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## **VISUAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH THE SPECIAL COSTUMES OF THE RITUAL YEAR IN A TRANSYLVANIAN VILLAGE AND ELEMENTS OF THESE COSTUMES IN THE RITUAL TEXTS**

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### ***Abstract***

*Visual communication through clothing is a very important aspect of the ritual year in the Transylvanian village of Gura Râului. The village is located in a multi-ethnic region that has preserved its traditions very well over time, in an attempt to preserve its identity. Following the same line of thought, the preservation of local identity, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the ASTRA Association from Sibiu proposed a so-called 'national costume'. This costume, made of black and white garments, was adopted by several villages in the Sibiu area. This explains why the traditional costume in black and white has become specific to this region, within which the simplest costume belongs to the village of Gura Râului. The most beautiful costumes are worn during the most important moments of the ritual year. This article highlights a series of aspects of visual communication through clothing: from wearing 'Romanian clothes' on Sundays and during holidays, to the differences between the costumes of an unmarried woman, of a married woman and an elderly woman, to the costumes worn, in the past, to the Sunday dance, during the Great Lent or fasting periods, to the rites of passage, and during the great Feasts of the călușari, the juni and the crai. The research methods used during fieldwork were: observation, participant observation, interviews and document/artifact analysis. Additional ritual texts, collected orally and containing descriptions of costumes, as well as photos from the author's and the villagers' personal archives, were used to illustrate and reinforce the idea of a simple costume, but one that communicates countless messages about those who wear it.*

**Keywords:** traditional costume; visual communication; ritual year; Gura Râului; Transylvania.

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### ***1. Introduction***

Transylvania, a multi-ethnic region in the heart of Romania, was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918, when it was reunited with the other two Romanian provinces (Wallachia and Moldavia), hence constituting the modern state of Romania. Although they represented the majority population of this region, Romanians did not benefit from the same rights as the other ethnic groups (Saxons<sup>2</sup>,

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<sup>2</sup> At the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, King Géza of Hungary started the colonization of Transylvania with German colonists, the Saxons (Rom. *sași*). Their main task was to defend the border of the Kingdom of Hungary in southern Transylvania. They are the founders of the fortified settlements in the region.

Hungarians and Landlers<sup>3</sup>). In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the newly created Romanian elite formed various associations, with the main purpose of promoting the rights of Romanians and preserving their identity within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Among these associations, the ASTRA<sup>4</sup> was particularly active. Its main objective was “the cultural unification of all Romanians within the Carpathian space” (Moise, 2004, 127). At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the ASTRA members proposed the creation of a so-called ‘national costume’ in black and white – as a form of resistance against Austro-Hungarian ethnic domination. This costume was adopted by several villages, particularly in the Sibiu area. Thus, the traditional costume in black and white became specific to this region. The costume was an important component in an attempt by the Romanian ethnic population to establish a national culture (at the same time, an attempt at national affirmation) in a multi-ethnic and multicultural space, such as Transylvania. The purpose of creating a Romanian national costume was to counteract the influence of the costumes of other ethnic groups. Underlining the historical context of this movement, Moise remarks: “This was the age of outlining the national and cultural identity in the whole Europe, the phenomenon of self-definition in relation with *the other* [...]. Fascinated by the beauty of the folk costume from Săliște<sup>5</sup>, the members of ASTRA [...] will proceed to an authentic *restructuring* of the folk costume following the mentalities and aesthetic refinement of the time” (Moise, 2004, 128).

Symbols are a powerful means of communication. This importance of visual communication is emphasized by Régis Debray at the very beginning of his book *Life and Death of the Image*: “A Chinese emperor one day asked the court painter to erase the waterfall he had painted in a fresco on the wall of his palace, because the sound of the water prevented him from sleeping. The anecdote fascinates us, those of us who believe in the silence of the frescoes. And it easily unsettles us.” (1992, 15)

The clothing one wears is a symbolic form of communication, which creates an identity for the individual. Adina Nanu, a Romanian specialist in visual communication through clothes, said that the human image is “the most significant visual art, especially in the years in which we live. [...] Every person creates an image every morning,” be it good or bad (Marinescu, 2014). Traditional clothes were signs of distinction, creating an identity brand, with its own language and traditions for a region and its people. As such, clothing communicates countless messages about those who wear them. “You should know that our character is like our traditional costume,” said Marina Loloi, from Gura Râului (interv. Loloi, 2005), in Sibiu County.

Sibiu County is considered to be the Southern Gate of Transylvania. As part of the county, Mărginimea Sibiului is a region where Romanian traditions have been carefully preserved over time. The simplest costume in the area (the costume with the least embroidery) belongs to the village of Gura Râului. Although a very simple costume, it communicates many messages about those who wear it. Father Ioan Peană (interv. 2005), a son of the village and priest in Gura Râului between 1990 and 2015, added that “the two colours, black and white, express simplicity, decency. White is purity, black is sobriety. Before, people didn’t laugh much. People were also shorter in their dialogues. They didn’t like to brag or judge others.”

