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**MAGIC AND RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM IN  
WINTER HOLIDAYS POETRY**

DOCTORAL THESIS ABSTRACT

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Introduction

#### I. Conceptual delimitations

#### II. Mythological reminiscences

##### II.1. Dacian substratum

##### II.2. Latin substratum

##### II.3. New Year Greetings

##### II.4. Mask games

#### III. Magical and mythical motifs common to carols and other folkloric texts

##### III.1. Carols and fairy tales

##### III.2. Carols, legends and ballads

##### III.3. The poetry of carols and disenchantments

##### III.4. Carols and rites of passage

###### III.4.1. Carols and poetry associated with birth

###### III.4.2. Carols and wedding poetry

###### III.4.3. Carols and funeral songs

#### IV. The evolution of carols its Christian forms

##### IV.1. Syncretic carols

##### IV.2. Resemanticized carols

#### V. Christian carols – between the biblical truth and the influence of other religious texts

##### V.1. Carols about Jesus

##### V.2. Carols on the Holy Virgin

##### V.3. Carols about saints

##### V.4. Carols as prayers

##### V.5. Carols of a cult origin

#### VI. Religious folk theatre

### Conclusions

### Bibliography

Carolling, as once practiced in our villages, used to be a form of folk magic, whereby people tried to influence the next year for the better. This happened because, in the archaic mentality, "the universe (or any micro-universe: the body, the house, the village etc.) is seen as being in a labile balance, always swinging between the State of Chaos and that of Cosmos. In the archaic and traditional societies, man does not act as a passive spectator to this "cosmic performance", he participates actively, with mythic and ritualistic means, in the regeneration of the used Cosmos and the reestablishment of the cosmic order, which is temporarily, sometimes cyclically, disturbed."<sup>1</sup>

Even after the emergence of Christianity, people have not given up to this magic practices. They acknowledge the sacraments taking place during the Holy Mass, they know that praying is a way of transcending to God and asking for certain blessings, but they also know that God may deny these requests, for certain reasons. Because they cannot understand nor accept the refusal, people resort, in parallel to magic, an ancient practice, pre-Christian, whereby they try to force the good they're expecting. On the other hand, used to these rites they have been practicing for hundreds of years, they cannot give them up out of the superstition, that, once they are forgotten, they will have unwanted consequences on the wellbeing of the world and their personal welfare.

This explains the existence, after 2000 years of Christianity, of customs accompanying winter holidays and related poetry, customs going in parallel or combining with the Christian services taking place in churches. Andrei Oișteanu mentions that, "ritually, on Christmas, the interrupted state of *illo tempore* because of human sins, was re-established. (...) Carolling is the main ritualistic act whereby this primordial beneficial state is temporarily but cyclically refreshed."<sup>2</sup>

In a summary analysis of carols, one can see that not all of them have the motif of Jesus Christ's birth, that one of them have other Christian motifs, and others have nothing in common with Christianity, the latter being the so-called *profane carols*. Nevertheless, the term "profane" is relative because, as Traian Herseni, "part of the carols that appear to us as profane nowadays, could be, in another conception or another cult, religious or magic-religious"<sup>3</sup>.

Thus, we cannot omit the mythological substratum of Romanian carols, whether it is a Latin substratum or a local one, Geto-Dacian, nor can we reduce the origin of carols to only one of them. "Much effort and erudition has been expended in our country in clarifying the purely Romanian origin of the entire Romanian people's culture. Given that researchers are fascinated with this doctrine, they have not seen common-sense things, as the people always creates new forms of life, sometimes leaving slowly, other times suddenly, their old customs, keeping only those deemed or felt as vital, essential, but even completing them unceasingly with new creations and adaptations

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<sup>1</sup> Andrei Oișteanu, *Ordine și Haos. Mit și magie în cultura tradițională românească*, Iași, Ed. POLIROM, 2004, p.15

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, p.25

<sup>3</sup> Traian Herseni, *Urme străvechi de cultură poporană românească*, Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Dacia, 1977, p. 167

and at the same time by mutual changes and influences with the cohabitant nationalities and neighbouring peoples.(...) The domestic and local customs are more likely kept by the native population, if it is not completely eradicated, only by conquerors and colonists even with the Romans' prestige.”<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, as Victor Kernbach notes, nowadays there are no more testimonies on Dacian religion: “From the conquering Romans we can expect one of the two usual attitudes in similar cases of invasion and transformation of the defeated countries in Roman provinces: either the acceptance of the religion of the conquered people and the identification (interpretation) of its gods with the Roman gods or adding them to the Roman Pantheon, or forbidding this religion (as it was the case of Druid religion).

But neither Trajan the Emperor nor his successors took such a step and, although Zamolxis and the elements of religion were known from the Greek writers, respectfully quoted in Rome (firstly Herodotus, Plato and Strabon), Zamolxis was taken over neither by the Roman religion, nor his forbidden cult administered by the Roman magistrates; on the contrary, an exceptional fact occurred: a conspiracy of silence set in, at least as we may think, based on the data known until the present).”<sup>5</sup> The explanation consists in the customs of human sacrifices included in the Dacian religion, or in its exclusivist character: “We know that the Romans, so tolerant towards the religions of neighbouring or conquered peoples, exempted from taking over by *interpretatio romana* only the religions practicing human sacrifices; and perhaps the ritualistic scarification of prisoners, as evidenced by an image of the Column, have been the first hindrance. (...) Or maybe, more likely, the Dacian religion, appearing because of its singularity an exclusivist religion, was compared by the Romans with druidism or Judaism, both forbidden by Rome's authorities, or even with Christianity, especially because, only several decades before, Josephus Flavius had compared the Dacian religion to the religion of the Essenes sect from Qumran; the assumption does not appear as hazardous, but cannot be proven either. Or Zamolxis was considered to be only a prophet and therefore the Romans deducted that the Dacians did not have an actual religion, as they had no god.”<sup>6</sup>

In exchange, Dan Oltean proves that, when the Romans conquered Dacia, they destroyed not only the Dacian citadels but also the temples, they killed and chased away the priests in their attempt to punish the Dacian gods, whom they considered guilty of the Dacian betrayal with respect to the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, pp. 72-73

<sup>5</sup> Victor Kernbach, *Universul mitic al românilor*, București, Ed. Științifică, 1994, p.79

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, pp. 89-90

agreement signed with them after the wars of 101-102 A.D. Nevertheless, they could not destroy a centuries-old religion<sup>7</sup>.

As they could not practice their rituals in the temples, the Dacians continued to do this in every home, *to carol* from one person to another, with New Year's wishes, as the Romans actually did, too. But they continued this way to recite their old myths, to narrate the rites that they had once solemnized in temples, to celebrate their gods, even if they dressed them in new clothing and gave them Roman names, taking them along, in symbolic shapes or hidden under masks.

Nevertheless, they did not escape Roman influence, visible both in some rituals and in the accompanying texts, of all the Romanian holidays, "Christmas is one of the most syncretic (...). We find here both the Dacian legacy but also numerous and strong elements coming from Roman rituals of Saturnalia, and from Dionysian festivals or those dedicated to Mithra."<sup>8</sup>

Victor Kernbach mentions that, after the conquest, the emperor Trajan brought to Dacia several legions, made of a lot of ethnicities, each of them bearing its own beliefs, which left "isolated traces in the conscience of the local Dacians", because the latter did not "give up their traditional religion, not only after the establishment of the Roman colonists in Dacia, or after the missionary spreading of Christianity"<sup>9</sup>. This means that, both the customs and the accompanying texts, can keep traces of these beliefs, along with the local or Roman ones.

We can note that the poetry of carolling is marked by a magic and religious syncretism, which disappears from the New Year's greeting poetry. Thus, *Sorcova*, *Semănatul* and *Plugușorul* reflect old, pre-Christian rituals, which had a well-established magical function, that of bringing the hosts' health and abundance, rich fruit in the fields, in order to re-establish the world in the correct and perfect patterns of the beginnings, after the chaos and disorder period brought by the end of the year.

In the same train of ideas, the mask games performed both at Christmas and at New Year's Eve are a reminiscence of totemic cults, their appearance at the passage between the years symbolising the divinity they represent coming down on Earth. The purpose of these divine beings coming amongst the people is to provide the renewal of the world, its rebirth but also to bring the abundance by means of their fertilizing and fecundative function.

Unlike the carols, where the emphasis is placed on the text, here, the game and the mask dance are more important. The text accompanying them seems to have lost its mythical character, but in a closer analysis we may find in the carolling poetry the narration that should have accompanied the rite produced by the mask. Aiming at bringing good mood, the lyrics

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<sup>7</sup> Dan Oltean, *Religia dacilor*, București, Ed. SAECULUM I.O., 2006, p. 245

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem. p. 432

<sup>9</sup> Victor Kernbach, *Op. Cit.*, p.86

accompanying the mask games still have the magical function of bringing joy to the year to come, and by it, a well seated and happy world as in the golden age of humanity.

