

Виходячи з викладеного вище матеріалу, можемо зробити висновок, що, незважаючи на багатонаціональне середовище Бессарабії, гагаузи зуміли зберегти особливості свого фольклору. Це зіграло важливу роль у збереженні етнічної ідентичності гагаузького народу й стало добродійним ґрунтом для його розвитку на сучасному етапі.

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## Mariya YARMOLENKO

Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor of the Department of Humanities of the Danube Institute of National University «Odessa Maritime Academy» The author of 107 scientific papers.

She worked at Izmail State University of Humanities from 1995 to 2003.

Research interests: regional features of ethno-national processes in Ukraine in the Soviet and post-Soviet era. The history and culture of the Gagauz in Bessarabia.

**E-mail:** mariayarmolenko62@gmail.com

### GAGAUZ FOLKLORE AND ITS ROLE IN PRESERVING THE IDENTITY OF THE PEOPLE

*The article explores the basic elements and distinctive features of Gagauz folklore in the 19th century after their relocation to Bessarabia. The role of folklore in preserving the ethnic identity of the Gagauz people is shown.*

**Key words:** Gagauz, folklore, ethnic identity, folklore traditions, folk art, Bessarabia.

The traditional culture of any ethnic group is to some extent a means of people's adaptation to the environment (Arutyunov, 1985: 35). It is associated with various aspects of everyday life of the people and is formed in close connection with the geographical environment, the direction of the economy, the social structure of the population, the ethno-demographic situation. Due to this, traditional and everyday culture, being the focus of historical and practical experience of the people, at the same time reflects the peculiarities of its ethnic history. The latter is due to the fact that the culture of each nation has the ability to reflect the stable specific features of human activity, which can be fixed by an objective,

definite form that transforms all its components not only into a phenomenon of universal culture, but also «into characteristic elements of traditional culture ethnic group» (*Rozhdestvenskaya, 1981: 7*).

Traditional forms of everyday culture and folk art are a central link in the development of national identity and the assertion of ethno-national identity of ethnic groups, in this case Gagauz. The ethnic culture and spiritual life of the Gagauz are not fully covered in the available literature, which in turn is the result of special conditions in which from the end of the XVIII century, i.e. with the beginning of migration to Bessarabia, Gagauz, like other immigrants from the Balkans, had to fight for survival.

A special place in preserving the ethnic identity of the Gagauz people belongs to its folklore, thanks to which they were able to carry through the centuries and preserve certain traditions of their ancestors.

Oral folk art of the Gagauz originally carried elements generated by the conditions of nomadic life, which led their ancestors. These features of national folklore, which enriched the spiritual culture of the Gagauz, survived in the XIX century. Thus, among the numerous Gagauz songs brought by them from the Balkans to Bessarabia, extremely interesting and rather unusual versions of the popular song «Oglan» – songs about the «wonderful shepherd» attract special attention.

The analysis of these options is of great interest not only because the history of the Gagauz is reflected in fragments or not at all in written sources, but also because the coverage of the question of the origin of the plots of this song, which testify to nomadic life, problems of the origin of the Gagauz. The arena of nomadic life of the ancestors of the Gagauz was the steppes. This is the deep meaning and origins of understanding the plot itself, which arose on the basis of nomadic life. At first glance, all this seems unclear to the farming people, which were Gagauz in the XIX – early XX century. However, this proves once again that in the life and minds of the vast majority of Gagauz peasants in the XIX – XX centuries lived folk traditions that have their roots in antiquity. Gagauz musical and poetic folklore is of considerable interest in originality and artistic value. The Gagauz distinguish two types of their folk songs: «turku» – long songs of different content and character and «maani» – lyrical quatrains such as ditty. «Turku» is divided into epic and lyrical. The content of folk ballads is mainly stories about the suffering of the people under the Ottoman-Turkish yoke and protest against oppression. The anti-Turkish orientation of Gagauz folk ballads, as well as historical songs, is explained by the fact Turkish authorities, being «infidels» – Christians. Therefore, Gagauz folk songs belonging to the era of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans have much in common with the Bulgarian folk ballads in their poetics – plots, compositions, artistic images and visual aids.