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<sup>3</sup> For centuries, the lands of Gura Râului village neighbored the lands of Cristian, one of the three villages where the Austrians (called ‘Landlers’, Rom. *landleri*) were deported, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, because they refused to give up their Lutheran confession and return to the Catholic faith instead. Because of this proximity, there were mutual influences between the Romanians of Gura Râului and the ‘Saxons’ of Cristian. Although they are two distinctive ethnical groups, in Gura Râului, both the Saxons and the Landlers were referred to by the generic name of ‘Saxons’.

<sup>4</sup> *Asociațiunea Transilvană pentru literatură Română și Cultura Poporului Român*, The Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People.

<sup>5</sup> One of the Romanian villages from the region of Mărginimea Sibiului, not far away from the city of Sibiu, Săliște has grown into a small town today. Thanks to its beauty, the traditional costume from Săliște was taken as a reference for the creation of a national costume.

By studying a traditional costume, we become better accustomed to those who wear it. I have always been interested in learning more about the mysterious black and white costume from the region of Gura Râului, which had colourful embroidery elements in the past.

**The priests and the members of the parish committees of the two churches in Gura Râului, in the 1980s  
(my father is the priest on the right, wearing a beard)**



source: author's personal archive

The most beautiful traditional costumes are worn on important days and events during the person's life (wedding day, funerals, baptism etc.), on Sundays, holidays and other important moments of the ritual year. In Gura Râului, the 'Romanian clothes' (Rom. *haine românești*), as the traditional costume is called, are still worn for special celebrations, on Sundays and during holidays. They are considered as the most valuable garment in the village, both materially and spiritually. In contrast, the everyday clothes are called 'German clothes'.

The traditional costume is for the villagers one of their most precious belongings and has been passed down from generation to generation. It defined the person who had created it. Traditionally, all the embroidery on the women's blouse, the *ie*, was made by hand, putting a lot of soul into it, with the naturalness and simplicity of the woman, with her joys, her sorrows and her faith. That is why, traditionally, the *ie* was not made to be sold, but to be worn by the one who sewed it, or to be offered, on her wedding day, to her mother-in-law, or her godmother.

Sewing was an important skill for women. Thus, girls started learning to sew at an early age, usually in early adolescence. Sewing an *ie* by hand could take a long time and a traditional costume was expensive. There were young girls in the village who, even in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, could not afford to make an entire costume for themselves. Therefore, they decided to become servants to richer women in the village for one year. At the end of this period, they would receive an entire costume from their former mistress, as a gift. Nowadays, on the other hand, modern means are used to make the embroideries – embroidery machines, applied materials, etc. – which shortens the time required to make a costume and has made the traditional costume more affordable. Each *ie*, however, remains unique, a true piece of *haute couture*.

The ritual year in Gura Râului is marked by holidays, rites of passage (birth, marriage, death) and, in the past, by the Sunday dance held in the pavilion located in the centre of the village. On these occasions, elements of the intangible cultural heritage could be heard and recorded – more precisely, songs and other oral expressions, including specific language used as a vehicle of this type of heritage. This living but, at the same time, fragile heritage captures the most valuable aspects of the intangible cultural heritage, which will be passed on to the next generations. It is thus revealing that most of the elements of the local traditional costume are mentioned in the lyrics of songs and shouts from Gura Râului. It emphasizes the importance given by the villagers to their traditional costume.

## 2. *The research methods*

The methods employed in the conduct of this research are those specific to cultural anthropology: general observation, participant observation, interviews and document and artifact analysis. My general observations, related to the special costumes from Gura Râului, began as a young girl, as this is the village where I spent my childhood (my father served as an Orthodox priest for 22 years in this village, until 1990). In 2005, I returned to the field as a trained researcher. The first part of my fieldwork was done from the perspective of ethnomethodology (as I was pursuing a master's degree in the field at that time). Since then, I have conducted research in different domains within the same field.

Nearly 20 years after my original fieldwork in the region, I continue to make observations, to interview members of the community, and to use the instruments of visual anthropology (photos, videos). The fact that I am the daughter of a priest who served in the village (a person of trust), helped me to easily interact with people in this field of research and to complete many interviews in the village. For this paper, I have chosen to mention only a few interviews from the beginning of my field research, and to report on some more recent ones, which demonstrates a constancy in visual communication through the elements of the traditional costume from Gura Râului.

Concerning the documentation process, I would especially mention the challenge of finding as many texts from local folklore mentioning elements of local costume as possible. I have worked with published and unpublished materials related to the village, including elements of local folklore collected orally. I have also appealed to the memory of the people interviewed, and to my own memory, as a former member of the village community, who has inevitably inherited elements of intangible cultural heritage. Thus, I have decided that, for each piece description of the costume, with its specific elements of image communication, I would also present the text from the local folklore in which the respective piece is mentioned.

## 3. *Visual communication through the special costumes of the ritual year in Gura Râului. Elements of these costumes in the ritual texts*

In Gura Râului, there are different traditional costumes: feminine and masculine; for summer and for winter and which communicate social status. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was also an everyday costume and a 'Sunday costume' (worn on Sundays and during important holidays). Today, only the latter is still worn. During winter, the number of pieces of the traditional costume of Gura Râului increases and some of the basic pieces, are made of thicker materials.

