

The Magical Power of *Căluș* Against *Iele*'s Possession in Dolj County

Mihaela (Marin) Călinescu

Romanian Book and Exile Museum in Craiova, Romania

Mihaela Călinescu is Research Assistant at the Romanian Book and Exile Museum in Craiova. She obtained her PhD in 2019 and published her thesis (*Căluș* from Dolj County, Ethno-anthropological Approach) in 2022. She conducted fieldwork on the *Căluș* stick dance in Dolj County, *Sântoader* rituals, and food heritage in Oltenia area and in Bulgarian Timok, in the "FOODie" project. Mihaela produced the documentary film *Călușul* from Dolj County. She worked as a researcher at the West University of Timișoara in the "FOODie" research grant. Her areas of interest include ethnology, folklore, anthropology, memoir writings, culinary heritage in the Oltenia area, cultural studies, diaspora identities, and exile correspondence.

Correspondence: mihaelacalinescu.m@gmail.com

Călinescu (Marin), Mihaela. 2023. "The Magical Power of *Căluș* Against *Iele*'s Possession in Dolj County." *Martor* 28: 147-163. [DOI: 10.5725/martor.2023.28.10]

ABSTRACT

Analyzing the female mythological beings *Iele* [They], we follow the theoretical body of work opened by Mircea Eliade, Anca Giurcescu, and Bogdan Neagota. It is important to observe the period when *Iele* are very active, that is the transitional period between *Strodul Rusalilor* (celebrated in spring) and *Rusalii* [Pentecost] that is seven weeks after the Orthodox Christian Easter. The paper investigates the relationship between *Căluș* dance, *Iele*, and people who fall ill under their spell. The article explores the *Căluș* ritual, especially the practice of healing the person *luat din Căluș* ["taken by *Iele*"], which is a neurological disorder. In Dolj County, healing relates with trance when the illness of the sick person is transferred to a *călușar* who is "knocked down." The enactment of "death and resurrection," the rhythm of the dance, the bells, the use of prophylactic plants, and the sticks are specific elements of the ritual. I analyse the particularities of the "death and resurrection" (*recuperarea din transă*) episode and the magical rite it is part of in different groups of *călușari* in Dolj County.

KEYWORDS

Iele's possession; *Căluș* ritual; healing magic; *Rusalii*; "taken by the *Căluș*"; *luatul din Căluș*; sick person.



Introduction

Despite modernization, globalization, and marginalization from the mainstream culture, many performing culture remnants continue the practice of traditional rituals. This paper unearths the beautiful world of the *Căluș* ritual dance that plays a significant role in the socio-cultural life of Romanian people. *Căluș* is a masterpiece included in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and has a vital role in the establishment and conservation of cultural identity. The *Căluș* ritual dance is transmitted from one generation to another, which suggests that the nonverbal communication and the symbolic language of this dance transmits cultural beliefs and values from one generation to the next.

Căluș is a complex protection, healing, and fertility ritual. The current *Căluș* dances are associated with their original functions used to protect people from evil spirits, healing the sick, and promoting the fertility of crops. *Căluș* takes place at the time of Pentecost,¹ fifty days after the Orthodox Christian Easter. The ritual stick dance category belongs to the Springing Dances Corps. In Romanian social context, *Căluș* is a ritual ceremonial dance that belongs to the seasonal work cycle, which marks the beginning of summer and has no fix date. The dances that belong exclusively to the *Căluș* ritual are part of the very large family of European weapon dances. "Movements of small amplitude and strong intensity alternate with those of large amplitude and lower intensity; jumps, hops, heel clicks (on the ground and in the air), stamping, deep flexions, acrobatics, and image

gestures are movements characteristic of these dances" (Giurchescu and Boland 1992, 229). In a variety of ways, *Căluș* has been manipulated by the media as a major symbol of the ancient unity and vitality of Romanian culture.

The aims of this paper are to investigate the relationship between *Căluș* dance, *lele*,² and those who fall ill under their spell; to explore the practice of healing the person who was "taken by *Căluș*" (a neurological disorder similar with epileptic seizure); to investigate how the illness of the sick is transferred to a *călușar* who is "knocked down"; and to research the role of the flag and of the rabbit [*șoșoi*] in the "taking by the *Căluș*" and in the "knocking down" sequences.

I follow conventional ethnography methods, including direct observation (where I adhered to the principle of non-interference), observation cards, video and sound recordings, ethnographic interviews, questionnaires, and participant observation specific to anthropology. The article goes beyond simple description and analysis. The ethical codes of the research participants are different from those of the researcher. Therefore, it is very important the researcher constantly checks her own knowledge against the views of active and passive participants. I used technology to document observations including photography, video, and audio recording. In addition, observation cards were required to analyse the *Căluș* ritual dances observed, to find out the succession, duration, and the content of each dance movement related to each dance piece, to observe the internal coherence of the *Căluș* ritual, and its social and cultural role and place in the community.

I wore the traditional Romanian blouse as a non-verbal communication tool in the relationship between the researcher and the researched group, and between the researcher and the whole community. I realised that the researcher's charisma matters a lot in the interaction with the community and I had to win people's respect and to be accepted by them. Therefore, I seriously considered my feminine presence among the male research participants in a traditional Romanian space.

I studied, noticed, filmed, and recorded the

Căluș in ritual as well as in theatrical context for more than five years (2016-2022). The bibliography on *Căluș* ritual is quite extensive. Selected references include Vuia (1935), Oprișan (1969), Eliade (1973), Pop (1998), Bucșan (1976), Bîrlea (1982), Giurchescu (1992), Costea (1996), Kligman (1999, 2000), Ispas (2003), Știucă (2009), Neagota (2015), Benga and Neagota (2010), Neagota and Benga (2015), Semuc (2009), Stoian (2009), Petac (2014), Bălosu (2007), and Alexa (2022).

The main question the research tries to answer is: Which is the relationship between the ritual of the performers [*călușari*], the diagnosis, the *lele*'s punishment, and the "taken by the *Căluș*" state? Other research questions are: Why and how do all the *călușari* in the group expose themselves to potential dangers while performing the ritual? Why do *călușari* have to perform the ritual of healing before 12:00 a.m.?



Some general observations on the *Căluș*

In the Romanian folk tradition, there are numerous dances associated with the ritual context. Dances are closely connected with their extra-choreographic components, such as ritual objects, costumes, ritual rules, masks, gestures, music, mime, and verbal and non-verbal communication. In this paper, we focus on the *Căluș* dance. The summer *Căluș* is a complex ritual performed with sticks by groups of men in south Oltenia and in some villages throughout the larger Danube Plain during the Pentecost period. The ritual marks the passage from spring to summer and has healing, protection, amusement, and fertility functions. This dance is characteristic of this area and expresses the Romanian national identity. "Culture is thus the protective shell of a community and cultural distinctions become, to some extent, an index of social identity" (Lewis 2017, 16).

The time and place in *Căluș* are ritually determined. In the past, the ritual used to last between seven and nine days. Nowadays, the



ritual begins on Friday (Dăbuleni) or Saturday evening of *Rusalii* and lasts until Sunday or Monday. Other *călușari* groups end the custom Sunday after *Rusalii*, or the following Tuesday. There are particularities for each group. *Călușari* are active only during the day and until sunset, while *Iele* are active at night. The performance space is differentiated between cultivated areas (villages, cities) for *călușari* [performers] and non-cultivated places (forests, rivers, mounds, glades) for *Iele* [the group of fairies].

We focus on some aspects on the "taken by the *Căluș*" state. This is a state of possession resulting from a transgression of an interdiction between *Strodul Rusalilor* [Whitsunday Stroud – this day is between Easter and Pentecost]. In this period of time, *Iele* are active. The "knocked down" is a sequence of the curing ritual, a kind of a trance induced by the *vătaf* [leader of the group] on one *călușar* from the group who "falls" unconscious. Both episodes are parts of a complex ritual stick dance that follows strict rules. It is very important to know the order of the three sequences of the *Căluș* ritual stick dance: (1) "The binding of the flag" or "The raising of the flag," or "The exhumation of the rabbit" [*șoșoiul*] or "The exhumation of the beak" [*ciocul*], followed by the scene in which *călușarii* "take the oath" that bounds them, body and soul, to the fraternity; (2) a suite of *Căluș* dances and pantomimes performed at crossroads or in the courtyard of each villager who invites them; and (3) "The burial of the flag, beak, or rabbit" [*șoșoiul*].