Ballads about robbers – «haiduts» – «Tudorka», «Haydut Pavych» and others (*Gagauz folklore, 1974: 23,31*), family and household ballads with a typical tragic ending - were also widespread in Gagauz folklore; historical songs dedicated not only to Russia's military events with Turkey, but also with Japan and Austria-Hungary (*Kuroglo, 1969: 179-182*). Most of the «Turku» was borrowed by the Gagauz from their neighbours: Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Moldavians, Turko-Ottomans, and others. «Turku» contains many foreign words, expressions and phrases that are foreign to the Gagauz language. Such songs on international themes as «sister-poisoner» and a legend «about the human victims buried in the earth at construction of the bridge» (*Kuroglo, 1972: 79*) were known. Such songs were composed by poets, so-called accordions who were engaged in creation of songs, as a craft. One of such accordionists-violinists was George Yalanzhi (*Kuroglo, 1972: 80*).

There were also calendar-ritual songs of an agricultural nature, performed on certain days: «Lazarus», «Pipiruda», «Germanchu», «Hey-hey» and others. Family and ritual songs (wedding, funeral) were sung by special people during various rituals. Lyrical songs of

Gagauz of the XIX century were devoted to women's, orphan, and soldier's destiny, love. A very popular genre of lyrical songs, consisting of quatrains («maani»), was very popular among the Gagauz. They were usually performed at gatherings («dernek», «manga», «oturmak»). «Maani» usually consisted of two parts: in the first part (the first two steps) was taken any natural phenomenon like: a bird flying through the air, and in the second a poetic parallel was built to this phenomenon of human life. Strict drawing of such a parallel was the ideal to which the poet should strive. Like any ideal, it was difficult to achieve in practice, so often in the «maan» to find a parallel between the first and second half is almost impossible. Both halves of the song are connected in a purely external way, i.e. the size of the poem and rhyme. There were plenty of such songs in Gagauz folk art.

It is interesting, despite the diversity of the song genre and the undoubted musicality of the Gagauz, their singing was not developed. In the Gagauz «unwritten code of decency» there was a rule that singing anywhere - at home, in society and even in the field - is indecent if the singer is not asked. The Gagauz «code of decency» in addition to the church, allowed them to sing freely, and only alone, at weddings, where the song was in the form of payment, if the ceremony required something or someone to redeem. In addition, young people sometimes sang «in conversations» (meetings), where the guy and the girl rebuked and characterized each other with short four-line poems, often fictionally impromptu. In such songs, in the heat of musical and poetic controversy, it was not considered obscene to use the most cynical expressions in the presence of girls, although the use of such expressions in the presence of women was usually forbidden by the «code of decency.»

Because of the «code of decency» Gagauz in the XIX – early XX centuries very little and rarely sang. This was the result of the difficult living conditions of the Ottoman Empire, when the Gagauz lived in constant terror and persecution.

Tales («masal») were widespread among the Gagauz in the XIX century. In content, they were divided into tales about animals, magic and household. In the images of animals, the people portrayed their oppressors and defenders. Many fairy tales reflected the difficult life of the Gagauz people, oppressed by wealth. People's heroes are shown good, smart, fearless, and the rich – greedy, stingy, funny. Humour of the people was reflected also in the content of anecdotes and short humorous stories («porezen», «fikra»). There were also anecdotes about Hodja Nasreddin, about the cunning Kесе, known to many peoples, humorous stories about Chon Myale and others. An integral part of Gagauz folklore were riddles («billmaid»), used at gatherings, works on mutual assistance («ortaklik», «borders»), at youth meetings.

A special place in Gagauz folk art belonged to dance. In each Gagauz village there was a place for a round dance (choir) – a choir of the era, usually in the central square of the village, near the church, but not within its fence. Village boys for a fold of 60-70 rubbles a year hired a musician on a violin or blacksmith with the condition to play every holiday and on Sunday in the choir, regardless of the number of attendees (*Moshkov, 1900: 70*). In large villages, such as the Kongaz of Izmail County, an orchestra of three musicians was hired for the choir in 1898: the violin and the small flute played the main melody, and the kobza, a stringed guitar instrument with 12 strings, accompanied them. The content of such an orchestra cost the villagers 75 rubbles for 5 months with the condition to play at all weddings. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, copper trumpets were added to Gagauz orchestral instruments, on which soldiers-musicians played military service. Such orchestras were very expensive and inaccessible to Gagauz peasants. They were hired for weddings only by rich Gagauz from among the inhabitants of large trading villages, such as Comrat (*CGA of Moldova, D. 378: 51*).

