Căluş – between ritual and national symbol

Anca Giurchescu

This article, by the Romanian ethnochorelogist Anca Giurchescu, examines Căluş, a Romanian protection, healing, and fertility ritual traditionally performed during Orthodox Pentecost, a liminal moment marking transitions between seasons, worlds, and states of being. Central to the ritual are dance and music, through which its core actions are enacted. During the twentieth century, Căluş underwent a process of de-ritualization as it was transferred from its traditional context to staged folklore performances. Although many Căluş groups differentiate clearly between ritual and stage environments, elements of belief in the ritual's supernatural efficacy sometimes persist even in theatricalized forms.

The article's second part analyzes findings from a 1993 fieldwork experiment in Optaşi-Măgura, Oltenia, where dance scholars documented the ritual's phases and observed numerous transformations, including adaptations, simplifications, expansions, and innovations. The experiment had several consequences: participating villages consolidated their status as authentic custodians of the tradition, and in 1999 a local ensemble was invited to perform at the Smithsonian Festival in Washington, D.C., further elevating the ritual's international profile. These developments contributed to the inscription of Căluş on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008.

The introduction, written by Swedish ethnologist and ethnomusicologist Owe Ronström, outlines the work and legacy of the late Romanian ethnochoreologist Anca Giurchescu and provides context for the fieldwork experiment that underpins the article's second part, as well as for the film on *Căluş* that accompanies the article.

Keywords: Căluş, ritual, traditional dance, traditional music, Romania, shifts, festivalisation, heritagization, Anca Giurchescu.

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Introduction by Owe Ronström

The ethnochoreologist Anca Giurchescu was born in Bucharest, Romania, in 1930. In the 1950s, she began her professional career at the Constantin Brăiloiu Institute for Ethnography and Folklore in Bucharest, where she dedicated herself to the collection and documentation of traditional dance. In 1962, she became a member of the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM).[1] She remained actively engaged in its Study Group for Ethnochoreology until her death in 2015. Through her longstanding commitment and her imaginative, methodologically sound research, Anca Giurchescu played a pivotal role in establishing and advancing the field of ethnochoreology both theoretically and methodologically.[2]

1. Today International Council for Traditions of Music and Dance (ICTMD).
2. See the bibliography of Anca Giurchescu's work at https://eliznik.me.uk/research/bibliographies/publications-authored-by-anca-giurchescu/

From early on, Anca began studying *Căluș*, a ritual involving dance and music performed during Orthodox Pentecost. Once widespread across Romania, the ritual is today mainly practiced in the southern and central parts of the country. Over many years, she conducted fieldwork in the Oltenia region of southern Romania, where she was able to closely observe the interplay between continuity and change – how the ritual preserved elements from centuries past, while simultaneously undergoing constant transformation and reinterpretation.[3]

In 1979, Anca fled Nicolae Ceaușescu's Romania with her husband and daughter, settling in Copenhagen. There, she continued her work within the ICTM, serving as Chair of the Study Group on Ethnochoreology from 1998 to 2006, and from 1999 to 2005 also as Secretary of the Study Group on Music and Minorities. After the fall of the Ceaușescu regime in 1989, she returned to Romania with her family for a few years, but later resettled in Copenhagen, where she lived until her death.

The legacy of Anca Giurchescu

I first met Anca at the ICTM World Conference held in Stockholm and Helsinki in 1985. At the time, I was a newly admitted doctoral student in ethnology at Stockholm University, having just begun my dissertation on music and dance practices among Yugoslav migrants in Stockholm.[4] At the conference, Anca presented a paper on the roles and positions of men and women at dance events in northern Romania, emphasizing the importance of analyzing not only the visible and apparent, but also that which lies hidden beneath the surface. Her analysis of the relationship between visible and invisible power — between what she described as "power and charm" – made a deep and lasting impression on me. Here, as in much of her work, she successfully combined rich, detailed empirical observations with analytical clarity and broad socio-cultural and theoretical perspectives.[5]

When Anca began her career as a folk dance researcher in Romania, origins and historical background were central epistemological concerns, as were the dances' motifs, form, and structure. In the 1970s and 1980s, a wave of interest in contemporary expressive culture swept through ethnomusicology and ethnochoreology, a wave that also influenced young scholars in Eastern Europe, among them Anca Giurchescu. From then on, her work has consistently focused on the act of *dancing*, emphasizing not only the dances, but also the performance, interaction, and meaning embedded in the event. Inevitably, this meant that the event and its contemporary socio-cultural setting became central. In this respect, her work exemplifies a significant epistemological and methodological shift within ethnochoreology – from studying dance and music as isolated cultural artifacts within a historical paradigm, to analyzing music-making and dancing as ongoing processes, socially embedded events, imbued with meaning also beyond the observed events. As a methodological consequence, the *dance event* came to occupy a central place in Anca's ethnography – not merely as "context" providing background knowledge, but as text: a foundational unit of observation and analysis.

In her article on *Căluș*, there are clear traces of all of these intellectual threads: the historical background, the motives, structures and forms of the dance, the ritual as meaningful dance event, and the social, cultural, and political functions and significances of dancing in contemporary Romania.

3. Anca Giurchescu's work on *Căluș* are listed in the bibliography, see sidenote 1.
4. Ronström, Owe 1992. *Att gestalta ett ursprung. En musiketnologisk studie av dansande och musicerande bland jugoslaver i Stockholm* [Giving form to an origin. An ethnomusicological study of dancing and music-making among Yugoslavs in Stockholm] Stockholm: Institutet för folklivsforskning.
5. Giurchescu, Anca 1986. "Power and charm. Interaction of adolescent men and women in traditional settings of Transsylvania". *Yearbook for traditional music* 18:37–46.

Fig. 1. Anca Giurchescu during fieldwork in Optași-Măgura, Oltenia, Romania, 1993. Photo: Owe Ronström

Furthermore, the article also reflects Anca's particular interest in what happens when folk dancing is transferred to the stage, choreographed, and presented in radically new contexts – at festivals, competitions, and on television. This concern forms a consistent thematic thread in her work on *Căluş*.