Similar variants of *Căluș* are found in Bulgaria, in some Serbian villages, and in Macedonia. There are some common features with the *Morris Dance* in England, like sticks and swords, and with *tarantism* in southern Italy, which is a psychological illness caused by the bite of a tarantula and is characterized by a hysterical impulse to dance (Benga and Neagota 2010, 219). The spread of similar traits of this ritual dance over a wide surface in Europe suggests it belongs to an ancient cultural stratum. We focus on the particularities of the Romanian ritual stick dance. In this study we stress that the Romanian *Căluș*, active in the Carpatho-

Danubian area, especially in Dolj County, has distinctive characteristics that include a complex and ambiguous relationship between Pentecost [*Rusalii*] and *Căluș* and between the men dancers and the female demons called *Iele* [They; or "evil fairies"].

Călușarii is a ritually closed group of seven, nine, or eleven men who perform the *Căluș* dance during the week of *Rusalii*, the seventh week after the Orthodox Christian Easter. Traditionally, this week represents a transitional period from spring to summer. The performers have to respect the period of ritual time. Before Pentecost, men work their fields and women clean their houses. It is believed that during the week of *Rusalii*, the spirits of the dead members of the extended family return to their families and the evil fairies, *Ielele*, are active. During this week, it is forbidden to work in the fields, to wash, to mow, to harvest, to climb trees, to cut down trees, to clean the house, or to sew. The female demons, *Ielele*, would punish anyone who does not respect these interdictions. Those who work in this period would be "taken by the *Căluș*" or "possessed by *Rusalii*." Moreover, the actants [*călușari*] have to respect strict rules of behaviour imposed by the *Căluș* ritual, such as to keep themselves clean physically and morally. During this week of interdictions, spouses are not allowed to sleep together. Octavian Buhociu (1966) registered this archaic aspect: "temporarily, *călușarii* would leave their own families, and camp out together" (18).

There are some particular cases, such as the group of *călușari* from Potmeleşu (Dolj County) who keep the old custom and sleep together as a group in the same house during the week of *Rusalii*.

• • • • •

Călușari – Iele

The balance in *Căluș* ritual is characterized by numerous polarities: culture – nature, male – female, healing – illness, life – death, *Iele* – *călușari*, and diurnal – nocturnal. The



contribution of the *Căluș* is to protect the people from evil fairies and to heal those “taken by the *Căluș*,” that are, those who fall ill under their spell. The complex relationship between *Iele* and *călușari* involves a transfer of energy while the actants are “taking their oath” on the flag, which can happen near a river (Giurgăța), in the *vătaf*’s courtyard (Potmelțu, Predești), or near a well (Pietroaia). Through this oath, the *călușari* come under *Iele*’s possession who give them supernatural powers to protect and heal people “taken by the *Căluș*” (or possessed by the *Căluș*/ *Iele*/ *Rusalii*). We can observe the relationship between *Iele* and *călușari* through the eyes of Giurchescu and Bloland (1992):

Further complicating this relationship is the fact that the *călușari*, even while possessed, remain susceptible like everyone else to the *Iele*’s maliciousness. (41)

At the same time, *Strodul Rusalilor*, the day that falls midway between Easter and Rusalii is considered a delicate period. The evil fairies are very active on this dangerous day.

The antagonistic “principles” which are pacified and brought together – sickness and death, health and fertility – were personified in one of the most inspiring expressions of the primeval feminine-masculine dyad, the fairies, and the horse-riding cathartic heroes. (Eliade 1973, 122)

This archaic pre-Christian scenario survived with some modifications in Romania only, as Eliade (2022, 122) and Pop-Curșeu (2013) confirmed:

Romanian folklore would therefore preserve “one of the most astonishing expressions of the primordial female/male dyad: the fairy and the cathartic hero on the horse”; this is a scheme that would have survived only in Romania. (26)

• • • • •

Esoteric sequences

The phenomenon of witchcraft is complex and difficult to explain. Witchcraft can be researched by other disciplines, including psychology, ethnology, history of religions, folklore, sociology.

Mircea Eliade (2022) observes that European witchcraft can be seen as a segment in a wider trend. The author draws attention to the researcher’s interest for occultism and esotericism (from pseudo-spiritualist movements to hermeticism, astrology, alchemy, yoga, oriental techniques, and tantrism. Carlo Ginzburg (1996) discusses the *Benandanti* [good sorcerers] cult attested in 1575 in the Italian province of Friuli. *Benandanti* believed they were born with *căință* [repentance]. They were under the leadership of a *captain* [leader], had a white flag, and fought at night, *in spirito*, against *stregoni* [evil sorcerers]. Before the “journey” in which the soul left the body, *benandanti* used to fall into cataleptic lethargy. The purpose of this archaic ritual performed by the two opposite groups – *benandanti* and *stregoni* – was to stimulate fertility, to regenerate the human society, or to save the community. The accusations of witchcraft in Italy did not highlight the worship of the Devil, but rather the cult of Diana, the Roman goddess. However, fifty years after the accusations, the *Benandanti* admitted they were identical with the *stregoni*/ *strighe* and they were actually making a pact with the Devil. Thus, a fertility cult was seen as a magical practice, under pressure from the Inquisition. In contrast, reminiscences of archaic popular culture have been preserved in Romanian folk traditions because here there was no institution similar to the Inquisition. If in Central and Western Europe *benandanti* used to fight with *stregoni*/ *strighe*, in Romania, the *strigoi* [undead] fought each other. While in Western Europe, the Roman goddess Diana was seen by the Inquisition as the head of witches, in Romania the Roman goddess brought by the Roman colonists substituted a Thracian-Getae goddess called Herodias and





Photo 1. Team of *călușari* from Giurgîța, Dolj, vataf: Ion Calotă,
Taking their oath on the flag, Giurgîța, 2021.
Photo credit: Mihaela Călinescu.



Photo 2. The rabbit [*șoșoiu*], Giurgîța, Dolj, 2021.
Photo credit: Remus Badea.

Photo 3. The Malvern Swordsmen, English Folk Sword and Morris Dances, at 48th International Folk Festival “Călușul Românesc,” Caracal, Olt, 2017.
Photo credit: Mihaela Călinescu.



had an ambivalent character. Surprisingly, the *călușari*, these cathartic dancers, fall under the rule of Herodias, the “Queen of witches,” Diana’s Romanian metamorphosis, to recover those “taken by the *Căluș*” (Eliade 1976).

In this regard, I confirm the performance of a special ritual in the case of a woman *strigoi* (undead) I met in Giurgîța in 2023. The space is interesting because of the reminiscences preserved in the collective memory. Equally, I recorded the case of “a patient” who was “taken by the *Căluș*” three times. “The patient” was recovered twice: first, by the group of *călușari* led by the former *vătaf* (leader), Nicolae Veleanu (1922-2012) who was recognized by UNESCO as a Living Human Treasure, and then in 2019 by the new *vătaf*, Ion Calotă. Immediately after the performance of this third ritual, I conducted a phone interview with the recovered “patient” and with *vătaf* Ion Calotă. In the following week, I recorded another interview with the “recovered patient” in front of his house (see the Annex).

In the following section, I focus on one delicate aspect of the “taken by the *Căluș*” sequence – the relation between the tools used in this sequence and the melodic diagnosis.

• • • • •

Melodic Diagnosis

The *vătaf* tries to find out the symptoms checking the sick person with a melodic diagnosis. Each dance has a specific function and meaning. The dance is a charm with magic powers used to protect people, heal ills, and to prevent evil fairies. The *vătaf* is trying to discover the tool the sick person used to work with in the week of Rusalii. He does so by observing the reaction the sick person has to each song of the *Căluș* dance. A relationship between the dance and the tool used in the peasant’s labour during the week of Pentecost. The rhythm of the song and the rhythm of the *Căluș* dance disturb and chase away the evil spirit and purify the soul of the sick person. The soul of the sick person has been taken over by the evil fairies because he or she has violated

an interdiction. The *călușari* of Giurgîța, led by T.F. in 2018, describe this investigation.

