

COUPLE VILLAGES FROM THE FĂGĂRAȘ LAND, WITH THEIR HISTORY AND ETHNOGRAPHIC PECULIARITIES

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Abstract: *The Făgăraș Land is an old Romanian state formation on the territory of Transylvania. Geographically located between the Olt and the Meridional Carpathians, the Făgăraș Land is considered the starting point of the founders of Wallachia. It was caught between the interests and pride of the Hungarian Kingdom and those of the Romanian lords throughout the Middle Ages, and suffered invasions of the Tartars. The memory of the latter is preserved in the collective memory of the locals, especially in the legends about the rocks that girls chased by attackers have jumped off. Many of the villages of Fagaras are arranged in pairs, one in the Olt meadow and the other in the mountain. Over time, there have been differentiations in the folk garment and traditions between the couple villages, but also between neighbouring couple villages. These differences strenghten the community identity of the Făgăraș Land villagers and indicate the existence of significant intangible cultural heritage resources in the area.*

Keywords: folk garment, community identity, Făgăraș Land

1. Introduction

Făgăraș Land (the historic-administrative name of the territory, with Olt Land as an ethnographic correspondent) is a depression in the South of Transylvania situated between the river Olt and the Făgăraș Mountains and, according to boundaries marked out during the period of Matei Corvin, between the villages Porumbacu in the west and Cuciulata and Lupșa in the east.

Folk garment in Făgăraș Land has a unitary structure. On this unitary structure, each community has added its own specifics. Differences are mainly seen in women’s garment. Differences are discrete, but visible enough as to provide information to Făgăraș inhabitants of the wearer’s village of origin. Imposing and assuming differentiation are the representative of

some strong expressions of identity. The marking of community identity in the garment is the sign of strong communities and, simultaneously, it is a consequence of a longlasting exercise of community resistance. This work points out the differentiation in women’s garment of Făgăraș Land, within a unitary structure, in a few neighbouring villages. The main historical references in the area, considered as part of an identity challenge, underlie the aforementioned emphasis.

2. Făgăraș Land: historical landmarks

The Făgăraș voivodeship, with its first documented mention in 1222 as *terra Blachorum*, is one of the oldest Romanian state formations on the territory that will be later called Transylvania. It was, at same time, one of the last Romanian state

formations with an existence of its own inside the Carpathian Arch, due to its geographical position in an area where “the penetration of the Hungarian rule was slower and later” [1, p.241]. According to documented mentions, the voivodeship commanded, in the 13th Century, the citadels of Făgăraș, Comăna de Sus and Breaza. At the end of the century, the voivodeship’s territory was under the rule of the Hungarian Kingdom (according to the documents of the Transylvania’s Diet from Alba-Iulia, 1291). In the time between its first documented mention and this moment are located the events that tradition calls *the settling of Negru-Vodă*: following battles with the Hungarian army heading South, the voivode Radu of Făgăraș Land had to withdraw from Făgăraș citadel to the one at Breaza, where he suffered a new defeat; due to this, he decided to go beyond the mountains, together with some of his subjects [2]. This is how the voivodeship of Făgăraș disappeared from history and the core state of Wallachia (Romanian: *Țara Românească*, literally *The Romanian Country*) was established beyond the mountains. The connections between the Romanians from north and south of the Southern Carpathians were older. Năgler shows that “it is not excluded that the idea of the donation of Almaș and Făgăraș to the rulers of Wallachia in the 14th Century was a continuation of rulers from the previous century” [3, p.213]. Under the rule of Vladislav Vlaicu, Făgăraș Land came under the rule of Wallachia. That given its position between the Ottoman Empire and the Hungarian Kingdom, Wallachia was under double suzerainty for a long time [4]. King Matei Corvin set up a district of Făgăraș, that he offered to the Universitas Saxonum in 1469, as a compensation for the wrongs caused to Saxons by the incursions of Vlad Țepeș in the south of Transylvania. The Romanian population of the district was not at all pleased by the decision of the king, “the Romanians in Făgăraș took prisoners the delegates of the Saxons who

were coming back from king Matei Corvin and destroyed their Donation Diploma, and afterwards they moved onto attacking possessions” [2, p.9].

After the battle of Mohács (1526), the Romanian nobleman Ștefan Mailat, from Comăna de Jos (Lower Comăna), obtained rule over Făgăraș Land. Ștefan Mailat, becoming a voivode of Transylvania, tried to use the conflicts between the pretenders to the throne of the Hungarian Kingdom in favour of acknowledging the status of an autonomous principality for Transylvania. His approach was not a successful one. After his death in prison, in Constantinople, Făgăraș Land changed its rulers several times.

In 1599, Făgăraș citadel came into the possession of Mihai Viteazul, who, according to the habit of the Transylvanian princes, offered it to his wife, Lady Stanca. After the death of Mihai Viteazul, the citadel was offered to other princes’ wives: Catherine of Brandenburg, the wife of Gabriel Bethlen, Zsuzsanna Lórántffy, the wife of György Rákóczy I, and Anna Bornemisza, the wife of Mihail Apáffy I.