Optași-Măgura, Oltenia, Romania, 1993: A Fieldwork Experiment and Its Consequences

After the ICTM conference in Stockholm/Helsinki, I initiated an intensive fieldwork on dancing and music-making among Yugoslav immigrants in Stockholm. During this time, I became a member of the Study Group on Ethnochoreology, where I had the opportunity to meet and be inspired by Anca through numerous workshops and conferences on traditional dance and music.

In 1993, Anca organized an international, interdisciplinary fieldwork experiment to study the ritual aspects of *Căluş* in several villages where she had conducted previous fieldwork since the 1960s – in the municipalities of Optași-Măgura and Osica de Sus in Oltenia. A dozen dance scholars from various countries participated, myself included. Over a week around Pentecost, we observed the different phases of the ritual – the preparations, rehearsals, performances, and the closing. We interviewed participants, villagers, and visiting spectators, we documented music and dance performances through audio and video recordings.

The field experiment and the attention sparked by the presence of music and dance scholars from several countries in Romanian villages had a number of consequences. One immediate result was that we, the participating researchers, gained direct experience and deeper knowledge of the complex, multifaceted ritual, which we later could draw upon to inform lectures, conference presentations, and scholarly articles. Thereby, the *Căluş* ritual received increased international visibility and recognition.

Another consequence was that the villages involved were able to position themselves as particularly authentic custodians and performers of the ritual. When the prestigious Smithsonian Festival in Washington, D.C. decided to feature Romanian music and dance under the theme "Gateways to Romania" in 1999, the role of curator was assigned to the American ethnochoreologist Colin Quigley, one of the scholars who had taken part in the Oltenia fieldwork.[6] Through his mediation, a group of *căluşari* – dancers and musicians – from Optași-Măgura were invited to perform at the festival, which further confirmed and enhanced the status of these communities as tradition-bearers.

In Romania, *Căluş* had already long since been adapted for the stage, becoming a virtuosic showcase for professional folk dance ensembles, and a national emblem prominently featured at festivals both at home and abroad. The increased international visibility and prestige generated by the fieldwork experiment and the Smithsonian Festival performance further reinforced this position. These developments ultimately contributed to the inclusion of the *Căluş* ritual on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008.[7]

This, in turn, spurred renewed academic interest in the *Căluş* ritual, both in Romania and internationally. Earlier studies by scholars such as Mircea Eliade, Anca Giurchescu, and Gail Kligman were followed by a growing number of new research contributions from Romanian and international folklorists, ethnomusicologists and ethnochoreologists.[8]

Presenting *Căluş* – in film and text

For my own part, the 1993 fieldwork experiment in Optași-Măgura led to the production of a DVD film presenting the *Căluş* ritual, *Dance for Living and Dead* (2004), in collaboration with filmmaker Darya Karim. While working on the film, I realized that it needed to be accompanied by a written text that would explain the ritual, place it within its geographical and historical context, and reflect on its significance in contemporary society. Anca Giurchescu was the obvious and ideal person to write such a text. However, at the time, she did not have the opportunity to take on the task.

In searching the public libraries and my own collection of articles, I found several of her earlier texts on *Căluş* – short papers published in hard-to-access obscure journals and newsletters. With a light editorial touch and Anca's approval, I compiled and adapted them into the article now published here. In the following years Anca and I used the article and the film for presenting the fieldwork experiment at seminars and conferences.[9]

Then years passed, filled with teaching and new research projects. Upon my retirement, I rediscovered materials from the 1993 field experiment, including Anca's article. It is now published in *Puls* as a tribute to Anca and her long-standing work documenting and analyzing folk dance. But it is also meant as a contribution to ongoing discussions about the consequences of research interventions such as the 1993 Oltenia field experiment, and about the broader implications of the global festivalization and heritagisation of "intangibles" like music, dance, and ritual. Finally, it is intended to encourage further debate on the impacts of heritage politics more generally, and in particular, on the often far-reaching interventions into living cultural practices that UNESCO's heritage listings entail.

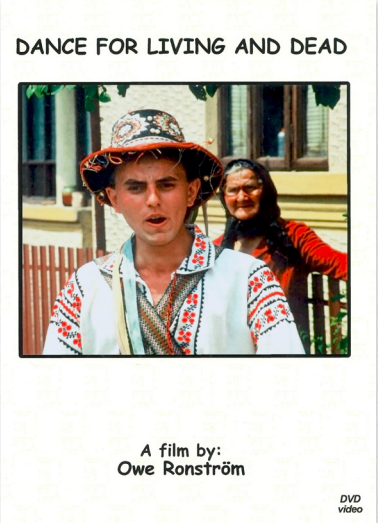

Fig. 3. Link to *Dance for living and dead* https://vimeo.com/1138437038/dc939566ab?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci

6. https://festival.si.edu/past-program/1999/gateways-to-romania
7. https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/clu-ritual-00090. The *Căluş* ritual was originally proclaimed 2005.
8. Mellish, Liz 2006. "The Romanian Căluș tradition and its changing symbolism as it travels from the village to the global platform". Online: https://eliznik.me.uk/wp-content/uploads/articles/The-Romanian-Calus-tradition-and-its-changing-symbolism-2006.pdf
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Anca Giurchescu[1]

Căluş is a protection, healing, and fertility ritual, carried out at the Orthodox Pentecost *Rusalii*, seven weeks after the Orthodox Easter. It marks the passage from spring to summer, from this world to the 'world beyond', and from the living to the dead ancestors. *Căluş* is deeply rooted in Romania's ancient cultural strata. *Căluş* pertains to a large and well-known category of men's corps customs, which include dances with swords or sticks used as props. Dance is one of the most important components of this ritual; it is through dance that the ritual acts are accomplished.[2]

Eighteenth century documents indicate that *Căluş* was at that time performed throughout most of Romania. To this day it is performed in its traditional context only in the southern part of the country – throughout the Danube Plain and northward toward the Carpathians.[3] Elements of Southeastern and Central-West European cultures are mingled in *Căluş*. Similar variants are found in villages inhabited by Romanians close to the Danube in Bulgaria, in some Serbian villages, and in Macedonia where the custom is called *Rusalii* (Arnaudov 1917). However, the *Căluş* as practiced in Romania does contain distinctive characteristics that are specific to the Carpatho-Danubian area. Each of the variants shares some common features with the Morris, sword (or stick), and mummers' dances from England and south-western and central Europe.[4] These similarities include group structure, costume, implements (props), the role-playing of masked characters, and the ritual enactment of death and resurrection. The presence of these similar traits over such a widespread area in Europe supports the notion that this custom belongs to a very basic and ancient cultural stratum.