“What has he been working on, if he is ‘taken by’ the *Floriciă*?” “He has been sewing.” “What has he been working, if he is ‘taken by’ *Chiser*?” “He has been working in the yard with the *Chiser* [keser], removing nails, chipping something, hammering the fence or he has been making something.” “What has he been working if he is ‘taken by’ the *Cal* [horse]?” “The *Cal*, we haven’t had that one.” “By the *Căluș*?” “He has been weeding, doing something, it is working the fields.” (N.N., T.F. (*vătaf*), G.M., Giurgîța, Dolj, 2019, Mihaela Călinescu collection)³

It is necessary to note some details. *Floriciă* song was used for healing in 2019 (*vătaf* I.C.; the sick man was “taken by *Floriciă*” for mowing, Giurgîța, 2021). *Hora de mână* song was used by *vătaf* I.C. and *Rața* song was used by *vătaf* T.F. for “knocking down” of the *călușari* in healing rituals in 2019 in Giurgîța.

• • • • •

Case Study: “Taken by the *Căluș*,” *vătaf* I.C., Giurgîța, 2019

Part of this mythical triangle is also the case of C.D., a farmer from Cerăt village, who was *taken by Căluș* in 2019, during the week dedicated to the *Stodul Rusaliilor* [Strand of Pentecost] or *Tudor-sale*. C.D. was mowing on the feast of the Holly Great Sovereigns Constantine and Helen. He fainted in front of his house and had an hallucination in which he saw *Moșul*, the former *vătaf*, Nicolae Veleanu, who had “woke him up” twice several years before and who has passed away. Initially, the *șoșoi* [rabbit] was thrown on him by the *vătaf*. Then, he was hit with *boatele* [sticks] by the rest of the group of *călușari*. C.D. felt the blows of the sticks from head to toe and he was unable to move and speak. However, C.D. argues that he was aware of everything that was going on during the “healing” process. He said: “I saw Nicolae Veleanu when he threw the



rabbit on me, and *Moșul* [the old *vătaf*] hit it, so that I'd have a cure!"

In this account, C.D. was punished because he cut the grass on a day "under the command of" *Iele* – *Strodul Rusaliilor*. He did not respect the period between *Strodul Rusaliilor* (spring) and *Rusalii* [Pentecost] when *Iele* are very active. After the melodic diagnosis, the *vătaf* realized that the man was "taken by the *Căluș*." The healing ritual took place on the grazing ground. C.D. was carried outside the village to be cured before 12 a.m. After midday, the *vătaf* confirmed that the *călușari* lose their strength. The musicians only sang the *Florica* song. The *călușari* ate garlic and greased the sick man with garlic. The *vătaf* spit garlic on the sick man. In this esoteric healing ritual that took place in Cerăt in 2019, the leader [*vătaf*] sacrificed three black chickens for the magic transfer of the disease and three actants were "knocked down."

The interview with the man *taken by the Căluș* in Cerăt village and who was *recovered* by the group of *călușari* led by *vătaf* I.C. is the following:

Interviewer: "Have you been taken by the *Căluș* this year, in 2019?"

C.D.: "Yes."

Interviewer: "Who helped you get up?"

C.D.: "My Old Man..."

Interviewer: "Do you mean I.C. from Giurgița? How did it happen?"

C.D.: "I woke up in the morning and cut a handful of grass on the Constantine and Helen Day. I fed the horse and the birds. I went to the village, got carrots, peppers, came home, got myself a bottle of beer and didn't even drink from it, as I didn't want to drink among women, so I'd rather go home. As I stepped outside, suddenly I got dizzy. I didn't know of myself anymore. I said to myself: 'Don't fall down here, so my wife won't see me' and I fell down by the gate, here. I got dizzy. I saw the Old Man, who danced me the first time eighteen years ago."

I.C. [intervened]: "Veleanu."

C.D.: "I saw him, look, like you see me, that's how I saw him! And he threw the rabbit at me.

He stood before me so he wouldn't hit me, and they thrust over me with their clubs."

Interviewer: "Who?"

C.D.: "The boys thrust over me with their maces!"

Interviewer: "What boys?"

C.D.: "Who'd danced me before."

I.C.: "We got him up once before, nine years ago. This is the third time. (...)"

C.D.: "But I saw the Old Man when he wanted to throw the rabbit at me and the Old Man hit it, so that I'd have a cure! And nine years ago, he (the Old Man) said I wasn't safe, that I'd still need to dance it again!" (C.D., 53 years old, "taken by the *Căluș*," Cerăt, 2019. C.D. was "taken by the *Căluș*" during the week dedicated to Whitsunday Stroud [*Strodul Rusaliilor*], on 21 May 2019. He was risen on 23 May 2019. In these two days, *călușarii* got organised and searched for musicians [*lăutari*]. (Mihaela Călinescu collection.)

When the former *vătaf* Nicolae Veleanu "healed" C.D., he used a *ghioc* [magical seashell] and the "enchantment of *Iele*" as an attempt to "recover" him, although he knew he failed to heal him. *Vătaf* Nicolae Veleanu realised he failed because the third black chicken did not die. This was confirmed in an interview in 2018.

The esoteric sequence of the secret enchantment has the form of a curse and was used by the former *vătaf* Nicolae Veleanu to heal the mentally disturbed patient (C.D.) trapped in the hallucinatory net of *Iele*. The chanting, uttered at the head of the sick, complemented by the poured water, apotropaic plants, and the mystical force of the *ghioc* [seashell] used in such sensitive moments had the power to empirically transmute the spirit by sacrificing the three black chickens. Currently, the chant is known by the former *vătaf* G.F. (inactive since 2020) and the performer N.N. active in the group of *călușari* led by T.F.: "We're fighting to get the devil out of him. That's very complicated."⁴

When he was "taken by the *Căluș*," *vătaf* Nicolae Veleanu told us that at the end of the ritual he was taken by hand in the *hora* and participants watched him to see how he was feeling. Over the next three years, the sick person



did not return to dance in the *hora* of *călușari*. It is also worth noting how the *ghioc* was used by the former *vătaf* Nicolae Veleanu in this context. He used this magical item, wearing it around his waist (he was the only one to touch it) to enchant the chicken. The invocation of the force of the *ghioc* was said in his own mind so the words of the incantation remained secret. *Vătaf* Nicolae Veleanu inherited the incantation from the former *vătaf* D.E. and he disclosed it to us only in the form of a “curse.” While the connection with a possible witch was clearly excluded, he did not deny the mystical connection with *Iele* through the “rising enchantment.”

In the dangerous day of *Todorusale*, *Sânțoa-deri* meet *Rusalii* or *Iele* and offer them a bouquet of *Todoruse*, so the evil fairies “are powerless with those who know when and how to collect medicinal plants” (Eliade 1973, 121).

In another village in 2019, the former *vătaf* D.M.P. told us a similar healing case. Some of the details are lost today. Long time ago, a former *vătaf* performed a ritual to heal a person who was “taken by the *Căluș*.” He used to say a prayer to the sick man’s head, lost today, then “a black hen was placed in a new earthen pot, and he had to hit the hen’s neck with a stick [*boata*]. (...) When the throat is cut, the sick person gets well” (D.M.P.).

In both cases, the patient was spread with garlic, the musicians increased the tempo, the pot was broken, a *călușar* (Giurgîța) was *knocked down*, and three black chickens (Giurgîța) or a hen (D.M.P.) were sacrificed. Next to the sick man, the *vătaf* enchanted (Giurgîța) or said a prayer (D.M.P.) to expel the evil spirit from the body and to recover the spellbound patient trapped in the hallucinatory net of *Iele*. The *pinteni* [spurs] and the bells accentuate the hypnotic rhythm of the *călușari*’s circle dance with sticks.

• • • • •

Case Study: Giurgîța and Dăbuleni (Dolj County) – The “knocking down” sequence⁵

This sequence is performed only by a few groups of *călușari* in Dolj County. The sequence is part

of their repertoire. It can be performed *la cerere* [on request] in the householder’s yard. In fact, it can be found in the healing ritual of people “taken by the *Căluș*.” Briefly, the *vătaf* breaks the pot, the ritual performer is “knocked down” and the sick man is *sculat* [recovered]. Each group of *călușari* has his particularities.

