THE WEDDING FLAG FROM MARAMUREŞ

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Abstract:The customs characterize a specific community representing spontaneous forms of culture traditionalizing. Characterized by a pronounced tendency of conservation, the customs remain intact for a long time, even after their social need lost ground. The way of manufacturing the wedding flag in Maramureș is given by Corina Isabella Csiszar's article - Customs in Maramures County within nuptial events, in the magazine entitled Memoria Ethnologică, year XI, no. 38-39, 2011. In the article Nuptial Habits of Prislop, Boiu Mare commune, from magazine Memoria Ethnologică, year XVI, no. 58-59, 2016 the author, Corina Isabella Csiszar briefly mentions the wedding flag. In Vasile Bele's article Traditional wedding from magazine Memoria Ethnologică, year XVI, no. 60-61, July-December 2016, it appears the name of "palțău" for the wedding flag. Maria Mirela Poduț, in ritual Sequences of nuptial ritual in Şurdeşti, from magazine Memoria Ethnologică, year XIII, no. 48-49, July-December 2013 recalls the sewing of the flag.
Pursued in this area of Maramures, the wedding flag ceremony presents many similarities. The ritual manifests uniformly, both as act, practices and ritual objects and the meanings involved.

Keywords: flag, flag bearer, tradition, wedding, ritual

A recognized role in the formation and perpetuation of the tradition is constituted of customs, considered as "true pillars"[1], precisely because they are ways of behaviour and forms of action through and in social life. The customs characterize a specific community representing spontaneous forms of culture traditionalizing. Characterized by a pronounced tendency of conservation, the customs remain intact for a long time, even after their social need lost ground. Today, the customs begin to lose their original functions, especially the ritual-magical ones, and evolve towards spectacular size, leaving behind a transitional phase of coexistence of some opposing trends.

The way of manufacturing the wedding flag in Maramureș is given by Corina Isabella Csiszar's article - *Customs in Maramures County within nuptial events*, in the magazine entitled Memoria Ethnologică, year XI, no. 38-39, 2011. The author presents testimonies of the performers from these localities: Cupșeni, Breb, Lăpușul Românesc, Costeni and Suciu de Sus[2].

The young men and „druștele" (best maids) where dealing with the manufacture of the wedding flag, while in Lăpușul Românesc and Suciu de Sus this task was only the callers' duty, „druștele" dealing with sewing the crown. The flag support was of hazel wood of about two meters long. To be noted the testimony from Costeni village: "I made at least 50 flags" from where we deduce that in this village the main actor in making the flag was an older, experienced woman, unlike Cupșeni, Breb, Lăpușul Românesc and Suciu de Sus, where the main role was assigned to the young people.

In Lăpușul Românesc at the top of the flag a cross is placed, and among the props elements,there are mentioned: the kerchiefs - one black, one white and one red –the bells, the

[1]Katalin Szego, *Natura tradiției*, în Știință, filosofie, ideologie, București, 1974, p. 132
[2]Corina Isabella Csiszar - *Obiceiuri în cadrul manifestărilor nupțiale din județul Maramureș*, în revista Memoria Ethnologică , an XI, nr. 38-39, ianuarie-iunie 2011, Baia Mare, p. 119-120

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tricolour and the „cipci" (ribbons). To be noted the flag crown made of yew, wheat ears and „bărbînoc" (periwinkle).

In Suciu de Sus, the kerchiefs are in several colours - one white „tasselled", another one red and one green. Crowns of „bărbînoc" made by "druste" (best maids) were laid over the kerchiefs. Here, the main actor is the bearer: „I was the bearer at least 50 times"[3].

In Salistea de Sus, Maramures county, at every wedding a flag is made. It must be completed a week before the wedding. The groom chooses, among his best friends or relatives, „the bearer", the one who shall „play" the flag during the wedding. The bearer is also intended to call the people at the wedding. The bearer is also the one who must bring the kerchiefs, the bells, the wheat ears, the „pospan" (an evergreen plant), the thuja. These flag props are taken to a woman who knows how to sew the flag. To be noted that also here, as in Costeni, the main actors in making the flag is an experienced woman. The woman is sewing it on a "bota" (support)made of bush, ash or maple wood, of about two meters long.

After the flag is sewed, the „flag dance" takes place at the bearer's house: „he calls young men, brings violin players and drink, play, whistle and make merry." The party lasts for 2-3 hours and is entertained by specific funny exclamations.

In line with the ritual acts that the participants execute, a specific repertoire is circulated, uniform as theme, relaxed atmosphere and tone, plenary externalizing the feelings, the experience in the human plan that the hero and those around him are living. Now, the bachelor is ready to separate from the band where he was integrated, from his friends, from the village girls, so from an age and a familiar universe, preparing himself to go in the other group, of married people. The meaning of the ritual would consequently be, precisely in the performance, at least on a mental and emotional level, of a rupture from the old way of life, of an exit thereof without trauma and without regrets and of an assurance ofan organic integration, of a full solidarity of the individual with his new status.

The texts of the songs contain advice or allude to what lies ahead, looming the lines of a virtual social and ethical code of conduct.

