transmitted orally from one generation to another, which preserved their ethnic identity, in spite of oppression and denationalization. In comparison with the pure Megleno-Romanian repertoire, songs in Bulgarian, Greek and Turkish are few in number. Also, even if people

² See, for example, Atanasov 2002, Capidan 1925, Țîrcomnicu 2004, Weigand 1892.

still sing in Bulgarian and Greek, nobody I interviewed could offer a translation, as they did not know the languages any longer; for the same reason, I received only a partial translation of the Turkish songs.

As the object of my research was the Megleno-Romanian community of the village Cerna, in addition to those who have completed the two migrations³, I also interviewed those born in South Dobruja or in Cerna, as representatives of the generation that took over songs and dances from the older generation. Both in the native settlements and in the territories of the two migrations, the Megleno-Romanian dialect was their strongest identity marker. The compact settlement in the South Dobruja villages and, later, in Cerna, was one more reason for the preservation of the dialect.

My research also took into account Greek, Turkish and Bulgarian songs and dances. Folk music from other ethnic groups was only included in the current Megleno-Romanian repertoire when they had the same, or a similar structure. The list of songs recorded in Cerna includes however, a much larger number of Megleno-Romanian songs, which points to the fact that the dialect has been and still is routinely used within the community.

The lack of composers, of folk artisans, has led to stagnation of the pure Megleno-Romanian repertoire. New texts were adapted, either in the dialect, or in standard Romanian, and sung on melodies of already existing songs. Their settling in Cerna village led to a uniform repertoire, because songs and dances have been adopted by all inhabitants, regardless of their native place. Not only does the repertoire lack new creations; it is also shrinking, as few people can play traditional instruments. In Cerna, one villager plays the *tămbură* (Otti Ion, Megleno-Romanian), another one the flute (Gheorghe Iordan, Bulgarian father, Megleno-Romanian mother), a third plays the *kaval* (Bulutu Gheorghe, Bulgarian father, Megleno-Romanian mother), a fourth the *țigulcă* (Rizu Ionel – Nelu the *țigulcă* player, Megleno-Romanian), while Rizu Anastasia (Megleno-Romanian), Otti Ion and Otti Traian sing.

The collected songs are variants, adapted to a limited number of instruments that were able to replace the *gaida* (bagpipe), the only instrument peculiar to Megleno-Romanians. Thus, the repertoire was adapted to the technical possibilities of other performers, playing the *țigulcă*, flute, the *kaval* and the *tămbură*. Songs and dance music that could not be played on other instruments than the *gaida* were lost.

Megleno-Romanians used polyphonic singing. Neither the elders nor the young use that specific vocal emission any longer, which is characterized by glottal stops and nasal resonance of the sounds. The relinquishment of the polyphonic style of specific vocal emission is more convenient for contemporary performers to sing, as it lacks the colour elements, which require high vocal and interpretative virtuosity. Gradually, precisely the elements that distinguished the repertoire and style of Megleno-Romanians from Daco-Romanians, Aromanians and Bulgarians, were left behind. Those who know all songs and dances from beginning to end are mostly elders above 60. The adult generation (30-55 years old) can sing with the elders, both Megleno-Romanian songs and songs belonging to other ethnic groups. Young people between 16 and 29 only sing three songs in dialect: *Chitu mila*, *Chitu*, *Z'dusi feata la apu*, *Trecui ăn sus mamă*, *trecui ăn jos*. Children only know what the song says, and consider the ones about Megleno-Romanian heroes and their fight against Ottoman oppressors the most interesting. They recognize melody or lyrics of a particular song, but rely on the support of the elderly to sing them.

In communist times, school festivities included showings of Megleno-Romanian traditions. Here, the repertoire was transmitted from one generation to another on stage, meaning from the

³ From the Meglen region to South Dobruja, and then from here to North Dobruja, to Cerna village, their present settlement.



stage to the community, not the other way around, as it usually works. After 1989, at the encouragement of parents and teachers from the village school, the children dance group *Altona* was established. From costumes to staging, everyone in the village contributed to support these shows. Children taking part are between 7 and 14 years old, and celebrate festive days of the community, take part in competitions or folk festivals, supported by their families.

