

The Traditional Romanian Folk Dance in Șieuț, Bistrița-Năsăud County, as Part of the Winter Traditions and Customs. Carol Singers and the “Beer”¹

Patricia-Smaranda MUREȘAN

Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of History and Philosophy

E-mail: muresan_smaranda@yahoo.com

Abstract: The present study focuses on the custom of “Beer”, a remarkable event that shaped the evolution of the communities that were part of the Second Romanian Border Regiment at Năsăud, a military unit of the Austrian army in Transylvania between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It focuses specifically on the Șieuț village and the detailed manner in which this social event was organized by the village’s young men between Christmas and the New Year, when young villagers could attend the “Beer”, an important occasion for social interaction. This research is based on a series of interviews with active community members from then and now and aims to offer an overview of the custom’s meaning and structure. According to tradition, during the Nativity Fast, young men would follow the call of the “bucin” and meet at the house of a host to plan the event. They were assigned the roles of “vătafi” and “colceri” who hired musicians for the event, while the “căprari” were responsible for collecting the traditional pastry received by carol singers. On Christmas Eve, they grouped and went caroling throughout the village. After the Christmas church service, the traditional folk dance (“Beer”) started at the host’s house. The traditional festive garments, the young men going caroling or the traditional men’s folk dance from Șieuț, included in the UNESCO World Heritage, represent elements of this custom that have survived the passage of time, integrating the traditional into modern life.

Keywords: Șieuț, “Beer”, Romanian folk dance, tradition, carol

¹ At Șieuț, the “Beer” is the gathering of young bachelors at Christmas and New Year’s Eve, being “the main event in the village, long awaited by the entire community” (the event included traditional Romanian folk dance).

Rezumat: Prezentul studiu se concentrează pe obiceiul „Berii”, un eveniment remarcabil care a modelat evoluția comunităților care au făcut parte din Regimentul II de Frontieră Română de la Năsăud, o unitate militară a armatei austriece din Transilvania între secolele al XVIII-lea și al XIX-lea. Se concentrează în mod specific asupra satului Șieuț și asupra modului detaliat în care acest eveniment social a fost organizat de tinerii satului între Crăciun și Anul Nou, când tinerii săteni puteau participa la „Berea”, o ocazie importantă de interacțiune socială. Această cercetare se bazează pe o serie de interviuri cu membri activi ai comunității de atunci și de acum și își propune să ofere o imagine de ansamblu asupra semnificației și structurii personalizate. Conform tradiției, în timpul Postului Nașterii Domnului, tinerii urmau chemarea „bucinului” și se întâlneau la casa unei gazde pentru a planifica evenimentul. Li s-au atribuit rolurile de „vătafi” și „colceri” care au angajat muzicieni pentru eveniment, în timp ce „căprari” erau responsabili de colectarea patiseriei tradiționale primite de cântăreții de colinde. În ajunul Crăciunului, s-au grupat și au colindat în tot satul. După slujba bisericii de Crăciun, dansul popular tradițional („Bere”) a început la casa gazdei. Îmbrăcămintea tradițională festivă, tinerii care colindă sau dansul popular tradițional masculin din Șieuț, inclus în Patrimoniul Mondial UNESCO, reprezintă elemente ale acestui obicei care au supraviețuit trecerii timpului, integrând tradiționalul în viața modernă.

Cuvinte cheie: Șieuț, „Bere”, dans popular românesc, tradiție, colindă

Traditional Romanian folk dance has always played an essential role in the lives of Romanian villagers. Perceived as an important opportunity to meet and socialize, especially by young people, it “represented for many centuries almost the sole means of entertainment of the Romanian peasant”.² Perhaps it was not the sole opportunity of entertainment, but surely one of the most important and sizeable events organized in the village, mostly by the village’s youngsters.

Moreover, folk dance was a major opportunity for youngsters to get to know each other more closely, to befriend each other and to create a basis for new relationships and even future families because “the folk dance offered

² Ovidiu Bîrlea, *Eseu despre dansul popular românesc* [Essay on Romanian folk dance] (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1982), p. 18.

two young people the best circumstances for flirting, physical intimacy, whispers, hand holding or embraces.”³

With time, the folk dance became a fundamental feature in a regular person's life, accompanying them in their most crucial moments - from births, weddings, parties or even to funerals. Furthermore, it was also present during events like harvesting, moving the sheep to their grazing grounds up in the mountains or back, during various local customs like small social gatherings or other community specific celebrations. At Șieui, the folk dance lives on to this day, staying at the heart of this type of traditional celebrations.

Șieui village is situated at the foot of the Călimani Mountains, approximately midway between the cities of Bistrița and Reghin, being a village that belongs to a particularly attractive ethno-folkloric area where not only traditional garments, speech idioms, traditions and customs are preserved, but also the main traditional activity of the villagers who breed sheep and cattle and take them deep into the mountains during the summer grazing season.⁴

Ethnographically, the area is quite compact and preserves elements of ancient traditional culture which interact with new elements of material culture. “Șieui village is first referenced in documents from the beginning of the fourteenth century (1319)”.⁵ In 1761, the military border patrol was set up and several villages became garrisons, included Șieui. Consequently, the village gained a series of benefits, - “some mountain peaks being nominated as exclusive grazing grounds for Șieui village.”⁶

As it is well known, “the unitary and insular geography, but also the homogeneity of the population were essential elements that determined the Habsburg authorities, in the second half of the eighteenth century, to militarize this area. The creation of the Năsăud Regiment had, over time, an important economic, social, administrative, military, religious and cultural impact on the 44 villages. [...] From a collective consciousness perspective, the existence of the second Romanian Border Regiment (1762-1851) was perceived as a period of growth and development, one that determined crucial changes and mutations in the way Năsăud rangers thought and acted due to the

³ Claudia Septimia Sabău, “Și ne-au făcut din grănițeri, țărani ... ” *Mentalități colective în satele năsăudene foste grănicerești în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea* [“And they turned us into peasants from Border Guards... ” *Collective mentalities in the former border villages from Năsăud region in the second half of the nineteenth Century*] (Cluj-Napoca: MEGA, 2015), p. 162.