The *vătaf* holds the flag up and waves it three times above *călușari* while they dance. Then, the *vătaf* dips the rabbit’s nose in enchanted wormwood water in a ceramic bowl and touches the mouth of a *călușar* with it. This *călușar* enters a lethargic state, some kind of dizziness. When the *vătaf* strikes with the *boata* [stick] and breaks the pot, the *călușar* touched by the rabbit is *doborât* [knocked down]. This ritual sequence transfers the evil spirit from the pot to the *călușar*. This is how two *călușari* from Giurgîța describe the state of *doborât*:

These are some emotions. I have fallen many times, it is something that disturbs your brain so (...) I might get up again or not, that is very complicated, one can even remain paralysed down there. (N.N., 70 years old, Giurgîța, Dolj, 2019, Mihaela Călinescu collection)

I fell many times and I really felt something in my body. I was no longer conscious, I was no longer part of the dance, because they always dance and I dance with them, but the one who falls no longer has control, he throws his hat, his stick. (G.M., 70 years old, Giurgîța, 2019. Mihaela Călinescu collection)

The *vătaf* from Dăbuleni describes the sequence in a similar way:

Interviewer: “What is the most important sequence of the *Căluș* dance?”

Ș.D.: “The ‘taking by the *Căluș*’ and the ‘knocking down.’ When a *căluș* dancer should be ‘knocked down.’ The *Florica* is danced, and we’d say ‘Haida, haida, haida!’ [Go, go, go!]. And I, as *vătaf*, walk with the flag over them, in the same way.”

Interviewer: “Why is the flag going over the head?”





Photo 4. Team of *călușari*, *vătaf* Ion Calotă, "knocking down," 2021, Giurgița, Dolj. Photo credit: Mihaela Călinescu.



Photo 5. Team of *călușari*, "knocking down," Dăbuleni, Dolj, 2018. Photo credit: Mihaela Călinescu.

Ș.D.: "To sanctify them! I don't hit them with the flag, I clean them."

Interviewer: "Are they purified?"

Ș.D.: "Yes, I purify them. I only hit one of them with the flag, who was in my way then. I touched him with the flag on his forehead. From the top of the flag, I take a little wormwood in the mouth and garlic, I chew it and just spit a little [he spits it out]. He, then, gets dizzy and falls. I hit him twice or three times with the flag down there [he gesticulates how he turns the flag's cloth to the left and to the right], the musicians come and play the violin, and slowly, slowly... He's a bit dizzy and slowly gets up, we wash his face with water, and then he starts to slowly get up."

Interviewer: "Is anything broken?"

Ș.D.: "The porringer is broken, in the man's yard there."

Interviewer: "Why?"

Ș.D.: "This symbolises... what the owner says, where we dance in there: 'You break my porringer, for me!'"

Interviewer: "On request?"

Ș.D.: "Yes, on request, because it chases all the

bad spirits away from the yard and they clear up."

Interviewer: "Do they transfer [the evil spirit] to the *Căluș* dancer who is *knocked down*?"

Ș.D.: "They don't go into him, but they feel calm because they will be well the whole year, and we, the *Căluș* dancers, we move on, we give them a helping hand."

Interviewer: "Why do you spit the wormwood and the garlic over the performer?"

Ș.D.: "Well, so it gets on his cheek, over here."

Interviewer: "Why?"

Ș.D.: "He smelled a bit of the garlic and wormwood and is dizzy. That's so!" (Ș.D., 65 years old, Dăbuleni, 2019, Mihaela Călinescu collection)

The two cases from Dolj County (Giurgița and Dăbuleni villages) have different particularities and highlight the "knocking down" sequence. In the past, *vătaf* used the flag to "knock down" a *călușar* in Giurgița and Dăbuleni or he used a cat to "knock down" in Bârca (*vătaf*E.).⁶ Nowadays, in Giurgița the *călușar* is "knocked down" with

the *șoșoiul* ("rabbit"), while in Dăbuleni he is "knocked down" with the *flag*. The *vătaf* chews wormwood and garlic and spits a little on the knocked down *călușar*. In the end, the smell of the medicinal plants and the melodic rhythm helps him to return from this dizziness.

It represents a ritual of semi-magic transfer of the disease from the patient to the therapist *călușari*, due to the action of the *vătaf* [leader], which induces the *throwing down*, with symptoms of the type of fainting, trance, through the touch with the *cioc* [beak]. (Benga and Neagota 2010, 220)

The witch Ioana from Rast village (Dolj County) offers the third testimony on the "knocking down" episode, and she points towards the mythical triangle formed by *Călușari-Iele-Sântoaderi*. M., a *vătaf* from a village in Dolj County, told me: "All is in Sântoader!" This sentence prompted me to find out more regarding the relation between *Căluș*, *Iele*, and *Sântoaderi*.

In this context, it is appropriate to read the interview with Ioana from Rast village, who explained how she was initiated in the practice of sorcery. She told us the story of her aunt (60 years old) from Băilești, who was punished about ten years ago on the day dedicated to Sântoader.

Ioana: "There in Băilești, the dead were taken by hearses with two or four horses to the church and to the cemetery. When I left home with her in the hearse, at the crossroad, all four horses raised their legs and neighed."

Interviewer: "Why?"

Ioana: "Because she was *taken by the Căluș*. The horse had killed her. And all four horses raised their legs and neighed, just about to turn the hearse upside down with her."

Interviewer: "At the crossroad?"

Ioana: "Yes, at the crossroads. And the coachman with another two guys forcefully held the horses, because the horses couldn't stand her any longer, because she was 'taken by the *Căluș*.' And they hardly arrived at the church with her

because the horses couldn't stand her."

Interviewer: "Did the *Căluș dancers* intervene?"

Ioana: "There weren't *Căluș dancers*."

Interviewer: "Weren't they in the village?"

Ioana: "They weren't, or nobody thought of bringing the *Căluș dancers*. Maybe if they had brought *călușari*, it wouldn't have happened what happened. They arrived at the church with great difficulty. They couldn't control the horses. It's not good to do anything to *călușari*, because look what happened to my aunt. I saw with my own eyes! And from the church to the grave in the cemetery, we couldn't take her with the horses anymore, they took her with the small funeral carriage." (Ioana, 57 years old, Rast, 2018, Mihaela Călinescu collection)⁷

Ioana's aunt has been "taken by the *Căluș*" because she did housework (cleaning, washing, painting, sewing) during St. John's week. A man embodied in *Sântoader* called her twice in the middle of the night. She did not answer. Third time, she answered.

Ioana: "She stepped over the threshold and saw a white horse. She didn't make it to the gate and the horse disappeared. She came back and didn't close the door. She laid down in bed next to a three- or four-year-old girl and the spirit of the horse entered through the door and stomped her with its feet, from head to toe. There were horseshoes all over her body, from top to bottom."

Interviewer: "Did she have signs on her body?"

Ioana: "She did, there were a lot of horseshoes signs on her body. (...) and she was dead." (Ioana, 57 years old, Rast, 2018, Mihaela Călinescu collection)⁸

Ioana gives us interesting details about the coachman who managed to control the horses with difficulty on his way to the cemetery. She argues that the four horses raised their legs and neighed because the woman had been taken by *Căluș* and she was killed by a horse. In the Romanian folklore there are customs and superstitions related to an archaic cult of the horse, as a zoomorphic symbol of a Solar



Divinity. In this cult, it is believed that the *Sântoaderi* are terrifying creatures endowed with forceful evil powers. In a way, *Sântoaderi* are the opposite of *Iele*, but, at the same time, there is a curious relation between them:

both groups travel by night at a specific date, singing, dancing, and accompanied by fiddlers (...) both bring specific diseases, punishing those who do not respect their holidays; both are mysteriously related to magical and medicinal plants. (Eliade 1973, 121)

The observation of academician Sabina Ispas (2003) clarifies certain aspects:

The transfer of authority from male to female is related to the season of spring (in our geographical area); the third sequence is under the tutelage of Pentecost, when the masculine again becomes the determinant of the ritual. (149)

Therefore, the transfer of power is transmitted from *Sântoaderi* to *Iele*, *Pentecost*, and then to *călușari* who follow a covenant under oath to enter under the possession of these malicious entities. Consequently, the *călușari* mediate between the evil female forces and the community. The ambiguity of the relations between *Iele* and *călușari* increases the interest and effort of the unified *ceata* [group] of *călușari* to protect the community. The *călușari* are devoted to balance out the particular and the universal, the earth and the sky, the day and the night, *Sântoaderi* and *Iele*, good and evil, while being exposed to danger.

