

The Song of the Bells: First World War Songs in Romanian Tradition¹



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ABSTRACT

The centenary of the end of the Great War, the War of Nations, First World War, has multiple meanings, expressed concretely in European geopolitics. This event, which occupies an exceptional position in the history of the last century, has led to the appearance in folklore of an epic-lyric category with specific features, Songs of Military and War. In Romanian folk literature, there is an impressive number of such poetic texts. Along with other categories of war memories — personal histories, family histories, and the versified songs of the soldiers, they make up a unitary and rich chapter of war folklore. In the occupied areas there were requisitions of all kinds: clothes, food, animals, objects, and especially bronze objects for the manufacture of weapons. Such a requisition took place in the village of Poiana Sibiului in Transylvania in which the villagers attended a funeral-like ceremony bidding farewell to the bells in song, ‘The Song of the Bells’.

KEYWORDS:

song of bells, military songs, the Great War, the First World War, Transylvania

‘Collective memory’ is usually made up of memories relating to lived events, living norms and rules, personalities, recognized as such, specific spaces and landscapes, and other cultural expressions such as the system of traditional material and spiritual values, in its entirety, kept, preserved and accepted by the members of a specific human group as an integral, representative part of the past, sometimes with a formalized structure and specialized functions. In traditional culture, to which orality and specific characteristics of the creation and transmission processes confer particular qualities, this ‘cognitive structure’ has a very special authority. This authority is easy to observe, especially in some narrative genres, prose and verse, considered markers of ethnic identity. In fact, specialists interested in ethnological research have lately been less concerned with the analysis of the *relations* among oral, traditional and contemporary cultures, and the *mechanisms* through which information is transmitted, and more so with the complex nature of the relationships established with other groups with which they have contact, in various circumstances. The end of the twentieth century and the first decades of the third millennium have brought along spectacular, sometimes unexpected changes to communication systems — relationships between collective memory and folklore creation, the daily ‘information bombing’, the impossibility to verify the information. These and many other global events all transform the human being of contemporary society into a ‘folkloric individual’, less

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1. Bell from an orthodox church.

and less impacted by the ritualistic or ceremonial character of the events, thus leaving room for festivalisation of routine, and implicitly of each individual life.

Collective memory is rather subjective, but it does preserve experiences common to the members of a more or less coherent group and, over time, it generates stereotyped structures, formalised units specific to various folklore genres and species, most often recognized and accepted as identity marks. Each community preserves knowledge, practices, patterns, exemplary memories in a specific structure, experienced by each single individual based on his or her own status, formation, and personal characteristics. A special relationship, evolving along a variable-length process and bearing significant long-term functions and effects, is established between collective memory and history. To clarify it, given the many issues that need to be identified and whose mechanism needs to be decoded, psychology, sociology, history, philology, political sciences, sometimes even biology and genetics, etc., expertise is needed. Active living memory of the group and individuals meets the officialised memory within collective memory. Its reconstruction is a complex activity bearing ideological and cultural functions. Collective (historical) memory does not, in most cases, reflect an event according to the data recorded in the documents certified by historians; usually, as this type of memory, it reflects perceptions of what happened in relation to the interests, circumstances, and emotions of a group that participated in a specific event. This is very different with the perception of an event that has had noticeably negative, sometimes even traumatic, consequences for the persons involved. In order to understand the context, special knowledge is required for those who keep the memory of events alive. Not infrequently, collective memory with historical involvement has interacted, especially over the last two hundred years, with

the processes of state and nation formation, at least in the European area. These have generated exemplary narratives, whose circulation, oral and written — handwritten or printed — led to the emergence of models of superior value, accepted by the majority.

In *The Meaning of history* and the *Meaning of Tradition*, Nikolai Berdyaev argued that the ‘human being is to the highest degree a historical being. The human being is in history, and history is in the human being. Human being and ‘historical’ have such a profound and lasting primordial fusion, such a concrete reciprocity, that their separation is impossible. Human being cannot be removed from history, it cannot be taken abstractly and we cannot separate history from human being [...]. And human being cannot be examined outside the deep spiritual reality of history’². ‘The recognition of historical tradition, legends, historical continuity is of particular significance for the identification of the “historical”’³.

For *historical memory*, confrontations, armed conflicts, and battles, often gory, provide reference material for defining moral values, recognizing intellectual abilities, appreciating physical qualities, heroic gestures, and assessing exceptional qualities such as bravery, heroism, courage, devotion, and spirit of sacrifice. The two world conflagrations — the first and the second wars — which marked the 20th century of the previous millennium, provided numerous opportunities for choosing and presenting exceptional situations, which were endowed with the value of an exemplum and remained imprinted in the collective memory, as such. Their memory offers opportunities for celebration and commemoration equally. In 2018, various cultural events were organized in remembrance of the 100 years that had elapsed since the end of the event preserved in the collective memory under the name of *The Great War* or the *War of the Nations*, in which the Entente and the Central Powers were combatants⁴. We are

2 „Omul este în cel mai înalt grad o ființă istorică. El se află în istorie, iar istoricul se află în om. Între om și «istoric» există o contopire atât de profundă și trainică în primordialitatea ei, o reciprocitate atât de concretă, încât separarea lor este imposibilă. Omul nu poate fi scos din istorie, nu poate fi luat abstract și nu se poate separa istoria din om [...]. Și nu se poate examina omul în afara profundeii realități spirituale a istoriei’ (Berdyaev, 2013, p. 18).