Many villagers were present at the choir on such days. Young people danced, children ran inside the round, dance, played their games, old people sat on priestesses, admiring their

children and discussing the latest news. Both friendly and loving relationships were established, maintained, and sometimes ended here. Various trade and economic agreements were concluded. That is why there have always been many people in the choir meeting, regardless of the weather or season. For example, one Sunday in the village of Beshalma, the choir was attended by about 360 people out of 2,500 people living in the village, 14% of the total population, and in the village of Kongaz, which had 5,000 inhabitants, was attended by 600-700 people. 300 people danced in the circle (*CGA of Moldova, D. 707: 39-40*).

The entertainment of young people here consisted exclusively of dancing. Songs were not sung in the choir – it was not accepted, the games were arranged only during Lent, as at that time the elderly were not allowed to dance. In addition to national, Gagauz performed dances of their non-national neighbours - Bulgarians, Russians, Ukrainians, Moldovans and others. The dances were accompanied by Gagauz wedding ceremonies. Special melodies, braiding and dressing of the bride, dance of the bride, etc. were performed. There were melodies that relate to a certain part of the wedding – march, vivat, guveyda and others (*Kuroglo, 1972: 165-166*). A special melody of Gureshavasa was performed on national holidays during wrestling competitions.

The choreographic inclinations of the Gagauz in the XIX century were manifested in the device of the Gagauz colonies in the village of Comrat, where all the best dancers from all the Gagauz settlements of Bessarabia gathered (*CGA of Moldova, D. 725: 7*).

The love of dance in the Gagauz in the XIX century contributes to the widespread development of their instrumental music. There were many different musical instruments and good musicians in the Gagauz villages. The most common musical instrument was the so-called kavale wind instrument from the flute family. In addition to the kaval, the Gagauz played the chirtme, a bagpipe that sounded like a piccolo flute; on a bagpipe, on a violin and on a kobza (*Moshkov, 1900: 75*). The Gagauz bagpipe was called a bagpipe and did not differ from the Ukrainian one. The Gagauz also had their own special, original string instrument kaush-kemenche (violin-spoon), similar to a large spoon. They played a bow on it. A sample of such an instrument is stored in the Ethnographic Museum in St. Petersburg. «The melodies of Gagauz dances and pieces for hearing are very beautiful, heartfelt and extremely complex in terms of rhythm. They resemble Hungarian music, as evidenced by the frequent use of the so-called Hungarian tetrachord» – said in 1900 Moshkov. (*Moshkov, 1900: 77*). The instrumental music of the Gagauz was very melodic. This is evidenced by the very word «melody» in the Gagauz language – hava, i.e. air, which in itself bears a poetic imprint.

Along with the preserved trends and forms of folk art, generated by the nomadic past of the Gagauz, in the XIX century there were many customs, rituals and beliefs about the Gagauz farmers, who led a sedentary lifestyle. Thus, a significant event in the life of a Gagauz peasant in the XIX century was the construction of a house, which is associated with a number of customs and rites designed to ensure the quality of the building, the well-being of the owners of the future house and against evil spirits that bring fire, destruction, disease and other disasters. The oldest were the rites, which are an echo of pagan beliefs and associated with sacrifice.

When laying the walls of the house, people were afraid to be near the masters, as there was a belief that they could measure the length of the shadow rope chosen by them for revenge man and lay this rope under one of the corners of the building under construction. In forty days his shadow will turn into a werewolf (talsa), which brings trouble and anxiety to the villagers at night. This belief is described by Atanas Manov in Varna Gagauz Bulgaria. Thus, the Varna Gagauz during the construction of the house cut a rooster as a



victim of talsim (*Manov, 1938: 73*). A similar rite was preserved in them and in Bessarabia in the late 70's of the XIX century (*Peoples of Russia. Bulgarians, 1879: 13*).