Căluş can be characterised as a form of communication between the real world represented by a given community and the mythical world represented by female mythological beings variously and euphemistically named *Iele* (They), *Mîndrele* (Beauties), or *Vîntoasele* (Windy Ones). *Iele* are the embodiments of old nature demons that may be traced back to the cult of Diana (Eliade 1973, 1995) and the Geto-Dacian cult of Bendis, the goddess of nature and death (identified by the Greeks with Artemis, Hecate, and Persephone) (Daicoviciu 1968:197–198). These fairies of the wild nature are known in Europe as *Vila* (southern Slavs), *Rusalii* (north-western Slavs), *Vodka Pane* and *Diva Zen* (Bohemia), *Bogunki* (Poland), *Elben*, *Elfen* (Anglo-Saxons), *Wilde Frauen, Nacht Frauen, Holden* or *Perthen* (Germans), *Bonne donne* (Italy), as well as the individual characters *Irodeasa* (Romania), *Herodia* (central Europe), *Frau Holle* (Germany), *Samovila* (Bulgaria).

1. This article is compiled by Owe Ronström from several of Anca Giurchescus earlier published texts on Căluş. The major work on Romanian dance is Giurchescu 1992.

2. Working either alone or together with a research team I studied, observed, recorded and filmed the Căluş in ritual as well as in theatrical context for more than 15 years (c. 1963–1979). In addition, the dances of *Căluş* were filmed out of context for purposes of analysis. All the documentary material (including approximately 41 films of the ritual and the dances) is housed in the Archives of the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore, Bucharest. More comprehensive ethnographic films were produced in county Dolj 1958 by the IEF (Pop), in county Olt, 1969 by the Wissenchaftlichen film Institut, Göttingen (Simon and Giurchescu) and in county Argeş 1972 by the University of Timişoara. The bibliography on Căluş is quite extensive. More recent and selected references are as follows: Kligman 1981 (the most comprehensive and important work for symbolic interpretation); Vuia 1921–1922; Oprişan 1969; Eliade 1973; Pop 1975; Bucşan 1976; Proca-Ciortea 1978/79; Bîrlea 1982; Giurchescu 1969; 1974; 1984.

3. Cantemir 1973:234. *Căluş* can also be found in Dobrogea, a consequence of demographic displacement.

4. Sachs 1952:332–341; Alford & Gallop 1935; Alford 1962; Kennedy. 1949; Louis. 1963.

The *Iele* were believed to be very active during the transitional period from spring to summer around *Rusalii* (Pentecost). "They" were supposed to punish people who did not respect the interdiction to work on special days in honour of the *Iele*. The role of the *Căluş* was to protect people from the malicious actions of these spirits and to heal those who fell ill under their spell. The *Căluş* rituals also served to promote fertility and fecundity (Eliade 1973; Kligman 1981:45–65; Giurchescu 1984:91–99).

The main ritual actors, mediators between the real and the mythical world, are a group of men, *căluşari*, supposedly endowed with supernatural power to protect the community against the *Iele*'s malefic deeds, cure sick persons, and bring fertility. The relationship between the *căluşari* and the *Iele* is highly complex. On the one hand, the *Iele* are believed to share many common traits with the *căluşari*. On the other hand, their relationship is also characterized by numerous polarities: male/female, culture/nature, life (healing)/death (illness), diurnal (sun)/nocturnal (moon). This highly ambiguous relationship follows from the fact that, in order for the *căluşari* to mediate between the *Iele* and the community, they must first come under the *Iele's* possession. While under possession the *căluşari* are invested with supernatural powers which they then redirect in order to assuage the pernicious behaviour of the *Iele* and, in turn, to protect the populace. Further complicating this relationship is the fact that the *căluşari*, even while possessed, remain susceptible like everyone else to the *Iele's* maliciousness. It is this highly precarious and ambiguous position of the *căluşari*, which requires them to respect and carry out the strict rules of behaviour prescribed for the *Căluş* ritual. In order to practice the ritual, the *căluşari* must be endowed with extraordinary psychophysical qualities. The *Căluş* dance alone demands a very high degree of agility, power, and endurance – qualities that are developed over a considerable length of time through arduous training, practice, and devotion. The fine moral and physical condition of the men is maintained by rules and norms which forbid all excesses, and which constitute the foundation for the organization of the team. In order to become a part of this closed ritual society, the group of initiates must take an oath to respect the various prescribed rules of behaviour.

The *căluşari* team is composed of an odd number of men (7,9 or 11), regardless of age or marital status. As in other men's corps there is a hierarchy of responsibility: the *vătaf* (chief) who has unlimited powers, *vătaful din coada* (the leader at the tail end), and the *ajutorul de vătaf* (chief's assistant), whose position in the dance is next to the *vătaf* and who can replace him when necessary. Another very important member of the group is the *mutul*, the mute (pl. *muţi*), a comic "fool" who wears a mask, carries a red painted wooden sword, and has a red wooden phallus attached to his belt. With gesture and pantomime the mute leads the ritual acts and also plays the comic. One or two musicians – a violinist and a *cobza* (shortnecked lute) or a portable *ţambal* (hammered dulcimer) player and recently an accordionist, also participate in the group.

Fig. 1. Zamfir Dumitru „Porumbelu", violin, and Costel Cocoşilă, accordion. *Hora* dancing during *Căluş* in Vitaneşti, Optaşi-Măgura, Oltenia 1993. Photo: Owe Ronström.

The *căluşari* wear a special costume consisting of a white embroidered shirt, white trousers tucked into knee-high, richly embroidered socks, bells tied under the knees, and *opinci* (peasant leather sandals) with metal spurs called *pinteni*. Woven coloured bands are worn at the waist and across the chest. A black or straw hat is entirely decorated with sparkling beads, long fringes around the brim, coloured ribbons, and bits of mirror. Attached to the belt are embroidered handkerchiefs and babies' caps given to them by women who wish to be healthy and have children. Each *căluşar* carries a stick. The mute's facemask is that of an ugly old man. He is dressed in a ragged costume with a woman's skirt over his trousers. The mute also has many other masks and costumes to use in the sketches.