Elders who had arrived in Cerna more than 60 years ago, still remember which songs they brought from their native places and which were added over time to the current repertoire of the Megleno-Romanians; who were the main characters of songs, and when events described in the songs occurred.

The texts of the songs in dialect that we recorded were inspired by real events. Some describe conflicts with Turkish authorities or Bulgarian revolutionaries, others are lyrical, epic or love songs. The songs regularly describe major events in the life of the Megleno-Romanian community in the villages of Oșani, Birislav, Liumnița and Cupa (the ballads *Isin begu* and *Lu Boșca* – their action is happening before World War I).

Regardless of the original home of the Megleno-Romanians from Cerna, their current repertoire is considered as belonging to all Megleno-Romanians. However, there are still dialectal differences, and therefore it is easy to determine to which community these songs actually belong.

In Meglen, Megleno-Romanians had very close relations with Bulgarians, from whom they borrowed both words, and songs and dances, while some decoration elements from the costumes of Bulgarian women can be found in the outfit of Megleno-Romanian women. Around their arrival in South Dobruja, Megleno-Romanians also borrowed the traditional instrument *gâdulka* from the Bulgarians. This instrument is called *țigulcă* and became specific to Megleno-Romanians only, and not to Aromanians. The Megleno-Romanians in Greece and the FY Republic of Macedonia do not know this instrument⁴. On arriving in South Dobruja, the Megleno-Romanians had a rich and

⁴ Virgil Coman has not found this instrument at the Megleno-Romanians living in Greece and the FY Republic of Macedonia, where he conducted research eighteen years ago (Coman 2003: 16-18).

well-rounded repertoire. Only the wedding-song repertoire included a few Bulgarian and Greek songs and dances. Megleno-Romanians also borrowed Turkish songs, and the instrument they were played on, the *tămbura*. The songs I collected in Cerna include *doină*, ballads, songs proper and dance tunes.

Organology

As far as the folk instruments used today by Megleno-Romanians are concerned, apart from the flute and the *kaval*, also found in Daco-Romanian and Aromanian folklore, they also play other instruments, characteristic to the Balkan peoples.

Instrumentele populare la care se cântă astăzi repertoriul meglenoromân se regăsesc fie în practica populară a tuturor vorbitorilor de dialect românesc, fie aparțin numai etnicilor meglenoromâni. În afară de fluier și caval, pe care le regăsim și în folclorul dacoromân și aromân, celelalte instrumente, așa cum am mai arătat, se regăsesc cu precădere în folclorul popoarelor conlocuitoare din Balcani.

The *tambura* (Megl. *tămbură*) is a plucked string instrument of Arab-Persian origin, belonging to the lute family. It may have two to 12 steel strings, pinched with the help of a plastic plectrum. It is a typical instrument for vocal or instrumental accompanying, and shows up in folk music from the Balkans up to Pakistan (Dolinescu 1965: 206). Otti Ion's *tambura*, made of walnut wood, with inlays of mother of pearl, has 4 strings tuned as follows: the lowest is do-sol-DO1-DO1.

Similar to the Bulgarian *gădulka*, the Megleno-Romanian *țigulcă* has three strings and a bow. The strings are arranged from low to high-pitched, the first string being the thickest. The neck of the instrument is quite thick, short and ends with a wider part to which the strings are attached. The bow is curved, and the musician holds it as if playing the double bass. The fingers are placed on the strings sidewise, like in the flageolet technique, and the sounds produced have a special resonance. When playing, the instrument rests upright on the musician's knees, and for the transition from one string to another, the musician moves the instrument as well, thus facilitating the quite cumbersome execution (Bărbuceanu 1999: 113). The Greeks call it "Cretan lyre", because it is the favourite instrument of the inhabitants of Crete. This instrument is also found in Bulgarian folklore under the name of *gădulka*, *gunilka*, *lirika*. In Turkey it is known as *kemence*. The *țigulcă* that Rizu Ionel (Nelu the *țigulcă* player) plays on has its strings tuned as follows: la-La1-MI1. He learned to play the *țigulcă* in Cerna, from an old Megleno-Romanian instrumentalist.