There is no need to search for a description of the root causes of such rites. Ethnographic science refers them to the rites associated with sacrifice. In ancient times, such a rite was widespread in many nations. The remnants of the ancient sacrifice in the establishment of housing are well preserved among the Slavs (*Sumtsov, 1889: 487-497; Arnaudov, 1921: 145-170; Zelenin, 1914: 308*). Similar rites are also found in the neighbours of the Gagauz – Moldavians. Several modified versions of sacrifices and magical rites during construction are also common among the Gagauz customs to lay candles, money, grain, and wine at the corners of the future house. These customs are observed in all neighbouring nations.

With the old beliefs were associated and the definition of days to begin construction of the house. The most successful was considered to begin construction on the first Thursday of the full moon (ah dolurkana). The people believed that this would save the future home from evil spirits and dampness. During the laying of the walls of the house in the middle of the end wall put a branch tied to it cloth, shirt or towel, intended as a gift (baashish) for the master. Behind the roof, the master received a new baashish from the owner.

The construction of the walls of the house was a laborious process, so the Gagauz, as well as the Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Moldavians and other peoples had a custom of mutual assistance, called «borders». «Borders» lives in Gagauz villages even today. Its participants are invited by the owner who prepares clay, straw, necessary tools, or other materials for performance of necessary work in an economy by the certain day. A special concern of the host is the organization of refreshments: a large dinner is arranged, which ends with general fun, sometimes dancing, games for young people.

The end of the construction of the house was also marked by a banquet (ayazma), to which all relatives were invited. Before moving into the rebuilt house, it was customary to consecrate it in order to prevent the universe of evil spirits (ev vatisliy). At the same time in holy water dipped sprigs of mint and sprinkled the hearth and all corners of the room. During the move into the new house, the owners were not the first to enter it, but called the neighbours, who with bread and salt crossed the threshold of the house.

Gagauz of the XIX century are also characterized by rites and customs associated with the veneration of fire and its centre – the hearth. These are echoes of the original bowing to the fire. The hearth was attributed many magical properties, including cleansing, healing, which brought prosperity, fertility and other benefits to all those who worshiped it. Thus, village healers scraped clay plaster from the furnace, chimney or its foundation and from this powder made medicines and potions. Due to the healing properties of this defect it was used in the treatment of cuts, burns or wounds.

The custom of carrying medicines three times for patients through the chimney is also connected with the belief in the cleansing and healing power of the hearth. To do this, a ladder was installed in the chimney and one of the children climbed it three times with the potion, going out through the pipe to the roof and going down into the room again. After that, the patient was treated with potions.

In the 80's of the XIX century, eyewitnesses noted in the Bessarabian Bulgarians «sorcery with a log near the hearth and stove on Christmas Eve with the order of the offspring of cattle and crops» (*Peoples of Russia. Bulgarians, 1879: 26*). Ethnographic observations in the Gagauz villages of the Gagauz researcher M.V. Marunevich confirm the existence of this rite in the past and in the Gagauz (*Marunevich, 1980: 149*).

The hearth, as a miraculous patron of the family, associated with some wedding ceremonies at the Gagauz. So, entering the house of the bride, the suitors went to the hearth and stirred the ashes, as if asking the hearth for patronage to successfully complete their

mission. Rejected by the groom, the bride could appear at the house of his parents, who in case of consent to the marriage lit a fire and invited her to sit next to him, after which the groom had no right to refuse marriage. V.A. Moshkov testifies to the presence in the life of the Gagauz of this rite in the late XIX and even early XX centuries (*Moshkov, 1902: 38*).

Gagauz also had beliefs and related prohibitions aimed at protecting the house and its occupants from evil spirits. It was believed that the removal of ashes and rubbish after sunset could adversely affect the harmony and well-being of the family. It was forbidden to whistle in the house. This prohibition is due not so much to ethical norms as to the fear of destructive spells supposedly sensitive to the whistling of domestic spirits. The Gagauz miraculous power was attributed to a horseshoe nailed to the threshold.