The time and place of *Căluş* is ritually determined. In the past the ritual lasted from seven to nine days. It began on the Saturday evening of *Rusalii*, continuing Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, the following Sunday, and ending a week from Tuesday. Today it lasts only three days. In contrast to *Iele* who are active by night, the *căluşari* are active only during the day and cease at sundown. Their designated performance space is the village and its surrounding cultivated areas while *Iele* are purported to exist only in non-cultivated places such as riverbanks, forests, glades, mounds, and clearings.

Dance music, gesture, pantomime, texts, costume, props, ritual rules, and magical actions serve to carry out the custom, which can be divided into three lengthy sequences. "The raising of the flag" or "the binding of *Căluş*" takes place on Saturday evening. This marks the beginning of the custom and the constitution of the group. The ritual actions enable the participants to pass from their everyday life to the sacred plane where they acquire supernatural powers from the *Iele*. This ritual is enacted in secret outside the village in places where *Iele* are said to reside. Until the actual raising of the flag everything is done in silence. The flag is attached to a pole and consists

of wormwood, garlic, and stalks of green wheat wrapped around a white linen hand towel. It stands for the magical *Căluş* power and is the symbol of the group's solidarity. On this flag the participants take the oath of submission: to dance with great energy, obey all commands of the *vătaf*, and practice this custom for three to nine years. Nowadays, the commitment is only for the current year. The reason for this more limited commitment is due to the fear of not being able to keep the oath and consequently being punished by the *Iele* (illness, loss of magic power, all other kinds of misfortune, and even death). Once it has been raised, the flag must never touch the ground or be touched by a woman, or its ritual power will be lost. In spite of the fact that most participants in *Căluş* admit that they do not believe in the power of the ritual, I collected many examples where their actions contradicted their statements.[5] The raising of the flag ends with a suite of *Căluş* dances around the raised flag. In south-east Oltenia a rabbit skin stretched over a stick (*cioc*) may be used as a substitute for the flag.

The second episode consists of a suite of *Căluş* dances and pantomimes performed in the yard of each villager who invites them. In the middle of the courtyard next to the flag the host places a bowl of water, some garlic, wormwood, rock salt, and raw wool. With his sword the mute draws a magic, protective circle which no one but the initiated may enter. The magic power of the circling *căluşari* is transferred to objects that are then used to heal animals and promote fertility. This part concludes with a *Hora* in which everybody takes part. This dance is believed to encourage marriage, bring fecundity to barren women, and promote prophylaxis when necessary. During the *Hora* the *căluşari* carry children in their arms or jump over babies placed on the ground thereby endowing them with health and strength.

Fig. 2. Dancing over a child. Optaşi-Măgura, Oltenia 1993. Photo: Owe Ronström.

The near obsolete practice of healing people, who were "taken by *Iele*," (a nervous disorder) was accomplished by a series of magical actions and a *Căluş* dance involving circling and jumping over the sick person. In Oltenia,

5. The passage of *Căluş* from ritual to theatrical performance is officially enhanced through the *Căluş* festival and competition organized in the towns Slatina or Caracal, often at Pentecost. This festival brings together a great number of Căluş teams from the Danube Plain and a few *căluşeri* groups from Transylvania.

however, the *vătaf* chooses a *căluşar* to be "knocked down" (doborîre) by means of lowering the flag over his head. This *căluşar* then feigns a trance-like state or, through belief, actually becomes entranced. He then dances rapidly with disorderly random movements, and finally collapses to the ground, symbolically taking on the illness. At this moment the sick person is raised to his feet and is "healed". At present the "knocking down" is performed rather as a demonstration of the *căluşari*'s power (Kligman 1981:66–83).

Fig. 3. Tudor Vancea and Nicolae Vasile performing as muţi, in the comic skit, "The killing of a calusar," Optaşi-Măgura, Oltenia 1993. Photo: Owe Ronström.

During intervals between the dances the mute occasionally engages a *căluşar* as an assistant in the performance of farcical, naughty sketches, which are extremely well received by the audience. The "killing" and revival of a *căluşar* is a variant of the well-known death and resurrection fertility rite. A vestige of an initiation rite nowadays occurs as a comical action: a *căluşar*, having supposedly disobeyed the rules, is carried on the shoulders of two others while the *vătaf* slaps him on the soles of his feet with a bundle of the dancers' sticks.

The third and final episode is the "burial of the flag". It is carried out in the same location as the first and is meant to disband the corps, release the *căluşari* from their oath, and reintegrate them into normal daily life. The actions are similar to those of "raising the flag" only in reverse. At the very last moment when the pole touches the ground and marks the end of their connection with the supernatural world, the *căluşari* scatter in all directions and return immediately. They shake hands and greet each other as if they had not seen each other for a long time.

From ritual to spectacle

Conceived as a complex and meaningful cultural text, *Căluş* is made up of several expressive interrelated means, which according to subjective or

objective circumstances, change their hierarchy of importance for the construction of what Algirdas-Julien Greimas (1971) designates as an "ethno-semiotic object". In essence this "ethno-semiotic object" is comprised of:

- ritual objects – i. e. flag, magical plants, bells, wooden phallus and sword
- actions – i.e. leaping over a person, passing under the sword, falling in trance, breaking a pot
- texts – verbal utterances, text of the oath
- ritual interdictions – not to touch or be tucked by women, not to separate from the group, not to divulge the 'secret' of *Căluş*
- dance + music + costume + ornaments + shouts and of dramatic skits + actions + dramatic texts + masks.

These means interlock in different constellations and at different semiotic levels such as ritual, artistic, or entertainment level, giving *Căluş* its polysemic character. Presently, the tendency is to de-ritualize *Căluş*, by changing it into an entertaining show. From this perspective one and the same *Căluş* event may be interpreted by both performers and spectators, depending on their age, education, and social status, as sacred ritual, ceremonial respect for tradition, identity symbol, art performance, entertainment, or simply economic gain – all according to education, culture, ideology, psychology, interests, age, knowledge, et cetera.[6] *Căluş* takes on not only one, but several meanings at the same time, as tradition and modernity, a 'magical thinking' and a pragmatic world-view exist side by side.