Gail Kligman (2000) observes that,

Complex ritual inversions within and between categories and levels, micro/female/particular and macro/male/audience, ensure the preservation of a necessary dynamic continuity. (...) Careful scrutiny of ritual inversions in Romania gives us the opportunity to understand that, in fact, [their] calendar customs are ritual inversions of customs in the cycle of life. Even rituals are reversed, and not just the isolated condition of their actors. (173-4)

The Romanian folklore is effervescent. The feast of *Sântoader* is performed in the first week of Great Lent and the *Căluș* ritual is held during the period dedicated to Pentecost. I have identified a common thread, that of the punishment that occurred because of violating a rule and the common equine theme.



Conclusion

The southern Oltenian *Căluș* has suffered some changes, but the ritual managed to keep archaic elements that were not influenced too much by the historical and cultural process brought by modernity. The stick ritual dance continues to be active throughout the Danube Plain. The *călușari* and *lăutari* [musicians] protect their communities and heal people "taken by the *Căluș*." People perform and preserve this ritual dance as a tradition.

Speaking about the melodic diagnosis, it is natural to analyse how a person "taken by the *Căluș*" responds to a melody. I want to highlight the relationship between the dance category (*Floriciă*, *Cal*, *Iele*, *Chiser*) and the type of work (washing, mowing, weaving, working with animals, building) the sick person has done. Sometimes, witnessing a violent act can cause someone feel like "taken by the *Căluș*." For example, in our research a dog was killed (in Cerăt village), which affected the emotional state of someone who witnessed the scene. There were liquids expelled, such as the blood of the dog, and the *vătaf*'s saliva. *Vătaf* Ș.D. (from Dăbuleni village) chewed wormwood and garlic and spitted the mixture on one of the *călușari*. The *călușar* got dizzy and fell to the ground. On the other hand, *vătaf* I.C. (from Giurgița village) performed the *Rața* [Duck] dance while digging a hole in the ground and filled it with a bucket of water. Then, the *călușari* took water out of the hole [*biba*] using their mouths. One by one, they lied down on their stomach and took water from the *biba*. Then, *vătaf* spit out three times, left, right and forward, spraying the *călușari*.





Photo 6. The old team of Călușari, with the *vătafi*: Deverșteanu, Elisei (Grasul – The fat one); Nicolae Veleanu (Tezaur Uman Viu - Living Human Treasure), Giurgița, Bârca, Dolj. Photos from the Calotă family's collection.

The Giurgița healing ritual involves the *transfer* of the evil from the sick person to the three chickens, while in Dăbuleni, the group used *Floricea* dance in a healing ritual. The ritual is a violent act and involves suffering. The *călușar* who is “knocked down” loses vitality and carries evil spirits. When the pot is broken, the evil is released and enters the *călușar* who falls down. In a ritual performed in Dolj County in 2019, three performers were “knocked down” to heal a patient who was “taken by the *Căluș*.” The *vătaf* from Giurgița stressed the importance of the space-time context during the healing ritual. The recovery of the sick person should be done in a meadow outside the village and before 12 a.m. for the cure to happen. The power of *călușari* is higher in the first part of the day. After midday, the power of the *Iele* increases. As an exchange for the healing, the healed person must dance

with the group of *călușari* for the next three years during the Pentecost period. In Dolj County, at the end of the ritual, the entire group of *călușari* dances *hora călușarilor* [horseman hora]. Anyone who wants can participate in this thaumaturgic circle. Children play to be safe from evil spirits, to be healthy, and to do well in life. The fast, circular rhythm and the sound of bells force the evil fairies out from the body of the sick person. After his recovery, the healed person participates into the thaumaturgical hora.

The *călușari* and the people “taken by the *Căluș*” embody the human nature that is subject to social weaknesses. He lied, he cheated, so he was punished. He gets sick suddenly. Healing is an honour. One must be honest in *Căluș*. Being honest is the secret to maintain one’s strength. The *vătaf* feels dishonesty while passing the flag over the *călușar*, so he spits it out the dishonest *călușar* with garlic and wormwood, then breaks the pot, which knocks the *călușar* down. Then, the *călușar* is *bătut la tălpi* [his feet are whipped] because he was dishonest and exposed the whole band to danger, to the malicious *Iele*.

The ritual gesture of expelling saliva suggests, by spitting on the performer, who is going to be “knocked down.” We perceive *Căluș* as an archaic ritual-act, with purifying, thaumaturgic, and healing implications. In fact, saliva stores unification, vitality, fertility, regeneration and, above all, light, the divine, nourishing.

Both the “knocked down” *călușar* and the person “taken by the *Căluș*” (in Giurgița and Dăbuleni villages) are rubbed with garlic and wormwood and cooled with water. At the end, he or she recovers and can dance in *hora de mână* [circle dance], thus purifying themselves through the prophylactic and apotropaic jerky rhythm of the circular dance.

The *călușari* and, implicitly, “the cat” (in Bârca), “the rabbit totem” [*șoșoiu*] (in Giurgița), or the “the beak” [*ciocul*]⁹ (in Dăbuleni) play the role of the transmitter that walks, dances, and propagates the supernatural energy of the unearthed “beak” or “rabbit.” Thus, the energy accumulated in this ritual-object buried

throughout the year is used to bring together the subtle vibrations of nature, the microcosm represented by the inner universe of the ritual, and the macrocosm, with the scope to integrate the community within the universal cosmic harmony. Therefore, in a cause-effect perspective, it is necessary for the group of *călușari*, under the lead of the *vătaf*, to restore the balance in terms of biomechanical and biochemical processes that happen in both the ritual performer who is “knocked down” and the sick patient who is “taken by the *Căluș*” following a violation of the norms. By restoring this balance, the patient re-enters into harmony with the universe at the physical and spiritual level.

On the other hand, I explored the relationship between the *vătaf* and a witch who could spell the *călușari*'s flag in exchange for a deal, as Mihai Pop (1998) investigated several years ago. Although I found two witches, Ioana, whose father was *vătaf* and the other, the aunt of the *vătaf* from Dăbuleni, I could not establish

a connection between the witches and the *Căluș* ritual, namely, in *the binding of the flag* and in the “knocking down” sequences.

Interviewer: “Do you know the enchantment for the *Iele*? Have you enchanted for the *Iele*?”

Ș.L.M.: “No, I don't know the enchantment for the *Iele*. The *Căluș* dancers did the dance so they'd recover. If someone was ‘taken by the *Căluș*.’ When the *Căluș* was coming, they danced three times for the one ‘taken by the *Căluș*.’”

Interviewer: “Did someone who was ‘taken by the *Căluș*’ come to you to ‘undo, to break the spellbound’ for them? Perhaps he was ‘bewitched’?”

Ș.L.M.: “No, nothing of the kind came to me, why should I speak if they didn't come! The *Căluș* dancers were solving him. The *vătaf* and those solved him, there.” (The witch Ș.L.M., 86 years old, Dăbuleni, 2019, Mihaela Călinescu collection)



NOTES

1. “Christian feast celebrated 50 days after Easter: On Pentecost Saturday, pots full of wine and dishes crowned with flowers are distributed for the dead. In folk mythology, there are evil fairies who unleash storms, kidnap children, maim people or take their minds; *Iele*, *Drăgaice*: owls, floundered *Iele* and Pentecost!” (Șăineanu 1996, 417).

2. “Mythical female fairies generally believed to be malevolent. They inhabit forests, crossroads, hillocks, mounds, fields and water and travel at night dancing” (Kligman 1999, 253).

3. *Vătaf* T.F. has been leading this new group for three years now. In the past, he has performed for a period of only five years with the former *vătaf*, Nicolae Veleanu, an UNESCO-recognized Living Human Treasure.

4. The performer was N.N., Giurgîța, 2018.

5. The “knocking down” sequence is a trance. The knocked-down *călușar* dances slowly with disorderly random movements and finally, when the transfer of the disease is done, he collapses to the ground. Then, the sick person is “healed.”

6. This is a village near Giurgîța. In Bârca, the first group of *călușari* in the region was formed. The group was led by *vătaf* E. The group included D. and Nicolae Veleanu, who became *vatafi* in Giurgîța after a while.

7. The witch Ioana, 57 years old, Rast, 20 October 2018, film from the personal collection, IMG_0407, 2:34 min. The whole interview is presented in Annex.

8. The whole text is in Annex.

9. The buried a piece of white canvas from the top of the flag, every year.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alexa, Cătălin. 2022. *Ritualul Călușului în context sociocultural actual* [Căluș Ritual in contemporary social and cultural context]. Cluj: Mega.