Below, I present the main elements of the traditional costume in Gura Râului, following the order in which they are put on by the villagers. The elements of the feminine costume are: the *ie* (the feminine traditional blouse), the *poale* (white skirt), the *brâu* (belt), the *șurțe* (black rectangular cloth apron), the *pieptar* (vest), and the *păstură* (scarf). The men's costume is composed of: *izmene* (trousers; those worn in winter are called *nădragi* or *cioareci*), *cămeșă* (masculine shirt), *șerpar* (masculine traditional belt), *cheptar* (vest), and *pălărie* or *căciulă* (hat or fur hat). Putting on a traditional costume is a meaningful action for the inhabitants of the village, which often implies a true ritual: after they take their usual Saturday evening bath, some people make the sign of the cross or say a short prayer before getting dressed. They put on the elements of the costume carefully, in the order mentioned above, making us think of the ritual in which priests put on the priest vestments on Sunday morning or at any other time before they serve the Holy Liturgy. The villagers, as well, act as if they put on a holy garment.

### 3.1. *The Sunday or the holiday traditional costume*

#### 3.1.1 *The feminine costume*

##### *The differences between the costumes of unmarried and married women*

The most important element of the feminine traditional costume from Gura Râului is the *ie*. The way the blouse closes around the neck is telling for the social status of the woman wearing it. The closure



system of the unmarried woman's blouse is in the front, while the closure system of the married woman's blouse is on the left side. It is only the husband's privilege to see more of his wife's bear skin.

**Maria Hanzu from Gura Râului, in 1969, wearing the *ie* of an unmarried girl (left) and in 2008, wearing the *ie* of a married woman (right).**



source: author's personal archive

The crease in the front of the blouse is supported by the *ciupag*, a kind of hand-embroidered necklace. The *ie* of unmarried girls does not have a *ciupag*. "Only after you were married could you have a *ciupag*, the wife's necklace" (interv. Paraschiva Damian, 2005).

***Ciupag* (left) and *ie*, with *cheițe*, from Gura Râului (right)**



source: author's personal archive

The embroidery of the *ie* from Gura Râului today contains several black vertical lines, called *cheițe* (small keys), on the chest and on the sleeves. The *cheițe* were not used in the past; they were considered somewhat 'indecent', because they drew attention to the chest. However, in time, they were adopted. Today a woman's wealth is considered to be directly proportional to the number of small keys on her chest. Paraschiva Damian recalls: "Well then, at the beginning, there was no woman with *cheițe* on her chest. The blouses were simple... The ones who started to sew *cheițe* on their chest were more luxurious. And the simplest people did not have *cheițe*. My mother didn't even want to hear it. She said: *From my house, you don't leave with cheițe! After you get married, you do what you want!* On the sleeves, yes. It didn't matter how many *cheițe* you had, but not on the chest. I don't know why... But after I got married, in the first week, I sewed *cheițe* on the chest of my blouse" (interv. Damian, 2005). Another woman from Gura Râului told me: "In the past, women didn't have *cheițe*. There were some snooty women who had *cheițe* on their chests. As people were poor... Maybe three or five women in our village had *cheițe* on their chests. And my mother said: *Let's ask your godmother! What shall we do? Shall we sew cheițe on your chest?* And she answered: *Yes, let's sew some on my goddaughter's blouse! She deserves it!*" (interv. Conțiu, 2021). However, there were also women who remained without ornaments on their chests all their lives.

**Paraschiva Damian with *cheițe* on her chest when she went to Sibiu, with her husband, soon after they got married, in order to take a picture as bride and groom (left). Marina Ihora, Paraschiva Damian’s sister, who never wore embroidery on her chest (middle and right)**



source: private archives of Paraschiva Damian and Marina Ihora; author’s personal archive

Adina Nanu advanced the hypothesis that the black stripes were “inherited from the Gothic ornamentation of the German Renaissance costume (present on Albrecht Durer’s coat in the Self-Portrait from Prado Museum in Madrid) and were taken over by the women’s blouse in the Romanian villages around Sibiu” (Nanu, 2012, 27).

Over the years, the villages, also having a local identity and wanting to show it visibly in comparison with their neighbours, made additions to the basic costume, created by the ASTRA Association. Obviously, they also took into account European fashion. The means through which they became acquainted with this fashion was, as can be expected, the Saxon culture. It was always sensitive to what was happening in the west, in the area of origin of the Saxon culture (pers. communic. Sedler, 2008).

Nanu remarks that “the stripes disappeared from the Saxon costume after the Renaissance, especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries when, keeping up with fashion, the female image became romantic” (Nanu, 2012, 28-29). Why were these stripes preserved on the chest and on the wide sleeves of the Romanian women’s traditional blouse from the villages around Sibiu? It is not easy to answer this question. “Their diffusion probably corresponded to a period of hope for a better future [...], followed by their freezing into a distinctive sign of the community that fought fiercely to preserve its identity” (Nanu, 2012, 30). Adina Nanu explains why the costume reflects the evolution of a civilization and, implicitly, different artistic trends:

Like architecture, furniture, ceramics, textiles etc., which together make up the framework of human life, the costume depends on the material and spiritual needs of society, in its historical development. Through wearing, by suffering faster deterioration, the costume changes the fastest, mirrors the incessant evolution of civilization the most promptly (2007, 12).