Taking this change into consideration the *căluşari* participate with the notion of impressing the audience. In turn, the audience becomes more interested in the artistic level of the performance and less in its ritual significance. Thus, most of the magical rites have lost their meaning. Released from restrictive ritual rules, the dance, music, costume, and dramatic sketches have become free to develop along innovative and artistic lines. In the past each *Căluş* dance had its own distinct function. Now that the dances have lost their specific meanings they function as a unit and often new dances from the common repertoire are added to the *Căluş* suite.

According to a local legend "when God built the church, the devil challenged him by making *Căluş*, in order to see which of them will attract more people... The devil largely won, because the whole village followed the *căluşari*" (Giblea 1993). Indeed, the spectacular dimension, inherent to *Căluş*, makes the ritual more powerful and convincing. On the other hand, belief in supernatural powers and in the efficiency of magical acts is fundamental for keeping the ritual alive. However, it is rather difficult to disclose belief in magic powers (as a state of mind), because of a deep gap existing between people's statements and their actions.

Due to the ongoing process of change, many *Căluş* teams perform in both traditional and stage settings, seemingly making clear distinctions between these two contrasting situations. There are situations, however, when

6. On a synchronic level and dependent upon the communities' social-cultural development, *Căluş* is situated on different diachronic stages, from ritual to spectacle, characterised by varied structural make-up. For example, in the Homole mountains of north-eastern Serbia, *Căluş* (locally named *Crai*), is performed by the Vlachs (Romanian speaking minority) exclusively in connection with the cult of the dead, in the Oltenian Plain its main function is healing through trance, in south-west Muntenia the emphasis is on dance and music, while in south-east Muntenia the theatrical component is foregrounded.

belief in supernatural powers is so strong that it persists even when *Căluş* is presented on stage. Such an example was lively discussed at the International Folk Dance Festival in London July 15–20, 1935, where a *Căluş* team from the village Pădureţi in county Argeş, so greatly impressed both the judges and audience that they were awarded first prize. The 'Folk Dancers' wrote: "Douglas Kennedy had to search London for fresh garlic" because the *căluşari* of the village, county Argeş, refused to go on stage without garlic attached to the ritual flag, believed to endow them with supernatural power coming from *Iele*.[7] In 1975, Grigore Stan, the *vătaf* (leader) of the *Căluş* team that participated at the festival in 1935, told me that their successful performances were certainly the *Iele*'s deed (Stan 1975). Presently, the performers consider ritual and profane (the event in traditional setting and on stage) as two fundamentally different situations, passing with ease from one to the other. "The real *Căluş* is that with flag, in the village, on stage is not tradition" states Florea Giblea, the old *vătaf* of Optaşi and continues: "When we dance on stage we are tired after few minutes, when we made an oath on the flag in the village we dance three days without getting tired" (Giblea 1993).

The trait unifying both village and stage performances is the teams' total and intense commitment to dance. The pride of being *căluş*ar, the belief in the power of the dance, the spirit of competition, the confidence of being the best, are rooted in the traditional dance contests in front of the villagers – which once substituted the ritual fight – when two groups of *căluşari* met.[8]

The dances

The dance form is an alteration of *plimbare*, or walking sequences, with *mişcări*-movements in place. The order of the *plimbare* and *mişcări* is dictated by the *vătaf* in loud commands to which the *căluşari* respond with equally loud shouts giving the dance the excitement of masculine power. Amateur and professional ensembles perform these dances on stage completely out of context, and are used as such as representatives of Romania's folk dance tradition at home and abroad (Giurchescu 1984:85–90, 102–107). In the context of staged performances for national or international festivals and competitions, and for state celebrations, the *Căluş* is presented either as pure dance or as stylised "ritual". The staged version dramatically emphasizes the virtuosity and skill of dancing. Presently this version is being used to replace the living traditional forms of *Căluş*, which are considered poor and less artistic. In a variety of ways, *Căluş* is manipulated by the media as a symbol of the unity and vitality of Romanian culture.

In general, the dances that constitute the *Căluş* suite can be separated into two main groups: dances exclusive to the ritual, and dances such as *Hora* taken from the common repertoire and ascribed ritual functions. The common dances are executed in a style consistent with the dances exclusive to the *Căluş* ritual.

The dances exclusive to the *Căluş* are part of the very large family of European weapon dances. Structurally they belong to the stock of men's springing

7. Violet Alford referring to the same group adds some more examples: "Their Fool is dumb, that is to say he may not speak during their dancing period... and although traveling by train and walking about a foreign city, he did not utter a word during his stay" (Alford 1978:145). She also witnessed a healing session enacted by *căluşari* during their visit to London, which had a great emotional impact on her: "This, in spite of the utterly inappropriate surroundings, was one of he most impressive folk manifestations I have seen" (ibid. 1978:145).

8. "If you have a heart and a faith, you must dance. It is similar to football, to rugby, to any kind of play" (Vancea 1993). In the context of a competition, a team may become angry, even violent, if they don't get the expected recognition.

dances of the Carpathian area. The *Căluş* dances are stylistically distinct because they have been cultivated within the Danube Plain area.

The *Căluş* dances can be grouped into several types according to certain structural criteria and their stage of evolution. All these types are unified under an umbrella of pertinent traits. These include performance by an odd number of men in an unlinked corps, the use of a stick for support and gesturing, organization into suites, commands and yells, a great variety of rhythmic formula of movement (RFM) combinations, accents in counter time, and high-speed syncopated rhythms. 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.

The southern Oltenian *Căluş* type, when compared with other types in this category, is less developed as a dance form because it remains very closely associated with the ritual. The suite is comprised of a varied number of independent dances, each having its own name and melody. In the past each dance was ascribed a specific function. Today these dances are no longer associated with their original function. Many of the image gestures used in the past, however, have been retained. A striking example is *Calul*, which incorporates movements that mimic horse pawing accompanied by neighing shouts. All of the dances within this type share a common kinetic vocabulary, based on binary, ternary (3/8), and asymmetrical (7/16, 5/16) meters, and they are generally of a simple structure consisting of variably linked motifs. Of all the dances within the suite, one called *Băţul* most graphically expresses the pertinent traits of this category.