⁴ Vasile V. Filip, *Eseuri ± etnologice* [Ethnological ± Essays] (Cluj-Napoca: EIKON Arcade, 2008), p. 102.

⁵ Pompei Cocean, Cristian Nicolae Boțan, Oana-Ramona Ilovan, *Județul Bistrița-Năsăud* [Bistrița-Năsăud county] (Bucharest: Romanian Academy, 2011), p. 235.

⁶ Albin Marcu, *Șieui* [Șieui] (Bucharest: Crater, 1997), p. 28.

benefits that came along with the status of free men, the improved financial circumstances, the more advanced cultural level and the distinctive administrative organization.”⁷

Even if in 1851 the Border Regiment was closed down, and the village was demilitarized, it continued to benefit from annual subsidies resulted from the administration of the border mountain area until after the Second World War,⁸ which led to a better economic and cultural development of the village compared to the other non-militarized villages in the area.

Șieut, the village at the foot of the Călimani Mountains, takes pride in its military status, enjoying the advantages that come with it, and takes pride in its traditions, folk garments and the specific Romanian folk dances that accompanied villagers during all the important moments in their lives and that of the community.

Thus, the traditional Romanian folk dance was part of all traditional customs throughout the year, even if we speak about specific winter, spring, summer or autumn traditions.

Furthermore, the folk dance was frequently organized in the village, following a well-established practice and represented a permanent feature of the community’s social and cultural life. As Albin Marcu describes in his book, – “few villages in Transylvania, and even elsewhere in Romania, organized the usual Sunday and holiday folk dances as Șieut did. The afternoon traditional folk dance, organized on holidays, in the centre of the village, next to the church wall, was part of the Șieut tradition as early as the nineteenth century.”⁹

Petre Dumbrăvan from Șieut (born in 1957), popular bard and famous dancer, who made his debut at the age of 5, dancing at a funeral on the dead man’s table, describes how the traditional folk dance was organized at Șieut:

“Here, the village folk dance was held on every Sunday and holiday, except fasting times, of course. Gypsies, summer players would come; they just needed to know that it was on that date, on Sunday, and they would come and play. And the girls and boys in the village would take turns to give them food; everybody knew this Sunday was your turn, the next one was somebody else’s. And the dance would begin at two or three in the afternoon and lasted until the evening, when the cattle herds came home from grazing.”¹⁰

His wife, Ioana Dumbrăvan (born Pantea, in 1958), also confirms the joy of the dance:

⁷ Claudia Septimia Sabău, “Și ne-au făcut din grănițeri, țărani...”, pp. 35-36.

⁸ Albin Marcu, *Șieut*, p. 29.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹⁰ Interview with Petre Dumbrăvan, Șieut, born on 17th April 1957, interview conducted in March 2017.

"The dancing happened here, in front of the church. God, it was wonderful! They danced only "De-a lungu"¹¹ and "De-a Învârtita"¹². Some would dance "Bărbunc"¹³ and those types of dance, if they would stay late. But not early in the day. We were very young when we started dancing, can't remember how old we were. There were no rules here saying you have to be of a certain age so that you can dance. If children danced at school, everybody could dance."¹⁴

Young women and men, wives and husbands, mothers of young women, children, old women and men, they would all take part in the village folk dance, this being "the most awaited event in Șieuț on every Sunday and holiday".¹⁵ Thus, the entire community would participate in the village folk dance.

As it is well known, all across the country, – "folk dances could not be rooted out, only prohibited during fasting times [...], and after long fasting, the thirst for dancing became almost pathological."¹⁶ At Șieuț, "even if the village priest would put a stop to the folk dance during fasting times, he would also encourage young men every year to hire musicians for the dance."¹⁷

Another description of how the traditional Romanian folk dance was organized in Șieuț is offered by elementary school teacher Ignat Pantea Senior (born in 1949), former choreography instructor of the folk dance ensemble "Ciobănașul" from Șieuț, a position he has held for almost 40 years:

"On holidays there was always dancing! The fiddler was hired for the summer. Every Sunday, if there was no fasting. Everybody knew it began after church, if the weather was nice. At that time the dance wasn't held in the village Cultural Hall, they didn't really let you use it. But it also wasn't big enough for the dance. The dance was held outside, behind the church. And we were children, and the young men would send us to water the ground. There was so much dust! And who wanted to watch the folk

¹¹ *De-a lungu* is a word describing a traditional Romanian dance of pairs that are slowly moving in a circular direction, whilst the partners are holding hands. It is usually played in the beginning of the dance.

¹² *De-a învârtita / Învârtita* is a Romanian word for a type of traditional folkloric dances from Transilvania and Maramureș. It is usually danced as a group of pairs randomly covering the dancing surface, whilst the partners are facing each other and holding the hands on each other's shoulders/waist.

¹³ *Bărbunc* is a word for a Romanian traditional male (soldiers) dancing that is commonly spread in Transilvania. It was born as part of the army recruitment process into the Austro-Hungarian army during the reign of Empress Maria Tereza (second half of the eighteenth century). Nowadays it is a usual dance from the villages bordering the river Someș; it is distinguished through its energetic and high amplitude movements that impose an army character of the dance.

¹⁴ Interview with Ioana Dumbrăvan, Șieuț, born in 1958, interview conducted in March 2017.

¹⁵ Albin Marcu, *Șieuț*, p. 84.

¹⁶ Ovidiu Bîrlea, *Eseu despre dansul popular românesc*, p. 18.