The *ie*, is mentioned in the lyrics of local folklore (Nicoară, 1999, 78-79):

*Doamne, de dușmane multe  
Nu mai pot ieși din curte.  
Că de ies c-o ie neagră,  
Zice că-s muiere slabă.  
Și de ies cu una albă,  
Zice că mi-i lumea dragă.  
De-ar da Dumnezeu să fie  
La toți neagră tot ca mie.  
Că de-ar fi la toți așa  
Și-ar încerni hainelea.  
Și le-or cerni lumea-ntreagă,  
Nimănui nu i-ar fi dragă.*

In English translation:

God, because of my many enemies  
 I can't leave my yard anymore.  
 If I go out wearing a black **blouse**,  
 They say I am a weak woman.  
 And if I go out wearing a white one,  
 They say I love the world too much.  
 May God grant that  
 Everyone's blouse be black like mine.  
 If it was like that  
 They would dye their clothes.  
 And they would dye the whole world,  
 And no one would love it

Villagers interpret these lines as the words of a hardworking, beautiful young woman, who loves life, and is envied by other women in the village for her qualities. The black blouse is understood as a dirty blouse (interv. Cătoiu, 2023), and the white shirt as one that shows the desire to celebrate. The last lines are meant as a curse against all those who speak ill of her: if their clothes were dirty, they would no longer be able to enjoy life.

### *Poalele*

The white skirt (*poalele*) of the feminine traditional costume is very large, allowing women to move easily. Maria Conțiu said that the pleats of the skirt are ironed “at about 1 cm and even smaller, according to age. It depends on how young the owner is [the younger the woman wearing it, the smaller the pleats]. The older women had the pleats on their skirts two or three fingers wide and did not iron them. Before, I didn't iron them with pleats either, when I was young. Not even for my husband” (interv. Conțiu, 2021).

**Women from Gura Râului (left). *Poalele* (the white skirt, to the right)**



source: author's personal archive

### *The belt*

The only element of the feminine traditional costume from Gura Râului, which is not in black and white, is the belt (*brâu*), often tricolour, which represents the centre of interest of the costume, the place from where the compositional reading of Romanian women's clothes begins. It is always worn red down and blue up because each colour carries a meaning. The elders of the village say that red is the blood of the heroes of our nation, yellow is the sun or the wheat, and blue is the sky. The older women do not wear a tricolour belt, but a darker one – usually purple and black.

Nanu remarks that “The [traditional] costume also communicates national information, different nations wearing their traditional costume as if they were flying their flag, with the same symbolic value” (2001, 13). This is also true for the traditional costume in Gura Râului, which is an identity mark, a symbol of belonging to the Romanian people.

### The tricolour belt



source: author's personal archive

The local folklore highlights the main elements of the women's costume. In the following lyrics (Nicoară, 1999, 93), an imprisoned lad (possible a war prisoner) begs his sweetheart to sell off all her most precious belongings – different pieces of the traditional costume or the *ciupag* of her blouse – in order to bail him out and save him from his misery:

Vinde-ți măndro, **brâul** tău  
 Și mă scoate de la rău!  
 Vinde-ți, măndro, batista  
 Și-mi plătește temnița!  
 Vinde-ți colții de la **poale**  
 Și mă scoate din prinsoare!  
 Și **ciupagul** de la **ie**  
 Și mă scoate din robie...

In English translation:  
 Sweetheart, sell your **belt**  
 And get me out of harm's way!  
 Sweetheart, sell your handkerchief,  
 And bail me out of prison!  
 Sell the lace of your **skirt**  
 And get me out of captivity!  
 And the **necklace** from the **blouse**  
 And get me out of slavery...

### Șurțele

The *șurț* (from the German *Schürze*, meaning apron) is an element of Saxon or Austrian (from the Landlers) influence on the traditional costume from Gura Râului. The rectangular cloth apron worn in the back is called *crătință*, while the front apron is called *șurț*. The two pieces of the apron altogether are called *șurțe*. They are both worn over the white, pleated skirt.

Women from Gura Râului wearing the black rectangular cloth apron (left). *Șurț* (middle) and *crătință* (right)



source: author's personal archive



A local shout mentions these pieces of clothing (interv. Cătoi, 2023):

*Hai, mândro, să trecem culmea  
Că de-acum ne știe lumea,  
Cu crătință și cu ie,  
Așa cum îmi place mie.*

In English translation:  
Sweetheart, let's cross the mountain  
Coz from now the world knows about us  
With an **apron** and a **blouse**,  
Just the way I like it.

With this shout, a lad asks his sweetheart to leave the village with him. He asks her to leave, dressed in traditional costume, in which women from Gura Râului are considered to be the most beautiful.

*The costume worn during the Great Lent or other fasting periods and the costume worn by elderly women*

The traditional feminine costume worn during the fasting periods of the year (including the Great Lent) in Gura Râului is less elaborated than the costume worn during holidays; it has few ornaments and the black is predominant. An additional element is added to the feminine costume: a simple but wider apron, made out of black satin, slightly pleated, worn over the apron of the basic costume.