The flute is called *sfirchi* in dialect, after the Bulgarian word *svirka* that designates the same instrument. It was brought by the Megleno-Romanians from their native places. We do not know exactly what kind of flutes accompanied them before their arrival in Cerna, but here they quickly appropriated the Dobruja flute, with seven holes (six on the front and one on the opposite side of the tube). The flute is semi-transverse, without a cap, small, and the fingers are placed at equal distances, covering the six holes placed on the front of the tube. Only one inhabitant of Cerna plays this type of flute today, Gheorghe Iordan.

While in Cerna, I recorded Megleno-Romanian songs, accompanied by tambourine (*dairea*), an instrument used by all peoples on the Balkan Peninsula, in Asia, and the Middle East. In Megleno-Romanian folklore, the instrument was borrowed from the Turkish folklore. The *dairea* is present in dance music, where the rhythm has to be strong. The person who played the *dairea* was Otti Traian, Otti Ion's son.

Upon their arrival in South Dobruja, the bagpipe (*gaida*) was considered to be the only

wind instrument specific to the Megleno-Romanian music, later it was replaced by other instruments. Apart from the *țigulcă*, the Megleno-Romanians also adopted the Bulgarian *kaval*. This instrument consist of three tubes joined together, the flute itself being the tube in the middle, with seven holes, three up and four down, plus one hole on the opposite side of the pipe. The third tube, the bottom one, has other four holes, grouped two by two.

As vocal and instrumental songs of Megleno-Romanian folklore were incompatible with the instruments currently played, the old repertoire, fully compatible with the *gaida* and largely compatible with the flute, was either adapted or abandoned.

Improvisatory genres: the ballad and the *doina*

The ballad

The ballads of the Megleno-Romanians in Cerna kept the basic features of “storytelling song for listening”, a versified and sung story about notable past characters and events. The Megleno-Romanians from Cerna have kept the ballad *Coanticu lui Boșca* in their vocal-instrumental repertoire, and the ballad *Coanticu lui Isin begu* in their instrumental repertoire. The melodic unwinding of the two Megleno-Romanian ballads generates the atmosphere of sung narration, even if the relationship between sound and word is not as direct as in Daco-Romanian ballads, sung by (non-professional) peasants, less rhetorically, with less extensive narrative unwindings, in a simpler style. Both Megleno-Romanian ballads address an audience familiar with the events described, and are interpreted monophonically. Heterophony moments occur either from the interweaving of voices with the instrument, or from the simultaneous execution of several performers.

The ballad *Coanticu lu Boșca* is interpreted vocally and instrumentally, with the accompaniment of the *tâmbură*. The version I collected is an example of adaptation to a different instrument and to a different style of execution⁵. The presence of the epic recitative, the reduced scale of the poetic-musical discourse, the melodic configurations made at intervals of seconds and thirds, all are means specific of ballad and distinguish it from the lyrical song or the song proper.

The ballad *Isin begu* disappeared from the vocal-instrumental repertoire. Nobody in Cerna was able to sing it faultlessly. All villagers interviewed regretted that after the death of the Tanur family, Nicolae (who played the *gaidă*) and Ioana (who sang), no one can sing this ballad “as it should be sung”. All claimed the instrument for this ballad was the *gaidă*, other instruments not being fit to the style and characteristics of the ballad.

Adapted to the instrumental technique of the *kaval*, the ballad does not start with an introduction similar to the prelude (*taxâm*) in the Daco-Romanian ballads. The transfer to the instrumental level did not affect the general formal properties of the ballad. The melodic recitative and the *recto-tono* one are easily recognizable, even if their dimensions are reduced, compared to the ones in the Daco-Romanian ballad.

The *doină*

The *doină*, which can be found in the music of all peoples in the Balkans, also appears in the Megleno-Romanian repertoire. While Daco-Romanians sing the *doină* individually, with

⁵ For the musical transcript and lyrics of the songs collected in Cerna, see Kozlovsky 2012.

the singer singing for himself, Megleno-Romanians perform it as a soloist (or soloists) for the audience.