¹⁷ Albin Marcu, *Șieuț*, p. 81.

dance, like my father who loved dances, would build a bench. And the women would come and stand in a circle, there were a lot of people! They would bring chairs or benches from home. Old people came to watch the dance, they loved it! They admired the youngsters, watched who people talked to. They enjoyed the atmosphere. And children learned the dances by watching the older one's dancing. Nobody taught them! My brother sometimes went to rehearsals at the school when Mr. Vasile Gotea was there and would come home in the evening; I remember as a child, father would whistle and my brother would dance. And I heard it all from my bed, and in the morning I knew the dance move too!"¹⁸

Hence, we see that at Șieuț, the folk dance represented a particularly important event for the entire community, as the villagers would spend their spare time together on Sundays and holidays, taking part in the village's folk dance, which was the ideal meeting place for social interaction. As illustrated in the description above, every person had a well-defined role and place in the space of the folk dance, known and respected by the members of the community.

Partenie Olar from Șieuț (born in 1963), dancer and *vătaf*¹⁹ (dance overseer) for the "Beer" dance points out:

"Our parents encouraged us to go to rehearsals at school and learn the dances. They used to say that if others were going, we should also! Everybody would go!"²⁰

At Șieuț, the folk dance was a central element of the winter traditions and customs, alongside carols. Organizing the "Beer" dance offered youngsters more opportunities to dance, namely on eight days and seven nights in the interval between Christmas and the New Year.

As recounted by our respondents, there was a laborious procedure in place for organizing the folk dance, perhaps quite difficult to understand and decipher for a person unfamiliar with rural customs in general, and Șieuț ones in particular. A person who is not initiated in the traditions and customs of the Romanian village might not fully comprehend the significance of these, but the details related to how the "Beer" was organized and how the event unfolded at Șieuț can be found in the following pages.

Carol Singers and Organizing the "Beer" at Șieuț

At Șieuț, there is no direct connection between the folk dance's name "Bere"²¹ (engl. "Beer"), the fact that it is organized by the youngsters in the village, and the alcoholic beverage. There is no knowledge or record of

¹⁸ Interview with Ignat Pantea Senior, Șieuț, born 21st October 1949, interview conducted in March 2017.

¹⁹ *Vătaf* / pl. *vătafi* is the head of the young bachelors and the main organizing of the „Beer”; he was in charge of hiring the „ceterași” (instrumental singers, mainly violin) and their payment, as well as deciding up on the location of the „Beer” (the host's house).

²⁰ Interview with Partenie Olar, born on 20th July 1963, interview conducted in February 2018.

²¹ *Bere* is the Romanian word for beer, the alcoholic beverage.

villagers predominantly consuming beer during those celebrations, wine and boiled plum brandy (called *jinars* in Romanian) being, in fact, the popular choices on those occasions. The respondents, who shared their memories of the folk dance, told us that they have always known the custom under the name of “Beer”, and that the name was passed on from one generation to another, not specifically mentioned in written records:

“This is the name we know for the dance, in our village. This is what it was called, at “Beer”, this was the name of the folk dance. It wasn’t called like that because people went to drink beer.”²²

Nevertheless, we consider that it is relevant for the present study to offer some details regarding the origin and the name of such cultural acts that used to be (and, in some places still are) present in the villages of Bistrița-Năsăud county.

“During the militarization of the Năsăud region (1762-1851), the consumption of alcoholic beverages, except beer, was prohibited across all 44 garrison villages. Elders recount that beer was produced at the beer factory in Tradam (at the border entry), near Năsăud. The factory was not in Năsăud, because the laws of the “Black Soldiers”, as border patrol soldiers were called, did not allow such constructions on the territory of the border villages.”²³ Tradam was not part of the militarized area and was inhabited solely by Jews, being a “purely Jewish village”. The villagers would “sell alcoholic beverages, so Tradam did not have a positive effect on the people of Năsăud, who would stop here on their way back from the weekly fairs in Năsăud”.²⁴

At Tradam, “people would bring some barley in order to obtain the beer they needed for different events. Sometimes, the young men who organized the winter holiday folk dance started collecting the barley needed for the beer already during the Nativity Fast and went to Tradam by cart or sleigh, depending on the weather, carrying the barley and the barrel in which they would bring the beer.”²⁵

The Land of Năsăud area has preserved to this day numerous traditions and customs of complex significance, which underline the spiritual richness of the land’s inhabitants. In winter, the “Beer”, a young people celebration, associated with folk dances and feasting, held an important place in the life of the community, alongside the spinning bee (*șezătoare*)²⁶.

²² Interview with Vasile Trif, Șieuf, born in January 1935, interview conducted in March 2017.

²³ Emilia Bumb, *Studii etnologice. Bistrița-Năsăud – obiceiuri, meșteșuguri, rapsozi* [Ethnological studies. Bistrița-Năsăud: customs, crafts, popular bards] (Cluj-Napoca: EIKON, 2007), p. 116.

²⁴ Claudia Septimia Sabău, “Și ne-au făcut din grănițeri, țărani...”, p. 165, *apud.* ANSJB, Iuliu Moisil collection, dos. 213/6, f. 46-47.

²⁵ Emilia Bumb, *Studii etnologice*, p. 116.

²⁶ *Șezătoare* is the Romanian word for a small gathering during which attendees do manual work, tell stories, jokes or riddles.

In Bistrița-Năsăud county, there is documentary attestation that the “Beer” was organized in the former militarized villages from the different valleys (of Upper Someș, Ilva, Sălăuța, Bârgău, Șieu). With the passing of time, the custom has developed singular regional features, has been invested with unique, distinctive meanings, specific to the valleys and the villages, so that each community has different features when it comes to the organization of the event, being influenced by diverse factors and proving the intense cultural interactions between the inhabitants of the area.