The costume worn by elderly women (usual widows), is similar to the one worn by women during the Great Lent or the fasting periods. In this case as well, black predominates and the embroidery is very simple. “As you get older, you make them simpler” commented one of my informants (interv. Damian, 2005).

#### **Elderly women from Gura Râului, on a Sunday, during the Great Lent**



*source: author's personal archive*

*The scarf with tassels*

In Gura Râului, women cover their hair with a black, cashmere scarf (called *păstura*), adorned with four tassels at each of its ends. When worn, the tassels are braided in a particular way. The braiding of silk tassels is very painstaking work and few women from the village know how to braid tassels; the pattern of the braid can be made according to the preferences of the woman who wears it. That is why the *păstura* (the scarf) is a very valuable piece of clothing, which is left as an inheritance in the family. Younger women prefer the long tassels (their length indicates that the woman is rich). Maria Conțiu, from Gura Râului, used to say: “If we grow old, we have less hair. And if the tassels are shorter, the scarf is lighter” (interv. Conțiu, 2021). That is why older women prefer wearing different scarves, having shorter tassels. They usually offer the scarves with longer tassels to their daughters. The way the scarf is placed on the head (without showing the hair and with the corners arranged in a certain way)

represents an element of intangible cultural heritage, as it is passed down from generation to generation. In winter, women usually wear a woollen scarf over the cashmere scarf.

**Shorter (left) and longer (right) tassels of the scarf**



source: private archive of Maria Conțiu; author's personal archive

*The straw hat*

In the summer, when women are outside, in the sun, they wear a straw hat, decorated with a black velvet ribbon, over a fine cashmere scarf. The hat is never worn inside of the church, where it is held by the ribbon that is tied at the nape of the neck when it is worn. Before in time, these straw hats were bought from the Saxons. The Saxon women and the Landler women used to wear the same kind of hat.

**The straw hat (Figure 18). Woman from Gura Râului wearing the straw hat (Figure 19)**



source: author's personal archive

*Decency*

The vest (*pieptarul*) is always worn when women go to church, no matter how hot it is, because it is considered *decent* that way. It is “decent” to always wear black tights with the costume, which do not allow the skin to be seen, in the same way, the scarf worn on the head should not allow the hair to be seen. The same *ie* (feminine blouse) is worn both in summer and winter, and its sleeves are always long.

**Women from Gura Râului in the church (Figure 20)**



source: author's personal archive

### 3.1.2. *The masculine costume*

#### *The men's shirt*

The villagers say that “A well-groomed woman is known by her man’s clothes”. An important element of the men’s shirt is the *crețe* (the pleats at the back). It is the wife’s duty to arrange this part of her husband’s shirt before he leaves the home. If it is not arranged, it means that the spouses may have argued and are not talking to each other.

*Crețele*



source: author's personal archive

These lyrics, from the local folklore (Nicoară, 1999, 98), are the words of a boastful, know-it-all young woman, trying to stand out:

*Știu lucru' cum să-l pornesc,  
Pe badea cum să-l iubesc.  
Știu să țes și știu să cos,  
Să-mbrac pe badiu frumos.*

*Și să-i fac cămeșă creață,  
Badiu' să mă strângă-n brață,  
Că-s din Gura Râului,  
Sub poalele muntelui.*

In English translation:

I know how to start the work,  
How to love my dear lad.  
I know how to weave and how to sew,  
To dress my dear lad nicely.

And to make him a pleated **shirt**,  
So that my lad holds me in his arms,  
Because I'm from Gura Râului,  
Under the foot of the mountain.

Another local shout (interv. Cătoiu, 2023) also mentions the male shirt:

*Măi bădiț cămașă creață  
Dă-i drumu și ia-mă-n brață!  
Măi bădiț cămașă scurtă  
Dă-i drumu' și mă sărută!*

In English translation:

Hey, you, my dear lad, pleated **shirt**,  
Come and take me in your arms!  
Hey, you, my dear lad, short **shirt**,

Go ahead and kiss me!

This shout is that of a young woman who encourages the lad she likes to be more daring. In the village world, physical closeness considered proper took place only during dancing. At the Sunday dance, young people became better acquainted with each other in view of marriage.

### *Șerparul*

The only coloured element of the male costume is the belt, worn over the white shirt. The masculine traditional leather belt also has a practical role. At the time when the traditional costume was worn every day and people worked in the forest (one of the main occupations of the villagers was working in the forest/cutting wood), the leather belt protected the men from possible hernias. In addition, the belt also has a pocket (called *bughilarăș*), used as a purse.