In terms of dance structure, the southern Muntenian *Căluş* type represents a higher stage of evolution within this category. There are two basic suites performed in this region: several distinct dances grouped around a nucleus dance called *Căluş* or a single dance, *Căluş*, made up of large structural units performed in free succession followed by a *Sîrba* and *Hora* and some dances from the common repertoire. Characteristics of the southern Muntenian *Căluş* are movements done close to the ground, especially those done in semi-prone position with both hands and both feet supporting the dancer, as in a "barrel roll," or in a kneeling position. The suite of the *Căluş* type from the adjoining areas of counties Argeş and Olt by itself comprises a suite which is always followed by *Sîrba* and sometimes other dances selected from the common repertoire such as *Brîu*, *Joiana*, *Ampuieţii*, and *Bugheanul*. The entire ritual is always concluded with a *Hora*.

The *Căluş* dances from this area have a complex structure comprised of three main segments. The first, called *marşul* (the march), consists entirely of walking and running steps. It functions both as an introduction to the dance and as a transition between the remaining two segments. The second, called *plimbare* (walking), is constructed of varied motif sequences which include heel-clicks, leaps, jumps, rapid changes of direction, and manipulations of

the stick held in a variety of positions, all the while progressing in a circular pathway. Each of the sequences of *plimbare* have been given distinguishing titles. *Mişcări* (movements), the third segment, are generally performed in place and are highly virtuosic. As in the case of the *plimbare*, each *mişcare* also has its own distinguishing name. A *mişcare* is a complex, fixed structural unit likened to the point of the *fecioreşte* category (particularly as in *haidău*).[9] The *mişcări* are comprised of an introductory fragment which remains constant for each succeeding one, a core fragment of changeable motifs which thereby distinguishes each *mişcare* from every other one, plus a constant, unchanging, final fragment (Proca-Ciortea 1978). In their native setting the *căluşari* teams might have 20 to 25 different *mişcări* and as many *plimbări*. The richness and variety of its kinetic vocabulary, its rhythmic formulas, and its elaborate structure make this *Căluş* type one of the most impressive of Romania's dance creations. For many years it has been a common practice in this area for *Căluş* dances to be performed outside their ritual context as a spectacle. The emphasis placed on the dance as entertainment has strongly influenced its rapid artistic development.

The *Căluş* in Optaşi-Măgura – adaption and transformation

After these general considerations, I will now focus on the way *Căluş* survives, is adapted and functions in the commune (district Olt), to where I have returned several times since 1969.[10] In Optaşi, as elsewhere during the 'revolutionary' stage of communism (1948–1965) when mystical beliefs were interdicted, the ritual components of *Căluş* continued to exist however in a latent phase. Conversely, the artistic components, adapted for the stage, became important ingredients in festivals and state ceremonials, with hundreds of *căluşari* from different villages, dancing together, to symbolise the "power of people's unity around the Communist Party" (Giurchescu 1987:169).

During the 'nationalistic' stage under the Ceauşescu's dictatorship (1965–1989), *Căluş* became a symbol for Romanian's cultural antiquity, historical continuity, and high artistic qualities. It was manipulated as art product, displayed by amateurs and professional ensembles at national and international festivals. In 1964 for the first time, a team of young *Căluş* dancers was founded in Optaşi to participate in state organised contests. In 1966 the process of adaptation for stage was completed by a non-local 'specialist' who choreographed the local *Căluş* dance suite. The *plimbare* ('walking') and *mişcare* ('movement') sequences (having many variants and names) were selected according to the virtuosity criteria, re-ordered in a stable succession and modified structurally, in order to coincide with the musical phrase. This patterned stage choreography has been perpetuated on stage over years and finally "got into their blood".[11] The main event for staged performances is the "*Căluş* Festival" of Caracal (created in 1969), a competition claiming its contribution to the preservation of the *Căluş* tradition. In reality, the festival was deliberately organized at Pentecost in order to hinder the practice

9. *Fecioreşte* and *Haidău* are Romanian versions of virtuosic lads' dances, involving fast sequences of rhythmical foot and hand movements, with snaps, claps and clicks.

10. 1976, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1997, 1998 and 1999. The commune Optaşi-Măgura is comprised of the villages: Vităneşti, Sîrbi, Coşereni, Ungheni, Braniştea, Zăvoi, Jugaru with approx. 5000 inhabitants.

11. Some names of 'walking' in a circle: *Plimbarea întîia, Plimbarea dublă, Călcata*, and sequences of virtuoso 'movement' on the spot: *Vîrtelniţa, Toarna, Gheorghiţa, Pădurea.* In traditional settings their succession and number vary from one courtyard to another.

of *Căluş* in the villages at its ritually prescribed time. For the cultural activists creating and reinforcing the 'tradition', the *Căluş* Festival was much more important than keeping alive the tradition of *Căluş* in the villages. To solve this dilemma two *Căluş* groups were organized in Optaşi-Măgura: one prepared to participate at the festival and another to perform in the village.[12]

Returning in 1993 to Optaşi-Măgura, after 11 years of absence, I was confronted with a large range of changes, which occurred in this span of time; many of them having a high degree of generalisation (Giurchescu 1990:55). A few will be mentioned here:

- In 1969 the belief in the power of *Iele* (fairies) and in the link of *Căluş* to witchcraft was consciously verbalised, while in 1993 the original significance was apparently lost. The healing of sick persons was still carried out in 1965 and 1969. Presently it is mentioned only as a potential function of *Căluş*. The long range of ritual interdictions, among them chastity, are no longer observed, being substituted with more permissive ones.
- Esoteric, magical actions such as 'raising the flag', 'taking the oath' and 'burying of the flag' (for binding the group, endowing the participants with supernatural power, protecting them against the malefic deeds of the *Iele*, and finally for disbanding the group), are presently reduced to simply key actions admitting the presence of an audience. For example, in Optaşi-Măgura the oath on the flag which once was secret, is verbalized and its text adapted to the present realities. "We pledge for keeping the secret of our dances, for not giving them away to other *Căluş* groups" (Turuianu 1993).
- The ritual space for 'raising the flag' has been changed and the duration reduced from one week to a maximum of three days.
- The costume, with ritual significant elements (belts crossed over the chest, babies' caps, embroidered handkerchiefs, bells) was produced by state co-operatives and embellished to suit the stage demands. The Turkish red caps (*fes*), which the *căluşari* still wore in the 1960's, were substituted by decorated black hats for being considered too 'Balkan-like'.[13]
- *Mutul* (the mute), originally the ritual leader of the group, became more of a comical character, carrying mask, wooden sword and a women's skirt. The wooden phallus (fecundity symbol) was removed for being considered 'obscene' by the local officials. In the comical skits, verbal expression became more important than the traditional pantomime, which had death and resurrection as a central theme.
- In 1969, the repertoire of *Căluş* comprised c. 16 *mişcări* (movements) and c. 7 *plimbări* (walking sequences) had in 1992 been reduced to 8 respectively 4. The structure of the dance phrases did not coincide with the musical phrases, and the tempo was not so fast. All these traits were changed as a *căluş*ar remembers: "20 years ago we were kicked out of the stage, because the dance wasn't phrased" (concordant with the music) (Poenaru, 1993).