At Șieuț, the “Beer” is the gathering of young bachelors on Christmas and New Year’s Eve, being “the main event in the village, long awaited by the entire community”.²⁷

We chose to present this moment from the life of the Romanian village because it is a defining one for the local folk culture, a fact that was attested practically on the field. All the interviews conducted at Șieuț about the village’s traditional dance revolved around the “Beer”. Whether or not asked about winter traditions and customs, respondents would constantly mention the “Beer” and describe the rigorous way it was organized and the important role it played in the village, even if they did not have an active role in organizing the event. Therefore, we decided to describe in closer detail the specific stages that are part of this particular event.

After the beginning of the Nativity Fast, the Sunday folk dance is stopped, but young men still gather every evening at the house of one of the village’s young unmarried women and hold council about how to organize the “Beer”.²⁸

Vasile Trif from Șieuț (born in January 1935), former *vătaf* and *arendaș*.²⁹ dancer in the first folk dance ensemble of the Șieuț Cultural Hall (formed in 1950), recalled how the custom unfolded in the 1950s:

“When Christmas started approaching, young people in the village had to look for a large house where they could gather to dance, as there was no Cultural Hall in the village at that time. And they would go there and come to an agreement with the host. At that time, the custom was that the host had to have a young unmarried daughter or son. Back then, the custom was that on Christmas Eve all young unmarried men would go caroling. They would gather at the host’s house, at the “Beer”. That’s what it was called. There, at the “Beer”, two of the most admired young men in the village would take on the role of “vătafi”. They were in charge, so to speak. The second most important role was that of the “colceri”³⁰. They were in

²⁷ Interview with Partenie Olar.

²⁸ Albin Marcu, *Șieuț*, p. 119.

²⁹ *Arendaș* is the Romanian word for a young bachelor responsible for organizing the traditional dancing throughout the year (including hiring and paying the musician, called „ceteraș”).

³⁰ *Colcer* / pl. *colceri* is a Romanian word for young bachelors, members of the „Beer”, who were responsible of food and drinks.

charge with the household. On the second day of Christmas, the girls would bring a plate of the best cakes, and the boys half of litre of plum brandy or a litre of wine. They would go to the host's house where the tables were laid, would sit and feast. Then the "colceri" would take cakes from each girl's plate and put them into a basket; that was their job. And in the evening they would bring a bottle of wine and a plate of cake to everybody. That was the custom. Afterwards, they came out of the "Beer" and went to the village centre, at the church there, because that's where the dancing spot was and they started to dance."³¹

Most of the time, the house where they gathered, "house of a well-off man" with girls to marry, would also be the "host" (where the "Beer" takes place). There, under the supervision of the house owner, the young men entering the "Beer" were counted, it was decided what amount of money they needed to contribute for expenses, the musicians for the dance were hired, the wine for the common meals was bought and other arrangements were made.³²

Ioan Pantea, nicknamed Panțirașu (born in September 1962), former *vătaf*, responsible with organizing the "Beer" and renowned dancer in the village's dance ensemble, offered more details regarding how the event was organized, especially in the 1970s and 1980s:

"During the winter holidays musicians were hired for all the holidays. I was "vătaf" for three years. You would start organizing the event before the holidays. Musicians were hired. You would gather six young men. You had two "vătafi", two "colceri" and two "căprari"³³. The "vătafi" and the "colceri" were in charge of everything that happened. Those four hired musicians and gave them food, collected the money and paid them. Everything was organized. You paid for the Cultural Hall, you signed a contract with the musicians and one with the Town Hall, and on Christmas Eve all the young people would gather in the village centre. We gathered all, like this, in a circle; everyone knew who the "vătaf" was and we grabbed him and threw him in the air three times! At Christmas we had "cemători"³⁴ from the smaller children in the village. Four for Christmas, four for New Year's Eve. And they went through the village to call young men and girls to the dance. They called for them to come to the "Beer". The chaps brought wine or boiled plum brandy, everyone took a bottle, and girls went with cake. That's how it was in those days!"³⁵

³¹ Interview with Vasile Trif.

³² Albin Marcu, *Șieuț*, p. 119.

³³ *Căprar* / pl. *căprari* is a Romanian word for young bachelors, members of the „Beer” who were responsible of collecting the „colaci” that the carol singers would receive as a payment for their caroling.

³⁴ *Cemător* / pl. *cemători* is a Romanian word for young bachelors who would walk through the village with the purpose of inviting people (especially young girls) to attend „joc” (traditional dancing) as part of the „Beer”.

³⁵ Interview with Ioan Pantea (Panțirașu), Șieuț, born in September 1962, interview conducted in March 2017.

His younger cousin, Florean Pantea (born in June 1970), *vătaf* at the “Beer”, also describes the highlights of organizing the event:

“We went caroling in the village and people gave us money. We went to the priest, to the mayor and then we split into two groups. Half of us went to one end of the village, the other half to the other end of the village, and when we met, we went to the big “vătaf” and counted the money. That money paid for the dance, if not enough, there would come the girls’ contribution too. That was how we established boys’ and girls’ contribution. And Trăienuț with Tiniș and me were “vătafi”, but not for long, because the Revolution came and it was over with the village dance!”³⁶

In the villages with many young men, there would be two “Beers” gatherings due to the insufficient space for tables, feasting and dancing. No matter how large the house of the host is, it can never be enough for the entire village. In Șieuț, villagers organized two events: *berea vălenilor* (a gathering for those living beyond the valley) and *berea susenilor* (a gathering for those living in the direction of Monor).³⁷

Several years in a row, in the 1950s, the house of Ion Pantea hosted the gatherings of the villagers living beyond the valley, as recounted with abundant details by his son, retired elementary school teacher Ignat Pantea Senior, first cousin of above mentioned Ioana Dumbrăvan, Panțirașul and Florean:

“For so many years, the “Beer” took place in our house! We had a large room; it was 8 metres long and 6 metres wide. It was the only house with such big rooms. I was still a child and remember how the chaps would throw their coats on the bed. And then they danced all night! They danced “De-a lungul” and “Învârtita”. And they danced “Sârba”³⁸ all through the room; the bachelors might not all fit in because married men danced also. There were also two “Beers” gatherings in the village. Ours was for the villagers beyond the valley, that’s where we lived. And the ploughman, the young man who was the first in the village to go ploughing in the spring, he was responsible with the music during the summer. My father was ploughman in 1951. He brought the musicians and all the young men obeyed him. Then, during the Nativity Fast, young men were called to the Cultural Hall with a horn. The instrument is decades old. Girls would not go to the dance if a young man didn’t come after her. It was shameful for a girl to go alone to the dance, without a companion. And when the dance was over, the one who took her to the dance had to bring her back home, which ended with a glass of plum brandy and a sausage. If a young man took the same girl two or three times to the dance, you knew they were getting friendlier.”³⁹

In order to make the necessary arrangements for the “Beer”, the young men gathered every evening at the host’s house. The signal to come together

³⁶ Interview with Florean Pantea, Șieuț, born on 28th June 1970, interview conducted in May 2017.

³⁷ Albin Marcu, *Șieuț*, p. 119.

³⁸ *Sârba* is a word for a traditional Romanian dance that is spread all over the country, executed in a fast tempo with the dancers usually forming a circle.

³⁹ Interview with Ignat Pantea Senior.

at the host's house was given with a *bucin* (horn), from the house's porch. *Bucin* is an archaic wind instrument, made of a beautiful, long and carved ox horn, which is outfitted at the end with an elderberry wood pipe.⁴⁰

Pantea Florean, famous village dancer and one of the young men who used to play the *bucin*, offers more details about the 70 year-old *bucin* at Șieuț:

*"When the Nativity Fast began, people started organizing the dance and drew out the "bucin". Not anybody could play the "bucin". If you don't know how to do it, you can't do it! My grandfather brought this "bucin" from Uila, from a local Saxon. It used to be about ... this long (he shows me that it used to be about 15 cm longer before - editor's note). It all wore away. For sure it was longer than this, it was bound with tie-wire and it wore away from that spot. My father was a young man or a boy when the "bucin" was brought. About 60-70 years ago. It was made from ox horn. Oxen were castrated bulls and they were used to draw the plough. But they were tame! When they didn't fit through the door of the stable, they bowed their heads to fit in. My brother, Albin, has the "bucin" now; he keeps it and gives it to chaps when they go caroling."*⁴¹

In the old days, young unmarried men used to gather on the streets of the village and showed their mastery of playing the *bucin* so that "the soundwaves reign over the village, and the echo comes back from the wooded hills and takes over all the Șieuț valleys and village paths. The call of the *bucin* is a long standing tradition, and its quaver is modulated by the breath of the player. The *bucin* melody is continuous, it starts on a long note, with rare quavers and ends loudly and powerfully, like cannon blasts. This sound vibrated through the village's winter evenings and signaled to the young men to gather at the host's house."⁴²

As we could notice from the above-mentioned description, selecting the right young men to lead the event, and bear the responsibilities of organizing it, was a vital part of the process. The selection took place on Christmas Eve, the host being in charge with making sure that all young men who entered the "Beer" had a decent behaviour.

Two *vătafi* are selected from the most worthy young men in the village, particularly those who underwent military service: the big *vătaf* and the small *vătaf*, being the head of the young bachelors and the main organizing of the "Beer". A *colcer* and four bigger *căprari* are selected for each *vătaf*. At the end, the remaining chaps are equally divided between the two *vătafi*, each one being assigned eight smaller *căprari*. Then, following the local hierarchy established within the "Beer", they start caroling through the village. "After

⁴⁰ Albin Marcu, *Șieuț*, p. 119.

⁴¹ Interview with Florean Pantea.

⁴² Albin Marcu, *Șieuț*, p. 120.

selecting the "vătaf", we all went caroling to the priest's house, the mayor's, and then in the entire village. We split in two because the village was bigger than now. And we went to every house."⁴³

The carols within the "Beer" have a unique structure, completely different from religious carols or other Christmas songs. "The young men's "Beer" caroling unfolds as a dialogue in two voices, without a melody, and with a histrionic nuance. The first voice, of the *vătaf*, charges the first verse on its own, and is followed by the choir of the young men as the second voice, continuing the verse as a response, similar to the dialogue present in ancient Greek theatre."⁴⁴

Hence, "we can determine the persistence of a novel manner of caroling, different from both the surrounding villages and the knowledge we have about the regular performance of this winter custom: recitative, without melody, a rhythmic chant of verses, alternatively reprised by the two groups of carol singers."⁴⁵ The text of such a carol is not based exclusively on a religious theme, but also references the day to day life of the people living in that particular house, and spells out the names of the young people living in the house.

For each house they visit, the carol singers receive a large type of white wheat bread named *colac*⁴⁶, as a reward, fair as "the face of Christ", baked in the oven, and set on the table that is at the centre of the room and around which the young men are caroling. As already known, according to the beliefs of the Romanian peasant, "the table was the most important piece of furniture, having a sacred role. It is on the table that the gifts for the carol singers are set, among which the customary *colac*, representing a wheel or a solar symbol",⁴⁷ therefore the *colac* received by the carol singers was a welcoming sign, an ancient custom, passed on from one generation to another and filled with meaning.

The *colaci* received for caroling are collected by the smaller *căprari* and put into a sleigh drawn by two horses with bells, and stored at the host's house. These *colaci* will be the bread for the common meals that will take place at the host's house until the dissolution, the end of the event, after the New Year or Epiphany.⁴⁸

⁴³ Interview with Ioan Pantea (Panțirășu).

⁴⁴ Albin Marcu, *Șieut*, p. 122.

⁴⁵ Vasile V. Filip, *Eseuri ± etnologice*, p. 103.