**Șerparul (left). Men from Gura Râului wearing the traditional male belt (right)**



source: author's personal archive

The male belt too is mentioned by the local folklore. The following lyrics (Nicoară, 1999, 87) speak of the fact that men often left their village, charged with various local goods (such as wooden boards), in order to sell them around the country. These seem to be the words of a young wife, who asks her husband to take her with him so she too could see the world:

*Tu te duci, bădiță-n lume,  
Du-mă și pe mini cu tine!  
De ți-a cădea cu rușine,  
Fă-mă **brâu** pe lângă tine.  
De ți-a părea **brâul** greu,  
Fă-mă lumină de său  
Și mă bagă-n sânul tău.  
Și unde vei însera  
Vei aprinde lumina.*

English translation:

My dear lad, you're going out into the world,  
Take me with you!  
If you feel ashamed,  
Make a **belt** of me and put me around your waist.  
If the **belt** seems heavy,  
Make of me a tallow candle  
And put me at your chest.  
And wherever you spend the night,  
You will light the candle.



### 3.2. *The costumes worn, in the past, at the Sunday dance*

For a young woman of marriageable age, entering the dance in the village pavilion (on Sundays and on feast days – when the dance used to take place) had a function of social protocol. This was a good opportunity for her to entry into the social life, to find her future husband, or to dance with the young man she loved. The dance in the pavilion stopped, in the 1980s, during the peak of the communist period, when most young people went to work in the city, and the influence of modern city life became increasingly visible..

**The dance pavilion (left). Villagers dancing (right)**



source: postcard; author's personal archive

#### *Ia feterească*

The blouse worn by the young women at the Sunday dance was not the one worn at church (the good *ie*, because the blouse risked tearing or getting dirty). It was a different blouse called *ie feterească*, with a coloured embroidery on the sleeves – instead of the black *altița* (the highest horizontal embroidery on the sleeves), there is a so-called ‘flower’ (embroidery), generally in dark blue and red (this blouse did not have *ciupag* – the woman was not married yet – nor any *cheițe*). It was at that level of the sleeves, that a young man put his hand during the couple’s dance. Observing the embroidery, he could realise how hard working, well-groomed and attentive to details the girl was.

#### *Rochiuța*

The young men’s mothers were looking for a daughter-in-law with the same qualities. They would sit ‘in the audience’ – outside the pavilion, where there were benches –, observing another element of the feminine traditional costume, very much visible during the dance – the underskirt called *rochiuță*. To prevent the girls from showing their legs during pirouettes, this piece of clothing was cut tight at the bottom. No matter how much the skirt rose, the dress staid around the body. The *Rochiuță* is also a very beautiful element of the young woman’s costume (the lace on the bottom of the under skirt, called *colțișori*, was very much analysed by the ‘audience’).

**Ie feterească (left). Rochiuță (right)**



source: private archives of Maria George and Maria Cătoiu

### 3.3. The rites of passage

#### Marriage

In the past, until the 1970s, the bride and groom wore the traditional costume, to which they added a few elements. The groom wore a colourful scarf (*cârpă roșie*), as a tie, and the bride wore a veil (*pahiol*) and a crown over the scarf (*păstură*). A very interesting clothing element of the bride was a white sarafan, worn over the entire traditional costume, as a wedding dress, an element that might have had a Saxon influence.

**Maria and Ilie Coțiu, the 50s, as bride and groom (left)  
and wearing the basic traditional costume (right)**



source: private archive of Maria Coțiu

#### *Cheptarul îmfundat* and *cheptarul despicat*

The vest is today made out of cloth, but, in the past, it was made out of leather, and crafted in Săliște. If worn by men; and open on one side, the vest was called *cheptar îmfundat*. If opened in front and worn by women, it was called *cheptar despicat*. On the pocket, one could read the year when it was made and the initials of the person for whom it was made. The vest had coloured embroidery. Normally, young people were commissioning such a vest for their wedding.

***Cheptarul îmfundat* (left) and *cheptarul despicat* (right)**



source: author's personal archive

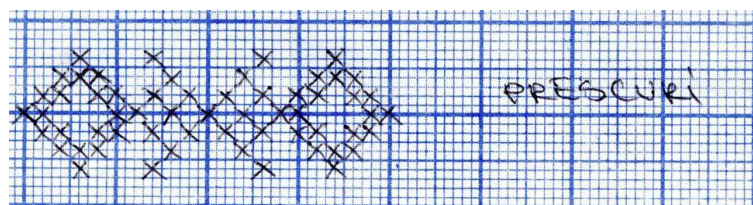
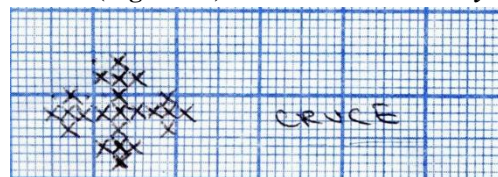
On the first Sunday after the wedding, the newly-wed would go to church wearing her new traditional costume (of a married woman), implicitly the blouse with *ciupag*, and with whom he met, he/she would say: "Cîstit să-ți hie portu'!" (May your **costume** be respected!).

