

MOURNING AND FUNERAL FOLK SONGS IN THE NORTHERN PART OF THE TRANSYLVANIAN PLAIN

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SUMMARY. Mourning and the farewell from the young, unmarried deceased are such occasional folk customs, which have survived only in the memory of the older generations. In the northern part of the Transylvanian Plain the traditional singing repertoire consists of mourning and funeral songs – besides the songs of the sitting, performed from the hymnals. The presented examples of mourning songs in general have a formal structure, their performance is individual, while the funeral songs are sung in groups, occasionally accompanied by musicians.

Keywords: Funeral, mourning, Transylvanian Plain

The funeral is one of the most sorrowful events of the rural society. If there is a death in the village, the news travel fast, as *“even the bells toll differently on such occasions”* – say the inhabitants of Boziș.

The custom of mourning is a communal practice, an occasional one, a certain phase of the funeral ceremonial. We are talking about a disappearing custom, a quite rare occurrence, thus we can find it or a specialized woman practicing it only in the most isolated villages. The disappearance of this custom is due to several factors: on the one hand the church has not been so keen on this popular manifestation, on the other hand the more and more modernized rural society does not require the memento of mourning when a person dies, furthermore people are quite reluctant concerning this custom, they consider it outdated. *“It’s ridiculous, it’s a shame to mourn”* – I used to hear when I was doing my fieldwork.

Regarding the custom of mourning, we must discuss two aspects: the object of mourning (who or what is to be mourned) and the occasion of mourning (when). Its first role is belonging to the funeral ceremonial. The

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object of mourning can change in the case when something is to be mourned: e.g., loss of goods, of animal stock, eventually fire. Furthermore, it might occur the custom of mourning of the bride within the wedding ceremony and the mourning of the tommy regarding military service.

“All kinds of mourning have a common function, as through the expression of some kind of loss they ease the tension of the mourner, and within the frames of folk customs (at funerals, at weddings) they also evoke the sympathy, the solidarity of the public.”²

The custom of mourning was the responsibility of the female family member (wife, mother, daughter) or of a close relative. In the case when there was no suitable woman in the family, the role was taken over by a paid mourner woman. There were cases of male mourners, but these were very rare.

The custom of mourning goes through the whole ceremony: at home, next to the exposed body, at the sitting, when relatives or neighbors arrive, on the day of the funeral, on the road to the cemetery, at the grave. The mourning culminates on the day of the funeral, when the casket is sealed, as the family and the relatives say goodbye to the beloved person.

There is a non-public version of the mourning as well. We have information about the fact that even after a long time, widows and mothers mourn for their husbands or sons, this practice being a kind of recollection of the beloved ones.

The performance of the custom is extremely expressive: “A heavily loaded emotional tone is assured by frequent rhetoric questions, exclamatory and imperative sentences, respectively interjections. The effect is even more intensified by the specific tunes of musical performance: screaming high notes, pausing voice, changing into singing mode, deficient intonation turning into crying and the cry that stops the singing.”³

Formally the mourning songs can be of two types: informal or formal. The informal version does not suppose the total lack of rules. The prosaic text is articulated by the periodical beat of the rhythm of the thought.

The informal version as well as the formal one is performed individually; in both cases the performance is in *parlando*. Its most important characteristic is the expression of personal thoughts, of personal emotions. In other words: “it can be considered as a monologue addressed to the deceased.”⁴

² Szenik Ilona. *Erdélyi és moldvai magyar siratók, siratóparódiák és halottas énekek*, [Hungarian Laments, Lament Parodies, and Mourning Songs in Transylvania and Moldavia]. Kriterion Kiadó, Kolozsvár- Bukarest, 1996, p. 8.

³ Idem, p. 11.

⁴ Ibid, p. 11.

The structure of the formal mourning song does not cover the definition in all its aspects. “Just like in the case of the informal version, the textual motifs don’t have a well-defined sequence. A major part of the verses combined by rhymes and ruled by metrical acquirements are fragments of songs, while a smaller part is represented by typical motifs of mourning: the latter can be found mostly in the forms of short syllabic prose or verse-like (metric) prose; in the verses the rhymes are incomplete or missing, the metric is often fluctuant. The melodies also are not obviously formal, [...]; plus, the expansions that are used during the frequent repetition are loosening the form.”⁵

Melody types

Except for a mourning song from Sic (example nr. 2) the mourning songs from the Northern part of the Transylvanian Plain are all formal ones; these can be found in the II. and III. group of the typology categorized by Ilona Szenik⁶, among the related informal mourning songs. The following list presents only the melody types of the Transylvanian Plain. The groups are delimited by A and B.

A1.a)

A1.b)

A1.b)

⁵ Szenik Ilona. *Erdélyi és moldvai magyar siratók, siratóparódiák és halottas énekek*, [Hungarian Laments, Lament Parodies, and Mourning Songs in Transylvania and Moldavia]. Kriterion Kiadó, Kolozsvár- Bukarest, 1996, p. 13.

⁶ Idem, p. 61–62.