Benga, Ileana, Bogdan Neagota. 2010. "Căluș and Călușari. Ceremonial Syntax and Narrative Morphology in the Grammar of the Romanian Căluș." *Studies in the History of Religions* XIV: 197-227.

Bîrlea, Ovidiu. 1982. *Essay on Romanian folk dance*. Bucharest: Cartea Românească.

Bucșan, Andrei. 1976. "Contribuții la studiul jocurilor călușerești" [Contributions to the study of Căluș dances]. *Revista de etnografie și folclor* [Ethnography and Folklore Journal] 21 (1): 3-20.

Buhociu, Octavian. 1966. *The Pastoral Paradise: Romanian Folklore*. Drawings by Eugen Drăguțescu. Lakewood, OH: Lucia C. Trandafir.

Costea, Constantin. 1993. "Repere istorice în evoluția jocurilor feciorești" [Historical landmarks in the evolution of young boys dances]. *Memoriile Comisiei de Folclor* [Memoirs of the Folklore Commission 1993] VII: 49-68.

Ducan Bălosu, Cornel. 2007. *Living heritage. Ethnographic landmarks of Giurgîța commune. Occupations, rituals, oral histories*, project financed by Dolj County Youth Directorate in partnership with Oltenia Museum from Craiova – Ethnography Department, Giurgîța Youth Center and Giurgîța City Hall, Craiova.

Eliade, Mircea. 1973. "Notes on the Călușari." *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 5: 115-22.

-----, 1976. *Occultisme, sorcellerie et modes culturelles*. Collection Les Essais. Paris: Gallimard.

Ginzburg, Carlo. 1996. *Istorie nocturnă. O istorie a sabatului* [Historia nocturna. A History of Sabbath]. Iași: Polirom.

Giurchescu, Anca, and Sunni Bloland. 1992. *Romanian Traditional Dance. A contextual and structural Approach*. Bucharest: Express.

Ispas, Sabina. 2003. "Căluș și călușar. O viziune neconvențională asupra unui ritual taumaturgic arhaic" [Căluș and calusar. A non-conventional view on an archaic thaumaturgic ritual] Sabina Ispas, *Cultură orală și informație transculturală* [Oral Culture and Transcultural Information], 149. Bucharest: Academia Română.

Kligman, Gail. 2000. *Căluș. Transformări simbolice în ritualul românesc* [Căluș. Symbolic Transformation in Romanian Ritual], translated by Lucia Ofrim and Ioana Ivan. Bucharest: Univers.

-----, 1999. *Căluș. Symbolic Transformation in Romanian Ritual*. Bucharest: The Romanian Cultural Foundation.

Lewis, Ioan M. 2017. *Social and cultural anthropology in perspective their relevance in the modern world*, third edition. London and New York: Routledge.

Neagota, Bogdan. 2015. "Avaturile documentului etnologic, de la generare la înțelegere: 'Căderea în Sfinte' și vrăjitoarele extatice în tradiția manuscrisă" [Avatars of the ethnological document, from generation to understanding: The Fall into the Holy' and ecstatic witches in the manuscript tradition]. In *Nașterea documentului de folk - lore. Răspântii metodologice* [The Birth of Folk-lore Document. Methodologic crossroads], ed. Ileana Benga, *Orma* 24, 73-97. Cluj-Napoca: Risoprint.

Neagota, Bogdan, and Ileana Benga. 2015. "Călușul Ancăi

Giurchescu și Călușul nostru: Ce se păstrează și ce se transmite între generațiile de etnologi" [Anca Giurchescu's Căluș and Our Căluș: What is preserved and what is transmitted between generations of ethnologists]. In *Nașterea documentului de folk - lore. Răspântii metodologice* [The Birth of Folk-lore Document. Methodologic crossroads], ed. Ileana Benga, *Orma* 24, 409 - 16. Cluj-Napoca: Risoprint

Oprîșan, Horia Barbu 1969. *Călușarii: studiu*. [The Călușari: A Study.] Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatură.

Petac, Silvestru Dorel, 2014, *Texte și context în cultura dansului tradițional. Călușul din Izvoarele (Olt). Călușul din Boșorod (Hunedoara)* [Texts and contexts in traditional dance culture. Căluș from Izvoarele (Olt), Căluș from Boșorod (Hunedoara). Bucharest: Etnologica.

Pop, Mihai. 1998. *Călușarii români la Londra și realitatea folklorică a Bucureștiului* [Romanian Călușari in London and the folkloric reality of Bucharest]. In Mihai Pop. *Folclor românesc: Texte și interpretări*. [Romanian Folklore: Texts and Interpretations], second volume, eds. Nicolae Constantinescu, Alexandru Dobre, 10-16. Bucharest: Editura Grai și Suflet - Cultura Națională,

-----, 1998. *Călușul. Lectura unui text* [The Căluș. Reading of a text]. Mihai Pop. *Folclor românesc: Texte și interpretări*. [Romanian Folklore: Texts and Interpretations], second volume, eds. Nicolae Constantinescu, Alexandru Dobre, 267-79. Bucharest: Editura Grai și Suflet - Cultura Națională,

Pop-Curșeu, Ioan. 2013. *Magie și Vrăjitorie în cultura română* [Magic and Witchcraft in Romanian Culture]. Iași: Cartea Românească, Polirom.

Semuc, Vlad Ionuț. 2009. *Elemente de geografie mitică a României. Călușul* [Elements of mythical geography of Romania. The Căluș]. Bucharest: Etnologica.

Șăineanu, Lazăr. 1996. *Dicționarul universal al limbii române* [Universal Dictionary of the Romanian Language]. Iași: Mydo Center.

Știucă, Narcisa Alexandra. 2009. *Călușul. Emblemă identitară* [The Căluș. Identity emblem]. Bucharest: Editura Universității din București.

Vuia, Romulus. 1935. "The Roumanian Hobby-Horse, the Călușari." *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, Vol. 2, International Festival Number: 97-108.

ANNEX

Transcriptions of field records documenting Căluș ritual sequences.

Interview 1. Giurgîța village. Past and present.

Research participants: N.N., 70 years old, from Giurgîța, research conducted in 2019; and G.M., 70 years old; T.F., 62 years old, from Giurgîța, research conducted in 2018.

Researcher: Călinescu Mihaela
Film from the personal collection

The "taking by the Căluș" sequence. The old performer, N.N. is in the group led by vâtaf T.F. He confessed what happened in the past when the same patient was "taken by the Căluș" for the second time. After călușari discovered what he has been "taken"



by, they danced the *Căluș* dance around him for two or three hours, under the command of *vătaf* Veleanu. They used a very lively rhythm but still could not raise him.

N.N.: "As he [*vătaf* N.Veleanu] was enchanting him [C.D.] there, the faster we were dancing, the more and more frequently he was jumping up. Dancing and dancing, he got up and [we] went about three-four hundred metres with him dancing. Afterwards, I came back with him. 'How're you feeling?' Why was I even asking... 'I guess somewhat better,' [C.D. replied], exactly what he [G.M.] said [previously], that you get dizzy."

N.N.: "I was coming with him, we would dance a *hora* [Romanian circle dance], and the same again: 'How're you feeling?' 'Hmmm, hmmm...' he said, 'So and so.' We put him on the blanket again, we danced again, so three dances like this were done, three of these enchantments were done."

The sick person was better when the ritual ended and the group was paid. *Vătaf* Veleanu was sure he was not completely cured, saying: *Nu îl scularăm!* [We did not rise him up!] As a result, the ritual continued the next day.

N.N.: "Well, next day we danced our hearts out, for four hours without stopping for a second."

Interviewer: "The next ritual was the one with the three black chickens?"

N.N.: "Yes, it isn't done without those [chickens]!"

Interviewer: "How was it done then?"

N.N.: "The *vătaf* was enchanting those chickens, with that garlic over there, with the wormwood, rubbing him on the heart, on the head."

Interviewer: "What was he saying there?"

N.N.: "We don't know, only he knows. This is not to be said."

Interviewer: "Is this said in the mind?"

N.N.: "Yes, normally. That it remained written on a paper there, he left it written to me, that's something else, but the *vătaf* says it in his mind, he doesn't say it for others to hear."

Interviewer: "How many people know this enchantment in Giurgița?"

N.N.: "Nobody knows, only I do, because I was with him at the time (...) The next day, I picked him up, came with him, a large table was laid, and we danced."

Interviewer: "Did all three black chickens die?"

N.N.: "The third chicken died if they didn't die, he wouldn't get up."