## Death

The basic element of embroidery of the traditional costume from Gura Râului is a small cross, faith being the basis of all things for the people from this village. Even now, there are villagers who are buried wearing their traditional costume. They believe that they will be protected (as embroidery patterns on women’s blouses, we can see *the cross, the holy bread* etc.) by the costume and thanks to it they will recognize, in heaven, other villagers from Gura Râului, wearing the same costume. The Romanian ethnologist Sorin Apan (2006) emphasizes the apotropaic function of the traditional costume:

On holidays, in the calendar squares of cyclic time: the square of the month (Sundays), the square of the year (equinox and solstice holidays), on Sundays and holidays, he [the peasant] went out with his costume. Not for beauty, but because holidays and squares are moments of difficulty, when the heavens open, and then the spirits circulate. And man had to defend himself. This is the reason why the peasants are buried wearing their costume, not because of beauty, because worms cannot appreciate the beauty of a costume, but because this costume has an apotropaic [protection] function.

**The motive of *the cross* (Figure 32). The motive of *the holy bread* (Figure 33)**



source: author’s personal archive

### 3.4. The costumes worn by the *juni*, the *călușeri* and the *crai*

#### *Junii*

An important Christmas tradition in Gura Râului is *Ceata junilor* (the young men’s group). Every year, on the 6th of December, on Saint Nicholas Day, a group of 16-18 young men gather together (usually, an even number). They choose a leader (called *jude* or *primar*) amongst them, who deals with the training of those who are in the group for the first time. The group must find a host in the village, with whom they could stay for the eight days between Christmas and the New Year. They also have to find someone to cook for them during this period. Furthermore, they look for the musicians (a violinist, an accordionist and even a saxophonist). The dances they learn are similar to those from the Transylvanian *călușer*: Căluțul, Banu Mărăcine, Călușarii, Fecioreasca and Romana (Arsenie, 2000, 301).

In the past, the young men’s mothers were the ones who borrowed or sewed *peana de june* (‘the young man’s feather’, a large ornament attached to the hat), the leg ornaments, and the decorated stick, for the costume of *june*. Most of the *juni* strive to make their own costume today. On the Christmas Day, *junii* attend the church service, dressed in traditional costumes and with the feather hats (which, in the church, they hold in their hands), but “unsewn”, meaning without the ornaments on the legs, with rattles, which make noise. On the second day of Christmas, after the Divine Liturgy, *junii* dance for the first time, in the centre of the village. Afterwards, they visit the priest, the mayor and other villagers who call them or are willing to receive them. Here they dance and make Christmas wishes. This is also a way for the young men to be seen by young women from the homes they are visiting, in the perspective of future marriages. They also dance in the centre of the village on the third day of Christmas and on New Year’s Day, when they give their last performance).



*Peana de june* is decorated with peacock feathers, beads, sequins and small pieces of mirror. The name of the owner is written on the back of the ornament.

*A june, a călușer, and an unmarried young woman (Figure 34)*



source: author's personal archive

*June feather seen from the front (left). June feather seen from behind (middle). Călușer feather (right)*



source: author's personal archive

The feather ornament is mentioned in a local shout (Nicoară, 1999, 64):

- *Cucule, ce pene porți  
De pe tin te iubesc toți?  
Și eu port **peană** ca tine  
Și nu mă iubește nime.*

English translation:

- Hey Cuckoo, what feathers do you wear,  
So that everybody loves you?  
I wear a **feather**, just like you  
And no one loves me, too.

In the village, the cuckoo is perceived as a bird that announces the coming of spring, through its song. That is why it is so beloved by the villagers. In the local folklore, the lads often have dialogues with the elements of nature (the forest, etc.) or with birds, telling them their feelings or their pains, while being away in the mountains, at work.

The same ornament is also mentioned by a local song (interv. Cătoi, 2023):

- *Bade, peană, trandafir,  
Lasă-mă să rup un fir.  
- Rupe mândro cât ei vrea  
Trandafiri din **peana mea**.*



English translation:

- My dear lad, feather, rose,  
Let me take a flower.  
- My dear girl, take as many roses as you want  
From my **feather**.

In the dialogue between the two young people, the ornament gives them the opportunity to interact to get closer to one another.

The lyrics of the local song called *De-aş mai fi o dată june* (If I Were a Lad Once More) also make reference to the feather (Hanzu, 2018, 23-24):

*De-aş mai fi o dată june,  
Aş şti **peana** cum se pune,  
Aş trânti-o pe-o ureche,  
M-aş uita de sus la fete.  
Şi când ar fi să mă-nsor,  
Nu-mi trebuie peţător.*

English translation:

If I were a lad once more,  
I would know how to wear the **feather**,  
I would wear it lower on one ear,  
And I would look down to the girls.  
And when I would have to get married,  
I won't need a matchmaker.

The song is the dirge of a married man who used to be a member of the young men's group, *ceata* junilor, in the past. He imagines how he would do things differently if he could turn back time.

### *Căluşerii*

The costume and the ornaments of the *căluşeri* from Gura Râului are less spectacular, compared to other regions. Arsenie (2000, 305) explains how the *căluşeri* came to exist in Gura Râului:

The first group of *căluşeri* in Gura Râului was founded by the teacher Nicolae Hanzu [at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century] and other teachers [...]. It is interesting that, unlike today, when the group of *căluşeri* is made up of school children, many years ago, it included young men, some even having had their military service, who, apart from participating in organized shows, also carolled through the village during the Easter holidays, similarly to *junii* at Christmas. [...] The custom *ceata de căluşeri* is still maintained today, thanks to teachers from the village school.

