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Consideration regarding the celebration of Dragobete and Saint Valentine in the Oltenia region

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Abstract

This article is a comparative and holistic analysis of two celebrations, Saint Valentine and Dragobete, which have the same subject, namely celebrating love. The main purpose of this article is to explain how these two celebrations are celebrated in Romania nowadays, especially in the Oltenia region. We resorted to different types of researching methods such as: participative observation, questionnaires, interviews and meta-analytical method to prove which of these two celebrations are considered more important in our society. In the last years, Saint Valentine has become an important celebration for Romania's society and it has almost taken over the meaning of our traditional celebration of love. Based on our research, we wanted to better understand this phenomenon, how an imported celebration as Saint Valentine has created its own rituals in the Romania's culture. Romanian celebration of love is still considering Dragobete, but it doesn't have the same intensity as it used to have in the past any more. From our research, we discovered that both Saint Valentine and Dragobete receive almost the same attention from people, but the former one is celebrated more in the cities than in the countryside. People from the countryside are less exposed to the influence of Saint Valentine, so it is celebrated in a few villages in Oltenia. However, the Oltenia villages are closer from the anthropology's perspective to Dragobete and they are more aware of the importance of the Romanian tradition. Also, we found out that neither Saint Valentin nor Dragobete are celebrated in a few villages from the Oltenia region.

Keywords: anthropology; celebrations; rituals; Saint Valentine; Dragobete;

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1. Introduction

In our opinion, both Saint Valentine and Dragobete have an important role in the preservation of the rituals celebrating love. We have come to the conclusion that in Oltenia, people are more responsive to the celebration of Saint Valentine's Day; many of them do take part in the holiday in order to demonstrate their love for their beloved. However, Dragobete becomes with time more and more known among people. Nevertheless, the Romanians resort to less eloquent love gestures and they do not manifest the same interest for the traditional Dragobete. On Saint Valentine's Day, people experience several essential stages related to the concept of love, which proves that love can be expressed by different ways. Saint Valentine has its origins in the English tradition, having love as a motif. According to Catholic religion, Valentine is known as the one that has not abandoned Christianity, in into a martyr. Saint Valentine is associated with love all over the world, including the current Romanian society. However, Saint Valentine's Day is a holiday recently borrowed. In the 90s, people started to become familiar with the concept, but it was nothing concrete. Subsequently, with the help of mass media, it has spread all over the country. It has turned into the ideal occasion to mark the importance of people's love for their beloved. The Romanians have quickly borrowed this phenomenon, relying on their need to impose a more important celebration of love. The Romanian tradition has been powerfully shaken by this festivity. People have tried to replace the traditional Dragobete with Saint Valentine's Day. We could sustain that due to Saint Valentine, the traditional Dragobete has been brought back to life. The Romanian tradition has been marked by this attempt to replace one feast with the other and people have finally managed to bring the traditional Dragobete back in the contemporary Romanian society.

Internationally, our study highlights how, through the two celebrations (Saint Valentine and Dragobete), cultures communicate with each other and how globalization of cultural behaviors take place by convergence of similar celebrations. On the other hand, at the social level it is obvious that in relation to the place where the two cultural behaviors come into contact, a global cultural behavior acquires local specificity.

2. Dragobete and Saint Valentine. From tradition to research

The theme chosen by us is also to be found in I. Nicolau (1998) and G. Orian (2014). Irina Nicolau, in her book, *The guide of the Romanian customs and traditions*, shows:

Although it is a fixed holiday, there are zone versions taking place on different dates. It is also called the Beginning of Spring. It is not really known who this Dragobete is. In some legends, he is described as the son of Old Dochia, in others he is illustrated as the son-in-law of Lăzărică, the one that dies, longing for pies. However, he is young and consequently he is the protector of love and people in love. He is a kind of Saint Valentine. He has been compared to Eros and Cupid. On Dragobete's day, the birds pair and start building their nests. The boys and girls go to the forest to pick snowdrops and collect water from the unmelted snow [1].