In 1691, by the Diploma Leopoldinum, the principality of Transylvania came under Austrian rule. In the meantime, over the 17th Century, the Brâncoveanus and Cantacuzinos from Wallachia acquired important properties in Făgăraș Land.

The legislation and social structure of Făgăraș Land were close to those in Wallachia in the Middle Ages, an expression of historical connections (related to origin, according to tradition) and administrative ones among the territories on either side of the Southern Carpathians. The rulers of Wallachia in the 14th Century made donations to the inhabitants of the area, thus contributing to the occurrence and strengthening of the class of Romanian boyars in Făgăraș Land. It is a matter of a (chronologically) first class of boyars [2]. To them were added the boyars lifted in rank from among the serfs. The latter received nobiliary decrees in a first stage in

exchange for some knightly duties of defending Făgăraș citadel, and later on, in the 17th Century, against payment. The territorial-administrative reorganisation imposed by emperor Josef II (1782) consigned to Făgăraș county Saxon localities beyond the Olt and entrusted administrative responsibilities to some imperial clerks, but in 1790 in Transylvania, the old organisation by counties, districts and seats by boundaries significant from an ethnic point of view was readopted.

From 1849, following the end of the revolution, in which the Făgăraș Legion took part by fighting against Hungarian revolutionaries, Transylvania became a province "directly dependent on the Imperial Court in Vienna"[2, p.37] and in 1850 Făgăraș district became a component of the Sibiu Military District.

Then, until the reestablishment of the autonomy of the Transylvania principality in 1860, the Court in Vienna tried a multitude of administrative organisation variants of the province. Between 1860 and 1865, the Romanians in Țara Făgăraș obtained acknowledgement of Romanian as the official language of the district, were appointed in different administrative positions and sent devoted representatives to the Diet. Its dissolving in 1865 and the convening of a new Diet, which voted for union of Transylvania with Hungary, interrupted the ascending political path of the leaders of Făgăraș Romanians. Until the Great Union in 1918, their energies focused against the Austrian-Hungarian regime that became official in 1867; their actions "being for the most part tending to radicalisation, including not recognising Hungarian laws and opposing with vehemence increasingly frequent tendencies of magyarisation" [2, p.259].

The above succession of historical landmarks highlights the frequency of political and administrative changes in Făgăraș Land from the first mention of the Romanian state formation up to its

integration into Romania after WWI. Beyond these frequent changes, arguing their impact at the level of the outlining of community identities, unfolds a number of dramatic trials. Repeated invasions of the Tartars [3], punishment incursions executed by Vlad Țepeș, angry with the inhabitants of Făgăraș because they sheltered some of his rivals to the throne of the Wallachia [4] and, later, the campaign of imposing Catholicism led by General Buccow upon the order of Empress Maria Theresa are a few of the trials. The memory of Tartar invasions is kept in the legends about maidens of the villages who would to throw themselves off rocks instead of becoming captive. According to the results of the field research carried out in 1918 within the project CarPaTO (*The Mapping of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Făgăraș Land*), on the side of the valleys toward the mountains, valleys that go through the pair of villages Comăna de Jos/de Sus (Lower/Upper) and Veneția de Jos/de Sus, in the east of Făgăraș Land, such rocks are located in tradition and the elders from Veneția de Sus recount about the tresses of maidens found at their base. Also according to tradition, the upper villages were formed as a result of the withdrawal of villagers from the path of the invaders. In the 1460 incursion, Vlad Țepeș had razed the entire village of Șercaia and its repopulation was needed two years later [4]. Almost all the villages under the mountain preserve in their toponyms the memory of the old Orthodox monasteries and hermitages destroyed by Adolf Nicolaus von Buccow and in collective memory stories of martyred monks and laymen.

To all these adds the ardent anti-communist resistance organised in the Făgăraș Mountains in the first decade after change of regime in Romania in 1947. The Carpathian Făgăraș Group led by Ion Gavrilă Ogoranu is one of the longest lasting resistance groups. Its members have benefitted continuously from the help of the villagers in Făgăraș Land[5].

3. Differences in the folk garment, as expressions of community identity

The firmness that the Făgăraș inhabitants needed to prove over time has strengthened their community identity. The differences in garment meant to signal their belonging are expressions of the need of marking community identity. The ownership of land within the boundary of the village is also part of the identity.

Many of the villages in Făgăraș Land are set in pairs in the same valley. The lower one is toward the Olt in the plain. The upper one is toward the mountain. Rather than escape from the path of the Tartars, the villagers in the plain decided to set up another hearth higher in the valley in order not to extend the hearth of the old village onto agricultural land in a damaging manner. The hay fields toward the mountain, still belonging to the villagers, were more suitable from an economic point of view as somewhere in between to be sacrificed making way to the new hearth.