12. Dueto Florea Turuianu, local teacher and excellent dancer, *Căluş* is taught in school to talented children who perform on stage but who potentially may become carrier of the tradition in the village as well. Since 1992 the *Căluş* Festival has been moved a week after Rusalii.

13. Until the mid of the 19th century in southern Romania, the ceremonial wedding costume for the bride included a red *fes* covered by a veil (*maramă*). It may be assumed that the *căluşari* have been dressed in women parts of costume.

Fig. 4. Tudor Vancea and Nicolae Vasile performing as muţi, in a comic skit during *Căluş* in Optaşi-Măgura 1993.
Photo: Owe Ronström.

- Traditionally in each courtyard the *vătaf* indicated the number and succession of the movement sequences to be performed by codified signals, because pronouncing their names was ritually interdicted. Today this interdiction has no more relevance. Keeping the secret of the dance names is nowadays motivated as a way of protecting the dances from being "stolen" by other competing groups.

Căluş between the courtyard and the stage

The *căluşari* of Optaşi-Măgura are aware of the differences between 'acting' in the village and 'dancing' on stage. As they move from one context to the other, they change their behaviour according to the given situation and characterize their experience in both contexts in the following terms: Performing in the village implies the presence of the ritual flag and of the oath that binds the group. Dancing in the courtyards is influenced by the impact of the audience "who look with pleasure to us" (Scarlat 1998), the dancers, and by the changeable circumstances from one courtyard to the other. It is characterized by the freedom to choose the repertoire, by improvisation or creation of new 'movements', and by the comical skits played by the mute during the dancing intermission. The ritual space, described in the courtyard by the mute with his sword, is substituted in theatrical contexts by the stage where the *căluşari* 'present' a dance as an 'artefact'. The dancers characterized the stage performance as being short, intense, fast and exhausting, ruled by homogeneity and uniform repetition. In blatant contrast to the performance in natural settings, the spirit of competition surpasses the pleasure of dancing.

Fieldwork experiments

The village of Optaşi-Măgura and the local *Căluş* were subject to two fieldwork experiments: one in June 1993 that brought "the large world"

Fig. 5. *Plimbări* ("walking steps") in a courtyard, Optaşi-Măgura, Oltenia 1993. Photo: Owe Ronström.

(members of the ICTM Sub-Study Group on Fieldwork Theory and Methods) to the village, and the second in June-July 1999 that brought the *Căluş* to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington DC.[14]

In 1993 at our first meeting with the local 'manager' of the *Căluş* team, Florea Turuianu, a conflicted situation emerged, due to the discrepancy between our expectations for a 'real, genuine, spontaneous' event, and that of our hosts, who wanted to present something 'beautiful, authentic, traditional'. I list a few ad hoc changes of the ritual made by the participants themselves, more or less influenced by the local cultural employees in order to create an idyll image of their community: Three *Căluş* teams from three villages of the commune Optaşi-Măgura merged to make up a large team with 15–17 dancers, thereby bringing together three leaders: the 'ritual' *vătaf* Florea Giblea (born 1930) still believing in the power of the *Iele* and observing ritual interdictions,[15] Florea Turuianu (born 1954) the 'artistic' leader, teacher and manager of the groups, and Marin Scarlat (born 1972), former leader of the teenager *Căluş* group. This unusual situation created a tension between the two older leaders. The ritually prescribed place for 'raising the flag' was changed, and Turuianu proposed to us a 'traditional' place, in a 'beautiful' landscape outside the village. The truth is that the last five years the flag was raised in the courtyard of the *vătaf*. The same care for a positive image made the *muţi* at first to polish verbal utterances and control their body movements (imitation of sexual act) when performing comical skits. However, our presence soon stopped being a disturbing factor for both *Căluşari* and the mutes. "We did our job, the way we always do", one of them concluded.

I returned in November 1994 to record local people's comments on our experiment. The presence of the foreigners raised the community's (and the host families') prestige and status. The videotapes they received from the researchers were showed in the village club, in private homes, at weddings

14. At the fieldwork experiment organized for the members of the Sub-Study Group on Fieldwork Theory and Methods of the ICTM Study Group on Ethnochorelogy (3–9 June) the participants were divided into three groups, each documenting the *Căluş* ritual in a different village. The team of Optaşi-Măgura included Helene Eriksen, Allegra Fuller Snyder, Fügedi Janos, Anca Giurchescu, Owe Ronström and Mariana Mardale (Museum of the Romanian Peasant). The participants from the other villages were Sunni Bloland, Felföldi Laszlo, Cyrelle Forman-Soffer, Yvonne Hunt, Corina Iosif, Mats Nilsson, Colin Quigley, Lisbet Torp, Narcisa Stiuca and Helen Van Buchove.

15. Being convinced at one moment that the *Iele* had taken away the strength from the *căluşari*, he insisted to raise the flag again in order to get back the power of their dance (which was not done).

and even borrowed to neighbouring villages. The *Căluş* of Optaşi-Măgura obtained official recognition by being stamped as 'representative'. Everybody agreed that the presence in the commune of foreign researchers had positive results. Instead of disturbing the event, it enhanced its festive character, brought a numerous audience and helped keeping the tradition alive. However, questions and complaints as "When will our *Căluş* be shown on TV?", "How much are you paid for this work?", and "They took our treasure and didn't pay for it!" proved that *Căluş* is also conceived of as a cultural commodity having a material value. This new perspective is certainly related to the researchers' interest in *Căluş*.