3 „Recunoașterea tradiției istorice, a legendelor, a continuității istorice are o însemnătate deosebită pentru identificarea «istoricului»’ (Ibid, p. 16).

4 *Casus Belli* was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914, in Sarajevo. It was circumstance motivated, although in reality there were several reasons rooted in the histories of the countries involved in the conflict, in the last hundred years, spread over almost all continents. The combatants were the *Entente* and the *Central Powers*, and the conflict ended with the Entente’s victory. The following empires were broken up: Russian, German, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian. New states emerged in Central and Eastern Europe, and others became larger. On the side of the *Entente*: France, the British Empire, the Russian Empire (1914), alongside which the following were combatants, at different times of the conflict: Italy (1915–1918), Serbia, Romania (1916–1918), Belgium, Portugal (1916–1918), USA (1917–1918), Greece (1917), Montenegro, Japan, Albania; co-belligerents: the Czechoslovak Legions, China (1917), Thailand (1917), Brazil, etc. On the side of *the Central Powers*: the German Empire, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire (1914), Bulgaria (1915–1918) and several co-belligerents. The spaces affected by the



interested in what events and in what form such events have been preserved in the collective memory of the people living at that time; how the specific information and experiences had been transmitted to the generations that succeeded one another over the one hundred years; how we can interpret, today, using a variety of documents — manuscripts, printed, mechanically recorded (as sound or as photographic images and films) —, official documents, etc., and, especially, sources of ‘traditional’, ‘popular culture’, (in oral or handwritten forms), preserved on various media, which reproduce the spiritual experiences of those who directly participated in the war.

An exceptional event that marked, at that time, the existence of the modern human being, the First World War generated a variety of forms of artistic expressions, creations made by mediating several types of languages, from the literary and musical one to the one specific to visual arts: painting, graphics, sculpture, photography, film, etc., each having the war as its central theme. The First World War brought a number of serious particular issues to the table. An overview of the types of creators who expressed spectacular and diverse thematic works, after the conclusion of the conflict, helps us to differentiate two such groups. The works of well-known writers, who in verse or prose approached the war theme, thus seeking to explain and justify, in the most elaborate forms, this great global conflict. War is being evoked in close relationship with a great diversity of authors’ personal experiences. The ample or concentrated narrative prose describes the progressive fracture occurring between the armed forces’ vision and the civil population’s vision on the war, and one of the sensitive topics here is the reintegration into the civil society, once the conflicts were over, of the former combatants, veterans, substantially mutilated, etc. The rift between the battlefield and civilian life is particularly presented from a post-war perspective. Pacifism, a representative feeling for the combatant soldiers of those times, becomes a topic of great interest in society, and later on turns into a desideratum or political slogan. Internationalism and a profound nationalism feeling take root. Literary works, such as Erich Maria Remarque’s *Im Western nichts Neues*, Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, W. Somerset Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage*, etc., are edited and translated into several languages. Romanian writers who experienced war in person expressed themselves mainly in novels: Liviu Rebreanu, *Pădurea spânzuraților* [‘Forrest of the Hanged’]; Camil Petrescu, *Ultima noapte de dragoste, prima noapte de război* [‘The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War’]; Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Balaurul* [‘The Dragon’], a woman’s vision on war, but also in memoirs: George Topârceanu, *Pirin Planina*, and in publishing: Octavian Goga, *Ne învățăm de la Mărășești* [‘We Learn from Mărășești’].

The film industry took over the war theme: movies based on a few popular novels and novellas were made, along with documentaries, which have become significantly of interest in recent years.

conflict comprised much of Europe, the Middle East and Africa, states in North and South America, for a short time China and some islands in the Pacific Ocean, etc.

More than 9 million people died as a result of the fighting, and there were over a million victims behind the front lines due to the poor conditions created by the conflicts. (** 1978; Ionescu, 2014; Hogg, 2007).



2. Statue erected (1929) in the memory of the specialized troops for the execution of fortification works, roads, bridges a.s.o. engineers — Bucharest.

War, as a literary thematic, is present mainly in popular poetry, but also in short narrative works — memoirs, legends, stories. The verses of a well-known lyric poem are directly addressed to the powerful sovereign: „Împărate, împărate,/ Pune pace, nu te bate/ Că-ți mor cătanele toate’ [Your Majesty, Oh, Your Majesty,/ Bring peace, and do not go into battle, / Or all your men-at-arms will lose their lives].