⁴⁶ *Colac* / pl. *colaci* is a Romanian ring-shaped type of salty pastry with a braided pattern.

⁴⁷ Angelica Pușcaș, *Ascultări din lumea satului. Introducere în etnografie* [Listening in the village world. Introduction to ethnography] (Cluj-Napoca: Cluj University Press, Vol. I, 2009), p. 76.

⁴⁸ Albin Marcu, *Șieut*, p. 124.

Our respondent, Ioan Pantea (Panțirașu), offers a detailed description of the reward received by the carol singers, namely *colaci*, the way young men collected them and the manner in which the dance was organized:

*"You would take them into your hand, like this. If you had five, seven, ten "colaci", you left them at some girl's house. Then the "câprari" came and collected them. The next day, on Christmas day, we brought a carriage and went through the village to collect them. And we chanted and feasted! On Christmas Eve, young men gathered and decided when to collect the money, how much money there was, how much a pair should contribute, how much money for the fiddler. After New Year's Eve, young men came at the host's house and figured out the numbers. There were these many dancers, this was how much money we needed, this was how much they would pay. We put a higher entrance fee for girls and married people so that we, the young men, wouldn't have to pay so much! There were tricks like this! In our village, everybody who wanted to dance paid to attend the dance. Then you gave out the "colaci" to the young men; everybody received about ten or twelve of them. What could you do with them? You fed some to the pigs because they went stale. You have to imagine that the host kept them for about two weeks, and then you gave them out. In the old days there used to be a shortage of bread. Now you don't give out "colaci" anymore, you give money."*⁴⁹

At Șieuț, one of the important moments at Christmas was going caroling at the mills. In the old days, the village had several old stone mills for grinding cereals, dating back to the times of the Saxon inhabitants. One of them is still functional at present. At the mills, the young men received the biggest and most beautiful *colaci*, before attending the church service. "On Christmas day, after going caroling at the mills, all young men, dressed in their best costumes, with their sheepskin coats and feathered caps, would answer the call of the *bucin* and gather at the house of the host where they form a column and, led by the host, go to church. The "Beer" attendees have a place reserved in front of the altar, where they remain in formation and attend the church service, then returning to the host's house."⁵⁰

Another custom tightly connected to organizing the "Beer" at Șieuț is taking a platter with traditional winter holiday dishes to the places where the "Beer" is hosted. The custom takes place on the first day of Christmas. After the church service is over, girls hurry to "go with a full plate" at one of the "Beer" gatherings in the village (if there are two), there where most of their friends go or where their sweetheart waits for them. The girl, dressed in her festive costume, goes there with a plate filled with the finest delicacies prepared by her mother: pork roast, sausages, dumplings, cakes and pies.

Ignat Pantea Senior recounted a funny story related to this custom:

"And the "vâtafi", the "colceri", took the best cakes from the girls who brought platters and hid them in chests, the wooden ones, with locks, that you used when you went in

⁴⁹ Interview with Ioan Pantea (Panțirașu).

⁵⁰ Albin Marcu, *Șieuț*, p. 124.

*the army. And when the midnight break came, they invited their sweethearts or a few girls to the room with the chests - at our place it was the larder at the back of the house - to eat, to have a cake. Once I found in the hay a chest with that kind of cake, after a month. It was spoilt of course. They had hidden it there, during the dance, and had forgotten about it."*⁵¹

After arriving at the host, the girl is seated at the table according to the ranking that her sweetheart holds within the "Beer". The food platters brought by the girls, *colacii* and the alcoholic beverages brought by the smaller *căprari* ensure a plentiful common meal. Two by two, young men and women dance and cheer to the melodies played by the musicians.⁵²

The glee of the moment is enjoyed not only by those gathered round the table, but also by those present at the host's house - children, married men and their wives, even elders who remember the times when they were young and used to dance at the "Beer".

The joy of the dance, the organization of the event, the village's musicians and the vernacular talent are described by Vasile Trif in the following manner:

*"There were two famous musicians in our village, the most famous across all Șieu Valley. They were gypsies. One was named Nonu, Ion Caculea, that's how he was also called, and the other one was Loica. They were brothers. And, by golly, they both knew how to play! We went to the centre of the village and we danced until nighttime ... young people, old people, every breathing soul. I remember one time when the elders were dancing, my father also, and my big brother. My father was a wild dancer! He jumped, old as he was, he jumped sky high. He loved to dance and I remember one time, when he was a bit tipsy ... but he didn't cause any trouble ... he jumped straight on the table! And danced, right there, on the table!"*⁵³

At Șieuț, on the first day of Christmas and New Year, the dance and custom of the "Beer" were confined to the village boundaries, but during the rest of the days the custom developed even more colour through the *lăturenii*⁵⁴ exchange. According to the *lăturenii* tradition, the "Beer" had to pay and receive visits for three days in a row, starting with the second day of Christmas or New Year.⁵⁵

Usually, young men from Șieuț visited neighbouring villages or received themselves guests from the nearby villages from the Șieu Valley (Sebiș, Ruștior, Lunca, Ardan, Monor, Gledin), but also from villages closer to Mureș county (Vătava, Râpa and Dumbrava) or the Mureș Valley (Lueriu and Săcalu de Pădure).

⁵¹ Interview with Ignat Pantea Senior.

⁵² Albin Marcu, *Șieuț*, p. 124.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ *Lătorean* / pl. *lăturenii* is a Romanian word for an inhabitant of a neighbouring village.

⁵⁵ Albin Marcu, *Șieuț*, p. 125.

Thereby, cultural exchanges were facilitated, impacting traditional clothing and dancing, but also leading to a mutual enrichment of traditional hollers and verses from the Șieu Valley and the Mureș area. Consequently, *lăturenii* “formed an emotional bond, and intertwined idioms, attires and customs.”⁵⁶ Also, on these occasions, young people met, befriended each other and formed new families.