The carols preserved the myths and rites accompanying them to a lesser extent, by the representation of magic and mythical symbols, which to a great extent lost their original meanings, being resemantized in time, especially because of Christianity influence. Nevertheless, they can be decrypted by comparative analysis with the identical mythical motifs kept by other forms of folk expression, such as fairy tales, legends, ballads and formulas accompanying disenchantments or the ceremonies of man's passing through life.

The identification of these common mythical motifs is a means of rebuilding an ensemble of which carols have been taken and which can disclose significances that would otherwise remain hidden or seem unlikely.

Thus, the poetry of carols is asserted, along with fairy tales, legends, ballads, disenchantments and rites of passage, from the same ancient magic and mythical fund, which it does not give up, not even under the pressure of Christianity.

Monica Brătulescu synthesizes this phenomenon, noted actually by most researchers: „...Romanian carolling has a diffuse ritual and ceremonial character: the custom includes vestiges from the puberty rites and elements of funeral ritual, aims at the fertility of vegetation and animals, presents tangencies with the ceremony of nuptials and social meetings, or even disenchantments.”<sup>10</sup>

Along with the emergence of Christianity, the ancient religion of the Dacian-Romans gradually loses its unitary and sacred character, part of it continuing to exist in symbiosis with the new religion, which does not correspond to the new doctrine, taking refuge in fairy tales, legends, ballads or in the traditions related to the essential moments of life, such as birth, nuptials and death. The fact is noted, moreover, by Romulus Vulcănescu: “The primitive Christianity was grafted on mythical Dacian and Dacian-Roman beliefs and traditions, which did not contravene in their ritual form and essence to the Christian doctrine.”<sup>11</sup> Since, in the beginning, there was no church organisation in our country, “from the props of old mountainous mythology of the Dacian-Romans, beliefs, customs and traditions were preserved in Dacia, filtered through the mythological conception of primitive Christianity.”<sup>12</sup>

Monica Brătulescu mentions that it is precisely this weak organization of the Church that permitted the perpetuation of the old beliefs: „Except for Dobrogea and the left bank of the Danube,

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<sup>10</sup> Monica Brătulescu, *Colinda românească*, București, Ed. Minerva, p.42

<sup>11</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, *Mitologie română*, București, Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1987, p. 134

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 134

which were included in the Roman-Byzantine hierarchy, Christianity was practiced by the Dacian-Romans in small communities, unsubordinated to any church jurisdiction. This folk Christianity has remained with our people until late, the Romanian Church gaining a strict institutional character only in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. One may assume that under these circumstances, the local folk traditions, as well as customs and beliefs brought by the Romans to Dacia, have continued to perpetuate in parallel with Christianity, or in tight connection with it.”<sup>13</sup>

Under these terms, the text of carols has undergone changes as well. On the one hand, some motifs which have lost their sacred meanings, and by it, the magical function, are replaced by Christian ones. Sometimes, these motifs do not replace each other, but they coexist, the carols having the aspect of a hybrid, syncretic text, trying to reconcile the old sacredness with the Christian one, in an ensemble with an increased magical power, as noted by Al. Rosetti: "In the religious carols we encounter, mixed with the primitive fund of folk beliefs, Christian elements of literary origin, added to the primitive substratum.”<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, the old texts are kept in their initial form, but, by resemantization to a symbolic level, they can be included in the Christian doctrine, even if they lose their old meanings in time.

In time, due to the activity of priests and teachers, the poetry of carols comes closer to the biblical text, wherefrom it takes especially motifs related to the Saviour's birth, but also themes from the *Old* or the *New Testament*. Nevertheless, these texts also undergo changes throughout time, on the one hand due to their oral character, on the other due to the influence exerted by other religious texts, some apocryphal, which have circulated in various eras. Recording carols in writing gives them a greater stability. Nevertheless, one can note some cultivated, religious poems have been taken over in the repertoire of carols.

At the same time, a change is caused at the level of the mask performances. As these games came in contradiction to Christian religion, they have been replaced by religious folk theatre plays, built in full agreement with the event celebrated by Christians at Christmas, Son of God, Jesus Christ's birth. Therefore, instead of gods symbolised by masks, Jesus Christ is brought into people's homes, not only by means of carolling, but also by a theatrical performance, *Irozii* or *Viflaimul*, that would satisfy the need of spectacular of the common man and help him represent the words of the Holy Gospel heard in church.

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<sup>13</sup> Monica Brătulescu, *Op. Cit.*, p.17

<sup>14</sup> Al. Rosetti, *Colindele religioase la români*, București, Librăriile „Cartea românească” și „Pavel Suru”, 1920, p. 9

Moreover, people are offered a Christian behavioural model by the play with Brâncoveanu and his children as protagonists, killed by the Turks for not giving up their Christian belief.

Our demarche tries to follow poetry accompanying customs practices on winter holidays in its evolution, from the magic and mythical forms to the Christian, religious ones, comparing them also to other forms of folk expression, in order to prove their syncretic magic and religious character and to provide them with a new area of significance.

Before going to the analysis of carols and other texts performed on winter holidays, I have deemed as necessary to present the way in which they have been defined, by different researchers, the underlying concepts of this paper, as well as the relations established between them.

The term *carol* is defined by *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române* ("The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language") as "traditional song performed by groups of children, lads or adults on Christmas and New Year's Eve holidays."<sup>15</sup>

Petru Caraman thinks that the term *colindă* (*carol*) has a Latin origin, being derived from *calendae* and in tight connection to the Roman holiday of year beginning, *Calendae Januariae*.

Moreover, he mentions that the customs of carolling can be regarded in terms of two aspects, profane and religious, according to the type of elements in the accompanying texts. Wherefrom the division of carolling into two groups, profane and religious: the former are called this way because "they always remain in the folk field, blending in the most fantastic way to the most different profane elements, and, especially because in their origin, they were nothing but profane"<sup>16</sup>; the latter are deemed as religious because they contain Christian elements.

The first person who classified carols in two categories, depending on their contents, was Atanasie Marian Marienescu: "Carols are *religious* and *worldly*. The *religious* ones are based on the Christian church object (about Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary, the Saints etc.) and they are independent folk songs; but they appear also as fragments of religious legends."<sup>17</sup> In contrast, "worldly carols are based on the worldly object, - on honour, heroism and nationality, and they are much like ballads and they are even traditions."<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately, the distinction he made is not entirely clear, because mythologically themed carols are included both in the category of religious carols, and the worldly ones: "As there is this transformation or even deviation, religious carols appear even as fabulous, mythical"<sup>19</sup> Moreover, "in

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<sup>15</sup> \* \* \* *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române*, București, Ed. Academiei R.S.R., 1975, p.172

<sup>16</sup> Petru Caraman, *Colindatul la români, slavi și la alte popoare*, București, Ed. Minerva, 1983, p.9

<sup>17</sup> Atanasie Marian Marienescu, *Poezii populare din Transilvania*, București, Ed. Minerva, 1971, p 514

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 515

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 514



the object of worldly carols we find grand souvenirs even in the historic scenes and the destinies of our forefathers in Italy! They remind us of the rape of *Sabine women*, and the *horse race* (...), on the *wild girls hunting* (...).<sup>20</sup>

For Ovidiu Bîrlea “carols are group greetings, the melody making them profoundly different from other recited greetings, and from those sung by children (Moș Ajunul, Sorcova)”<sup>21</sup>. He notes the existence of different names of these songs, depending on the region. Thus, the term *colindă* is found in Moldavia and Transylvania, although in the West and North of Transylvania there is also the term *corindă*. In Walachia there is the term *colind*, with the plural *colinde* or *colinzi*<sup>22</sup>.