Thus, the second group of creators, explicitly individualized, consists of a very wide and diverse category of ‘folk writers’, whose artistic creation is based on traditional motifs, specific to the ‘rural’ creation, mostly in the form of narrative prose with specific themes (for example, memories from the battlefield) or poetic texts, sometimes sung, which are part of the lyrical song itself, of the narrative song, but also of the species with ceremonial or ritual function, some from the funeral register. (In the case of funeral scripts, we distinguish the funeral and mourning ceremonial songs) (Brăiloiu, 1932, pp. 280–359; Brăiloiu, 1937, pp. 1–84; Bîrlea, 1973, pp. 509–581). The folk creators use the direct experience of the battles and follow the dramatic nature of the events: death on the battlefield, the large size of the battlefields, a new type of military training and new weapons and techniques of fighting, imprisonment, survival, and homecoming. The war is ‘narrated’ through memorates, personal stories, and family stories (Călin, 1992, pp. 103–108), but also in versified texts of some established categories of the oral culture system — genres and species whose literary texts are structured having the war as a reference point: the epic song, the oral diary,



versified letters, poetic texts of the lyrical song, etc. Together, they all form a thematic unit whose presence has become particularly authoritative throughout the conflict and afterwards. A psychological motivation of telling personal narratives is also considered: 'when putting it into words, the memory is not passively lived on the contrary its moments are systematically reconstructed, and the identity of the protagonist comes closer to the exemplary one of the mythical hero' (Frunțelată, 2004, p. 29; Călin, 1993; Dobre, 2001).⁵ War folklore has become distinct and specific, which with the outbreak of the second world war can be identified through new forms and structures expressed in the correspondence between those on the battlefield and those left behind, relatives, friends, authorities, etc.

Village intellectuals and cultural activists in Romania during the first decades of the twentieth century were familiar with the activities of collecting and publishing folklore in all its forms of expression, so for many of them the collection and publishing of texts depicting war, the lives of the people on the battlefronts and the state of the people left 'behind, off the battlefront', 'at home', was a natural cultural act. The first collections of war poetry were printed having suggestive titles by which the editors endeavoured to highlight the dramatic circumstances in which their authors lived: *Lăcrimioare. Cântece de război culese de la fetele din Poiana Sibiului* ['Little Tears. War Songs Collected from the Girls in Poiana Sibiului'], 1917; „*Floarea dorului. Poezii de dor, de drag și de jale. Versuri cătânești. Culese din Bănat de Milentie Cerbe* ['Yearning Flower. Yearning, loving and mourning poetry. Battlefield lyrics'. Collected in Bănat by Milentie Cerbe]; C. Rădulescu-Codin, *Cântece din războiul zise de flăcăi și fete între 1914-1919* ['Songs from the War Told by Lads and Lasses between 1914-1919']; Ioan Pop, *Cântarea celor rămase acasă. De mai multe femei din Ardușat. Comunicate de...* ['The Song Of The Women Left Behind At Home. By several women in Ardușat'. Passed on by ...]; R. Hodoș, *Frunzulițe din război. Versuri din Ardeal și Bucovina adunate și alese de...* ['Leaves of war. Lyrics from Transylvania and Bucovina' gathered and selected by...]; George Țăran, *Cântece populare din războiul. Primitive din partea vitejilor noștrii de pe câmpul de luptă. Aranjate de...*, vol. I-III ['Folk Songs of the War. Received from our warriors on the battlefield'. Arranged by..., vol. I-III]; Gheorghe Cătană, *Flori din războiul. Versuri populare culese din gura soldaților de..., 1919* ['Flowers from the War. Folk verses collected verbally directly from the soldiers'...]; Aurel Esca and Ion Iosif Schiopul, *Flori de sânge. Cântece populare ardelenesti de pe câmpul de războiul adunate de...* ['Bloodflowers. Transylvanian folk songs from the battlefield' gathered by...].

The themes frequently used in poetic texts have as their central hero the soldier, before and after mobilization, when he separates from his girlfriend, wife, family, children, the field that he can no longer work on and who is forced to respond to new requests, to face the psychological shock caused by the battles and the awareness of the danger of a painful death among strangers. The actual fight is described, the unknown and inhospitable lands where the one responding to his military duties has arrived are depicted, portraits of the enemies, but also of the superior officers 'of a different nationality', under whose command the soldiers were forced to fight are drawn up. We have the image of the wounded soldier, prisoner in a foreign country,

5 See also: von Sydow, 1948; Dégh, 1984; Honko, 1989; Stahl, 1989.



away from the family and the native places. The combatants, who became ‘folk poets’, much more numerous than those included in the category of ‘established’ writers, who in their civil lives carried out totally different activities and lived according to traditional norms and prescriptions — peasants, workers, craftsmen, etc. —, created, following the folk pattern, mainly versified texts — army and war poetry —, but also personal journals and memoirs.