In Poienile Izei, Maramures county, sewing the flag takes place a day before the wedding begins. After the wedding date is set, the bearer walks through the village to gather ribbons and „cloths" (pieces of cloth) from the village girls, especially from the „groom ex-girlfriends".The red colour is predominant in the flag, symbol of love. At the sewing flag ceremony, a few boys and girls are gathering at the groom's residence, close friends of the groom and groom's „druşte" (best maids). When the flag is readily sewed and decorated, the bearer and groom are playing the flag.Meanwhile, at the bride's residence the preparation of the"struț" (bouquet) for the groom takes place. The bearer, the groom and a few young men, good friends of the groom, go to the bride's house to show her the flag and to receive from the bride the "struț" in a hat, and the bearer from the "druște". After the flag was presented and analysed by those present, the bride and "druşte" take the hats from the groom and the bearer in order to put the"struț" on them. After receiving the "struțuri", the flag was played, the boys performed a round dance and circled three times against the sun in order to ward off the evil and the evil spirits from the young people's house. Then they shifted the round dance and rolled three more times, sun-wise, to bring the good and the good luck to the house. Once the flag game was completed, the young men spun the flag above the groom, all three times, shouting "May God give you luck"[4]. Finally, the young men press down the flag on the head of the young groom saying: „may the good luck press on you as the flag on your head"[5].

[3]Idem, Ibidem, from Valer Burzo, 75 years old, p. 120
[4]Pop, Ioan, *Peţitul, credinţa, cusutul steagului şi nunta în Poienile Izei*, în *Memoria Ethnologica*, nr. 2-3, februarie - iunie 2002, anul II, Baia Mare, p. 374
[5]Idem,Ibidem, p. 374

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The flag is then put above the bride and the groom, tied by the beam, then the bride's dance starts, where all girls and wives sing the bride's song, all around the house.

After playing the flag and the bride's dance takes place, the violin player plays a rolling dance. At this point the groom dances with the bride and the bearer dances with the best maids.Usually they dance three rolls, then the „march" is played, thus everyone knows that the party is over. Only a few young men stay on and „dance the drinking dance in circle, the groom gives them a bottle of twice-distilled plum brandy when the dance is over and the young men drink the plum brandy received"[6].

In Suciu de Jos, Maramures county, the sewing flag activity is held at the groom's house. This action is accomplished by the best maids, flag bearer and a specialized woman from the village. The flag support is made of a "cujeică" (a stick of hazel wood) of about 1.80 m, „mottled" (decorated). Over the „cujeică", they put red kerchiefs gathered from the village girls, and over those,colourful belts were sewed. On both sides of the flag,there are sewed white paper crosses symbolizing the groom's honesty. Along the„cujeică", the crown of 1.5 m is sewed, similar to the bride's one. On the top and at the bottom of the flag it was fixed a cross-shaped stick to which some bells were attached. After the flag is completed, and is admired by all participants, the same ceremonial surrounding the table takes place, as in the bride's case. During flag sewing, the violin players sing and the young men sing out: „Nobody in the world does not trick himself more/Than the young man when he is getting married/He catches four oxen to the cart, /And goes away into the world to look for bitterness/He catches four oxen to the perch/ And goes away into the world to look for toil/"[7]. The anxieties caused by the unexpected of his future existence, the regret after the lost status, impress the verses with a special, elegiac tone. The tough fight that he will have to lead henceforth in the clashes with life is suggested in the ritual-symbolic plan.

In the article *Nuptial Habits of Prislop, Boiu Mare commune*, from magazine Memoria Ethnologică, year XVI, no. 58-59, 2016 the author, Corina Isabella Csiszar briefly mentions the wedding flag. It is made at the groom's house by the callers, girls and boys.Kerchiefs with flowers, crepe paper and on top a cross with basil were put on the flag support[8]. The same author, in *Nuptial Habits of Oncești* from magazine Memoria Ethnologică,year VI, no. 20, July-December 2006[9]presents the sewing of the flag at the groom's house on the wedding eve, with youth participation.

The flag making[10] in Făurești, Maramureș, is presented equally brief also in the work of Valentin Bilț *Poems, traditions and folk customs of Maramures*. The flag is made by the „callers" and „best maids"at the groom's house.The props of the wedding flag consist of a „back apron" (wool cloth, part of female popular wear) of red silk, green, basil, bells, small horsebells, „cipci" (coloured laces).Over the flag „zaghia", a wide ribbon with the „three Romanian colours" is sewed[11]. The most skilful dancer among the „callers" has the role of a bearer. After sewing the flag, the party follows and it will last until midnight. The flag bearer plays the flag to the music.