With respect to their thematic division in religious and worldly carols, Ovidiu Bârlea thinks that the “distinction has a relative value, firstly because there are various oscillations in various regions, with Christian and non-Christian variants of the same type.”<sup>23</sup>

A different position towards this issue is adopted by Octavian Buhociu, who mentions: “...we think them all as magic and religious, as it is their reality, and the oldest of them, of pagan and laic, we thin they are inherited from the Dacian-Gets; a second group consists in the carols of Christian inspiration and generally savant (bookish), and a third category “variable”, are the carols of Christian and non-Christian blending.”<sup>24</sup>

For Andrei Oișteanu carolling is “a compulsory ritual whereby Cosmos is maintained *ad infinitum* on the ontological spiral.”<sup>25</sup> It “updates a drama of cosmic proportions. If it is not a matter of simply narrating an event which happened at an indefinite time (of the type “once upon a time”) and not even in a primordial time (in *illo tempore*). The drama is produced *here* and *now*, even at the place and moment of its narration. The entire community of the village participate - wither in the position of “carollers”, or in that of “carolled” – in this drama, not only in its remembrance, but also in its revival.”<sup>26</sup>

Here we can note the syncretic character of the carols, as it contains both Christian religious elements and pre-Christian religious elements, that are subscribed to the old myths. But their recital in the sacred moments of the year is a magical practice of attracting divinity goodwill, whether it’s Christian or archaic. Therefore, the custom of carolling itself acquires magical effects. “In the past

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<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 515

<sup>21</sup> Ovidiu Bîrlea, *Folclorul românesc*, vol. I, București, Ed. Minerva, 1981, p. 303

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 303

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 362

<sup>24</sup> Octavian Buhociu, *Folclorul de iarnă, ziorile și poezia păstorească*, București, Ed. Minerva, 1973, p.89

<sup>25</sup> Andrei Oișteanu, *Op. Cit.*, p. 20

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 21

carolling was attributed beneficial effects : the good crops of wheat and hemp, abundance, health, cattle pedigree.”<sup>27</sup>

Petru Caraman also mentions the magical character of carols, coming from the greeting they contain: “Greeting is one of the elementary forms of word magic”.<sup>28</sup> He identifies magic with witchcraft: “But carolling is nothing but witchcraft, as we are dealing with the utterance of a formula with the well-defined purpose of causing things expressed by that form and because here too, as in most witchcraft, we are based on the same complex of emotion-desire, accompanied by the strong belief that everything will happen just as the formula says.”<sup>29</sup>

One can note this way that the poetry of carols is compared either to magic and myths or mythology, or religion. In order to better understand these correlations, we think it is necessary to have a closer look at the various interpretations of these terms.

According to the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language*, the term *magic* designates “all the procedures, formulae, gestures etc. whereby one thinks certain supernatural forces can be invoked in order to produce miracles”.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the adjective *magical* gains the meaning of “occult, mysterious, occult, mysterious, mystic”.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast, according to the same dictionary *religion* is “a historic form of social conscience consisting in the belief in supernatural beings or forces, in their worship and the existence or appropriate organizations and institutions.”<sup>32</sup>

A more comprehensive explanation is given by Bronislaw Malinowski. He considers magic as “a body of purely practical acts, performed as a means for a purpose”.<sup>33</sup> These acts consist either in the imitation of the situation wanted, or in predicting the en, expressing a special idea or emotion. But beyond all these, there is “the force of magic”, which is “unique, specific force, a unique force in its way, residing exclusively in the human, emanating only by its magic art, being released at the same time as its voice, transmitted by the ritual act.”<sup>34</sup>

At the same time, the origin of magic is in a “powerful emotional experience, which gave birth to spontaneous behavioural practices becoming magical rituals by their positive accomplishments. They are accompanied by narrations reporting the positive effect of the act, as

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<sup>27</sup> Monica Brătulescu, *Op. Cit.*, p. 21

<sup>28</sup> Petru Caraman, *Op. Cit.*, p.363

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 362-363

<sup>30</sup> \* \* \* *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române, Op., cit.*, p. 516

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p.516

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p.795

<sup>33</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magie, știință și religie*, Iași, Ed. Moldova, 1993, p.109

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 120

well as the wonderful accomplishments of any of the magi, becoming a real “*current mythology of magic*”. Hence, the term of *magic* acquires a new meaning, that of “bridge between the golden age of primordial acts and the miraculous power of today. Therefore, the forms are filled with mythical allusions which, by being uttered, unleash the powers of the past, throwing them in the present.”<sup>35</sup>

We think that it is precisely here where we are when we refer to the magical character of carols. Its poetry becomes a corpus of archaic, mythical elements which, by remembrance, unleash occult, mystic forces, whereby a beneficial effect is caused.

Moreover, if “magic is surrounded by strict conditions: the exact memory of the disenchantment, the impeccable performance of the rite, the constant adhesion to taboos and prescriptions ...”<sup>36</sup> and carolling has its pre-established rules, and the text of carols must be reproduced exactly, hence its archaism and conservative character, translated by the formula “‘cause this is our elderly law”.

At the same time, in the opinion of Malinowski, magic precedes myths, which is the “historic formulation of one of those events, which once and for all, have certified the value of truth of a certain form of magic.”<sup>37</sup> Therefore, “each belief produces its own mythology, because there is no belief without miracles, and the main myth simply narrates the primordial miracle of magic.”<sup>38</sup>

For Mircea Eliade magic comprises all beliefs, superstitions and laws deriving from them, which existed in the primitive society. “Magic is the materialization of primitive mentality”<sup>39</sup>, which has not been lost yet with the evolution of the society, but it was “sent in the Oriental (...) and Greek-Roman religions”<sup>40</sup>.

This primitive magic has two aspects, the *imitative magic* and the *contagious magic*. “The former is based on the premises that any action entails a similar action. For instance, by destroying the effigy of an enemy, it was once thought that the enemy died (...). And contagious magic thought that two things that were once in contact continue to influence one another after their separation. Examples of this category are countless: by burning the hair or the nail of an enemy, the enemy lies in bed and dies.”<sup>41</sup>

As regards the myth, Mircea Eliade defines it as the story of a sacred history: “the myth tells of a sacred history; it reports an event taking place in the primordial times, the fabulous time of the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, p. 133

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 136

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, p. 134

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, p. 134

<sup>39</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Morfologia religiilor – Prolegomene* -, f.l. Ed. „Jurnalul literar”, 1993, p.50

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, p. 50

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, p. 50

"beginnings". In other words, the myth tells us, thanks to the deeds of supernatural beings, a reality was born, whether it is a total reality, the Cosmos, or just a fragment: an island, a vegetal species, a human behaviour, an institution. (...) The characters of myths are supernatural beings. They are known mostly for what they did during the prestigious times of "the beginnings". Therefore, myths reveal their creative activity and disclose sacredness (or only its supernatural character) to their works."<sup>42</sup>

The relationship between the three forms of spiritual expression, *magic*, *mythology* and *religion* is expressed with great clarity by Romulus Vulcănescu: "The fact that mythology is *the second step of religiousness*, after magic, does not mean that it must be interpreted strictly as religion. That it may foreshadow some religious intentions (henotheism), it is different. Mythology is halfway from magic to religion. Mythology performs religion, because religion is an individual enhancement of mythology."<sup>43</sup>

As a conclusion to the above, we consider that a pertinent definition of the terms was given by Traian Herseni, who captured both the resemblances between the two ways of expression of man in his relation to the sacred, and what makes them essentially different. Thus, he says that "there is no religion without magic or magic without religion. Both of them are based on the belief in the existence of supernatural forces, favourable or unfavourable to man, but religion tries to draw in some of them and alienate the others, by peaceful means, by sacrifices, offerings, prayers, so by *captatio benevolentiae*, whereas magic tries to do the same by constraint, spells, songs and disenchantments, witchcraft and enchantments, charms and charms undone."<sup>44</sup>

In this context, the custom of carolling has a complex character, it cannot be reduced to just singing the carol. Monica Brătulescu mentions that the "texts of carols represent merely one of the elements for a ceremonial based on the reunited power of words, music, gestures, dancing, sometimes on that of plastic representation."<sup>45</sup>

Profane carols contain motifs and themes that are not found in Christian religion, they belong, according to researchers' opinion, to an old substratum, whether it is Dacian, or Roman, or both combined. As few things are known on Dacian religion, some people have insisted on the Roman character of carolling origin, whereas others have thought that the poetry of carols maintains

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<sup>42</sup> Idem, *Aspecte ale mitului*, București, Ed. Univers, 1978, p.6

<sup>43</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, *Op. Cit.*, p. 108

<sup>44</sup> Traian Herseni, *Op. Cit.*, p. 261

<sup>45</sup> Monica Brătulescu, *Op. Cit.*, p. 18

elements of Dacian mythology. This was possible, on the one hand, by hiding some of them under Roman *clothing*, and on the other, due to their resemblance to the Roman ones, as a result of their origin in a common Indo-European stratum.<sup>46</sup>

Petru Caraman considers that the tradition of carolling is rooted in a Roman celebration practiced at the beginning of the year, *Calendae Januariae*, which “was the first among the Roman customs and will have been very much cultivated and very popular in all the Empire, as were the holidays it was related to, otherwise it would have been impossible to explain why they were so spread and had such deep roots in the entire world.”<sup>47</sup>