As time passed, some motifs formalized and generated stable repetitive structures. In his work dedicated to the analysis of soldier Vasile Tomuț’s poems, Constantin Brăiloiu makes some observations that are revealing for the definition of these categories of the ‘folk’ artistic work, made mainly of the inhabitants of rural spaces, where the influence and even the presence of some of Anton Pann’s verses is noted. ‘The notebook in which Vasile Tomuț wrote his poems resembles almost all the Transylvania and Bukovina poems I have seen so far’, he observes. ‘[...] In those areas, the country people call this type of book a ‘vers’ (or sometimes ‘viers’) (variants for ‘verse’) — which apparently are very old — which they use to refer to: 1) a somewhat scholarly poem, meant to be sung, and 2) a handwritten notebook containing mainly this type of poems’ (Brăiloiu, 1944, p. 7). He quotes Iosif Stoia, ‘the peasant in Drăguș’, who had some verses (vers) composed during his army years and [...] who put the songs he knew into verses (vers)’. C. Brăiloiu also renders the information received from the rural poet relating to the techniques used to make them: the verse ‘was not a book. I made it. I got some pieces of paper, I sewed them up and wrote on them. Over a hundred, perhaps even more verses’ (Ibid, p. 8). As per C. Brăiloiu’s notes, the Folklore Archive of the Romanian Composers’ Society contained ‘an older verse, handwritten around 1877 by Dumitru Fogoroș, a church singer in the said Drăguș’ (Ibid), in relation to which the professor observes: ‘It is clear that Fogoroș has mainly found inspiration in the printed works’ (Ibid). For the analysis of the text called *The Song of the Bells*, which we are here referring to, we take into account the specificity of the category mentioned by Ovidiu Bîrlea in his work *Folclorul românesc. I. Momente și sinteze* [‘The Romanian Folklore’]: “‘vers’ (a variant for verse), or more rarely ‘joltar’ (in the region of Crișana), [...] artistic works of the rural scholars, which are interpreted exclusively by the church singers before marching to the cemetery, or at the grave, at the end of the funeral service. They are spread mainly in Transylvania, however small infiltrations have been noted remotely to the South and the East of the Carpathians as well. [...] The funeral verses have a structure identical to the star songs, [...] they contribute to the pomposity of the funeral itself and sometimes even make the down-hearted shed tears’.⁶

Therefore, within the Romanian folk culture a thematic section evolved, which soon became productive and dynamic; it contains the folklore of the military camp and of the war⁷. The ones interested in writing around such topics were mainly the

6 «Vers», mai rar «joltar» (Crișana), [...] creații ale cărturarilor sătești, pe care le cântă numai diecii înainte de plecarea la cimitir, sau la groapă, la sfârșitul slujbei. Ele circulă numai în Transilvania, dar slabe infiltrații au fost semnalate insular și în sudul și estul Carpaților. [...] Versurile funebre au structura identică cu cea a cântecelor de stea, [...] măresc fastul înmormântării și câteodată chiar storc lacrimi din sufletele atât de obidite (Bîrlea, 1981, p. 493).

7 «Versurile» la morți și cele militare, au, de asemenea, multe, foarte multe puncte comune, după cum scrisorile-reportaj trimise din tranșee sau lagărele de prizonieri trebuie



3. The monument of the Romanian heroes from the First World War erected on Caraiman Peak (1924–1928), Bucegi Massif, Carpathian Mountains — cf. postcard from the interwar period from the Romanian Academy Library.

combatant soldiers, fighting on various battlefronts. However, the ones that remained at home, ‘behind, off the battlefield’ also created poetic texts describing the yearning for the departed, the daily hardships, the pain experienced by those deprived of their parents’ support, or by the spouses and brothers on the battlefield. They are ‘dramatic stories’ on the solitude of those remaining and of those leaving, memories, stories of places, of families, etc., which they all establish a specific type of communication, not necessarily active or concrete, but mostly virtual. A narrative category having its own specific personality has even appeared — the *memories* — with a secondary theme: *war memories*.

During the nineteenth century it was very common among all population categories to keep personal ‘journals’. As a literary genre still attested nowadays and accepted specifically by the end of the nineteenth century and in between the wars, it

să ne ducă cu gândul la ceea ce deja cunoaștem sub numele de jurnal-oral, dar și la cronicile și povestirile în versuri. La granița dintre cele două culturi, dintre cele două literaturi — cea cultă și populară, ne întâlnim cu o literatură de autor aparținând ambelor straturi, dar de amândouă refuzată ca fiindu-le străină’ [«Verșurile» for the deceased and for the military also have numerous, really numerous things in common, just as the report letters sent from the war trenches or the prisoner camps should remind us of what we already know by the name of oral journal, but also of chronicles and narrative poetry. On the border line separating the two cultures, the two types of literature — the cult and the folk one, we find an author’s literature which belongs to both layers, at the same time rejected by both, as considered foreign to them’.] (Dobre, *op.cit.*, pp. 139–140).

contributed to the emergence of the *war journals* during the great conflict; along with it, a popular oral narrative text in verses evolved, and it can sometimes be associated to the ballad, with a diverse thematic, which belongs in fact to the ‘oral journal’; it is still productive nowadays, when it of course elaborates current topics.