The comparative research of women's traditional garment highlights local differences in each village, the basic

garment being the same in the entire ethnographic area Făgăraș Land. As examples, folk garment from the eastern extremity of the area, namely from the villages Cuciulata (the most eastern village), Comăna de Jos/ de Sus and Veneția de Jos/de Sus and Părâu will be presented. For Cuciulata and Veneția de Jos, documented mention dates back to 1372, in a Donation Diploma of the voivode of Wallachia Vlaicu Vodă to a relative of his, Ladislau de Dăbâca [6]. As shown above, Comăna de Jos is the birth place of Ștefan Mailat. Părâu is mentioned in 1292 [7]. Cuciulata, Comăna de Jos, Veneția de Jos and Părâu are neighbours, located in a row in this order on the road between Hoghiz and Șercaia, in Brașov county. To get to Comăna de Sus and Veneția de Sus, one can go through the lower villages, climbing up the valleys that go past them. The distances between the villages are of several kilometers (around five).

In figure 1 below are presented together the folk garment of the girls in Cuciulata and Comăna de Jos



Figure 1: Folk garment in Cuciulata (source: <http://fagarasultau.ro/2016/12/28/>) and Comăna de Jos (source: collection of Comăna Mayor's Office)

As it can be noticed in the picture, the girls in Cuciulata (left) wear hand-woven aprons, with geometrical patterns and a flounce at the bottom end, over a skirt made of thick fabric (*androc*). The girls in Comăna de Jos wear aprons from thin, factory fabric, with floral ornaments.

In figure 2 below, the folk garment of girls in Veneția de Jos and Părâu are presented together. The girls in Veneția de Jos (left) wear the same aprons over the skirt made of thick fabric and the same leatherbreastpieces as the girls in Comăna de Jos (figure 1). But the peasant

blousediffers, the ones in Veneția de Jos have yellow adornments of the sleeves (at Comăna these are black). Also distinct

from the garment in Comăna de Jos, at Veneția de Jos the girls wear a long red ribbon at the waist.



Figure 2: Folk garment from Veneția de Jos (source: http://www.dozadebine.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ceata_feciori_Venetia-de-jos) and Părău (source: CarPaTO collection)

The girls in Părău (to the right, figure 2) wear the peasant blouse with blue coloured adornments, the vest made of embroidered fabric instead of the leather breastpiece, and their aprons, still made of flowered, factory cloth finished with a flounce.

Even between the garment of the upper and lower villages, toward the plain, there are differences. Figure 3 below shows photographs of young people in Veneția de Sus (left) and of peasant blouses from Comăna de Sus.



Figure 3: The folk garment from Veneția de Sus (source: <http://www.centrulculturalreduta.ro/ro/arhiva-tradi%C8%9Bii/>) and peasant blouses from Comăna de Sus (source: CarPaTO collection)

The girls in Veneția de Sus do not wear the black, flowered head scarves on their heads and neither the red ribbon at the waist. Their peasant blouses, besides the yellow coloured adornments, of the peasant blouses in Veneția de Jos, also have red ornamental fields in the low part of the sleeves and around the neck. As for the

garment in Comăna de Sus, the peasant blouses in the photographs taken in the field research from 2018 rather resemble those in Veneția de Jos than those in Comăna de Jos (figure 1), richly adorned in black. The differences noted do not affect the unitary structure of the garment that is shared across Făgăraș Land. But the effort

made for differentiation signals, in a functionalist perspective, the need to mark, through garment, belonging to a community. The existence of differences between neighbouring villages, and moreso between villages within the same original precinct, indicates the strength of this need. The special historical status of Făgăraș Land, its tight connection with Wallachia and the interests of Hungarian royalty in this boundary territory, the existence of Romanian boyars, given land by rulers beyond the mountains, together with Hungarian “land owning gentlemen”, given land by kings of Hungary [2], have favoured the forming of a local community identity. Their firmness, supported by the proximity to the mountains and manifest in the Orthodox and anti-communist resistance, has fostered the thoughts explaining the differences. Locals can easily identify, judging by traditional garments, a person’s village of origin. A peculiar garment represents an ensurance that everyone knows with whom he deals. The locals in Făgăraș Land know each other also by the character traits attributed as a characteristic to all the inhabitants of one village or another (in one village people are known as being stingy, in another one as quick tempered, in another one as good dancers etc). The fact that they recognize one another by these traits indicated the

grafting of differences on the substratum of sharing the same identity, the one of being a Făgăraș Land dweller.

6. Conclusions

The relation between the area’s identity and local differentiation manifest within the villages in Făgăraș Land (the option for its eastern part as an example was determined by the photographs found most at hand; the things are the same, according to field research, in the rest of the ethnographic area) constitutes a considerable resource of intangible cultural heritage. It transposes onto the garment the history of the communities and the specific way in which each of them have assumed their own community identity. The differentiation effort made, on the unitary structure of Făgăraș garment, signals the importance of defining community for the locals. It signals implicitly the strength (as a force to resist various trials) of Făgăraș communities.

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