However, he does not deny the existence of related local customs, which, in contact to the Roman one, could give birth to the current customs: “But to attribute the origin of customs from the cycle of Christian winter holidays exclusively to a common heritage (the Greek-Roman pagan holidays, for instance), which spread from a certain centre to all Europe and from here in the European colonies of other continents, is a mistake in any case. We should not forget the great contribution, undoubtedly brought to the transformation of these common customs by their superposition on the customs and traditions specific to each people, customs giving a smaller or a greater analogy with those coming from the common centre.”<sup>48</sup>

Ovidiu Bârlea considers that the custom of carolling at Christmas has the origin of specific ritual practices specific to several Roman holidays: “Roman Christianity, in its attempt to cancel the memory of customs involving pagan deities, has sought to oppose them to an appropriate holiday, establishing Christmas precisely in this period in which fell *Saturnalia*, *Dies natalis Solis Invicti* and *Calendae Januariae*, contributed substantially to the contamination of some practices.”<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, he notes the mythical character of carols: “...carols are some sort of myth in action, only (sic!) in this "critical" period of the beginning of the year, when the ghosts of Cosmos arise instable and they can be guided so as to be entirely beneficial to man. (...) The person carolled is deeply involved in the action taking place right before his eyes, he is then actively participating, during carolling, implicitly bearing elongations, pretends that give him mythical dimensions and virtues, that is to a maximum extent. This way, “the wonder” narrated becomes plausible, it gets real contours and the earthly world enters for a minute is the full osmosis with the Cosmos, the

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<sup>46</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 122-134

<sup>47</sup> Petru Caraman, *Op. cit.*, p. 7

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, pp. 351-352

<sup>49</sup> Ovidiu Bârlea, p. 268

human “micro cosmos” becoming one with the unlimited macro cosmos, as two faces of the same reality.”<sup>50</sup>

Gheorghe Vrabie considers, in contrast, that the origin of carolling lies in the greetings practiced by the Romans at *Calendae Januariae*, as well as in the local archaic traditions: “But we think that the Gets-Dacians themselves, who shared the same space of carols, living from agriculture and animal breeding, had different practices from those of the Romans. Springing from the same way of pastoral-agricultural living, they have continued to survive - as those of the colonizers - in the life of new people born by many crossings.”<sup>51</sup>

He notes that the Romanian poetry of carols is different from the Roman one, suggesting the existence of another substratum: “Nevertheless, we notice that the charming and interesting ode-like carols, praising man’s life, were to be found neither with the Romans nor the ancient Greeks, or the Italians – direct heirs of the former – nor the present Greeks, nor the French, the Spaniards or other peoples of our continent.”<sup>52</sup> The famous folklorist considers that they were inherited from the Slavs, as they are encountered in their folklore. Here, we must also mention Petru Caraman’s opinion, who thinks that Romanians have taken carols in the form of greetings from the Romans, on which they superposed certain Slavic elements, leading to their radical transformation. In its new form, the carol penetrated again the Slavic world afterwards .<sup>53</sup>

In contrast, Octavian Buhociu thinks that winter holidays customs are inherited from the Dacian-Gets, having a much older substratum, Indo-European: “the 12 days belong to the Indo-European tradition and they were fixed around New Year, which took place either on the solstice or the equinox. The Christian calendar took them over with just as many pagan beliefs and they are 6 before New Year and 6 after New Year. In this regard, the Carpathian traditions lead us back in the past; (...) they were inherited from the Dacian-Gets. The Romanian traditions from these days are confirmed by those which are equivalent to other peoples from the same linguistic family, such as the Iranians, the Hellenes, the Romans.”<sup>54</sup>

As we can see, the opinions are divided, which means that the poetry of carols can find significances both by the exploitation of the Dacian substratum and the Latin one, sometimes one of them having a larger share than the other, other times both of them being equally pertinent.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, p. 327

<sup>51</sup> Gheorghe Vrabie, *Folclorul, obiect – principii – metodă – categorii*, București, Ed. Academiei R.S.R., 1970, p. 222

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, p. 221

<sup>53</sup> Petru Caraman, *Op. Cit.*, p. 395

<sup>54</sup> Octavian Buhociu, *Op. Cit.*, p. 48

The beginning of each year is accompanied by magical practices and formulae meant to cause the accomplishment of man's most important wishes: to be healthy, to have abundance and luck in everything, to start a family, to have children etc. These have been practiced by all the peoples since ancient times. Thus, they have been attested in documents in the Romans, but certainly they were also in the Dacians, or the other Indo-European peoples.

Petru Caraman mentions the custom of New Year's greetings, practiced by the Romans, and their magical function of producing in real life what has been expressed by words.

Still, for the formula to have the necessary magical strength, it needs to be accompanied by gestures, a certain practice, the rite. According to Caraman, the rite preceded the formula: "The greetings on which carolling is based belong not only to the magic of words, but to a certain magical practice, they are merely arisen from a simple reflex of it."<sup>55</sup>

In time, the formula has become more and more powerful, sometimes the practice disappearing completely, as the case of other carols, other times being transposed in a narration that does verbally what once was made with gestures.

Nevertheless, there are customs in which gesture and formula continue to coexist, such as *Semănatul*, *Sorcova*, *Plugușorul*, even if practice is reduced to certain gestures and the formula contains also the rite description of old, being "some sort of its interpretation."<sup>56</sup>

More present nowadays, both at Christmas and New Year's day, there used to be mask games, of which more known are *Jocul ursului*, *Capra*, *Jocul cerbului*, *Turca*, *Brezaia*.

In the scenario of these games as in the accompanying text, old magical rites can be identified, with the same purpose, of causing welfare in the hosts' household, their health as well as other essential events in people's lives, such as childbirth and marriage.

Romulus Vulcănescu situates the origin of these games in archaic times: "In the Palaeolithic era, the collectors of edible and pharmacopoeic plants and especially hunters (of bears, stags, wild boar, deer etc.) may have invented the masks for their practical harvesting and hunting needs."<sup>57</sup> In time, they change their function, becoming mythical-religious instruments in order to perfect community group ceremonies"<sup>58</sup>, and more recently they have become "ludic instruments for folkloric entertainment."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Petru Caraman, *Op. cit.*, p. 362

<sup>56</sup> Idem, *Studii de folclor*, vol. II, București, Editura Minerva, 1988, p. 266

<sup>57</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, *Măștile populare*, București, Editura Științifică, 1970, p.19

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem, p. 15

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem, p. 15

The magical character, and their considerable age are remarked also by Victor Kernbach: “Arisen in the archaic stratum of animism, influenced directly or indirectly by totems and fetishes, the folkloric masks are relictual magical elements, whether it is those in the Greek and Roman theatre or they keep their meaning of liturgics accessory in the primitive populations in Africa, America or Asia.”<sup>60</sup>

Ovidiu Bîrlea situates in a prehistoric era also the origin of this custom, connected to a rite of nature forces regeneration. Its scenario comprised several moments, that are found in the current game: “the god was sacrificed, his body infused in earth under various forms, accompanied by festive and dramatic ululating of the god, then he is reanimated from these *membra disjecta*, to the enormous joy of the collectivity, as his revival ensures implicitly nature’s revival, especially the vegetation. The sacred drama is considerably accentuated by the crisis caused in the ancient humanity by the menacing destruction of the day, when the sun appeared to be extinct, at the end of its powers. Only the scarification of the god lent it new powers, it reactivated the entire nature and humanity was saved from destruction.”<sup>61</sup>

It results from the above that behind the mask there is a pre-Christian divinity: “the animal represented by the mask is a numenal being, with sacred features and especially with special efficiency in promoting vegetation, health and generally wellbeing.”<sup>62</sup>

To this end, G. Paul Meiu considers “there is a possibility that in an archaic magical-religious system, the group of carollers could have been the one bringing or representing divinity, shook hands with each member of the community, who had to preserve it by individual rites. In the case of the group of lads in Comăna de Jos, a proof to thin end is constituted by turca, if we were to consider it a ritual representation or a sacred materialisation of the divinity creating blight.”<sup>63</sup>

The identity between the mask and divine being is certain because, as Romulus Vulcănescu shows, “in most ancient peoples, they thought divine beings came on earth only with masks, because this way, the brightness of their sacred image would have killed the people.”<sup>64</sup>

In Roman mythology, the gods did not wear masks, they were metamorphosed into animals, and sometimes they were accompanied by an animal which became their double or symbol.

In Dacians, the cult of the king Zamolxis was also connected to a bear mask.