Interviewer: "Were the three black chickens used on the first day?"

N.N.: "Yes, since the first day, but only two died, one didn't."

Interviewer: "Was this repeated the next day with three chickens?"

N.N.: "No, with one, the one that's left."

Interviewer: "Did it die eventually?"

N.N.: "Yes, it was gone, like I said, four hours..."

Interviewer: "How do you do it, do you put it [the chicken] in the water?"

N.N.: "No, next to him, there, and he's enchanting to the chicken and rubbing garlic all over it."

Interviewer: "How does the chicken die? How is he done? Is it strangled, does it drown?"

N.N.: "No, it dies from the enchantments, he puts its beak a little in the enchanted water [from his gesture you can understand that he twists his hand around his body]. When the chicken is dead, he [the sick man] gets up and runs, he recovers."

At the request of *vătaf* Nicolae Veleanu, the family of the person "taken by the *Căluș*" brought the following:

I.C.: "Three chickens and if possible, black, and naked neck ones, a porringer with garlic and a pestle to crush it, and all

the way through the *Căluș* dance he must be rubbed with garlic and wormwood, and when he [*vătaf*] is about to break the pot, a chicken must die and a *Căluș* dancer must fall. And then, this one, who's taken by the *Căluș*, gets up and runs. (...) We stuck the flag on his head and the rabbit, he gave us garlic, we crushed it like that. Bălcescu rubbed him everywhere, up to his waist, on the head, on the hands."

I.C.: "When he 'is knocked down' and breaks the cup, he'd also run away. And how big I am, and with another one ... [he would] go to drown himself in the pond. We hold on to him, so the first time he leaves after the first fall, to go on one road. Afterwards, the second time, on another road. And the third time, on another road. So that, all the evil is left behind on those three roads, while we dance him there. (...) He runs two-three hundred metres away from where that place is, there."

Interview 2. Giurgița village. Past and present. The man "taken by the *Căluș*" in 2019.

Research participant: C.D., 53 years old, Cerăt, 2019. He was "taken by the *Căluș*" during the week dedicated to *Strodul Rusaliilor* [Whitsunday Stroud] on 21 May 2019, and he was risen on 23 May 2019. During the two days, they got organised and searched for *lăutari* [musicians].

Researcher: Călinescu Mihaela

Film from the personal collection

Excerpt 1.

C.D.: "And from here, I saw how they knocked me down. I saw everyone. [The *călușari* with the old *vătaf* appeared in his mind as a hallucination]. All of them were hitting, all of them were beating me up. I was holding my arms [he shows how he was protecting himself with his hands around his head]. They were hitting my hands, my legs, my head. My hands, my back, my legs, and my head were hurting me. My head was messed up. I was holding my hands so they wouldn't hit my head anymore. They danced me on the pasture. I couldn't walk. When the crises, seizures started, then it was bad, in ten, fifteen, twenty minutes. They came to take me, as I didn't know anything about myself anymore. They tormented me a lot with their feet."

Interviewer: "Who? Did they appear in your mind?"

C.D.: "The boys who danced me eighteen years ago."

Interviewer: "How did you figure it out?"

C.D.: "I said to my wife: 'Girl, you go call your sister to bring me some wormwood.' That's it, it's taken me! Because if I hadn't seen the Old Man [Nicolae Veleanu], I wouldn't have realised it, but I saw the Old Man when he wanted to throw the rabbit at me and the Old Man hit it, so that I'd have a cure! And nine years ago, he said I wasn't safe, that I'd still need to dance it again! The Old Man said [that]. I also saw them when they came to my yard. They were dressed normally, they got dressed on the pasture."

Excerpt 2.

Interviewer: "Who gave you a lift?"

C.D.: "My son drove me to the grassland!"

Interviewer: "Is that where they got you up?"

C.D.: "Yes, that's where they rose me."

Interviewer: "How did it happen?"

I.C. [the *vătaf* intervened]: "Many said he had epilepsy, but you see... to be taken by the *Căluș* in Dolj County, this by the *Căluș* is not... there's a difference between epilepsy and *Căluș*."

Interviewer: "Do you know about yourself to be sick?"

C.D.: "No, I've got nothing, hard as a rock!"

The following is the explanation of performer I.C.: "And I just said to the musicians: 'Here, hold on... and gently play the *Căluș*.'" The musicians said 'No!' Because they said: 'I'm afraid to play.' And after we got dressed, we equipped ourselves in there and started playing the *Căluș*, he started to jump up there... we were



holding him by his hands, feet, about three or four guys, as he was lying down there... he was just about to overcome us right there. The others were dancing around us there, all around, and we smeared him with garlic and wormwood and a little vinegar, from head to nails, three times, all over."

Interviewer: "Why three times?"

I.C.: "Well, so that all evils get out. And I was asking him, I said: 'Did they leave?' And he'd say: 'They left, but there's more...' 'Did they leave...?'"

Interviewer: "Were you seeing them?"

C.D. [very determined]: "Yes, yes, yes..."

I.C.: "And, finally I told him: 'Hey, they're all gone!' And then I turned him over, and I smudged him also on his back and his legs and on his head and face, I smudged him all over him."

Excerpt 3.

C.D.: "Then I ran with them both. When they got me back to dance that *hora*, I fell, I fell back down again."

Interviewer: "How many chickens have been used?"

C.D.: "Three."

Interviewer: "What happened before sacrificing the second chicken?"

C.D.: "They've also left some... Well, I didn't see them with the third one, when they danced me, I no longer saw anyone."

I.C.: "He was free, and then I took him, and rubbed him all over with garlic. [I asked him:] 'Hey, do you still have anything?'"

C.D.: "No, I got nothing."

C.D.: Look, not even now! Well..., I was thinking, hey..., it [the *Strodul Rusalilor*] starts on the 26th."

I.C. [intervened] "On the 16th."

Excerpt 4. First time when the man was "taken by the Căluș."

Interviewer: "Why did it happen?"

C.D.: "Because of my mum! Eighteen years ago, I didn't live here, I was living in the valley and... I had built a house, and then I was to put soil on the cellar because I didn't have space anymore in one room only, and my mother came and I said 'Mother, don't you see it's a Feast Day?' Mother: 'Come on, mother, everyone is ploughing! I just came back from the lucerne, from the field, to work on the farm.' C.D.: 'Let it be, mother!' 'Hey, I can't anymore! You put your hands [to work], because I won't [work] anymore!' She prepared the soil... when I saw she couldn't throw it with the pitchfork, I gave her a hand. And that was the moment my head started, the first time!

Interviewer: "Where did you carry the soil?"

C.D.: "I threw the soil into the hallway, to put it in the cellar. And from there, I went to get a pill from my aunt, that one... her man was playing the accordion, and just as I heard the music, I fell on the ground by the window. Then, I punched the window, and the glass broke. They came out, and when they saw me... I was on the ground. That's it! They realised I fell."

Interviewer: "And that was the first time you were "taken by the Căluș?"

C.D.: "Yes, the first time!"

Excerpt 5. The second time the man was "taken by the Căluș."

Interviewer: "How was the second time?"

C.D.: "The second time it was the same. I lived in the valley. There, I went out to a well nearby, by the gate, to talk to my son and a Roma person killed a dog. I said to him: 'Hey, stop hitting it!' And I saw that blood..., and that poisoned my heart, I got angry and went inside. Just as I got by the gate, I fell to the ground!"

Interviewer: "Who killed it?"

C.D.: "A neighbour."

Interviewer: "Was it the blood that made you feel sick?"

C.D.: "Yes."

Interviewer: "What did your son say when they got you up? Was he satisfied?"

C.D.: "He was... very much so! He was..."

Interviewer: "What happened the third time?"

C.D.: "I cut the grass. Right here, it took me on the ditch. I cut only a handful of grass."

Interviewer: "When?"

C.D.: "On the Day of Saints Constantine and Helen."

Interviewer [asking the performer Ion Calotă]: "Can he be "taken by the Căluș" before the Pentecost?"

C.D.: "I cut it today, on the Constantine and Helen Day, and the next day it was the Whitsunday Stroud. And I went and took a handful of grass and threw it to the horse and from there, I went to the village, I bought some carrots, a few peppers and I had just bought some bread from here..."

I. C. "It was the Whitsunday Strode!"

Interviewer: "Does the period [*Strodul Rusalilor*] start when someone is likely to be taken?"