As already stated, in some areas of Romania there are present those text categories with ritual and ceremonial features: the *vers* (variant for *verse*), the ‘*mourning of the dead*’ song — both used on occasion of the funeral service, some of them created by folk authors specifically to evoke the identity of the deceased, or significant moments in his or her life, or the circumstances of his or her death⁸ —, the *free lament*; the *vers*, a category widely spread mainly in Transylvania, meets the ‘oral journal’ in Oltenia, Muntenia and Moldova and is similar to some thematic categories of the family ballads. Sometimes, this lyrical species is simply called a *song*, referring to ‘mourning’, ‘lamentation’, ‘and sad dramatic story’. In 1944, C. Brăiloiu published such a notebook written by soldier Vasile Ion Tomuț, a peasant from Botoșana village, Suceava county, who had enrolled with the Austro-Hungarian army (Brăiloiu, 1944). He lived intensely the events of World War I, he was a prisoner in Russia for 3 years and travelled to Siberia, the Caucasus, the Urals, and the Caspian Sea. After being released, he was sent back to the battlefield, to the Tyrol Mountains, as he himself confessed, he travelled through Serbia, through Budapest, Vienna, and Lemberg (Brăiloiu, 1944, p. 7). He wrote several poems, analysed by Constantin Brăiloiu in the work we mentioned.

In many cultures, attested official ceremonials are held for those who are to leave for their military service or to participate in the war. ‘The young men leaving for the military camp takes place within a ceremonial [...] and in some variants (of the literary text *n.b.*) the representation is magnificent. Found in totally different positions from the emotional point of view, there are the young lads and their weeping mothers, but also the animals they used to care for. In this context, the pastoral songs bring in their specific, own note’⁹. In the Romanian tradition, apart from the ‘initiation’ feature this type of manifestation often implied, there is also another component marked by a funeral connotation, where the sung poetic text had a special place. On such an occasion, significant, painful events of a man’s life were being evoked, and among these there were: alienation, separation from the loved ones, from the family, from the birthplace, and the depression caused by the feeling of loneliness. It was not so much the fear of death that was disturbing as the ‘longing’ for balance, normality and safety, which living by traditional norms ensured, and which would never return, even if the departed was to return home.

8 A petrece: a reconstitui în minte trecutul, a însoți, a conduce pe cineva la plecare o bucată de drum, a conduce un mort la groapă [To spend, to escort: to reconstruct the past in one’s mind, to accompany somebody, to escort someone for some time, to escort the deceased to the grave] (*Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române*, 1996, p. 786).

9 Plecarea feciorilor în tabăra militară are loc în cadrul unui ceremonial [...]. În unele variante (ale textului literar *n.n.*) spectacolul este măreț. La el participă, în ipostaze opuse ca stare sufletească, nu numai feciorii și maicile care plâng, ci și animalele pe care aceștia le-au îngrijit. În acest context, cântecele păstorești aduc o notă proprie, specifică (Dobre, *op. cit.*, pp. 66–67).



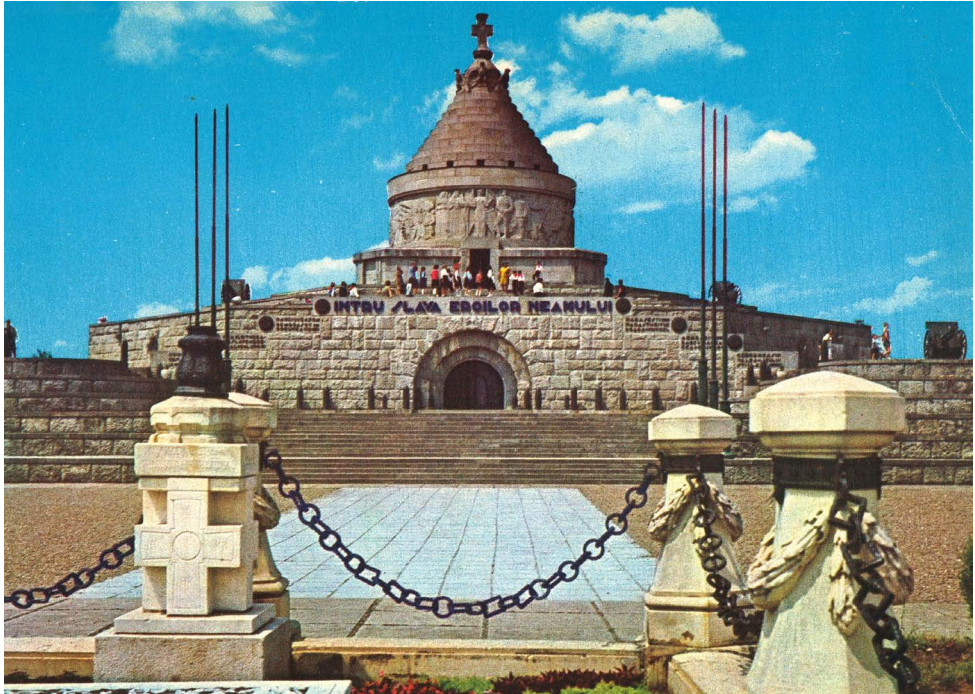
After the end of the war, a ‘cult of heroes’ was established in order to consecrate the memory of those who had died in the war, to honour them, and respect them for the exemplarity of their deeds. This way of preserving the memory of the heroes is a complementary, ‘formalized’ form compared to what the traditional Romanian culture has always had and continues to have today: the rites and practices of commemorating the dead — the grand-parents and the great grand-parents of the lineage —, customary three times a year (before the great Christian holidays of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost). The ‘Heroes’ Cult’ is a sequence thematically associated with this Orthodox ritual, ‘Heroes’ Day’ being celebrated on the day of the Ascension of the Lord, which is celebrated 40 days following Easter.