A2

B

A: The base of the melodies is the *C-D-E* trichord. The recitative notes and most of the cadences are situated on this. Based on these specificities the melodies can be included in the psalm-like style. The examples all have a *C* ending.

The **A1** group includes the *C* ending 4 *b3* cadency types. The first subgroup offers 5, sometimes 4 reciting notes. The starting or changing notes (in some cases both in one) expand the *C-D-E* trichord into tetratonic or tetra-pentachord.

a) The *C-D-E* type presents three lines.

E. g. 1

**Matei, Salak Mihályné Darlaczi Zsuzsa, 50 y.o.,
collected by Mann G. 1975, KZA Mg. 2491/136**

The b) and c) melody types are tetra pentatonic. One informal mourning song from Sic and a formal one that was found in several settlements belong here. We can observe a close relationship between these.

E. g. 2

Parlando $\text{♩}=126$ $\text{♩}=138$

Jaj, jaj, lel - kem, drá - go, jó i - des - a - nyám!

Jaj, jaj! De sok jó szo - vát nem fo - gad - tam

meg kend - nek. Drá - go, jó i - des - a - nyám!

Sic, Hintós Sándorné Láposi Róza, 52 y.o.,
collected by Jagamas J., 1954, KFA Mg 72/lj

E. g. 3

Parlando $\text{♩}=108$ $\text{♩}=116$

1. Lel - kem, drá - go, jó em - be - rem! Mondd meg, mit is

gon - dol - tál, hogy in - gem i - lyen ha - mar itt - hat -

tá - la, hogy in - gem i - lyen ha - mar itt - hat - tál?

Chesău, Járai Jánosné Tóbiás Erzsi, 58 y.o.,
collected by Jagamas J., KFA MG. 124/c

In most cases the formal mourning songs have four lines. The next example, originally with four lines, is also used in a three-line version.

Parlando

É-des a - nyám, ar-ra ké-rem, Nyis-sa ki a sze-me - it,
Lás - só a gyer - me - ke - it.

**Bozies, Tóth Mari Szatmári Mari, 65 y. o.,
collected by Gergely Zoltán, 2010**

The same melody was sung also with Romanian text by the informant:

„Mamă dragă nu te duce,
Că-i sară si nu-i ajunge.
Mamă sara te-apuca,
Oare unde ci- culca?
Lasă-ti mânurile acasă,
Că-i păcat să putrezască.
Lasă-ți-le pe cuptor,
Mamă, la tata de ajutor.
Lasă-ți-le pe fântână,
La tata de îndemână.
Hai, mamă că popa vine,
Oare unde te-om ascunde?
Te-os ascunde în grădinuță,
Sub o tufă de săscuță.
Săscuța s-a scutura,
Mamă popa te-a afla.
Și in groapă te-o băga,
Altu nu te-om mai vedea.”

*[Dear Mom, don't go,
It's late, you won't arrive, so
Mom, it will be dark,
For sleep where'll you stop?
Leave your hands home,
It's a shame to turn to stone.
Leave them next to the oven,
Mom, to help father.*

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*Leave them at the well,
For dad things to tell.
Mom, the priest is comin`,
Where should you be hidin`?
I'll hide you in the garden,
Under marigold flower.
The flower would flutter,
The priest would get you discover.
He would burry you underground,
We'll never see you around.]*

In a recording from the village of Fântânița the mourner switches to Romanian twice. In the informant's opinion the Romanian text would express her sorrow very well:

*Hogy nem mondtam meg lelkem,
Hogy nem mondtam meg, drága,
Hogy mit üzenjek ides anyukámnak,
Mit üzenjek, lelkem, utánad
Crapă, Doamne, pământu,
Crapă, Doamne, pământu,
Crapă, Doamne, pământu,
Să mă bag de cu tătu.
Jaj, Mondjad, drága, mondjad meg idesanyukámnak,
Mióta két esztendő's vótam, lelkem,
azóta nem láttam soha"*

*[Why didn't you tell me, dear,
Why didn't you tell me, sugar,
What to send a message to mother,
What to send, my soul, forever.
Oh God, split the earth,
Oh God, split the earth,
Oh God, split the earth,
To lay down to dirt.
Oh, tell her, my dear,
Tell to my sweet mother,
That since I was two,
I have never seen you.]*

(Lakatos Anna, 59 y. o., Fântânița)

The same melody type was recorded by the scholars of the Folklore Archive of the Romanian Academy of Sciences from the Saxons of Bistrița. Due to the confrontation of verses and prose sometimes the form loosens. Among the German verses some Romanian sequences were also introduced.⁷

In the case of type A2 the basic line is an A ending tetra-pentatonic with cadences 4 3 3 1.

E. g. 5

Parlando ♩=92

1) Lel - ke - mő, drá - ga, jó a - nyám!

2) Bo - csás - sá meg, ha vé - tet - tem!

Mert én meg-bo - csá - tok a - ne - ked,

♩=84
Mert én meg-bo - csá - tok ne - ked.