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<sup>60</sup> Victor Kernbach, *Op. Cit.*, p. 102

<sup>61</sup> Ovidiu Bîrlea, *Op. Cit.*, p. 271

<sup>62</sup> Ibidem, p. 271

<sup>63</sup> Paul Meiu, *Vin feciorii cu turca! Schimbări semiologice în obiceiurile cetei de feciori din Comăna de Jos*, Braşov, Editura Fundaţiei Culturale Arania, 2004, p. 58

<sup>64</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, *Măştile populare*, *Op. cit.*, p. 23



This means that behind the masks there is a divine being who, once in a while, like God in carols, comes down amongst people to reward them and reward their deeds.

The ludic character of today's mask game is owed to the disappearance of its sacral function, under the influence of Christianity. Nevertheless, as Victor Kernbach notes, "the folk theatre with masks (as in *Capra*, *Brezaia* or *Turca*, in *Irozii* etc.) is not a ludic theatre (and if, in modern times, it has become ludic this was owed to city men's request as well as the theatrical models offered by the city), but only a ritual in its intrinsic structure and ends; therefore, the performers are not actors, they are faithful bearers of tradition, some people interpreting the myth, reliving it – with the implicit or explicit purpose of invocation of supernatural forces asked for rain, good crops, deliverance from plagues and so on."<sup>65</sup>

The third chapter of the work has attempted to identify the common elements of carols and other types of folk expression such as fairy tales, legends, ballads, disenchantments as well as texts accompanying ceremonies of passage, childbirth, nuptials, death. It has aimed at proving their belonging to a magical-mythological archaic stratum, as well as providing to the poetry of carols the chance of a more ample interpretation, by comparing it to the other folk texts or even in some ritual gestures.

In the poetry of carols we can note the existence of an archaic imaginary, present in the other forms of folkloric expression as well, imaginary originating in the old magical myths and ceremonies, which followed the wellbeing of the world in general but also the individual welfare of men.

Andrei Oișteanu notes to this end, "that a great deal of the legends, carols, ballads, disenchantments (by their recital) and ceremonies, rituals, magical gestures (by their practice) have the ultimate purpose of maintaining or re-establishing "world ordinance".<sup>66</sup>

Along with the change of old beliefs and the settlement of Christianity, the sacred character of myths has been lost, they became legends, ballads or fairy tales, the rites have lost of their strength, sometimes gliding from magic to the spectacular, as in the case of nuptials ceremonials. It has allowed certain motifs to pass from one genre to another, from one species to another, and even from one form of expression to another.

In this context, as Monica Brătulescu notes, "although well-structured and with an obvious modelling, carols have numerous correspondences to other genres and species: to ballads, Christian

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<sup>65</sup> Victor Kernbach, *Op. Cit.*, p. 102

<sup>66</sup> Andrei Oișteanu, *Op. cit.*, p.15

legends, to the lyric, the disenchantment, the funeral and nuptial ceremonials, the ceremonial social repertoire.”<sup>67</sup>

That is why in carols we can find motifs and themes present in fairy tales, in legends and ballads. Moreover, by keeping its ritualism character, the carol present motifs also common to rites of passage, because it pursues the cosmic renovation by the social and firstly, individual one. If the man is healthy and enjoys wellbeing with his people, then the society functions as it should, and the world, as perceived by the traditional man, is reseeded in its natural characters.

Thus, just as the disenchantments, the greeting in carols must give the man, first of all, health, but also the reach of his individual meaning, just like in love disenchantments. Moreover, the same as in rites of passage, it purposed the good integration into the collectivity of those who have changed their status, either by reaching a certain age, or by marriage, or by the enrichment of the family with a new person or by losing one of its members.

The identification of motifs common to carols and the other folkloric species allows the comparison to an archaic folk imaginary, giving the poetry an area of significance, or, by filling in the blanks, giving them new meanings.

The resemblance between carols and fairy tales is visible especially at the level of motifs, as many of them are common to the two folkloric species.

The custom of carolling is specific to the twelve days around New Year’s, from Christmas to the Twelfth Day, prefiguring the twelve months of the year to come, with all the situations in which man might be put, and their solutions. Mihai Pop notes that in the “New Year’s repertoire and especially in the poetry of carols, these solutions are prefigured.”<sup>68</sup> Therefore, there are carols such as *Cerbul*, *Soarele și luna*, *Miorița* or *Meșterul Manole*, because “these carols are in essence poetic forms of ancient rites.”<sup>69</sup>

The rites have always been accompanied by the myth, the spoken text, the story of the new situation and its solution. When the myth, under the influence of the Christian religion, was desacralized, it lost its magical function, it was broken from the rite and became a fairy tale or a fairy tale motif. Because, as Gheorghe Vrăbie, shows, “there are the so-called conglomerate fairy tales, offering the image of a work based on additions of motifs, of sequences and even subjects”<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>67</sup> Monica Brătulescu, *Op. cit.*, p. 44

<sup>68</sup> Mihai Pop, *Folclor românesc. Texte și interpretări*, vol. II, București, Editura Grai și suflet –Cultura națională, 1998, p. 297

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 297

<sup>70</sup> Gheorghe Vrăbie, *Proza populară românească. Studiu stilistic*, București, Editura Albatros, 1986, p. 40

The relationship between the rite and the fairytale, on the one hand is amply illustrated by V.I. Propp. He mentions that “fairy tales kept the traces of numerous traditions and rites: there are many reasons that find their genetic explanation only by comparison to the rites.”<sup>71</sup> In contrast, myths and fairy tales have an identical form: “From the formal viewpoint, myths cannot be differentiated from fairy tales. Fairy tales and myths (especially the myths of people in the period before the division of society in classes) can sometimes coincide with one another so much, that in ethnographic and folklore such myths are often called fairy tales.”<sup>72</sup> What makes them different is “their social function”<sup>73</sup>, as the myth is sacred history, in direct relation to people’s belief. In contrast, fairy tales, losing their sacred character, become “work of art”.

So, as the carol and the fairy tale have ancient origins, lost in the myth, it is natural to find in them common motifs. Moreover, according to Ovidiu Bîrlea’s opinion, both of them build the image of an ideal world: “... carols are close to the fantastic fairy tale, since both of them aim at the representation of a profoundly idealized world, as it should be as per people’s multi-millenary dreams. Fairy tales operate with two categories of representations, negative and positive, whereas carols, by its encomiastic profile, paints only the field of the optimal, even if in subsidiary one can note the strong contrast to the daily world.”<sup>74</sup>

Nevertheless, one can not that the texts of carols present a fact, an event surprised in progress, as a present moment, and most of the times, broken from the past or the future. Fairy tales project the event in an undefined past, which allows it to present all its aspects, both the initial and the final. This is why carols find most of the times their meaning in fairy tales, the motif they present is completed by the others kept by the story alone.

With respect to fairy tales characters, Victor Kernbach notes that some of them are rooted in mythological characters. For instance, he says, “it cannot be excluded that, partially from the cult of Heron, the mythical Romanian figure of Făt-Frumos (Prince Charming).”<sup>75</sup> This Heron or „god-hero *Heros*” is none other than the “Thracian Knight”, “according to a myth, a mortal deified posthumously, [who] had a very widespread cult between the Carpathians and the Balkans. (...) The roman era considered him to be a god patronizing hunting, since he was represented by a young

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<sup>71</sup> V.I. Propp, *Rădăcinile istorice ale basmului fantastic*, București, Ed. Univers, 1973, p. 12

<sup>72</sup> Ibidem, p. 17

<sup>73</sup> Ibidem, p. 17

<sup>74</sup> Ovidiu Bîrlea, *Op. cit.*, p. 316

<sup>75</sup> Victor Kernbach, *Op. cit.*, p. 27

horseman often in cinergetic circumstances, and fecundity, life and death, and some images show him as giving blessings with his right hand.”<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, Iana Sânziana might be originated in them mythical figure of the goddess *Bendis*, “goddess probably magician and protector of women, patronizing the Moon, the woods, spells and apparently, similar attributively to Artemis/Diana, but also to Venus.”<sup>77</sup> But the name, thinks Victor Kernbach, is derived from that of the goddess Diana.

With respect to the relation between carols and legends or ballads, one can note both common motifs for the three and a specific means of representation, by means of symbols and allegory.

“In Romanian folklore, as in that of other European peoples, the legend designates a repertoire of oral narrations with cognitive function. In essence, it explains a real fact or considered to be real by a narrative symbol that usually include, fabulous and supernatural motifs.”<sup>78</sup>

Like the legend, carols resort to mythical symbols and allegories, but which do not have the role of explaining a situation or a phenomenon, but they represent a means of conveying the greeting. “This projection [into the myth] is not only the result of a vision, but also the intention to potentate the function of greeting; according to the magical thinking, so that the greeting should be efficient, and be materialized, the daily it refers to must be classified as myth.”<sup>79</sup>

Hence the resemblance, much bigger, between carols and legends, and the ballads.