Family relations of Gagauz people also attract attention. The very foundations of the Gagauz family were patriarchal, with a strong predominance of paternal authority. The Gagauz had their own special system of attitude of parents to children, children to parents and even children among themselves, the essence of which was to respect the elder, his respect. This is manifested in the traditions of the Gagauz people. So, on the first day of the New Year, for example, all family members, wherever they live, all come together with their parents, bringing with them a large loaf of wheat with boiled chicken placed on it. The same thing is repeated throughout the week of Shrovetide and at Easter. Such a show of respect for the elders in the Gagauz family has survived to this day.

A special place in the family of the Gagauz peasant was occupied by the position of an employee, without whom in the XIX century no more or less wealthy Gagauz could do. The workers were mostly young people who were going to start their own farms, but did not have the money to buy oxen, without which the economy of the Gagauz peasant was impossible. They were usually hired for one year with a payment of 100 to 120 rubbles, ate and lived with the children, participated in all family celebrations. The owner at this time replaced the father of such an employee. Gagauz attached great importance to this service of a mercenary worker, comparing it with the end of a course in some educational institution. No wonder most of the Gagauz fairy tales begin with the fact that the hero asks his mother to bake him bread, puts this bread in a bag and goes to hire workers, after which his adventures begin. Indeed, as V.A. Moshkov writes, «during the service in the mercenaries, the young Gagauz will see, feel and learn as much new for himself as he is unlikely to see later in his life» (*Moshkov, 1901: 12*), as hired they became workers not only in their own village, but also in other Gagauz villages, and more often in the Bulgarian and German colonies. First of all, they learned to deal with strangers here, got acquainted with agriculture «in its smallest details», and if the owner owned a craft, then - and with the craft (mostly Germans). At the same time, a young man who lived in a foreign village, looked closely at other people's orders, habits and customs, joined them. However, the Gagauz themselves were especially hospitable. Even this very concept (in Gagauz – «Adamlyk») comes from the word «Adam» – a person in the broadest sense of the word, regardless of his condition, nationality, language, skin colour, etc. Because of this, each Gagauz of Bessarabia tried to build not one but two houses: one small and cramped for himself and called it «kitchen», and the other - large, decorated with carpets, towels and other decorations – the house itself (*eni ev*), intended exclusively for the reception of guests.

The Gagauz hospitality was also manifested in the organization of public feasts, which were called «kurban», i.e. sacrifice to God. In fact, it was not perceived as a sacrifice to God, but as a duty of hospitality. Sacrifices were arranged in Gagauz by both individuals and entire rural communities. Most often, private sacrifices were performed «for the health» of a long-sick and recovered family member. Interestingly, private sacrifices have survived in the Gagauz to this day. Such banquets were arranged and such treats as «holy spring» – for health, for a good harvest and in general that God did not leave them with his graces.

Wealthy Gagauz in the XIX century arranged such «holy springs» 3-4 times a year. If we add to all this treats at birthdays, weddings and memorial services, the manifestations of hospitality in the Gagauz becomes obvious. Moreover, it was not a waste, because they largely denied themselves to save for the holiday. On the one hand, for the Gagauz, it was a worship of God to appease him, and on the other hand, it was a duty to public opinion. Thus, we see that the Gagauz are characterized by rites and beliefs similar to the rites of the peoples of South-Eastern Europe. This suggests that, regardless of the origin of the people, the main features of their life and culture were closely linked with the culture of neighbouring peoples and led to the enrichment of their culture. In Bessarabia, the Gagauz remained true to their ancient traditions, but at the same time they were affected by the non-national environment, the culture of other ethnic groups.

Considering some elements of Gagauz culture associated with folklore, which was formed and created in previous centuries of history, we see that the processes of their life in the lands of Bessarabia as part of the Russian Empire, where they were able to freely practice their Orthodox religion, Gagauz folk art developed and constantly updated. It should also be noted that, being one of the many segments of the colonial development of Bessarabia, the Gagauz found themselves in a multinational (Bulgarians, Moldavians, Russians, Ukrainians, Germans) environment, which could not but affect their spiritual life.

Based on the above material, we can conclude that, despite the multinational environment of Bessarabia, Gagauz managed to preserve the features of their folklore, which played an important role in preserving the ethnic identity of the Gagauz people and became a benevolent ground for its development today.

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