

TRANSCRIPT (AUDIO)

J: Hello! I am John Travis and welcome to another edition of our weekly program dealing with traditions. This time we will discuss about some customs related to Christmas and my special guest for this occasion is a folklorist from the local museum, Ms Edit Molnár. Welcome!

E: Good afternoon! I am thrilled to be here and talk about some of the Hungarian traditions related to Christmas.

J: So, tell us about some of the most important events that happened in Transylvania around Christmas!

E: Between Christmas and Epiphany people usually had a rest and the family was together. In villages children and young men used to go and sing carols [*'kántálás'*], act out the nativity scene [*'betlehemezés'*] or perform an ancient tradition called *'regölés'*.

J: Let's take them one by one. What does *'kántálás'* refer to?

E: Traditionally, it refers to a group of people walking around the village and singing songs to the various households kind enough to welcome them inside. Once permission was granted by the head of the household, the performers would be invited inside to perform in front of the whole family. The text of the Christmas songs from Transylvania is quite varied in content. Most of them describe the story and conditions of Christ's birth and the Holy Family looking for a place to stay. After the performance the head of the house would offer the performers poppy seed or nut rolls and mulled wine. Long ago, Christmas caroling would start as early as noon. This would allow the young children to take part in the performances. Later in the afternoon teenagers and young adults would continue. Finally, adults and married couples would take over in the evening. Caroling is still performed in the countryside. Many villages and towns perform carols in different ways.

J: What about *'betlehemezés'*? What can you briefly tell us about it?

E: The tradition of the *Bethlehem-play* is very popular in villages of Transylvania nowadays. At Christmas people, usually young lads or male adults, go from house to house with a small model of the holy family and perform *the nativity scene*, the story of Christ's birth. The story usually contains some funny elements, such as the deaf shepherd who was hard of hearing and misunderstood everything. This is also known as a pastoral play (*'pásztorjáték'*). The first written document about groups performing them was dated in the 1600s. Today the custom is kept by communities of *Sekler* villages in the eastern part of Transylvania or in the Csángó communities in Moldova. Also, some folk and non-profit groups are dedicated to preserving the atmosphere and custom of this tradition.

J: How interesting! Any other old traditions in the region?

E: There is another ancient tradition called *'regölés'*. The word *'regös'* denotes a traveling minstrel who used to visit medieval towns, going from house to house and singing songs in order to receive some food. The text of these songs often preserves the memory of ancient magic incantations and they were sung with the belief that whatever they say will happen. Lads wearing animal skins and equipped with pipes made from ceramic jugs and sticks walked around the houses. They did not play a melody with their instruments, but accompanied the rhythm of the song. They expressed their good wishes to each family member, mostly wishing them fertility, wealth and good health for the New Year. It is believed that the word *'regölés'* is of Finno-Ugric origin and the repetitive parts performed in chorus have traces of Shamanism, referring at the trance or ecstasy that the shamans of the ancient *regös*-singers fell into. These Hungarian carols can be heard sporadically in small villages throughout the holiday season.

J: Ms Molnár, thank you for describing all these wonderful traditions to us. This was another edition of our weekly program dealing with local traditions. We hope you liked today's show. Until next week, I wish you all the best!

Sources:

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