Olden ballads or songs which are traditionally epic songs which, by their cognitive and educational function and by certain themes and motifs, come close to legends, especially mythological legends, but also the historical ones.

Mihai Coman explains the pedagogical status of the ballad, by relating it to the myth: “By allusions or direct exhortations, ballads remind, justify and strengthen the ethical and social behaviour norms. (...) The thing was favoured also by the fact that the themes of ballads came from ancient mythical structures. Or (...), they had involved already a certain pedagogical dimension. The myth, narrating an exceptional fact from the beginning of the world, always offers general models of human behaviour. It shows their interdiction and causes, as well as ethical norms.”<sup>80</sup>

Moreover, “some structural and functional correspondences, of motifs and formulae, seem to confirm the fact that the oldest epic songs developed as a natural continuation of ritual and ceremonial songs and they have coexisted with them for a while.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibidem, p. 27

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem, p. 27

<sup>78</sup> Mihai Pop, Pavel Ruxăndoiu, *Folclor literar românesc*, București, Ed Didactică și Pedagogică, 1990, p. 214

<sup>79</sup> Ibidem, p. 129

<sup>80</sup> Mihai Coman, *Studii de mitologie*, , București, Ed. Nemira, 2009, p. 117

<sup>81</sup> Mihai Pop, Pavel Ruxăndoiu, *Op. cit.*, p. 223

This brings many similarities between the ballad and the carol, which is nothing but “ritual poetry with the function of greeting.”<sup>82</sup> Moreover, Mihai Pop notes that “in the areas of intense circulation of carols, especially in Transylvania and some parts of Walachia, many themes and motifs of epic songs appear in the repertoire of carols.”<sup>83</sup>

Gheorghe Vrabie also notes the existence of motifs common to ballads and carols, as a result of a transfer from the ballad to the carol. This happened by observing the structure of carols: „...carols have some distinctive signs: they have a chorus, as a result of the melodic chorus; they begin after a certain formula, and especially they end with a praise addressed directly to the person or the family. When some motifs are taken from the sphere of the heroic and legendary ballad, they receive these features belonging to carols.”<sup>84</sup>

Noting the closeness between the ballads and the carols, Ovidiu Bîrlea also mentions the aspects making the two folkloric species different, the former emphasizing the narration whereas the latter emphasizes the significances: “The ballad is focused on a hero who has done some memorable deeds in a far time, defeating a powerful opponent. It enjoys the display of the phases of the struggle, spectacular clashes, along with verbal challenges on one side and the other. On the contrary, in carols, the happening itself falls on the second place, its meaning being in the focus, the meaning that can be speculated, the interpretation that can be given, the protagonist being the person carolled himself. Therefore, the narration is short, hardly sketched, as much as it is necessary to configure the extraordinary feat so as to deduct the meaning wanted.”<sup>85</sup>

As to the meaning of loans, he notes that the transfer took place in both directions. Thus, “in Transylvania, especially in the Southern part, the collections of carols also include ballads, which circulate as such in the same region: Șarpele, Chiva (the dead bride), Ilincuța Șandrului, Nevasta fugită, Iencea Săbiencea, in Maramureș Pinteia etc. They have faithfully kept the ballad features, so recent and especially temporary borrowing, because they exist there primarily as ballads. In Walachia and Oltenia, the process is generally reversed, a few carols ending by being adopted in the repertoire of ballads and interpreted by musicians, even if the occasions are different...”<sup>86</sup>

Carols are encountered along with disenchantments, first of all at the level of the magical-ritual function, which is characteristic to both of them. Moreover, there are resemblances both at the

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<sup>82</sup> Ibidem, p. 221

<sup>83</sup> Ibidem., p. 224

<sup>84</sup> Gheorghe Vrabie, *Folclorul, Op.cit.*, p. 197

<sup>85</sup> Ovidiu Bîrlea, *Op. cit.*, p. 328

<sup>86</sup> Ibidem, p. 328

level of compositional structure, by the bipartite construction and at the level of the ideas, by the presence of mythical characters or the narration of ritual gestures.

The disenchantment is tightly connected to the ritual of curing and favouring marriage to the person destined, thus having a beneficial function in the traditional society.

There are, of course, texts with a malefic function, trying to produce a shortcoming to the person targeted, but they belong, more likely, to negative witchcraft practices, and the people practicing them were, generally, marginalised by the society.

As Mihai Pop notes, “since they are poems with a strong ritual function, disenchantments are the main component of the magical act as such and the main bearer of magical efficiency. The underlying mythical concept is the magical power of words, understood as material power, with a direct efficiency on the concretised structure in the event it refers to.”<sup>87</sup>

The same faith in the magical power of uttered words is found in the custom of carolling. The greeting made or the event narrated had the power of concretization, the host having his/her greatest wishes come true, health, abundance, marriage etc. For Petru Caraman, “carolling is nothing but witchcraft, as we are dealing with the utterance of a formula with the well-defined purpose of causing things expressed by that form and because here too, as in most witchcraft, we are based on the same complex of *emotion-desire*, accompanied by the strong belief that everything will happen just as the formula says.”<sup>88</sup>

Hence, the existence of similarities between the “functional structure” of disenchantments and that of carols: “In the plan of ritual reality, the beneficiary is the actual listener, so the recipient of the message, similar to the position he has in the greeting poetry. But, as a codified message, the disenchantment is never addressed to the beneficiary, as it usually the case for carols, but to the force actuated in its favour, or the evil force, thus accomplishing a fictional movement of the beneficiary from the position of message recipient, in the position of referent.”<sup>89</sup>

With respect to the poetic structure, disenchantments resemble incantation poetry by the formulation of request and its concise motivation, but, at the same time, they accumulate “narrative and descriptive broad developments, which brings them closer to the greeting poetry.”<sup>90</sup>

According to Mihai Pop, depending on the means of accomplishment, disenchantments can be imperative or fabulative, the latter being the type which presents similarities to the carol because “the acts of falling ill and being cured, and the sequences they mediate, are substantiated in ample

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<sup>87</sup> Mihai Pop, Pavel Ruxăndoiu, *Op. cit.*, p. 170

<sup>88</sup> Petru Caraman, *Colindatul la români, slavi și la alte popoare*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 362-363

<sup>89</sup> Mihai Pop, Pavel Ruxăndoiu, *Op. cit.*, p. 170

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 172

narrative developments, including, in their structure, the protagonist and the disenchanter (real agents of communication), the hostile and benefactor forces, represented by pagan or Christian mythological embodiments, and an entire arsenal of mediating objects and agents, taken, usually, from the daily universe.”<sup>91</sup> In carols we encounter the narrative development, the protagonist but also those making the greeting, hostile forces (the snake, the lion), but also benefactors, such as the various objects of reality.

Similarities between the two types of texts can be seen also at the level of the ideas structure where there are numerous common motifs, coming from the same ancient mythical fund.

Born from the same mythical imaginary, the poetry of carols is very much like that of passage ceremonials, especially when it aims at the individual, even in relation to the society. This happens because of their magical function of causing good, for the person they address. Thus, a baby is wished to have not only health, but also a grand destiny, young people are presented with the special qualities that help them get married, and the dead are helped to integrate completely in the after world.

Childbirth, nuptials and death are three important existential and inevitable moments in man’s life. “By ceremonialisation, they are reinterpreted at the level of an imaginary thinking, involving the allegory and the myth plenary.”<sup>92</sup>

As defining and unrepeatable ceremonial acts, they are always accompanied by poetry, text, as calendar ceremonies, only, unlike them, which aim at the entire community, rites of passage address the person alone, and “their fundamental purpose is to give individual support in moments of existential status change.”<sup>93</sup>

As the new religion gains ground, carols adapt their text, thus enriching the repertoire with new productions. At the beginning, they mix mythical elements to Christian ones, resulting in a syncretic creation, a *hybrid*, which, in folk mentality, enhances the magical effect of lyrics. Placing together mythical and Christian figures, man hopes to obtain the goodwill of some people or the other, perhaps of all, which can only be to his benefit. Sometimes, the mythical character is replaced by the Christian one, because he lacks credibility, but the scenario, the framework, remain the mythical ones.

