

## MILITARY SONGS IN THE NORTHERN PART OF THE TRANSYLVANIAN PLAIN

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**SUMMARY.** The traditional farewell from men starting their military service belongs to those folk customs, which are remembered only by the older generations. Up to the suspending of mandatory military service in the Hungarian language area, therefore in the Northern part of the Transylvanian Plain as well, the day before the send-off a festive dinner and dance party was organized at the house of the recruit, then in the morning he was accompanied to the railway station with music. The melodies of this custom are quite varied, while the most common starting lines are: “They are cutting (or cleaning) the forest roads, / Taking away our Hungarian boys.”

**Keywords:** Military Songs, Transylvanian Plain, army, custom.

The farewell to the men starting their military service is one of those folk customs, which is preserved only in the memory of the older generations. The custom was born once with the introduction of the permanent army in 1715 and it had been alive up to the end of WWII.

On the Transylvanian Plain in general, so in my home village as well, we could document the fragments of this custom until the suspension of mandatory military service. One day before the send-off the conscripts organized a festive dinner. The godparents, the neighbours and especially the close friends were invited. The dinner was followed by a dance party until dawn, when the friends accompanied the conscripts to the railway station singing and usually escorted by musicians.

Historically speaking the recruiting was an organic part of military service. According to the Hungarian Ethnographic Lexicon the recruiting “...was a custom with revelry and dance formed after the introduction of

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military service (1715). [...] The first historical mementoes of dancing recruitment date back to the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. One slightly more informal way of the recruitment at fairs and events was the revelry and dance at the tavern, which used to live on even next to the gradually forming spectacular dancing recruitment [...].<sup>2</sup>

According to some song lyrics and to the specialists of folk poetry the popularity of the recruiting song was due to its true contents. It has been changing, fading or completed with other elements during the ages, but it has always remained in folk memory as “the advocate of the poor peasantry taken and kept with force within the army”.<sup>3</sup> The lyrics of the next example seem to back up this aspect. In the village of Sic this is one of the traditional recruiting songs.

E. g. 1

*Rubato* ♩ = 96

1. Szék vá- ro- sán ver- bu- vál- nok kö- tül- lel,  
El- fog- ják a sze- gín le- ginyt e- rő- vel.  
A gaz- dá- nak öt- hal fi- át nem bán- t- ják,  
A sze- gény- nek, ha egy van is, el- fog- ják.

RMN/70, Sic, Kiss Sándor, 49 y.o., collected by Jagamas J., 1954

2. „Utána megy apja-anya, siratja  
Kéri vissza drága pénzér, nem adja  
Térjél vissza, apám anyám, szomorán,  
Növeld többi gyermekedet szigorán.”

<sup>2</sup> MNL, Verbuvalás

<sup>3</sup> Jagamas–Farágó: 1974, p. 380, note 70.

- [1. In the city of Sic are recruiting with ropes,  
Taking the poor lads with force.  
The rich have 5-6 boys, no bother,  
The poor's only one is gone forever.  
2. His parents go after him crying,  
Uselessly try for money rebuying.  
Go home, mom and dad, sadly,  
Raise up the others more severely.]

The custom of farewell to the recruited men probably leads back to the recruit balls or military balls: "...being one version of the organized dance occasions for youngsters, taking place between the recruitment and the send-off. These balls could only be attended by the recruited boys and their friends, respectively their girlfriends and female guests. In some regions the dancing events were organized already after the recruitment. The recruit ball was usually held the day before the send-off (on Sunday).

The youngsters were gathered in the dancing hall of the village or at the house of one of the recruited. At these occasions, the boys were taken with music from the dancing place to the railway station. On the Transylvanian Plain as well as in other regions men were singing specific military accompany songs through the village. From time to time they stopped and danced, which they continued to do even at the station."<sup>4</sup>

Back in the old days the emotional load of the farewell was completely different as the military service could last for up to seven years, not to mention that in times of war there was a chance that the young men would not come back home at all. Military service had been a social problem for the rural communities especially between the age of the Habsburgs and the end of WWII: parents were left without their sons, women without their man, children without their father, brides without groom and family farms without the best workforce.

Just like birth, marriage or death, military service has become one of the major landmarks of life. In time the event has become a permanent issue as once or several times every year the recruiting was unavoidable, all boys were taken to the army.

Just like the other stages of life the military service gave birth to a new genre, the military song, and the accompanying song. It is important to mention the fact that generally the accompanying songs are not identical with

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<sup>4</sup> MNL, Regrutabál.

the military songs. The accompanying song is tied to one momentum of the farewell custom, its lyrics differ from the military songs and the melodies belong to the old style.

“The military songs represent a large group of our folk poetry, related to a temporary and forced occupation, and are dealing with the life and emotions of recruited men, actual soldiers and demobilized soldiers. Temporarily, especially during war, they become more largely known in society.”<sup>5</sup>

The military songs deal with different topics, like the departure from homeland, family house, parents, family, girlfriend, the burdens of military life, the curse of those who “made the wars”, being homesick, the desire to desert from the service and the list could go on. These songs were sung not only by the soldiers who were away from home, but also by the mothers and wives who were left behind. The return of a soldier was a great joy, but the loss was even greater. There are lots of data on how the mothers are mourning for their sons and husbands who fell in battle and cannot return home anymore.