Personal stories on the events of the First World War, preserved in the memory of each combatant, are reunited into a group ‘collective memory’, accepted by the entire society, which leads to a common understanding of the Great War, and implies a way to interact with the past in a process of constant updating. In various countries, reference episodes of the conflict are recalled differently.

During the First World War, the Kingdom (at that time) of Romania conducted a policy of neutrality between 28th July 1914 and 27th August 1916. It then became a warring country on the Entente’s side from 27th August 1916 to 9th December 1918 (with an armistice between 10th December 1917 and 7th May 1918) and a non-combatant country from 7th July 1918 to 9th November 1918. The capital of the country, Bucharest, was occupied by the armies of the Central Powers — German, Turkish, and Bulgarian — in December 1916 and was liberated two years later, in the same month of 1918. On December 9, 1918, King Ferdinand, Queen Mary, and the Romanian Government, who had taken refuge in Moldova, returned to Bucharest.

Apart from the numerous and impressive poetic texts written by the soldiers that were directly involved in the conflict we mentioned, Constantin Bacalbaşa, in his book entitled *Capitala sub ocupația dușmanului. 1916–1918* [‘The Capital City under Enemy Occupation. 1916–1918’], a true ‘journal’ of the important events that marked the life of the inhabitants of the Romanian capital, offers an evocation that carries a special emotional charge, which is comprehensible and deeply analytical, at the same time. For two years under the occupation of the army of the Central Powers, it was under the authority of the German Imperial Government of the City of Bucharest, which coordinated the Romanian local authorities for control and prevention (Bacalbaşa, 2017).

According to the laws of war, during the occupation the following were requisitioned: spacious houses, hotels, and restaurants, whose names were changed. The same thing happened to the goods belonging to the inhabitants of the city: means of transport — carriages, coupes, horses —, clothing, quilts, carpets and traditional clothing, embroidery (with traditional cultural heritage value); firewood and food were rationalized; drinks, poultry and animals had to be declared — some of them handed over to the occupying forces — and ‘the dog fee’ was introduced. Identity tickets were handed over, trams could not operate at night, the theatre opening hours were changed, and Central European Time was introduced, while national insignia were prohibited. Oil, grain, wood, rolling stock, industrial and agricultural production units, typewriters, and microscopes were seized. Several documents of historical



4. Mausoleum erected in Mărășești town in the memory of the soldiers who died in the First World War — postcard 1950.

and cultural value were taken from the Romanian Academy, which were later recovered. From the cathedral, the relics of Saint Dumitru Basarabov, the patron saint of the city, were taken and returned a few days later. Some Romanian personalities, who had not left the country as refugees, were supervised and even subjected to longer or shorter periods of detention, in specific spaces, while the ladies were sent 'to the monastery', near Bucharest.

Two decisions have particularly disturbed the lives of the inhabitants of Bucharest under occupation: the replacement of the Julian calendar, which had been followed by the Romanian Orthodox Church, with the Gregorian one and the requisition of metal objects, especially those made of brass and copper, including the bells of some churches (and, even, doorknobs) to be melted and reused in the war industry. (The Gregorian calendar was officially introduced in Romania in 1919 and accepted by the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1924.) The changes in the calendar disturbed the celebration of holidays and folk traditions (of the Romanians), both in the case of those with fixed dates and of those with flexible dates, and their effects can be identified even today. The two decisions taken by the occupants also affected the sacred functions, and disrupted the religious life of the communities, which were predominantly Orthodox. The modification of the dates of celebration of the two holidays considered to be the most important — Easter and Pentecost — which had been celebrated on flexible dates, represented a great concern for all categories of population.



‘The requisition of copper and church bells caused restlessness. [...] Women mainly rebelled, they stood before the churches, while the bells were being brought down, making the sign of the cross and sending out curses’¹⁰. The decision to take away the bells of the churches to be melted and to use the metal in the war industry was enforced throughout the territory that was under the authority of the Central Powers.