Mircea Eliade mentions, to this end, the difficulties encountered by the Christian missionaries in their attempt to fight folk religions: “Willing or unwilling, they ended up by “Christening” divinities and “pagan” myths that would not be extirpated. A great deal of gods or heroes killing dragons have become like St. George; the gods of storm have turned into St. Elias;

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<sup>91</sup> Ibidem, p. 173

<sup>92</sup> Mihai Pop, Pavel Ruxăndoiu, *Op cit.*, p. 141

<sup>93</sup> Constantin Eretescu, *Folclorul literar al românilor. O privire contemporană*, f.l, Ed. Compania, f.a., p. 81

countless goddesses of fertility have been assimilated to Virgin Mary or other saints. One might say that part of the folk religion of pre-Christian Europe has survived, camouflaged or transformed, into the calendar holidays and the cult of saints.”<sup>94</sup>

But this does not mean we are dealing with a “paganisation” of Christianity, on the contrary, it represents a sort of “Christianisation” of our forefathers’ religion. (...) Christ comes down on earth and visits the peasants, as he did in the myth of the archaic populations the Supreme Being, before turning into a *deus otiosus*.”<sup>95</sup> This folk Christianity emphasizes the essential themes of the Bible, whereas “all these folk creations are impregnated with a *Christian spirit*, not “pagan”: everything revolves around the redemption of man by Christ; around faith, hope and loving your fellow, around a world that is “good”, because it was created by God the Father and because it was redeemed by God the Son; around an unrepeatable human existence, that does not lack meaning; man is free to choose the good or the bad, but he shall not be judged only by this choice.”<sup>96</sup>

This transfer of elements from the old mythology to the Christian religion is also noted by Romulus Vulcănescu: “In the phase of gradual passage to the Christian confession of the Dacian-Roman people and then the Romanian one, and implicitly of a part of Dacian-Roman and Romanian mythology to a Christianized folk mythology, like a doublet of Romanian mythology, we assist a process of teologumenic assimilation and transfiguration of *old village divinities* (called “pagan”) into *Christian saints and martyrs*, of an undefined initial rite and, later, of orthodox rite.”<sup>97</sup>

The hybrid character of carols, oscillating between laic and religious, is noted by Ovidiu Bîrlea who explains the phenomenon by including mythical and Christian elements in the same scope of folk religious beliefs. Thus, he says, “any laic carol can receive Christian elements, just as religious carols can bear deeper or superficial laicisation. In fact, the Christian elements are assimilated to the same large group of folk mythology, therefore subject to continuous re-elaborations, and the folk mythical elements resized by Christian grafting or extensions, within the same general framework with mythicising coordinates: between them there is a continuous bridge of comfortable passage.”<sup>98</sup>

Besides these syncretic texts, the old ones are also kept, especially because of the belief in their magical power, and due to the resignificance capacity of people, who discover in them Christian symbols. Thus, the lad killing the snake finds his correspondent in Saint George who fights the dragon and defeats him, but becomes also a model of those who by faith defeat the sin and temptation, represented by the snake.

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<sup>94</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Aspecte ale mitului*, *Op. cit.*, p. 160

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 161

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 162

<sup>97</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, *Mitologie română*, *Op. cit.*, p. 324

<sup>98</sup> Ovidiu Bîrlea, *Op. cit.*, p. 364



This way, we have two types of texts that assure the passage to the Christian carol: Some of them are hybrid, in which the mythical element coexists with the Christian one, and others in which there are no Christian motifs, but they can be considered as such only at the symbolic level, by resemantization.

In contrast, Christian carols observe, to a great extent, the biblical truth of Jesus Christ's birth, as it appears in the New Testament Gospels. But there are also texts containing motifs and themes taken from other religious texts, such as *Apocryphal Gospels*, *Saints' Lives* and other apocryphal texts.

The phenomenon was noted by Al. Rosetti, who thinks the text of religious carols is a creation of priests and deics who for their inspiration in the New Testament, the Saints' Lives and especially the apocryphs, the current pseudoepigraphs and apocalypses, versifying their wording".<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, these Christian carols do not maintain the form in which they were created, "because they were too artificial and far from the particular character of similar productions that had become popular, and in harmony with folk trends, but they are definitely assimilated by the people and transformed in this laboratory, according to its desires."<sup>100</sup>

Ovidiu Bârlea comes to the same conclusion: "The Christian themes of carols bear a peasant seal, such that it is fundamentally distinguishable from the biblical spring, more often coming in contradiction with it. The biblical fabulation is subject to intense processing in order to be adjusted to the size of the folk vision in a certain region."<sup>101</sup> The only ones observing the biblical truth completely are, according to him, the star songs, who have as authors "priests and monks remained unknown"<sup>102</sup>.

Hence the great diversity of religious carols, narrating not only events regarding the birth of Jesus but also episodes with other biblical faces, such as Virgin Mary, God, Christian and pre-Christian saints.

Moreover, we must mention the fact that there are carols sprung from cult creations, such as Dosoftei's *The Psalms* or the poems of known poets like Coşbuc.

Next to masks and greetings, which are pre-Christian, and along with carols blending the Christian element to the ante-Christian one, in winter holidays various performances were given, folk theatre, the most popular being *Irozii* or *Viflaimul* and *Jocul Constantinului*.

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<sup>99</sup> Al. Rosetti, *Op. cit.*, p. 3

<sup>100</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7

<sup>101</sup> Ovidiu Bârlea, *Op. cit.*, p. 369

<sup>102</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 390

Arisen from the need of man to visualize, to represent the “story” of the Saviour’s Birth, preached by the sacred writings and retaken by the Christian carols, the play *Irozii* is the most popular religious theatrical scenario that is played around Christmas.

The name of the play as G. Dem. Teodorescu shows, comes either from the main character of the play, Herod, or the city of Viflaim (Bethlehem).

As it is a Christian play, it can be considered just as old as the Christian carols, actually scattered all throughout it.

It is possible that along with the interdiction of mask games by the Church, the priests or the diecs, who also came from among the people, thus knowing how to handle the folk lyrics, this play was created, just so as to meet the man’s need of spectacular and to give him a concrete image of the biblical text read in the church on Christmas day.

Horia Barbu Oprișan denies the involvement of church forces in the emergence of these scenarios, he considers “Herod, the play, is the work of laymen, and the actors have played it in the cleanest rustic spirit.”<sup>103</sup>

Nevertheless, Mihail Kogălniceanu admits the Church’s contribution to the emergence of the theatrical species: the teachers and the diecs, just as the Fracs in *Cleres de la Bazoche*, were schoolmasters, painters, singers, even actors, representing the *religious mysteries* that everywhere were the beginning of modern theatre and wherefrom the remains are kept still by means of our *Herod* or *Bethleme*, which – from Christmas until Shrove Tuesday – cross our cities’ streets and are especially represented by church singers. (...) Here, I must repeat that while there is still time, we do not take care of preserving the last remains of the *Herods* which, for ceturies, along with *Păpușile (The Dolls)*, have been our folk theatre.”<sup>104</sup>

Moreover, T. Burada considers that “these games taking place in our country (...) have entered the people’s customs, they resemble the so-called ancient times mysteries, which have a theatrical and religious character and which are performed in many parts even by priests and monks. They are nothing but dramas, with the subject wither of an episode of the Old Testament of one of the New Testament. Such views take place today and they are done with great luxuriance in various cities in Italy, France, Germany etc.”<sup>105</sup>

Therefore, the contribution of church faces to the emergence of these plays cannot be denied, especially considering the old texts, presented by Teodorescu and Burada, are scattered with

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<sup>103</sup> Horia Barbu Oprișan, *Teatrul popular românesc*, București, Editura Meridiane, 1987, p. 14

<sup>104</sup> Mihail Kogălniceanu, „Revista pentru istorie și filologie”, București, Tom I, 1882, p. 33, apud G. Dem. Teodorescu, *Poezii populare române*, București, Editura Minerva, 1982, p. 110

<sup>105</sup> T. T. Burada, *Istoria teatrului în Moldova*, București, Editura Minerva, 1973, p. 6

church songs, with troparia, that only a priest or a layman would have added to the text. Moreover, between the carols mingled in the text there are also some the origin of which is to be found in Dosoftei's *Psalms*, known by only a few. Even if there were also folk creators, as Oprișan notes, they made plays on a model already created by a churchman.

*Jocul Constantinului* is another folk play acted on Christmas day, although the area is a lot smaller. There are two variants of the same play, one in Maramureș and the other in Moldova, the differences between them being significant. Thus, the variant in Moldova has a religious character, because it emphasizes the killing of the ruler Brâncoveanu and his sons because he had refused to leave his Christian religion and go to the Mohammedan.

Maramureș variant has a more historic character, because it does not motivate Brâncoveanu's killing by his refusal to give up his Christian religion, but as a result of the noblemen's betrayal, who no longer wanted him to rule. They go to the sultan with lies and they turn him over to them.

In the attempt to follow the evolution of the carol from the magical-mythical forms to the Christian ones, by the identification of those elements pertaining to various strata of Romanian people religiosity, I noted that the poetry of carols is a mixture of Christian and archaic motifs, which, nevertheless do not diminish their artistic value, but, on the contrary, they enhance it.