There are differences between the Danube Plain *căluş* and the Transylvanian *căluşer*. The first one "is a *sacred ritual* [performed for the benefit of the community] performed once a year at Pentecost [...], by an odd number of men, who, via their dancing and magical actions, carry out such functions as healing, protection and assuring fertility." (Giurchescu, 1992, 32-33) The second, is "made up of a suite of stick dances, performed by an even number of young men, in ceremonial context between Christmas and New Year, or theatrical contexts on special occasions during the year. It has aesthetic and entertainment functions." (Giurchescu, 1992, 33)

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "the ritual form of *căluş* was spread over a broad area" (Giurchescu, 1992, 33), including in Transylvania. "Historical and socio-cultural circumstances in Transylvania" (Giurchescu, 1992, 36) enhanced the deritualization of the *căluşer*. "The expressive components, such as dance, music, and costume became autonomous, were taken over by the *ceata de feciori* (the young men's band) and integrated in the structure of ceremonials carried out by the band between Christmas and New Year" (Giurchescu, 1992, 36). Therefore, it moved from summer to winter.

As a general trend, in East and South-eastern Europe, *the national elites, seeking for symbols of national identity, turned to the rural dance tradition*. Thus, in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Romania chose *călușerul* as a symbol of their national identity. For the Transylvanian intellectuals the demonstration of the Romanians' Latin origin was an indisputable argument in support of their struggle for unification and independence. (Giurchescu, 1992, 37)

### *Craii*

***Craii* feather (Figure 38) Paper hat for the Magi (Figure 39)**



source: private archive of Ileana Damian; author's personal archive

The 11-to-13-year-old children form groups of four members (three Magi and king Herod; there is always more than one group in the village) and prepare to play this sketch of *craii*, on Christmas Day, in the church, then in the houses of the villagers. The children's mothers make their costumes or borrow elements of these costumes from the children who, in the previous year, were *crai* – fur hat, colored paper hat (there are three similar ones for the Magi, and, for Herod, a slightly different one; the paper hats are worn over the fur hats), the traditional costume, a cape decorated with ribbons and embroidered handkerchiefs (usually, handkerchiefs with the bride and the groom's initials, given by the bride to the groom's friends on the wedding day as a way of saying goodbye to them), wooden sword with scabbard.

### **4. Conclusions**

Carrying out this study, I realized that a thorough analysis of the main elements of traditional costume contribute to the correct understanding of the messages that their wearers want to convey. Thus, by understanding the messages transmitted by the people of Gura Râului through the special costumes they wear throughout the ritual year, we become better acquainted with them.

In ethnomethodology, there is the principle of reflexivity – the ability of people to interpret the signs they observed in order to construct meanings. During interviews, I often asked the question “Why?” and the villagers quickly constructed a meaning to explain to me, for example, what kind of message they wanted to transmit through a particular piece of garment etc. For each specific behaviour, they were able to produce a discourse in order to justify it.

The Sunday or the holiday traditional costume is one of the most valuable costumes they have, reflecting their sober character, simplicity, but also their elegance, communicated through materials, colours, and the dominant vertical line in the whole costume. The *ie* is considered by the villagers to be the most complex piece of traditional costume from Gura Râului, transmitting messages related to the social status of the woman (married or unmarried), her material situation and how hard-working and well-groomed she is (depending on the embroidery of the *ie*). The white elements of the costume, clean and well ironed, show the attention and value that the villagers give to the costume – the most precious garment, in with which they appear, on Sundays and on holidays, before the divinity. Interestingly, during the fasts over the year, black dominates in the costume; otherwise, white – the colour of the Resurrection – dominates. The costume follows the course of the ritual year by adapting the colours to the time of year, but it also takes into account the age of the woman – the closer women get to death, the more they make black the dominant in their clothes. In addition to the utilitarian function of the

costume (to protect the body from cold, heat etc.), the social function, but also the aesthetic one, the communication function also refers us to the apotropaic, the defence function of the costume. In the past, the traditional costume was worn for the most important moments in a person's life – the wedding and the funeral. There are still elderly people who are buried in the traditional costume (just this month a woman from the village was buried in this way). “In the past, all the dead were buried in their traditional costume” (interv. Conțiu, 2021).

The special costumes of the *călușeri*, *juni* and *crai*, which are worn by children and young people, are full of colour and are still fascinating for the younger generations – and their attraction towards displaying these costumes explains the preservation of these traditions in the village.

The texts from local folklore make the importance given to these costume elements by previous generations also reach the young descendants. Thus, by safeguarding the elements of intangible cultural heritage, related to the special costumes from Gura Râului, the continuity of wearing these costumes is also ensured. All the elements of intangible cultural heritage – the names of the pieces, their meanings, the way in which they are made, the materials, the colours, the shapes, the knowledge related to the functions of the costume, the meanings of the visual communication through the coat, the connection of the costume with the ritual year, local folklore – that are transmitted from generation to generation, in an unaltered way, can encourage younger generations to become keepers, bearers, promoters and transmitters of cultural heritage. Finally, a tacit impulse towards simplicity and normalcy appears in this increasingly complicated world in which we live.

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