I. C. "Well, yes!"

C.D.: "Yes, yes, that's the one to start first! Now, I'm not allowed to wash or shave until these won't come out! I just wet my hands because you can't eat like that."

Interview 3. Dăbuleni village.

Research participant: Ș.D., 65 years old, Dăbuleni, 2019.

Researcher: Călinescu Mihaela

Film from the personal collection

Excerpt 1.

Interviewer: "What is the most important sequence of the Căluș dance?"

Ș.D.: "The "taking by the Căluș" or the "knocking down." Then, a Căluș dancer should be "knocked down." The *Florica* is danced, and we'd say 'Haida, haida, haida!' [*Go, go, go!*] And I, with the flag, as *vătaf*, I go with the flag over them and the same way."

Interviewer: "Why is the flag going over the head?"

Ș.D.: "To sanctify them! I don't hit them with the flag, I clean them."

Interviewer: "Are they purified?"

Ș.D.: "Yes, I purify them. I only hit one of them with the flag, who is in my way then. I touch him with the flag on his forehead. From the top of the flag, I take a little wormwood in the mouth and garlic, I chew it and sprinkle only a little [he spits]. He then gets dizzy and falls on the ground. I hit him twice or thrice with the flag down there [he gesticulates how he turns the flag cloth to the left and to the right]. The musicians come and play the violin and slowly, slowly... he's a bit dizzy and slowly gets up. We wash his face with water, and he starts to slowly get up."

Interviewer: "Is anything broken?"

Ș.D.: "The porringer is broken, in the man's yard there."

Interviewer: "Why?"

Ș.D. "This symbolises... what the owner says where we dance in there: 'You break my porringer for me!'

Interviewer: "On request?"

Ș.D.: "Yes, on request, because it chases all the bad spirits away from the yard and they clear up."

Interviewer: "Is the evil spirit transferred to the călușar who is 'knocked down?'"

Ș.D.: "The evil spirits don't go into him, but they feel calm that they're doing well the whole year, and we, the călușari, we move on, we give them a helping hand."

Interviewer: "Why do you spit the wormwood and the garlic over the performer?"

Ș.D.: "Well, so it gets on his cheek, over here."

Interviewer: "Why?"

Ș.D. "He smelled a bit of garlic and wormwood and was dizzy. That's so!"

Excerpt 2.

Interviewer: "Did it you have any cases of people being 'taken by the *Căluș*'?"

Ș.D.: "Yes."

Interviewer: "How did he or she recover? What year did it happen?"

Ș.D.: "Two years ago, in 2017. It happened here, in Sadova, there was a woman "taken by the *Căluș*." She was 24, and they came with her to Dăbuleni because she was feeling weak. How are you feeling? You don't feel like doing anything, you're dizzy all week. And they take the person to Dăbuleni because they don't dance the *Căluș* there. They found me, you take the *Călușari* group and come tomorrow. It's usually danced on the village border [he whispered], we set up a beautiful place. We went there, danced, those poles were measured, as I just told you, from the centre of the circle. This woman "taken by the *Căluș*" was out on a blanket laid on the floor, it was soft, and the porringer was put at her feet there. The *Căluș* was danced. I hit the flag over her, softly, softly. They were dancing."

Interviewer: "Why was the flag hovered over her?"

Ș.D.: "If she smelled the wormwood and that garlic in there, slowly, I would give her to smell some more and told her: 'If the porringer breaks, you have to run!'"

Interviewer: "Was she conscious?"

Ș.D.: "She was, but she was speaking... she was sick, what can we say?"

Interviewer: "What was she taken by? Has she been checked before?"

Ș.D.: "No. Check what? She told me she wasn't well. We, the *Căluș* dancers, we're not going to take her blood pressure, are we?"

Interviewer: "I was thinking that maybe she was checked like with a dance."

Ș.D.: "Yes! We checked her with a dance and saw her, when we were dancing... she was moving her legs [gesticulating with his hands up and down] like the *Căluș* dancers were gesticulating, and I realised she was 'taken by the *Căluș*.' Then, I said: 'Make this hard, because we have risen her up!' (...) I realised she was 'taken by the *Căluș*.' When I broke the porringer, that's it, she stood on her feet at once and ran to the car scared."

Interviewer: "How long did the dance last?"

Ș.D.: "Quarter of an hour, until I considered she should get up." (...)

Interviewer: "Was she like in a trance?"

Ș.D.: "Yes, yes! And she came to her senses and drove home safely, to Sadova, all satisfied."

Interviewer: "Did they reward you?"

Ș.D.: "Yes! How much one wants to give! There's not an established amount/ fee! We dance, you can give us as much as you want."

Interviewer: "Why was she taken outside the village?"

Ș.D.: "That's the custom, to dance in the field!"

Interviewer: "Why?"

Ș.D.: "That's how I inherited too! And there, this is one question I asked myself too: Why dance in the field? Because we danced many who had been 'taken by the *Căluș*' and we danced only in the field. There, this one, I haven't figured it out myself either, why dance in the field? Maybe there's a more secluded place, somewhere, where... one can run away, one can..."

Interviewer: "Why do you have to measure three and a half poles?"

Ș.D.: "That's the distance! The distance between the one 'taken by the *Căluș*' and the centre, where we dance."

Interviewer: "What does it symbolise?" [I insisted to find out details]

Ș.D.: "It symbolises, how can I say this to you? The place where one can disappear, run away, have space, because like that, with us dancing and them placed at the centre... what can they do? One wouldn't run away or disappear among..."

Interviewer: "Do you let her run away?"

Ș.D.: "Yes, yes! We let her, to go away... who is..."

Interviewer: "Does one roll over?"

Ș.D.: "No, no, one's leaving on their own feet, they don't roll over!"

Interview 4. An event occurred during the week dedicated to Sântoader (Saint Theodor). Ioana, the witch from Rast village, Dolj County.

Informant: Ioana, 57 years old, Rast, 2018. Ioana lived in Măceșu de Jos, a village near Bârca, for 23 years. She moved to Rast a few years ago.

Researcher: Călinescu Mihaela

Film from personal collection

Interviewer: "What happened?"

Ioana: "An event with an aunt of mine."

Interviewer: "What's her name?"

Ioana: "I know her as Leana, from Băilești."

Interviewer: "In what year did it happen?"

Ioana: "About ten years ago. On Sântoader Day, she started painting, cleaning, and she was called first time at night. She didn't answer. So, she was called a second time. She answered. And the third time she was called, she stepped over the threshold and saw a white horse."

Interviewer: "What was the time when it happened?"

Ioana: "Twelve at night. She didn't make it to the gate and the horse disappeared. She came back and didn't close the door. She laid down in bed next to a three or four-year-old girl and the spirit of the horse entered through the door and stomped her with its feet, from head to toe. There were horseshoes all over, from top to bottom."

Interviewer: "Did she have signs on her body?"

Ioana: "She did, on her body. In the morning, the little girl got up and was pushing her to get up: 'Grandma, get up! Grandma, get up!' But grandma was dead! She started crying and went outside to the gate. The neighbours came in, lifted the blanket, and when they saw her, she had horseshoes everywhere, from top to bottom. You couldn't put a finger because of the horseshoe signs, and she was dead."

Interviewer: "Was she punished?"

Ioana: "This because she had painted and washed during the Sântoader week. So, during the Sântoader week, the horses are at play, and you're not allowed! Especially on Friday, because it's the Friday of the Mares (*vinerea iepelor*). In our region, the mares were racing. There were all the children, from all over, with their horses adorned, with red ribbons on, with harnesses that glittered, riding, and they were one after another, and they did circles and rode and the horses neighed and it was beautiful, because that's why it was the Friday of the Mares. The boys would bring water with flowers in buckets, and the unmarried girls would go and wash their faces with that water, they were seasonal flowers, and the boys would put flowers in the girls' hair. There were unmarried girls and chivalrous boys. And they do that now too... who keeps the tradition, but it's not done as it used to be done, when the line was full of horses, they used to race the horses on each lane."

Interviewer: "During the Sântoader week, were the girls afraid, didn't they come out of the house at night?"

Ioana: "No, they didn't come out. That's why I told you, because there were the lines, the houses haunted by the horses, like I told you about my aunt, how that horse haunted her until it killed her."

Interviewer: "How old was the lady?"

Ioana: "I think she was in her sixties. She was an old woman. And afterwards, her son came and when they undressed her fully, they were convinced she was killed by horses."

