

## **ELEMENTS OF TERRITORIAL IDENTITY IN THE OAȘ LAND**

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**Abstract :** The present study, which aims at a historical-geographical entity of "land" type, aims to highlight some elements of territorial, local identity that underlie the definition of the Oaș Land. For this purpose, an important component of an event in the life of the community, namely the wedding, with an emphasis on a "the bride of preparing", from the perspective of local identity, were analyzed in terms of literature. From a methodological point of view, the main defining elements of a wedding were targeted, namely : the flag, the bride of preparing and the dance of the bread. The analysis of this festive event highlights the fact that the wedding and the bride of preparing is a strong identity element for Oaș.

**Key words:** territorial identity, "Oaș Land", wedding, dance of the bread

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Oaș Land is in the north-western extremity of Romania, in Satu Mare County, being closed on all sides by the volcanic chain of Gutâi and Oaș Mountains. Considered the smallest "land" in Transylvania, it is located about 35 km from Satu Mare and about 40 km from the city of Baia Mare, having as

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polarizing center the city of Negrești Oaş. From an administrative point of view, it consists of "33 villages grouped in 11 communes and a single town to which the village of Tur belongs" (Ilieș, 2006). Thanks to its location outside the major axes of traffic, sheltered by the volcanic chain mentioned above, in this area people have generated and developed a special civilization, with many notes of great originality. These include music, dress, and folk dances (Herman & Wendt; Herman & Gherman, 2016).

Oaş Land, (thanks to traditions, customs, port, genesis, physical and economic geography, local specificity, etc.), has been the object of study for many researchers (Bănățeanu, 1955, Andron, 1971, 2001, Focșa, 1975, 1999, Halmi, 1998, Haiduc, 2004, Suci, 1989; Velcea, 1964, Savu, 1970, 1981, Surd & Nicoara, 1989, Ilies et al., 1998; Herman & Vârnăv, 2014).

There are some differences between the villages in Oaş, but overall, the unity of their style is obvious, being built around the ideas of the people and the village. "The consciousness of belonging to this space called "Oaş Land" is not of yesterday, it was built in time, in the homonymous depression, in the shelter of Oaş and Igniș Mountains" (Herman, 2012).

In today's globalized society, unlike other territories, the identity elements are very strong in Oaş Land. Territorial, local identity, so often present in foreign and Romanian literature (Herman & Benchis, 2016, Downey, 2017, Black and Veloutsou, 2017, Banini, 2021, Filimon, 2012; Ilovan, 2020) finds a suitable ground for manifestation in Oaş Land. The local identity is present in Oseni in all its components: opinions about the place, the individual identity of the place, social practices, etc. (Banini, 2021).

In the present study we propose to analyze from the perspective of local identity, a common social practice, respectively marriage, seen as an integral part of the construction of territorial identity. Of all the complex traditional ceremonies, related to human life, the wedding represents the most interesting ethnographic phenomenon through the magnitude, diversity, complexity, and significance of its manifestations economic-social, moral, artistic and folklore.

The wedding in general, and especially in Oaş, is an important territorial marker. Beyond the festive aspect, the transition to a new stage of life, for Oseni, the wedding is perhaps the way in which it best displays its identity character. It is a moment of "pride", on this occasion the financial potential, the place occupied by the groom's families and the future place of the young family within the community are displayed.

Marriage is the foundation of new families, it ensures the material, biological, social, and moral bases of the continuity of life, a wide public participation is effectively mobilized. Every new family is another cell social center in which the creative force and the joy of life are promoted, the center in which the efforts and the results obtained in work are merged, the ways in which it is carried out responsibility naturally and concretely morality compared to future generations.

During this festive event, an important role belongs to the bride and the actions that take place around her. Through the specialized literature, consulted, were identified those specific components, identity, found in Oaş and which are related to what is called: the flag, the bride of preparing and the dance of the bread.

