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## The Moții's Village – Social and Ethnic Aspects

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From the depths of the history, the moții people lived in the Apuseni Mountains, in the Romanian province: TRANSYLVANIA.

Facing the permanent barbarian invasions, they felt safer in the mountains. Toward the prairie, they went only in calmer times and for very short periods of time, to exchange their market goods.

When they couldn't do this, they adapted themselves to more limited goods, which their mountainous land offered; less crops, but a richer fruit diet and on the open hills they raised animals.

Despite life's difficulties, the moții people maintained the Romanian language, and the habits and traditions of their ancestors.

I want to present these things the way I remember from my childhood. Many of them are common to all the Romanians and some of them exist on other meridians, too.

It is known that the New Year does not start on the first of January for all nations; but for us it does!

I hesitate to use the verbs at present or past tense, because many traditions have vanished throughout the years. Therefore, I will use the past tense.

For New Year's Eve, the children were going from house to house wishing people "Happy New Year", and the people would give them baked goods, fruits or money.

Something unique in our religion was that for the New Year, after you washed yourself, you had to throw the water out of the window. I don't understand the meaning of this tradition.

Many old people would say that if it was a lot of snow in winter, it was a sign of a good harvest year. And not to take off the snow from your shoes as it meant that your husband or wife hates you.

The construction wood used to be cut in January, Friday morning on full moon light and on an empty stomach. In this month, the wood has less juice and the termites are not attracted.

In the winter evenings, there were the so called "tocării" or "șezători", at which the people use to gather by turns in the neighbourhood. At these "tocării", the young men used to play cards, sing, tell stories, jokes... or courting the young ladies that were spinning or knitting.

The expression "tocării", came from the verb: to spin. This type of work was done only during the winter, when there was no work to be done out on the field.

In every house there was a weaving loom that would make the cloth / material. The bed sheets and the intimate cloths were made out of flax and hemp. The processing of these textile plants required a long and hard work to reach their final cloth stage.

The national costumes have detailed and decorative designs in which the black colour predominates on a white background. The typical vests made out of sheep skin with the wool on the inside, were all well decorated in and worn only at folkloric festivals. They meant to bring back the ancient time styles and to please the tourists during the festivals. A reconstitution of the ethnic costumes can be found today only in the local museums.

On Friday the ladies did not spin, because they believed in the myth that wolves would eat their sheep. Another myth of this kind was that the bread dough couldn't be made on that day.

The blankets and the winter heavy clothes were made out of wool.

Even the "desagii", a kind of knapsack, were made out of wool.

They were decorated with coloured tassels and laces. The desagii were never absent from the moții people that come down from the mountains to the villages to do shopping, either with the horses or carrying the goods on their back. Desagii were two connected sacks that were put on the shoulder, balancing the weight. People would bring home their goods from the mills in the sacks or desagii.

Along the rivers, there were many mills put in function by water. When the communists arrived, they put high taxes, forcing the mill owners out of business. The same happened with the people that owned oil pressers or manual combines.

Those costumes did not emphasize the national character, they were the simple clothes, worn daily, because the fabrics were not available in the stores, yet, and besides, they could not afford them.

After the snow melted, the outdoor work commenced.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, they celebrated the day of “mărțișorul”.

This was hand-made from coloured silk and it was given to the lover, as a sign of love and it was visibly worn on their clothes on the chest.

Then the 1<sup>st</sup> of April came, the day of trickers.

They were making big tricks on other people. They would take person kilometres away, to meet... nobody. There were no hard feelings that day.

At the Festival of Flowers (8<sup>th</sup> of April), they would have brought catkins that were put in front of the doors to scare the thunder away. When the thunderstorm came, they would have burn out of the catkin to drive away the storm.

Then the Easter came. Weeks in advance, some women started painting the eggs. It was a true art, which only a few could accomplish.

The typical Easter dish was the lamb meat.

In the second day of Easter, the young men went to spray perfume on the young girls and, in turn, the girls gave them painted eggs.

In the “Fat Tuesday”, there was a big festival on out hill, named: “Mânântălu”, between the village of Sohodol and Cărpiniș.