The church bell is an idiophone musical instrument of ancient, perhaps Oriental origin. Used in ancient times in rituals, ceremonials or festive contexts, they had different sizes, they were usually cast of bronze, sometimes of improved alloys. They may also be made of clay or glass (crystal), materials whose vibration, when touched, is perceived in the environment. The casting of a bell requires rigorous training, knowledge and special skills.

The Old Testament mentions the golden bells that adorned the High Priest’s garments. With Christianity, bells have been used since the 6th century roughly in the Western Church, while in the Eastern Church, since the 11th century roughly. The bell sound is preceded by the sounds made by the wooden semantron and, subsequently, by the metal one.

In the Christian Orthodox Church, they become an integral part of the cult; with them, time acquires a liturgical dimension: both the officiant and the believer ‘come out’ of the routine, because a special way of communication with the transcendental is ‘opened’. The fitting of a bell in customary places is preceded by a ‘prayer for the sanctification of the bell itself’. The bells are used at well-established times during the liturgical day, alone or together with the semantron: at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, of important services — evening, midnight and morning services —, or some hierurgies. Important events in the lives of believers or communities are marked, and announced by the sound of the church bells: the death of a person, the war, a revolt, natural disasters — fires, floods, extreme weather phenomena such as hail, violent storms, earthquakes, etc. In some localities in Romania there are the so-called ‘hail bells’, or ‘storm bells’, the sound of which leads to the spreading of dangerous clouds. There is a ‘language’ of the bells, that the members of traditional communities knew, with which modern people are less and less familiar.

In Romania some old bells have been preserved, some from the 14th century, while others were cast more recently: at Cotmeana Monastery in Argeş County, at the Cozia Monastery built by Mircea the Elder Voivode, at Putna, Bistriţa, Voroneţ etc., Monasteries. Some are decorated with phytomorphic motifs, with Christian symbols and may even have the image of the donor incised. Due to the direct involvement in the officiation of the Orthodox Christian religious service, the worshipers conferred the bells a specific personality and individuality; the bells are thus considered carriers of divine messages, they have a precise ceremonial function in marking reference moments in the sacred space and time, in which the communication with the transcendental is of high intensity. Therefore, their requisition with the purpose of using them for the production of weapons was a real psychological shock for the majority

10 Rechiziţionarea aramei şi a clopotelor de la biserici a provocat agitaţie. [...] Mai ales femeile s-au răsculat, s-au postat în faţa bisericilor, pe când se scoborau clopotele, se închinau şi blestemau (Ibid, p. 60).



the Orthodox population. Its permanent contact with the sacred endows this musical instrument with a special personality, and in its physical, metallic body a type of specific 'life' is 'encoded', and its destruction is assimilated to a killing. The reactions of the communities around the churches from which the bells were requisitioned are similar to those of the members of a family in which a death occurs, and the members of the parish where the bell was to be taken away gather together.

An illustrative example of the way in which an event significant for a particular historical moment is reflected in the folk creation by using specific categorical techniques and peculiarities, is the poetic text from the volume published during the war by Eugeniu Dobrotă, which refers to a dramatic moment that took place in Poiana Sibiului when the churches' belles were requisitioned and melted, together with those in Jina and Rod settlements (Dobrotă, 1917).

Being, thus, considered a dramatic event for the Orthodox communities, not only for those in the Kingdom of Romania, the forced takeover of the bells of the two churches in Poiana Sibiului provided an occasion for the creation of a special song, in the category of the *versș*, namely the funerary poetic text we mentioned. The young lasses created *Cântarea clopotelor* [The Song of the Bells] (*song* can also mean 'lament', 'mourning' in the case of a funeral ceremony), which was published, without its accompanying song, in the brochure cited. The taking away of the bells to be melted was perceived as their 'killing', given the special role played by this metallic instrument in the religious services, but also at crossroads in the life of a traditional community or in the rituals of the family life cycle.

The officials announced their decision to requisition the bells located in the two churches of the locality, the one 'up the hill' and the one 'down the hill' on the eve of the great Christian holiday 'Saint Mary' (Assumption of the Mother of God), on Sunday, August 14, 1916, as part of an old technique characteristic of psychological warfare, fought with the means at hand at that time. The poetic text of the song records the date on which the decision was communicated, marking, this way, the importance of the celebration for the Orthodox Saint Mary cult: 'Long have we been waiting / For the Assumption Day / And now they've taken away the bells / For which we are all saddened'¹¹. The taking away of the bells is regarded as a sanction with effects on a spiritual level, interrelated with the mobilization and the departure to war of the young people — 'With longing hearts / We first escorted our lads / With mourning spells / We now escort our bells'¹² — that was administered to people for their mean deeds: 'Oh, You Almighty God / The hardships we've come to live! / God is now making us pay / For what we did'¹³. A rigorously structured ceremonial with significance that can be associated with the traditions in preparing the deceased for 'their last journey' and in escorting them to the cemetery is mentioned within the poetic text and in the

11 Mult am așteptat să vie / Ziua de Sântă Mărie / Și acum ne-am întristat: / Clopotele le-au luat (Ibid).

12 Mai întâi am petrecut / Tinerimea, cu dor mult / Și acuma cu jele / Petrecem clopotele (Ibid).

13 O, Puternice de sus, / Ce zile grele-am ajuns! / După ale noastre fapte, / Dumnezeu acum ne bate (Ibid).



description of the event, as remembered by the collective memory. The feeling of irreversible separation also leaves room for a possible continuation of the mediation function with the transcendental in a form that touches the spiritual component and 'exceeds the limit of perceptible knowledge'.