The wedding, as a stage of fulfillment from the existential point of view of the individual, represents a cycle of conclusion, of initiation from a person's life,

which offers him the possibility to enter the world with equal rights and duties to others who have crossed this threshold. That is why the people say that young people who marry "get married, are connected to the world", that is, they now make up the world as it must be in its essence to exist in eternity, according to decent rules and norms. If birth and death are phenomena that do not consider man's will, marriage is at his disposal, it is his involvement in the act of creation and the existence of the world and through this he becomes associated with the Creator. Therefore, "holtei" are not found until deep old age in Oaș, just as there is no marriage without a wedding (Suciu, 1989).

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The realization of the present study was the result of the direct observations of the authors, regarding the main moments of a wedding in Oaș Land, through the effective participation in numerous events of this type. This was facilitated by the origin and belonging of the authors to the local community of oșeni. The direct observation was completed with the indirect one which involved the analysis of the literature on the studied area and similar events recorded in other parts of the country. The research focused on some key defining elements for the wedding in Oaș Land, namely: the flag, the bride of preparing and the dance of the bread.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **The flag**

First, we must talk about the flag that he is one of the main characters of the wedding. All its development in theoretical and practical terms is led by it. He has the most involvement in the ritual, he is the liaison between the groom and the bride, the groom's special messenger, the center of the wedding until after the religious consecration when his importance will begin to decline rapidly so that in the end only the bride and groom will triumph. Stegarul, at weddings in Oaș, is chosen from the village's sons, mainly the first cousins or the groom's close friends. If one of the parents of the boy who is supposed to be the flag bearer has died, then he is not called by the flag bearer "it is said that one of the bride and groom dies sooner" and in this case a relative of the bride is called the flag bearer. He must be a person who enjoys the full trust and affection of the groom. His immediate concern is to make the wedding flag and for this he proceeds to procure the material he needs. Even if, in most communities in Oaș, at present, the flag is worked at the groom's house, but also in the presence of the bride, it is still customary for it to be made at the bride's house in parallel with her weaving. This situation is also present in Coca, a component village of Calinesti-Oas commune.

The flag is made in an atmosphere of joy, with dances, songs, food, and drink. The flag consists of a "stick" made of hazelnut wood, almost 1.50 m long above which is placed the "ostrich" (bouquet) of basil branches, flowers, beard, then other smaller bouquets attached to the flag, with hemp and cotton twine. On the "chischineu" are then put collars with "zurgălauă". On a wire, the girls sewed embroidered "chisels", folded in four, rosemary bouquets combined with garden flowers. There are also rolls of crepe paper and "beads" in different colors tied around the zig-zag stick.

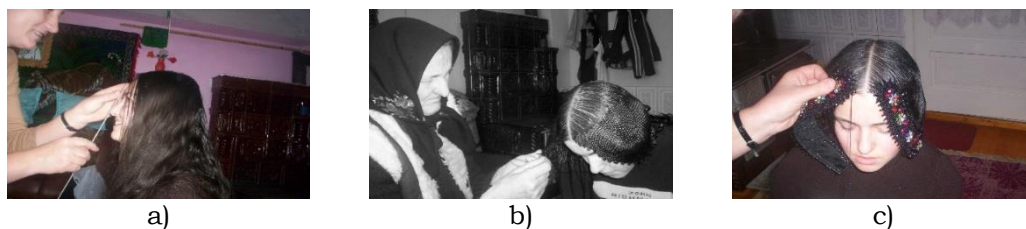
The flag accompanies almost all the rituals performed during the wedding ceremony, and the flag leads this whole ceremony. That the flag is a sign of the groups of boys is proved by its presence in the funeral ceremony of the unmarried young man.

The summary analysis of the wedding flag from Oaş reveals some interesting aspects, different from other areas in Transylvania. It is first noticed that the adornment elements of the flag belong to the feminine dress and especially to the adornment of the head: *năfrămi*, “*chișchineauă*” and “*chișchineuță*”, collars and flowers.