A Current Look at the Șieuț Folk Dance, the “Beer”, Carols, Carol Singers, Traditional Garments and the “Bucin”

At Șieuț, some of the main elements related to the way the old holiday dance used to be organized still remain. Even though the “Beer”, the gathering, no longer takes place, and there are no *vătafi* and *colceri* selected to be in charge of the logistics of the event (the last ones were Petru Dumbrăvan, nicknamed Ciliga, and Ion Tiniș, in 1990), the main elements are still in effect, like the married men and the young men of the village who get together and go caroling on Christmas Eve.

The carol singers are dressed in festive garments, with a beautifully embroidered traditional shirt, with a low collar adorned with beadwork. “As time passed, the embroidery grew richer, appearing also on the chest, collar, sleeves and at the bottom of the shirt, where a lace ribbon, called *ciurel*, appeared, and also a jagged cotton lace that is handmade with a special needle, called *cipcă*.”⁵⁷ The chromatics of the patterns are quite different: beige, yellow and brown can be seen on the traditional shirts of married men, while young unmarried men wear a flowered traditional shirt, with red, blue and green embroidered flowers, and elderly men wear a shirt with discrete embroidery on the collar and on the sleeves.

The carol singers from Șieuț wear very tight traditional peasant trousers made of wool, called *cioareci*, or trousers made of woven linen with stitched patterns (small fir trees, cart wheels or diamonds).⁵⁸ Men wear on their waist a wide, leather belt stitched with colourful threads, manufactured at Bistrița or Morăreni (in Mureș county) or a belt punched with floral or geometric patterns, while young men wear a belt adorned with colourful beads.

The open traditional vest is made by Șieuț skimmers from sheep fur, it is white, with blue, brown or gold string patterns on the back. It is decorated in black and brown stitched fur, and some designs have colourful tassels and patterns of stitched flowers.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 130.

⁵⁷ Aurel Bodiu, Maria Golban, *Portul tradițional românesc din Bistrița-Năsăud* [The traditional Romanian costume from Bistrița-Năsăud county] (Cluj-Napoca: EIKON, 2012), p. 148.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

The most important garment of the Șieuț carol singers is the long, white, sheepskin coat, decorated with floral patterns and black stitched fur all around the bottom part. There were also one or two buttons at the waist or at the bottom of the coat. Given its considerable length, down to the boots, the beautifully embroidered white coat of the Șieuț villager is a spectacular and imposing garment that local carol singers still wear at present.

Carol singers wear a traditional cap made of sheep fur, called *cușmă*, unmarried men also wear a feather, a geranium and a ribbon in the three colours of the national flag. They wear tall, black, leather boots.

Although one can observe today some mutations and changes in the festive garments worn by Șieuț villagers, we are excited to see that traditional shirts, vests, belts or coats worn by carol singers have survived to this day, bearing the initials of their owner and the year they were manufactured. Such an object is also the belt of Ion Șoimușan (nicknamed Ciogâga), born in 1971, former deputy mayor of the village, who still wears a leather belt, sewed with beads, with the year "1932" visibly stitched in white beads among the red, green and blue ones. The belt belonged to his grandfather, Ion Cueșdean (Ciogâga), who hosted in his house the "Beer" events and the *lătoreni* visitors from Sebiș village between 1924-1925.⁵⁹

There are other similar examples in the village, namely the open traditional vest, with tassels, belonging to Petru Seica, made in 1954, and worn at present by his grandson, garment on which the initials "1S9 - 5P4" can be seen or on the vest of Ion Pantea, who hosted the "Beer" for the villagers beyond the valley, and where the initials "1P9 - 4I1" can be seen (a sign that it was custom made for Pantea Ion in 1941). The vest is worn at present by his grandson Neluțu Pantea.

As far as the repertoire is concerned, the old, archaic carols, unique in the research area, have remained mostly unchanged. Although some of them disappeared from the community's collective memory, together with the *vătafi* from former times, the original style of execution has been preserved and was carried on by the new generations of carol singers.

At present, young men and married men from the village no longer go caroling solely on the streets of the Șieuț village. They also participate in various performances centered on carols, folklore competitions that promote the winter traditions and customs of the old Romanian rural settlements or various television shows. We consider this to be an effort worthy of praise, given that it promotes the beautiful elements of traditional garments and carols, which deserve to be shared with the world.

⁵⁹ Albin Marcu, *Șieuț*, p. 129.

The *bucin*, the more than 70 years old wind instrument brought from Uila, faithfully accompanies the group of carol singers to this day. Although a little worn out, it is masterfully played by the former young men of the village, the famous dancers Petru Dumbrăvan (nicknamed Ciliga), Dumitru Trif (the village blacksmith, nicknamed Trifu) or Florean Pantea, all presently well into their old age.

Being a spectacular, archaic instrument, the *bucin* is a particularly unique element of the cultural life of Șieuț, an element that the carol singers identify with and which still accompanies them at the *Jocul Însuraților* (the dance of the married ones), when young men gather at the Cultural Hall, where the event is held. In the old days the event was held on Epiphany, but since 2011 it has been organized on the last Sunday in January, being a joyful and festive moment for the entire community, irrespective of religious convictions.

During the rest of the year, the *bucin* is kept at the house of Albin Pantea, Florean's brother, being used during some performances or during folklore competitions, shows or foreign tours of the village folk dance ensemble.

Even though the "Beer" is no longer organized as it happened in the former days and as we described in the present research, the village can pride itself with the fact that the traditional Romanian dances and customs have not been forgotten, on the contrary, are well known by almost all the members of the community, be it adults or youngsters. The latter were initiated in these traditional customs within the village's folk dance ensemble and under the supervision of the village elementary school teacher and dance choreographer, Ignat Pantea Junior, who took over the work carried out by his father, Ignat Pantea Senior.