Before they were taken away, 'the people rang the bells once more to hear their sounds echoing, then they lowered the one up the hill with the rope, and threw the one down the hill down from its tower. It fell face down and it sat on the ground without getting damaged'¹⁴. They were placed in the village square where young girls adorned them with flowers. (According to the Orthodox tradition, everyone who goes to say goodbye to a deceased carries flowers and a candle.) 'And everybody was crying'. The young girls composed and sang the *Cântarea clopotelor* [Song of the Bells], assimilating the personality of the bells with that of the community of parishioners, due to the functions they fulfil by direct participation in all the events of the family life cycle, as parts of the sacraments. They all got photographed next to the bells, which later on were taken away, along with the other two requisitioned in the localities of Jina and Rod, during a procession, accompanied by the girls' singing, to where they were supposed to be taken over and transported to the foundry.

With the end of the conflict, the following years brought major changes in most areas of daily life, but also in science, in the system of administrative organization and structure.

Collective memory can preserve for two, or at most three, generations the detailed and relatively accurate memory of special events. The processes used to formalize, turn abstract or place within a narrative motif pattern, mainly, specific to a certain cultural area, transform the peculiarities of a specific event. Their collection (mechanical or handwritten registration) and, mainly, their publication (by any traditional or modern digital means) facilitates the upgrading of the events or of the circumstances in which they occurred and the understanding of the profound psychological effects. They can determine specific attitudes towards other human communities, be they close or far in time and space, persistence of bias, hard feelings or affection and respect. They can be well explained, understood and shaped in the spirit of tolerance and cooperation if they are well known in the contexts that generated them. At the same time, understanding and decoding the cultural meanings of actions, traditions, particular objects, sacred or symbolic temporal and spatial values, in general, the traditional culture system specific to an area, to a human group with a well-defined identity, can develop into tools and techniques of combat in a current conflict, in which psychological manipulation acquires a function of great authority.

Cântarea clopotelor (Dobrotă, 1917, pp. 55–56).

O, Puternice de sus,/ Ce zile grele-am ajuns!/
După ale noastre fapte,/ Dumnezeu
acum ne bate./ Mai întâi am petrecut/
Tinerimea, cu dor mult/
Și acum cu jele/
Petrecem clopotele./ Oare cum vom aștepta/
Oameni buni, duminica?/
Clopotele

¹⁴ oamenii au mai tras odată clopotele ca să le mai audă odată glasurile răsunând, apoi pe cel din deal l-au coborât cu funia, iar pe cel de la vadul-au aruncat din turn. Acesta a căzut cu gura în jos și s-a așezat pe pământ fără să i se întâmple ceva (Ibid, p. 56).

nu răsună,/ Cum s-avem inimă bună?/ Veniți toți să lăcrămăm,/ Lacrimi multe
să vărsăm,/ Din inimă să oftăm:/ Clopote nu mai avem!/ Și voi bătrâni suspinați,/
Plângeți toți și lăcrămați,/ Căci când moartea ne-a răpi/ Clopote-n sat n-or mai
fi!/ Mult am așteptat să vie/ Ziua de Sântă Mărie/ Și acum ne-am întristat:/ Clo-
potele le-au luat./ Ziua bună ne luăm/ Că acum ne depărtăm,/ Mai mult nu le mai
vedem./ Rămas bun, clopotelor,/ Că noi rămânem cu dorⁱ.

The Song of the Bells — cf. Dobrotă, E. 2017. *Small Tears. War Songs Collected from the Girls from Poiana Sibiului*, Poiana Sibiului, pp. 55–56.

Oh, All Mighty,/ Painful days we are living!/ God is punishing us/ Because of our
deeds./ First, we saw/ The young ones off,/ And now, shedding tears,/ We are giving
the bells away./ I wonder how Sunday will be?/ No bells will ring./ How can we have
a good heart?/ Let us all shed tears and lament:/ No more church bells!/ You, old
people,/ Shed tears and lament,/ 'cause when death will take us all,/ There will be no
church bells./ We were looking forward/ For Virgin Mary's Day to come/ And now
we are all miserable:/ They took the church bells away./ We bid them farewell/ and
walk away./ Farewell, church bells,/ We remain here longing for you! — cf.

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