The hill was full with young people; everybody wearing their best folk costumes. My father would attend this festival with his violin.

There were singing, dancing, meeting new people, there were friendships made; the young people would lie down on the fresh grass and not only them, but even the older people would come on the hill to warm their souls from memories.

The good time on the “Mânântălu” hill has vanished only a few years ago. What was the cause?

Because the people left the hills and moved towards the cities.

The houses covered by shingles (through which even the rain goes), you can still find some old people, left to live their last days.

On Saint George’s Day (23<sup>rd</sup> of April), the winter hat was substituted by the summer hat, which was worn until St. Dumitru (26<sup>th</sup> of October), when the hats were again reversed. Also, on the same St. George’s day, the animals had to be guarded by children, so that they would not graze on the neighbour’s land. And this tradition was valid until the Cross Day (14<sup>th</sup> of September), when again they would have open grass field.

In the last few years, having in view the less and less children remaining, the people had to enclose their lands with fences, so that the animals would not be guarded any longer by children.

Another tradition regarded the people that were called Gheorghe. The neighbours of such a man would come early in the morning to throw water over him, in bed. This meant that he had to treat everybody with a drink.

On St. Gheorghe, they would also put a type of plant named dead nettle or thorns, in front of the barns, to protect the animals from evil.

Another myth was that if a priest or a black cat crossed the road in front of you, you might as well return, otherwise it wouldn’t go well.

And also, if the chicken sung on the rooster, it would be a bed sign and you had to kill it. And speaking to chickens, the old people would say to always have a black chicken at the house.

There were also sayings, that if the dog would cry at home, it was a bad sign; someone would die.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, there was another festival, called "Armindenu". With this occasion, they would plant a young tree, barely growing their leaves (usually a birch tree or a beech) and they kept it until they baked the bread of the new wheat of that year.

At the "Sânzienelor" Festival they used to make crown made of these flowers (the sânziana, is a local wild flower), and they used to put these crowns on the frames of the doors, to keep the bad spirit away. If there is a thunder on this festival (24<sup>th</sup> of June), then the filberts nuts would spoil. The same thing was believed about the Festival of Prophet Ilie, which was celebrated on 20<sup>th</sup> of July.

On the festival of the "40 Saints", on that eve, they used to make a bonfire, named "bobătaie". The purpose of this festival was believed to drive away the parasites. We, the kids, used to jump over this fire. On that eve, the "bobătaie" fire was seen from all the houses in the village.

The weddings were with different formalities. When they would take the bride to the groom's house, they would sing a patriotic song, called "Iancului March" (the hero of the moții people).

On the way to the groom's house, then to the church, many would block the road, and would not unblock it until they received something to drink (alcohol).

The wedding would last from Sunday morning until Monday morning. Even in our region, we had the tradition of the stealing of the bride and the good-parents had to buy her back.

After the midnight dinner, the bride would change into wife clothes. The white dress and the veil would be replaced by a head scarf.

In regard to the funerals, I should mention that until the dead will stay in the house, you could not dispose the garbage, but after the dead was out, and then the garbage was burnt.

When the dead was taken out of the house, it had to come out with the legs first and outside it was laid with the head towards sunset.

They had to knock three times on the door, upon the dead man's exit, and the wood-boards which supported the coffin were thrown out the windows.

They would also break a plate or cup.

Before Christmas, they would kill the pig, a tradition which is still kept.

Even here, there was a custom; before the pig was burned, they would take two hairs, which were put together, and if they would coil while burning, that meant that certain people would get married.

In the same sense, they would put to boil Romanian donuts with people's name inside. When boiling started, the first donuts that came to the surface that meant those people would get married.

Anyway, the habits and customs differed from village to village.

As our villages have less and less people, the same happens to the customs.

Maybe, some of the traditions did not have any meaning, but they gave a sense to life and a unique charm.

Only thinking about the day of the trickers; who and how you can trick. It was one day a year.

Today we live in a society of ... money, when tricking became a day-to-day routine.