In 1998, the *Căluş* team from Optaşi-Măgura was invited to participate in the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, to be held in Washington D.C., USA, in 1999.[16] Not belonging to the staff responsible for selection and organisation, I had the privileged position of the independent observer, adviser and confident of the group, recording their expectations and experiences.

The team learned that they had to perform 'as in the village', to be perceived as 'real' and 'credible', in order to create the illusion of reality in an unfamiliar surrounding. Forced to limit the number of participants to only eight *căluşari* out of many gifted dancers and two musicians, the criteria for selection were "strength, endurance, commitment to dance, mutual friendship relations and obedience to the leader" (Turuianu, 1998). In search for originality, the participants promised to wear handmade costumes, giving up the standardised stage costumes, and to provide an "*ugly mask after the old model*" and a red wooden sword for the *mutul*.

The political dimension of such a prestigious cultural project imposes its own interests and demands, which paradoxically contradict the theoretical foundation of the initial project. The surprising result was that the 'mute', the most important ritual and comical character of *Căluş*, which always had a tremendous success in the village, was left at home. The official explanation was that the 'mute' did not get the entrance visa to the United States. According to the leader of the group, Florea Turuianu, and the team members,[17] the 'grotesque' behaviour of the mute, his sexual imitative gestures, rough dialogue, and ugly appearance, might have carried the negative message of 'primitivism' to a foreign audience. In fact, self-censorship, which certainly pleased the officials, is the expression of a stereotype inherited from the communist period, which tries to hide the crude reality or to present it under an idealised form. It is true however, that the comical skits enacted by the 'mute' out of the traditional setting and lacking the audience with knowledge and interest, may be misinterpreted.[18]

For the participants at the Folklife Festival, *Căluş* was neither a ritual, nor a staged performance or a reconstruction. It was a combination of all these forms with a strong participatory character that made it an authentic and unique experience: "We danced on stage, but also on the ground with a cheering crowd around us, that enhanced our pleasure and commitment to dance"; "People in the audience danced the final Hora with us." As in the

16. The main idea of the Festival is the presentation of groups which are carrier of a living tradition, able to perform in non-conventional spaces, as close as possible to the local traditional social contexts, giving the performance a participatory character and a feeling of communion with the audience (Kurin 1997:111–137).

17. F. Turuianu and some *căluşari* as well, are members of the ultra nationalistic party Romania Mare aiming to the preservation of a 'beautiful, non polluted' traditional heritage.

18. For example, at a pre-view in Sibiu (town of Transylvania) a common, uninformed audience considered the performance of the 'mute' as being licentious and not adequate to represent Romania abroad at the Folklife Festival (Scarlat 1999).

village, the *vătaf* had the freedom to choose the set of dances he wanted for each dance performance on the Mall (Scarlat, 1999).

The impression of a real, spontaneous, non-staged performance was enhanced by the presence of Romanian-Americans who acted as insiders of the event. They asked the *călușari* to dedicate the dances to the well-being of a person, and, as the *vătaf* Marin Scarlat related, "everybody gave us children to 'be danced' for protection, health and luck. The audience paid by throwing money on the floor or into our hats."[19] Situated on the midway between play and ritual, *Căluş* was experienced by both dancers and audience in an ambivalent way. June 23rd the *călușari* raised the flag on the Mall, marking the beginning of the festival: "It was only a demonstration and the oath we took was not completed, because the real oath has been taken in the village, at *Rusalii*." However, the enactment of the ritual gestures and the oath taken on the flag endowed the *călușari* with a state of "responsibility, courage, and fear" (Scarlat, Pirciu, 1999).

Thus, the ambivalent attitude emerges at the point where the *călușari* apparently perform as in the village, with great conviction and argue that the traditional *Căluş* has been little changed. In fact, they enact a virtual reality, though with great conviction, as excellent actors. In order to enhance entertainment, the *călușari* at the end of the ritual performed the well-known *Periniţa* (little pillow), a wedding *hora* involving kissing, which was presented as "our oldest ritual round dance". Marin Scarlat, the leader, changed the two home-woven bands across his chest, with bands in the colours of the Romanian flag: "It was my idea. People in America should know where we are coming from. It was a kind of symbol" (Scarlat 1999).

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival set the frames for a complex manifestation that illustrates the way traditional heritage is both preserved and modified in the present society. For the individuals the participation in the Festival brought along raised status, envy for the economical gain the participants had. The unique experience exerted a strong psychological impact

Fig. 6. Marin Scarlat during *Căluş* in Optaşi-Măgura, Oltenia 1993. Photo: Owe Ronström.

19. When the ritual is performed at Pentecost in the villages, the *călușari* are still paid by the parents to leap over children and dance with children on their arms, actions that are believed to induce positive, beneficial effects. At the Folklife Festival most of the American parents did not want their children to lie down and be stepped over by *călușari*, but they were given to the *călușari* to dance with them on their arms.

increasing their self-esteem and the conviction of being not only good dancers, or musicians, but – using the mass media typified language – great 'artists', 'maestros', 'prestigious creators', or 'famous rhapsods' (referring to the violin player and singer Radu Titirica who accompanied them).

Globalisation and survival

The *Căluş* of Optaşi-Măgura demonstrates the ambivalence that emerges from the globalisation of a local ritual, and the way people themselves conceptualise and manipulate it. Among the questions raised by this case are:

- Should the *Căluş* ritual be considered an intangible cultural asset, protected, valued, and preserved as such?
- Should the dances of *Căluş* continue to be displayed on stage, for festivals and art competitions, or should other forms of presentation be experimented?
- In a process of globalization, will the *Căluş* still continue to be performed in the villages?
- Should its traditional form be reconstructed and revived, or should the living *Căluş* be accepted with all its structural and functional modifications imposed by the present socio-cultural demands?

Căluş is a polysemic phenomenon that exists in multiple forms, each being justified by one of the many cultural, socio-political and economical circumstances that characterise a community. It is possible that the *Căluş* will be performed also in the future, but then perhaps not primarily for the ritual functions, but rather for its role as national symbol, for the prestige and status it conveys to the community, and for enabling people to surpass the narrow boarders of a limited local culture.

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