I collected only one *doină*, a vocal-instrumental one (with *tămbură* accompaniment) called *Durustoare*, *Durostoare*. This is a relatively new creation and belongs to the period in which the Megleno-Romanians were forced to leave South Dobruja. This *doină* is simultaneously sung and played on the *tămbură*, monodically, with ornamental notes reduced in number and importance, the accompanying instrument players respecting the melodic-rhythmic motives of the vocal *doină*. This non-occasional genre has, in the Megleno-Romanian creation, a lyrical recitative of small dimensions, while the *recto-tono* one is incipient. The lack of an introduction and conclusion give a special touch to this *doină*, the only one in the repertoire of Megleno-Romanians in Cerna.

The proper song

Comparing the lyrics of the songs from Cerna with those found in Gheorghe Oprea's book (Oprea 1998: 39), we deal with variants of the same Megleno-Romanian songs. The interpretation of proper songs largely depends on the performer's style. The variants I collected are merely different interpretations of the same creations, by Megleno-Romanians from different villages, using other instruments than the traditional ones, for example replacing the *gaidă* with other instruments. Even if the *tămbură*, the *figulcă* and the *kaval* were borrowed into Megleno-Romanians' folk music from other ethnic groups, they are now considered as being representative for the Megleno-Romanian culture.



The music of the folk dances

Megleno-Romanians learn the traditional dances and songs at village round dances (*hora satului*), and various other village and family celebrations. Today, the Megleno-Romanians in Cerna strongly identify with five dances. These are two dances, and three songs that double as dance songs, too. The two dances are *Moșescu* and *Paidușka*. The songs used for dancing are *Chitu, mila Chitu, Z' dusi feata la apu* and *Trecui ăn sus, trecui ăn jos*.

Moșescu, a dance in the style of *Horă cu cap*, today is only performed on stage by the dance group *Altona*. The musician uses a flute with no cap, and his improvisatory talent may manifest itself freely. *Paidușka* is a Bulgarian dance, introduced into the Megleno-Romanian repertoire after their arrival in South Dobruja. It has a fast tempo (184 M.M. eighth), with hopping steps and steps on the spot, thus indicating its Bulgarian origin. The steps performed when dancing the *Paidușka* are different from the ones used by Bulgarians, Daco-Romanians or Aromanians.

The dance music is nowadays sung at school or community festivities, folk competitions or festivals. At weddings, Megleno-Romanian songs are interpreted by modern instrumental bands (playing the organ, electric guitar, drums), which leaves little opportunity for improvisation, since all musicians follow the melodic line.

On songs which double as dance songs, people dance *Or drept* or *Horă dreaptă*. Megleno-Romanians prefer slow movements, lifting legs in turn, with the leg muscles tightened, similar to Greek dances performed by men.

Conclusions

In my research of the Megleno-Romanian community in the village Cerna, I focused on the specificity of their traditional songs and dances. The analysed creations show that new elements of versification appear, as a consequence of the enlargement of melodic lines. The verse itself retains its traditional structure (the most common being hexasyllabic), but gets completion choruses at the end of the melodic line: *more, dodo, frati, soro*.

Transformations also took place at the rhythmic level. The old, *parlando-rubato* style changed; the desire for measurement and symmetry (seen in ballads and songs proper) led to a preference for *giusto-syllabic*, as most songs can be now placed in constant measures. These rhythm changes are the consequence of the adaptation of the vocal repertoire to dance music, since a good part of Megleno-Romanian songs can double as dance songs, too.

The traditional music of Megleno-Romanians, therefore, is undergoing profound change. All transformations notwithstanding, tradition has not disappeared, but is adapting to present conditions. Even if the death of musicians who could play the traditional instrument *gaidă*, prompted the adaptation of the repertoire to instruments borrowed from cohabiting ethnic cultures, traditional creations survived.

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Mirela Kozlovsky is associate professor at the Faculty of Arts, “Ovidius” University of Constanța (Romania), where she teaches Theory of Music, History of Music, and Romanian Folk Music. Her main research interests are Romanian culture, current folk music of the Daco-Romanians, Megleno-Romanians and Aromanians. She plans to expand her research to the Romanian communities in Bulgaria and Serbia, to the Vlachs of North-Eastern Serbia, as well as to other ethnic communities in Dobruja, such as Turks, Tatars etc.