### **About the melodies**

The melody of example 1 from above is a generally known and widespread type of melody, belonging to the psalm-like style, moving around the Do-Re-Mi pentatonic core. The cadence order is VII b3 1, the structure of the melody is A B C D.<sup>6</sup>

The farewell songs from the Transylvanian Plain regularly start with the following lines: “They are cutting (or cleaning) the forest roads, / Taking away our Hungarian boys.” The rest of the lines can differ. For example, one variant from Sic starts with a mourning text and the typical lines appear only in the fourth verse.

According to the ethnographic collecting the melody of examples 1a and 2b can be found only in the Transylvanian Plain. The type is included into the psalm-like style, although between its first and third line there are some fragments of fifth.<sup>7</sup> The cadence order of the melody is 4 b3 VII, the melody structure is A B C D.

Between the two variants from Vișea there is only a difference of a few notes, but the scale presents some changes: the melody 2.a) is pentatonic, while the variant 2.b) gets a nuance of Phrygian mode (Es and As pien-tones).

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<sup>5</sup> MNL, Katonadal.

<sup>6</sup> MNTK type I A. 26.

<sup>7</sup> MNTK type I. 61 e-f; MNT IX. type 77; RMN nr. 98, 100.

E. g. 2a

**Rubato** ♩ = cca. 63-66



1. Sep-rik az er - de - i u - tat, —  
 Sep-rik az er - de-i u - tat,  
 Vi - szik a ma-gyar fi - ú - kat,  
 Vi szik a ma - gyar fi - ú - kat.

**KZA Mg 3105/61, Vișea, Papp Sándor (Karikás), 69 y. o.,  
 collected by Bogdán É., 1979**

E. g. 2b

**Rubato** ♩ = 140



1. Sep-rik az er-de - i u - tat, —  
 Vi - szik a ma-gyar fi - ú - kat,  
 Kit le- fe - lé, kit fel - fe - lé,  
 E- gyi - ket se ha - za - fe - lé.

**KZA Mg 3105/ 39, Vișea, Fodor Józsefné Fodor Erzsébet, 41 y. o.,  
 collected by Bogdán É., 1979**

The variant 2c was performed by a Romanian informant, its lyrics are in fact a farewell song, but the content is not identical with the Hungarian text. The melody is quite frequent within the Romanian society with certain mourning lyrics, and Bartók collected it from a soldier from the Transylvanian Plain, more precisely from Coasta. He also published numerous variants from Mureş County and Turda region in his great Romanian collection.<sup>8</sup>

## E. g. 2c

## Rubato

*Foa - ie ver - ble de bu jo - ru,*

*Foa - ie ver - de \_\_\_\_\_ de bu - jor. \_\_\_\_\_ Vai de mai - ca*

*cu fe - ciori, \_\_\_\_\_ Vai de mai - ca cu - fe - ciori.*

**Vişea, Moldovan Chita Susana, 27 y. o.,  
collected by Sebestyén D. K., 1951**

The melody of example 3 is also part of the octave equivalence psalm-like melodies.<sup>9</sup> Variants of this melody are known mostly from the Transylvanian Plain and Călata Region. Among the published versions we can find several melodies with expanded 5 lines, respectively versions with expanded lines. The cadence order is 7 b3 b3 1, the melody structure is A B Bv C.

<sup>8</sup> Romanian variants: BRFM II, nr. 148. and 267.; example 2.c): Szegő-Sebestyén, 1958: nr. 123.

<sup>9</sup> MNTK I B. type 54; var. Lajtha II/ 58, RMN/ nr. 149 and 283, MNT IX. type 74 (expanded lines variants from the Transylvanian Plain).

## E. g. 3

**Parlando rubato** ♩ = cca. 100

Vág-ják az er - de - i u - tat,



Vi-szik a ma-gyar fi - u - kat,



Vi-szik, vi - szik sze-gé - nye - ket,



Sze-gény ma-gyar le - gé-nye-ket.

**KZA Mg 3310/ 45, Vaida-Cămăraș, Nagyné Tóbiás Jolán, 54 y. o.,  
collected by Kostyák A., 1979**

The melody from example 4 belongs to one of the most well-known and wide-spread types. The cadence order is 5 (b3) VII, the melody structure is A B C D. It belongs to the pluperfect ambitus descending pentatonic melodies.<sup>10</sup>

## E. g. 4

**Parlando rubato** ♩ = 126-132

1. Sep-rik az er - de - i u - tat,



Vi- szik a ma - gyar fi-ú - kat.

<sup>10</sup> MNT X. type 118.

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Kit le-fe-lé, kit fel - fe - lé,  
E-gyi-ket se ha-za - fe-lé.

**KZA Mg 3105/72, Vișea, László Ferencné Gáspár Anna, 31 y. o.,  
collected by Bogdan É., 1979**

Example nr. 5 is a three-line descending melody in Dorian mode, with the cadence order 5 4 1, the melody structure being A B C. It cannot be found in any collection or catalogue. It is possible that we are dealing with an incomplete melody.

**E. g. 5**

**Parlando** ♩ = cca. 164

1. Sep-rik az er - de - i u - tat,  
Vi-szik a ma - gyar fi - ú - kat,  
Kit le-fe-lé, kit fel-fe - lé,

**KA Mg 3105/ 14, Vișea, Nagy Dánielné Kis Amália, 62 y. o.,  
collected by Bogdán É.,**



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