Vișea, Fodor Juliska, 54 y. o.,
collected by Jagamas J., 1955, KFA Mg126/d

B: The delimitation / contact surface of the superior and inferior segment of the melody is 5-4; the high cadences are situated here.⁸

These melodies are related to the types of mourning styles. On the Transylvanian Plain the melodies of mourning and funeral processions are related, in some cases are identical. Example nr. 6 has an E ending, it differs from the melody of the funeral procession by the fact that its ambitus – especially on the superior level – narrows back to a few recitative notes. At this type of melody, it happens that the finale slides up to b3, something of what we can find examples in the collecting of Lajtha from Sânmărtin.⁹

⁷ Szenik: *Studii etnomuzicologice*, p. 110.

⁸ Szenik Ilona. *Erdélyi és moldvai magyar siratók, siratóparódiák és halottas énekek*, [Hungarian Laments, Lament Parodies, and Mourning Songs in Transylvania and Moldavia]. Kriterion Kiadó, Kolozsvár- Bukarest, 1996, p. 59.

⁹ Lajtha László. *Szépkenyerűszentmártoni gyűjtés. (Népzenei monográfiák, 1.)* [Collection from Sânmărtin. Folk Music Monographs 1.] Zeneműkiadó, Budapest, 1954a, nr. 8.

Parlando ♩=120

1. Jaj, de szé-pen ha-ran-goz-nak Az én drá-go
a-pó-sam-nak! El-vi-szik a te-me-tő-be,
El sem bú-csúz-ha-tok tő-le.

**Malin, Máthé Ilona Varró Ilona, 53 y. o.,
collected by Jagamas J., 1954, KFA Mg 61/**

Funeral songs

Funeral songs are used outside the religious ceremony. Most of these are popular songs, but we can include in the same category also the other religious songs or the songs with laic lyrics. The songs are performed in the honour of the deceased on different moments of the funeral ceremony: at sitting, during the funeral procession, at the grave. On the Transylvanian Plain at the sitting people usually sing the funeral songs from the official hymnals.

Differently from the mourning song, the funeral song is not performed individually. It is performed in a group, with the help of a better lead singer. The lyrics are about the cruelty of death and the ephemeral nature of life. We can observe some characteristics of elite poetry here.

All around Europe there was a custom related to the death of a young person, which was called the "wedding of the dead". According to folk belief the deceased would find peace only if he/she could experience this rite of passage. This custom had been alive on the Transylvanian Plain until not too long ago, but nowadays only a few aspects have survived: the wedding dress of the deceased, the procession of wedding ceremony leaders and bridesmaids.

In these cases, in the funeral procession the young people are singing specific songs for this occasion, the outfits are imitating a wedding, and sometimes there are even musicians accompanying the deceased to the cemetery. The Hungarian term for this ('gózsálás') presumably comes from the Romanian popular term 'gogea'.¹⁰

At the funeral of young girls appear some expressions, terms that are related to the folk custom itself: „*Ilona, mit cselekedtél? / Hogy ilyen menyasszony lettél. / Násznagy nélkül, vőfély nélkül, / Menyasszony vőlegény nélkül.*” [Helen, what have you done? / Such a bride to become. / Without wedding guests, without ceremonial, / Bride without the groom.]

In the lyrics of such songs appear some lines identical to those used at weddings: lines thanking the parents for everything, lines saying goodbye to the bride.

*„Anyám, anyám, édesanyám,
Köszenem a jószágodat!
Ekkorára felneveltél,
Takargattál, ápolgattál,
Minden bajtól megőriztél.”¹¹
[Mother, mother, my dear mother,
Thank you for all your kindness!
For bringing me up,
For watching over me,
For protecting me from all that is bad.]*

On the Transylvanian Plain the songs for the death of young persons have two kinds of melodies. One of them (ex. 7) belongs in fact to the mourning style and it is related to the one presented at example 6. The other melody (ex. 8) has two lines, La-tetratonic notes and psalm-like style.

¹⁰ Szenik Ilona. *Erdélyi és moldvai magyar siratók, siratóparódiák és halottas énekek*, [Hungarian Laments, Lament Parodies, and Mourning Songs in Transylvania and Moldavia]. Kriterion Kiadó, Kolozsvár- Bukarest, 1996, p. 16.

¹¹ Idem, p. 382.

E. g. 7

Parlando



I - lo-na, mit cse-le-ked-tél, Hogy i - lyen meny-asz-szony let-tél?



Nász-nagy nél-kül, vő-fély nél-kül, Meny-asz-szony vő - le-gény nél-kül.

**Bozies, Tóth Mari Szatmári Mari, 65 y.o.,
collected by Gergely Zoltán, 2010**

E. g. 8

Quasi giusto ♩=72-76



1. Ha - lál, ha - lál, ku - tya ha - lál!



E - gyik ut-cán fel - sé - tál-tál,

**Vaida-Cămăraș, Orbán Sándorné Vad Eszter, 78 y.o.,
collected by Szenik I. and group, 1979, KZA Mg 3110/55**

In the northern part of the Transylvanian Plain the custom of mourning is not alive anymore. The songs from the sitting and from the day of the funeral are performed by the people from the hymnals and led by the priest and the cantor. It is most probable that the presented examples are remembered only by the older generations.

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