First of all we can see the existence of an old stratum, which associates magical rites, coming from totemic cults, with mythical motifs kept from the Dacian religion and Roman mythology.

Both people are Indo-European, therefore related, both of them celebrated their gods in solstices and equinoxes, which means their customs have to coincide. Therefore, carolling existed in the Dacian too, the Romans too, even in slightly different forms and contents.

Because of the many years passed since the Dacian era, the lack of written documents and the influences borne in time, the pre-Christian carols as they were in the Dacian and Dacian-Roman era, can no longer be reconstructed. Still, we know that the people has been conservative, that it tried to observe as faithful as possible the old traditions because "it has to" and "it must be done". This way it has kept the old texts, poems that seem incomprehensible to us because the realities they represent no longer exist and neither did the ceremonies and rites they accompanied, and some of them came to us in pieces with parts missing or separated in most variants.

Nevertheless, some carols, regarded from the mythological perspective disclose their meanings hidden until now, such as *Colinda pomului înrămurat* and that of *Doamna curților* or they get new meanings as the case of *Colinda șarpelui* or that of *Colinda leului*.

As regards the god celebrated by the Romans in the winter solstice, the things are clear, it is Saturn. Its Dacian equivalent is Zalmoxes, who survived in the Romanian carols as Santa Claus (Moș Crăciun), name resulted from putting together a Dacian word, *moș*, and a Roman one, *creatio*.

As to the reminiscences of Roman religion in the Romanian carols, I have noted that some episodes in carols can resemble events in Roman mythology, such as the deer or the ox with the girl in between its horns, reminding of the kidnapping of Europe by Zeus-Jupiter. Other times, there are elements suggesting the existence of Roman divinities, proving they were superposed on ancient ones, that they entered a well-rennet text, the structure of which could not be changed. It is the case of the carol with the motif of animal hunting, animals associated with various Roman deities.

Here and there, elements surface which refer to an ancient cult, that of our forefathers, which existed for the great mass of Dacian and Roman population also in the era of gods and which was perpetuated until today, even if in much more simplified forms.

Therefore, carolling is "an ancient ritual, with a very complex magical-symbolic function: apotropaic, gracious, augural."<sup>106</sup> But the accompanying text, although it preserves this function, has lost its mythical character it once had, and hence, its strictness. Hence the great diversity of the poetry of carols, arisen from the need of personalisation of the text depending on the host where it is sung, the place or the time they are produced and influenced by the folk imaginary, expressed in other types of texts as well.

Thus, we note similarities between carols and fairy tales, at the level of motifs and symbols, fact explained by the ancient origins of the two literary species, that are lost in the myth.

With the legend and the ballad, the carol has in common not only themes and motifs, but also allegories and symbols, the resemblance is advanced due to their mythical and ceremonial character. The greeting of carols would not have been effective without this projection in the myth, as no ritual can be produced outside it.

Based on the magic of the uttered words, on its powers of doing physically what is produced verbally, carols resemble disenchantments, too. We find, in both of them, both the ample narration of some events, and a bipartite construction, which, besides the event narrated, contains direct greetings, especially for curing, in case of disenchantments or health, abundance and others in case of carols. Moreover, we can note common formulae, regarding time and means of producing the magical act.

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<sup>106</sup> Delia Suiogan, *Simbolica riturilor de trecere*, București, Ed. Paideia, 2006, p. 99

Accompanying a passage ceremonial to a new year and therefore, the renovation of time and space, carols address, first of all the entire collectivity, but also considers the individual, hence it is personalized depending on the host. Hence the resemblances to the texts accompanying the rites of passage, with the same magical purpose, of supporting the individual in the moment of his status change, of integrating him into the collectivity, whether it is a new-born, a newly-formed family or one that has lost one of its members.

The text accompanying ceremonials of passage has, as the carol does, an allegoric and mythical character, that is why resemblances can be found in them, both at the level of the contents, by motifs and symbols, and at the level of the composition, by narrating allegoric events, gestures of rituals or direct greetings that they contain.

Many of the pre-Christian carols, belonging to a magical-mythical stratum, cannot be understood today, because the myths or the rites they refer to have been lost, as they were desacralized. Still, the identification of motifs common to the poetry of carols and other forms of folkloric expression, allows for the reconstruction of a mythical mentality, as well as filling the blanks in the text of the carols, leading to a better interpretation of it or another way of significance.

Christianity has not emerged on a virgin spiritual ground, it is grafted on myths, beliefs and ancient rites, that could not be destroyed and therefore it „saved” then, as Mircea Eliade says: „Absorbing a folk custom or an archaic theoretical pattern, Christianity restored their spiritual significance, transfigured then if they had been disfigured, enhanced their contents.”<sup>107</sup>

The same process was produced in the poetry of carols. First of all, the Christian motifs replaced some archaic ones, which have lost their meanings. This way, the syncretic carols emerged, in which the Christian element blends the mythical one, where the image of God is mistaken for that of Santa Clause, in the yards of which Jesus is born, or which metamorphoses faces of Christian saint into sacred animals of ancient religions.

On the other hand, old texts have been kept, which do not contain any Christian motif, even if some of them have lost their original meanings. This happens because they contain symbols which, regarded from Christian perspective, they get new meanings, new connotations that can be assimilated to the new religion. Thus, by resemantization, *colinda șarpelui* (the carol of the snake) becomes an illustration of man’s fight with the devil and sin, and the flock of God is mankind itself that must be led by a good shepherd.

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<sup>107</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Op. cit.*, p.132

From this perspective, even the carols like Miorița or Meșterul Manole can be put to use by resemantization. Thus, in the Mioritic carol we can find the myth of Christ's sacrifice, but also his revival, and the call of all people to the new faith.

The carol of the mason proves that the sacrifice of his wife is not a creative sacrifice, because it would not give up anything of his for the creation, but a sacrifice for the redemption of sin of the one which has become proud and selfish.

Alexandru Rosetti sees in the religious carols of creation of the priests and diecs, which were then turned in time by those who used them and transmitted them orally.

Thus, even if at their core, there are events, episodes, themes and motifs taken from the New and the Old Testament, there are also others that are found in *Saints' Lives* or in other religious apocryphal texts.

Sometimes, the text of carols is organised around a single event or motif, and sometimes it combines several of them or even rememorizes events that are not celebrated at Christmas, such as the Crucifixion, but which can always find a justification.

There are also texts originated in prayers as inspiration, and from here until the transformation of a psalm in a carol there is only a step. Of course not all psalms can be taken, but the *Psalms* of Bishop Dosoftei prove adequate, due to the fact that they are transposed in lyrics and they have a metrical structure close to that of the folk lyric.

When the folk caroller discovers a cult text that is appropriate for the repertoire of the carols, he does not hesitate to take it, from the wish to diversify and even enrich his own repertoire, as it happens with Coșbuc's poetry, *Colindătorii*, which has become the carol *Afară ninge liniștit* or the carol *Colo sus*, springing from Petre Dulfu's poem *Bunavestire*.

The same magical and religious syncretism specific to the poetry of carols can be seen in the poems accompanying other customs of winter holidays. Thus, New Year's greeting poetry, *Sorcova*, *Semănatul*, *Plugușorul*, have an obvious magical and mythical character, as well as the mask game, practiced either at Christmas or on New Year's Day.

The mask game proves the perpetuation of ancient cult rites until the present, even if the text accompanying it keeps only to a small extent mythical motifs, proving especially a comical character.

In contrast, there are correspondences between them and some carols, proving that the poetry of carols keeps the old myths, and the mask game used to be, in its origin, a rite of them.

Nevertheless, the religious theatre has a pronounced Christian character, it brings before the audience biblical or historic characters and events, in its attempt of replacing mask games, but also

of meeting the man's need of spectacular, at the same time offering him a concrete image of the gospel word uttered during church services.

The poetry of carols, as well as the one accompanying other customs in the repertoire of winter holidays, is originated in an archaic stratum, pre-Christian, in which reminiscences of Dacian and Roman mythology can be identified. Moreover, magical practices, rites can be identified, which were either replaced by the uttered word according to the folk conception that a narrated action can be just as effective as the one performed due to the magical power of words, or it is practiced today, even if they lost the magical credibility and they have become merely a comic performance, such as mask games.

Along with this magical and mythical stratum and a Christian one, which can be identified in most texts, either because it stands besides archaic elements , thus accomplishing a syncretic poetry, or at the level of symbols, which makes pre-Christian poems be resemnatized from Christian perspective.

In this context, the poetry of winter holidays can be understood only if it is regarded from both perspectives, since it is a magical and religious syncretic product.

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