Saint Valentine begins its rituals as early as the 1st of February, when people start to pave the way for the feast. In the case of Saint Valentine's Day, the rituals are completely borrowed from the foreigners proving once again the fact that this holiday has different roots when it comes to the Romanian people. The holiday is borrowed. According to the volume *Traditional yearly customs. Dictionary* by Ion Ghinoiu, Dragobete appears as a god: a young god of the autochthonous Pantheon with a fixed celebration day in the same village, but varying from region to region (24th and 28th of February; the 1st and the 25th of March), the patron of love and good-humour on the Romanian lands [2]. However, Saint Valentine's Day is celebrated by the Romanians by means of various rituals. Saint Valentine is the best occasion for the Romanians to show their love for their beloved. There is a difference of ten days between Saint Valentine and Dragobete. Saint Valentine is celebrated on the 14th of February, whereas Dragobete on the 24th of February. We have noticed in the space of the current Romanian society the increased desire of people to bring forward the Dragobete, aiming at a return to the past. Saint Valentine remains however the most important holiday of February. Gabriela Rusu-Păsărin includes the signification of Saint Valentine into her book, *Romanian traditional calendar* and she thus catches the image that this holiday has in the Romanian society. The villagers are not familiar with the myth of the holiday. Many of them consider Saint Valentine to be a continuous preparation for the celebration of Dragobete: Saint Valentine, the holiday of all those in love, is a borrowed holiday. The Romanians have been responsive to its signification, a celebration of love. As it precedes the Romanian Dragobete, one more rehearsal is welcomed. In order to help the young men and women meet, the girls know all kinds of things from the old women in the village, the ones that do and undo everything. [3] Dragobete ranks second when it comes to the people's choice of celebrating love. The Romanian towns are the prisoners of everything that means profane [4]. These are more inclined to borrowing cultural elements from other people, which leads to a

misunderstanding of the Romanian traditionalism, with a new series of unknown rituals [5]. The traditional feast called Dragobete turns into another point of the rituals' manifestation, soon after Saint Valentine ended.

These researches approach unilaterally and separately the two celebrations. Specifically, we approach them holistically and comparatively. At the same time, we highlight the social coexistence of the two celebrations and the benefits they gain from one another: Dragobete provides a Romanian reception background for Saint Valentine, and Saint Valentine strengthens the celebration behavior with which Dragobete is associated.

3. The questionnaire on the influence of Saint Valentine's Day and Dragobete

The myth of love is resumed all along the month of February both in towns and the villages. Throughout the years, traditionalism has been done away with, by the introduction of several rituals specific to Saint Valentine's Day. One has focused on the rebuilding of the traditional form related to the celebration of love. In order to understand and better notice how people perceive Saint Valentine and Dragobete, we have resorted to the questionnaire. The persons who were given the questionnaire were previously known to researchers from previously sociological investigation activities carried out in different localities in Oltenia. These people reside in those localities, live there and participate in the events involved in these two holidays. We have reached some interesting conclusions. At the same time, relying ourselves on the meta analytical method as well, we have made short interviews with people living in Oltenia, with a view to demonstrating that both the Romanian feast, Dragobete and the borrowed one, Saint Valentine, have a powerful impact on the Romanian society [6].

This February, we have made a survey and we have noticed several interesting things.

In the present study, the sample of research consisted of 100 subjects, 50 female, and 50 male. Given that St. Valentine's Day is celebrated in Romania since 1990s, there were selected graduates from the University of Craiova aged between 25 and 35 years. It was meant that the selected persons lived in a permeable environment at the celebration of the two events (Dragobete and St. Valentine Day) and who were part of different areas of Oltenia. The participation of these people was totally voluntary. There was no motivation from the researchers.

We have formulated six questions for a varied public, made of 100 people, coming from different domains.

What does Saint Valentine mean to you? 30 %
 Nothing/no signification 30 %
 It is the day of love 30 %
 A day with commercial meaning 10 %
 Other

What does the Dragobete mean to you? 20 %
 Romanian tradition 50 %
 It is the day of love 20 %
 A day with commercial meaning 10 %
 Other

If you celebrate Saint Valentine's Day, how do you get ready for this holiday? 60 %
 Do not celebrate 15 %
 In town, together with partner 15 %
 At home, offering each other presents

If you celebrate the Dragobete, how do you get ready for this holiday? 60 %
 Do not celebrate 20 %
 In town, together with partner 20 %
 At home, offering each other gifts

Do you know regions from the rural environment in Oltenia, where people do celebrate Saint Valentine's Day? If you do, please motivate in a few words. 88 %
 Do not know 12 %
 Yes, they do, (Bobicești, Leotesti, Racovita, Olt County)

Do you know regions from the rural environment in Oltenia, where people do celebrate the Dragobete? If you do, please motivate in a few words. 72 %
 Do not know 28 %
 Yes, they do, Râmpești, Vâlcea County, Mirila village, Olt County, Mârșani, Dolj County

4. Oltenia, divided between Saint Valentine's Day and Dragobete

As we have noticed from the answers offered by the interviewees, the Romanian people are aware of these two holidays, but most of them choose not to celebrate them. A high percentage of people sustain that neither Saint Valentine's Day nor Dragobete represent a special occasion to celebrate love. However, it has been interesting to notice that people have called Saint Valentine's Day a commercial celebration. They have made the difference between Saint Valentine's Day and Dragobete, claiming that the latter is a Romanian traditional celebration. The two holidays are symbolically different. The current Romanian society has acknowledged Saint Valentine's Day and integrated it into its festive actions, but it is only Dragobete that is considered to be part of the Romanian tradition. The interviewees come from the urban environment, especially Craiova, București, Slatina, Drobeta Turnu Severin and Râmnicu Vâlcea. Women have answered the survey in a higher percentage, standing for 60 % of the interviewed persons.