In the past few years, I have had the opportunity to participate in or organize events and cultural performance during which this distinctive folk dance ensemble presented to the audience traditional folk dances by bringing together on the stage 60 dancers, representing four different generations of dancers, just as it happened in the 1960s and 1970s at Șieuț. Petre Dumbrăvan recounts:

"Back then it used to be Cântarea României.⁶⁰ And they put together the folk dance group, made of four generations. There were the married people, the old people, who only danced Sârba, with their coats on. Only Sârba, then they would stand in the back of the stage and cheer. Then there were the married ones, about my age, between 50 and 60 years old. They all wore the traditional sheep fur hats. Then there was the third generation, young men and women, with felt hats and feathered hats, and then there

⁶⁰ *Cântarea României* was an annual national cultural festival in the Socialist Republic of Romania between 1976-1989 intended to promote ideologically-approved artistic manifestations.

were the children, who were in front of the stage. It was beautiful! Four generations, they filled the stage, it was wonderful!”⁶¹

His wife, Ioana, also confirms the beauty of that moment:

“The married ones were just like us now. Back then, in Mr. Gotea’s time (n. red. – elementary school teacher Vasile Gotea, who founded in 1950 the first folk dance ensemble at Șieuț), that’s when it was amazing! Then it was my cousin’s turn, Ignat. Then it was even better! We were four generations on stage, can you imagine? Children, young men and women, the married ones and the old ones. It was such a beauty!”⁶²

Conclusions

Even though the “Beer” is no longer organized at Șieuț as it happened in the former days, few elements of this custom have survived the passage of time. The traditional festive garments, the young men going caroling or the traditional men’s folk dance from Șieuț, included in the UNESCO World Heritage, represent significant elements of it.

This study offers us the possibility to notice the changes that took place in time concerning the organisation and the actual course of this custom. Thus, we have been able to discover that, in Șieuț, connected to these local traditional customs, a truly cultural phenomenon was developed, supported and encouraged by manifestations such as the festival “Song of Praise to Romania” (*Cântarea României*). With the help of communist cultural policies of that time, but also by having a Cultural House, the villagers were offered the possibility to manifest themselves artistically during numerous events.

At the same time, taking part in such events meant for villagers to have an alternative to the heavy-laden agricultural life, folk dance and holidays being seen as true relaxation. On the other hand, in Șieuț, the village customs were kept during communist times also due to the fact that here there was a special local pride, rarely found elsewhere, but also because “it was a shame not to know how to dance!”⁶³.

The political events that took place in December 1989 led to profound changes which affected the entire Romanian society. Irreversible changes happened in the cultural life of villages, as well; spinning bees disappeared, together with certain customs, the main contexts in which villagers would essentially work, socialize and contribute to creating folklore. Step by step, true creations and authenticity disappeared and the villagers looked for alternatives. They found them in the advantages offered by modernization and technology, the TV set becoming the main ally in spending free time. Why

⁶¹ Interview with Petre Dumbrăvan.

⁶² Interview with Ioana Dumbrăvan.

⁶³ Interview with Partenie Olar.

go and dance in the village when they could easily stay at home in front of the TV? It is much more comfortable!

Nowadays, even if in a simpler version, without all the traditional details (as now there are fewer young people living in the village, many choosing to move to the city, in Bistrița, Târgu Mureș, Cluj-Napoca or even abroad to study or work), the traditional Romanian folk dance from Șieuț, the olden carols and the men who gather to sing them have passed the test of time. They are still put into practice today, reviving memories of the old “Beer” and the traditional folk dance that took place behind the church.

Although the “Beer” gathering is no longer organized, the traditional winter holiday folk dance is remembered through another old custom that was part of it, namely *Jocul Însuraților*. Time passes and people change; the village elders fade away and their place in the community and in the group of carol singers is being taken by young men who continue to walk the streets of the village on Christmas Eve.

The old traditional folk garments of their parents and grandparents, many dating from 50 or 60 years ago, the respect they have for the inherited costumes, the old *bucin* brought from the Saxon in Uila more than 70 years ago, the archaic carols, faithfully remembered by so many generations, make us feel confident and hopeful that at Șieuț - the village at the foot of Călimani Mountains, watched over by the Poiana Tomii peak - the present day folk dancers and carol singers, proud of the inherited traditions (many say “for generations, this has always been the custom”), are able to take us to another century, to the world of their ancestors, and to carry on the charm of the old Romanian holidays, joyfully celebrated by the Romanian peasant.

LIST OF RESPONDENTS

- **Pantea Ignat Senior** (born on the 21st October 1949) – elementary school teacher, dancer; choreographer of the folk dance ensemble between 1976-2003; his parents' house hosted for years in a row the "Beer" for the villagers beyond the valley (*Berea vălenilor*);
- **Trif Vasile** (born in January 1935) – dancer; was part of the first generation of dancers at the Cultural Hall in Șieuț (starting 1951); *vătaf* at the "Beer" and *arendaș* at the village dance, for years in a row;
- **Dumbrăvan Petre** (born on the 17th April 1957) – dancer and popular bard; important member of the ensemble, from 1962 until the present day; attendee of almost all folklore competitions and festivals during the Communist period;
- **Dumbrăvan Ioana** (born Pantea, in 1958) – dancer, member of the folk dance ensemble; sister of Pantea Ioan (Panțirașu);
- **Pantea Ioan** (nicknamed Panțirașu), (born on the 13th September 1962) – dancer; *vătaf* at the "Beer" for three years; responsible with organizing the event and paying the musicians;
- **Pantea Florean** (born on the 28th June 1970) – dancer; skilled in playing the *bucin*; *vătaf* at the "Beer"; cousin of Ignat, Ioana and Panțirașu;
- **Olar Partenie** (born on the 20th July 1963) – dancer and former *vătaf* at the "Beer".