The flag is now more of a decorative element whose magical significance has been lost. Most of the time it is placed at the gate, at the "corner of the saivan" or in the tent next to the bride and groom's table, or it is "played" on the way to the wedding. Also recently, given the fact that the operation is long, the practice of renting it from one wedding to another has appeared.

### **The bride of preparing Crown**

In arranging the bride's head, two categories of distinct elements are combined, the hair braided according to an archaic technique, in a completely particular and original structure, unmatched, with crowns, collars, bars, strings of beads, natural flowers, rosemary flowers and basil flowers etc. All these ornaments together constitute a complicated decorative ensemble, sewn with the greatest care over the entire braid of hair, which in the end can no longer be seen from under this varied and rich decoration. The most skilled craftsman devotes at least five or six hours of concentrated work only to weaving hair and at the same time arranging the mentioned ornaments. Here it should be emphasized that this completely archaic habit, which requires specific technical knowledge, which is passed down from one generation to another, within the same family. The technical details for braiding hair can be summarized as follows: long and rich hair, greased in the past and hair oil in the present, is carefully placed around the head, sectioned into four equal parts, then grouped into three distinct sequences. Two quarters, on the sides, for the "wings" or "bottoms of the wings" of the ears, and a third sequence of the other quarters, intended for the wide tail at the back (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Braiding the bride

With a "undrea" choose the straight, central path, from the forehead to the top of the head. Starting from the forehead path first to the left, then to the right, the anointed hair is twisted into two groups of twelve long strands of 'small twigs', from which two 'big twigs' are braided. Both groups are tied at the ends with colored threads. Next are the two nets, from the ears to the front, braided from numerous strands twisted first, braiding strands from the sides of the

group, with successive alternation, a small crotch on the right and the next on the left and advancing to the central threads. Working with both hands, the braid advances one at a time to both sides of the head. The widest tail at the back is woven according to the same technique from an even larger number of twisted strands - grouped into two distinct halves, working first the right side and then the left half, from the nape down to the back. After the completion of the initial phase of braiding the parts, follows the second work, fixing the ornaments, also within five to six hours. In some cases, this second phase is performed by another person who replaces the hair braid.

The crown in the shape of a truncated cone, made of wool or velvet fabric 15-20 cm high, is placed at the top of the head and fixed by thread seams, fastened to the hair net in four distinct points, on the forehead, nape and two parts (Figure 2).

"Fodrele" and "zgărzile", with two distinct shapes - some rectangular and up to 35-40 cm long, others with one angled edge, are arranged in alternating shapes and decor, separated by rows of larger beads, all carefully sewn over the hair of the head and over the crown. In the meticulous decoration, with geometric, floral and symbolic motifs, made with variations from one lining to another, the color red predominates. The fixing of these elements of adornment is not without aesthetic preoccupations, which follow alternations of forms and chromatic harmonies. Thus, for example, at the base of the crown are placed around four parallel rows, superimposed, by the larger beads, the two central ones colored in red and the other two lateral ones in green. During the work, braided and adorned, the bride is surrounded by youth, from small children to girls and boys from relatives or neighbors who attend the wedding and who attend with great interest to this show, embellished by the song of those present.



a)



b)

**Figure 2.** Crown

### The bride's dress

The same person helped the young bride to dress and match her new clothes, composed according to the tradition of the popular folk costume specific to such an event, of three basic pieces: shirt, "pindileu" and "zadie". Cut from a white cotton cloth, of the best quality, woven in the "tiară", with decoration in geometric shapes and small beads, in white, with a remarkable finesse and elegance (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** The bride's dress

In front, the suit was completed by a pleated hem, tied around the waist under the belt of the pindle, the embroideries were structured and sewn in the usual decorative spaces for all three distinct fundamental pieces, to the shirt with rectangular plate that covered the finely pleated fabric around the neck, with the top of the chest and back, with the extension of the short sides of the rectangle of very beautiful embroidery on both shoulders. From the shoulders, the embroidery descends along the sleeves with "rivers", to the headbands that tighten the canvas one and a half inches wide, from which the sleeves had been cut, in numerous small pleats, tightened over the wrists, from the polychrome embroidery, 12 - 15 cm, "fodorii" closed at the edges, through corners worked with the "iglița".