After several discussions we have had with persons from both the rural and urban environments, we have noticed that the city dwellers are more attracted by Saint Valentine's Day, which they celebrate more than the villagers. Tradition remains a powerful bond of our culture. We have also observed the Romanian people's wish to designate Dragobete as the most important celebration of love for the Romanian nowadays society. However, paradoxically, although most of the Romanians have stated this thing, they choose to celebrate Saint Valentine's Day, due to their desire to resemble more the other cultures. Nowadays, the Romanians are responsive to the identification with the tradition, but they also accept to take part in other celebrations, whether borrowed or even created. Romanian culture experiences a permanent shaping, new customs and traditions coming into existence [7;8].

According to the tradition, Dragobete signifies a kind of Cupid that celebrates love amongst the young men and women. In the past, in the old Romanian village, people used to attend traditions, whereas the rituals were carefully observed. Thus, if the weather were fine, the young men and women used to go to the forest to pick up spring flowers. However, if the weather were bad, they used to gather at somebody's house, where they were spending the whole day, dancing and singing. Nowadays, this tradition is not taken into account anymore. Moreover, many people are not really familiar with the Romanian traditions. Nevertheless, the Romanians are much more aware of it, compared to 20 or 10 years ago, which is especially due to the

appearance of Saint Valentine in the Romanian space. We could even say that Saint Valentine is responsible for the reanimation of the traditional spirit proper to the celebration of love. If Dragobete had not appeared in our society, it may have remained a myth, a feast significant only for the connoisseurs of the folklore or for those interested in this domain. Romanian people, as we have also noticed from the survey, lay great store on Dragobete, from the point of view of its significations, but, paradoxically, they choose to celebrate Saint Valentine's Day more than Dragobete. This is due to the influence of mass media on the society. Nowadays, the Romanian tradition of love is rewritten, focusing on the present times, where the town has turned into the main place of this holiday's manifestation. According to the survey, the Romanians do not really know places from the rural environment [9] where these two holidays are celebrated. They can identify the celebration of Dragobete in different regions of the rural environment, but do not celebrate them. A signification of love in the contemporary present is going to be undertaken and the Romanian society wishes to regain the customs and traditions related to Dragobete.

The urban environment does not correspond to the old rural traditions [10;11], it does not identify itself with them. Consequently, we need a more detailed briefing on everything that Dragobete means. [12] The Romanian society gives shape to different perceptions on the sacred or the profane, arriving at an unbalance of the passing rituals and a lack of magic in the contemporary society. Romania needs to reinforce its own traditional rituals and admit that there is the wish to implement other cultures, as well. Saint Valentine's Day and Dragobete represent two holidays whose theme is love. Nowadays, Romania accepts Saint Valentine as a festive day, conferring it an important role. We have also noticed that both holidays have an important role in Oltenia. However, in the Oltenia region, we have observed that city dwellers are closer to Saint Valentine's Day, whereas the villagers feel more connected to Dragobete. Neither the villagers nor the city dwellers celebrate especially these two holidays. The fact that 60 % of the people do not celebrate them demonstrates that Saint Valentine's Day and Dragobete have mainly symbolical values for the contemporary Romanian society. 30 % of the people interviewed have mentioned that they did not celebrate Saint Valentine's Day due to mass media. A higher percent, more precisely 40 %, have admitted that they celebrated Dragobete, because it represents a Romanian tradition. Oltenia is divided between the sacred and the profane, the old and the new, whereas the alternation between these two holidays leads to the need to clarify the real significations of both Saint Valentine's Day and Dragobete.

4. Conclusions

The contemporary Romanian society experiences an ongoing change. Saint Valentine's Day and Dragobete focus on the theme of love and they both belong to the profane. They take place at present, competing for the same role, generating the powerful contrast between them. [13] The Romanian people wish to relate more to Dragobete as the celebration of love. As we have noticed from the survey we have carried out, people are really aware of Dragobete and accept it as the traditional Romanian holiday of love, but they choose to celebrate Saint Valentine's Day. [14] On the one hand, the Romanians manifest their wish to celebrate love, according to the customs of Dragobete, on the other hand they prefer only to remember it. Saint Valentine's Day shapes people's behaviour during the month of February. By celebrating Saint Valentine's Day, Romanians accept this holiday, introducing it into the contemporary Romanian culture. The research papers, various literature books try to reanimate the traditional Dragobete. Nevertheless, this is not enough for nowadays people that are constantly exposed to various, more or less known rituals.

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