In Vasile Bele's article *Traditional wedding* from magazine *Memoria Ethnologică*, year XVI, no. 60-61, July-December 2016, it appears the name of "palțău" for the wedding flag. „Palțăul" is made at the bride's house with the participation of young people, a week

[6]Idem, Ibidem, p. 375
[7]China Samfira, *Obiceiuri de nuntă în Suciu de Jos*, în *Memoria Ethnologica*, nr. 2-3, februarie - iunie 2002, anul II, Baia Mare, p. 381
[8]Corina Isabella Csiszar - *Obiceiuri nupțiale din Prislop, comuna Boiu Mare*, din revista Memoria Ethnologică, an XVI, nr. 58-59, ianuarie-iulie 2016, p. 146
[9]Idem, Ibidem, p. 147
[10]Valentin Bilț, *Poezii, tradiții și obiceiuri populare din Maramureș*, Editura Grai și Suflet – Cultura Națională, București, 1996, p. 199 - 200
[11]Idem, Ibidem, p. 199

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before the wedding. The flag is made of a „stick on which there are sewedtowels with embroidery and tricolour ribbon”[12]. On wedding day, “palțăul” was constantly played by those who have made it, both at the groom's house and on the way to the bride, on the way to the altar, during the wedding, until the couple sat at the table. Then the wedding flag was seated behind the couple. To be notedthe superstition that the flag must always be played without being dropped down. If this happens, the couple will be separated.

The same name of „palțău” is denoted by Paulina Albu in *Wedding customs* from magazine *Memoria Ethnologică*, year VII, no. 21-22-23, January-June 2007[13], but for the hallmark - a stick as a cane - worn by the callers in Şomcuta Mare. Similar to the nuptial flag which an evening is dedicated for sewing and party, also the action of „getting ready for palțană”[14]is developed with the participation of girls and boys. The kerchief, the bouquet of basil, coloured crepe paper ribbons, individual items to the nuptial flag are mentioned by the author as being used for the adornment of „palțău”.

Maria Mirela Poduț, in ritual *Sequences of nuptial ritual in Şurdeşti*, from magazine *Memoria Ethnologică*, year XIII, no. 48-49, July-December 2013 recalls the sewing of the flag. The flag props consist of bells from horses, basil, greenery and ivy.The most talented caller had the task to carry the flag in the nuptial ceremony Suite „he had to beat to the music”[15].Titus Bilțiu Dăncuș, in *Wedding in Săpînța,* from magazine *Memoria Ethnologică*, year VI, no. 18-19, January - June 2006 [16]presents the sewing of the flag which happens at the groom's house, the night before the nuptial ceremony. At the flag party, both girls and boys of the village attend. On a pole of 1 m - 1.5 m length, a red „șirincă” (ribbon) big as a „lepedeu” (bed sheet), and another white one, 28 coloured ribbons and five handkerchiefs are sewed. On top of the flag is made an „struț” (bouquet) of basil and greenery.

The information obtained from field research carried out in Poienile de sub Munte, Maramures, in February 2017, confirm the conservation of the nuptial flag ritual flag in this area. According to the performers Oncea Pavel and Oncea Vaselina (72 years old, respectively 64 years old), the sewing of the flag occurs before the evening beforethe celebration of the religious marriage. Meanwhile, at the bride’s house,the braiding of the crown takes place.

The sewing of the flag is held at the groom's house with only village boys attending. The main actor is the flag bearer. His main role is to gather from „groom’s ex-girlfriends” all the decorative parts to be used in making the flag.The flag support – „a botă (stick) of wood" - is decorated with „haircloth”, handkerchiefs, „cipce” (ribbons), bells, wheat ears and „thuja” (plant with perennial leaves). The completed flag is popped up by the bearer, to the music, thus taking place the first test for the nuptial ceremonial.Thus, the party intended for the „flag play” is marked. The young men clap to the „violin” pace and „sing” specific songs. The flag bearer rotates the flag three times sun-wise in order to ward off the evil spirits. After the wedding, the flag isloosenedand the borrowed items are returned. The wheat ears are kept until the first child is born, who is “ciupăit” (bathed) in water with these wheat ears in it.

We shall therefore conclude that, from the theme and motive points of view, the wedding songs related to the nuptial flag and the bearer role in Maramures wedding highlight

[12]Vasile Bele, în articolul *Nunta tradițională*, din revista *Memoria Ethnologică*, an XVI, nr. 60-61, iulie – decembrie 2016, p. 168
[13]Paulina Albu, *Obiceiuri de nuntă*, în din revista *Memoria Ethnologică*, an VII, nr. 21-22-23, ianuarie – iunie 2007, p. 2163 - 2173
[14]Idem,Ibidem, p. 2166
[15]Maria Mirela Poduț, în *Secvențe de ritual nupțial din Șurdești*, din revista *Memoria Ethnologică*, an XIII, nr. 48-49, iulie – decembrie 2013, p. 184
[16]Titus Bilțiu Dăncuș, în *Nunta în Sapânța*, din revista *Memoria Ethnologică*, an VI, nr. 18-19, ianuarie – iunie 2006, p. 1802

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the most important moments of this rite of passage, translating their atmosphere and their meanings in terms of art.

Pursued in this area of Maramures, the wedding flag ceremony presents many similarities. The ritual manifests uniformly, both as act, practices and ritual objects and the meanings involved. Of course, this unity does not exclude diversification, the presence of local peculiarities, this being a feature of all popular creation. Such distinctiveness provides a distinct profile to the ritual.

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