The women's shirt, still at the beginning of our century, was, in frequent cases, made of a single piece, in which the "stani" and "poale", the skirt or the pindle, were cut from the same wave of cloth from top to bottom. After the dissociation into two distinct, separate pieces, the tins on the shirt received an extension of the cloth, more often of hemp of a quarter of a meter, like a bait caught under clothing under the "collar" of the pendulum.

At the bottom, the pendulum is adorned with a polychrome embroidery made of arniches in different colors, with flower and bird motifs or geometric shapes, continued at the bottom edge with "chipcă" in larger corners, intertwined with the "iglița", with two baths woven of twisted cotton in different colors. But this lark, worked like the other pieces, gradually gave way, like the "chischineul", obligatory from the day of the wedding to similar pieces in shape and size, but made of finer industrial materials.

### The dance of the bread

As usual, the godmother had to make a round braided loaf that she broke over the bride's head when they went to the wedding. In turn, the young people went a week after the wedding with bread to the godparents, the rolls becoming

components of social convenience, gifts that changed in a festive way in the wedding ceremony. At the entrance to the tent or the wedding house, the bride must play the bread in a circle of unmarried girls while the mother-in-law throws wheat and water, after which the bride breaks the bread and distributes it to the bride and groom. The wedding cake has much larger dimensions than an ordinary cake, it is made of white flour, with several braids, greased with egg yolk and baked in the oven. It has several symbolic meanings: Sun, Moon, female fertility, abundance. The bride's necklace is round, braided in 3, with a crack in the middle and ribbons (Figure 4). At church, this coil was placed on the bride and groom's head, as a sign of their union forever.



**Figure 4.** The bride's ring

Although the preserving power of tradition has protected them from total extinction, the everrenewing contribution of successive generations has led to their simplification and the addition of other meanings along the way, corresponding to the continuous transformation of the popular mentality.

Although the rolls are no longer prepared at home, the shapes of the old products are still preserved, they are being ordered at bakery units. In time, the bread was replaced with cakes and the wedding cake present today was introduced, but which no longer breaks, but is cut.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Oaș Land, one of the many country-type territories in Romania, stands out for its archaic, ancestral character from all points of view. Old living space, closed both geographically and from a human point of view, ethnic component,

confessional being a Romanian one, is imposed by the way of life transmitted from generation to generation in all social, economic and spiritual components.

The identity elements are given by the geographical position, at the northern extremity of Romania, typical of Osan, hardworking, hardworking, ambitious, eager for "wealth", doubled by a strong belonging to inhabited space and the pride of being Osan.

Perhaps one of the most powerful and symbolic elements of identity is the moment of marriage, the wedding. Beyond the social significance, the spiritual one intervenes, to "enter the world", respectively to find a meaning in life. This moment has a special connotation, for the boy it is the maturity exam, for the girl it represents the substantial contribution to the prosperity of the future family.

Even if theoretically, practically, economically, and socially, the groom - the boy is the important person in the acceptance of the bones, the most important and relevant "manifestations of force" take place around the bride. The preparations for the wedding take place mainly around the bride, maybe nowhere in Romania, the bride does not coagulate, through the bride's neck, so many energies, traditions, people willing to help as in Oas.

A true technical-cultural feast, in view of the needs required by the crown, dress, teeth, tapestries with significant values, the bride's cooking is a main component of Ossetian identity, more in the bride's crown is concentrated the whole essence of Osanian art and craft. Even if, the evolution of the society, the change of some attitudes, we could say maybe a certain degree of comfort established in the composition of the osan, did not manage, for the moment, to change the place and the role of this traditional ceremony during the weddings in "Oaş Land".

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