

FITOKALIA - BETWEEN TRADITION AND OPPORTUNITY

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Abstract

The title of this study is generated through a linguistic sequencing, in which we associated the religious notion of „filocalia” - love of divine beauty, with „fito”, meaning love towards the beauty of the nature. The goal of the study is to introduce some theoretical ideas connected to the existence of the Romanian peony (*Paeonia peregrina*), then following the manner in which the peony related rituals became a starting point for economic growth and social development. The appraisal for this endangered plant imposed its protection by law in a few sanctuaries. Since the earliest times, festivals and manifestations were dedicated to the peony in order to celebrate its beauty and its magic facets. Our research is aiming mainly on the economical outcome related with the Peony Festival, followed on a three year period, between 2011 and 2013. Starting from 2011, the revenues were 35% higher than the costs, this percentage being maintained also in the following years, proving that the public is still interested in attending this festival.

Key words: peony, festival, ritual

Born as herders and farmers, the Romanian people evolved in correlation with the regular sequence of the seasons, transferring towards these occupations some sacred attributes. Thus, it emerged an entire folklore with tremendous ramifications connected with the great moments of the simple man, who was busy working the land, but didn't forget to look up toward the sky. The folkloric creations became a foundation of the popular spirituality, a perpetual generator of feelings and empiric knowledge, an integrator ensemble for traditions, customs, rituals and ancestral beliefs. Among these, the vegetal archetypes are constant and integrative for the mental collective, their universality aiming, initially, the therapeutical, symbolical and mythical impact, in order for the modern society to tie them to the socio-economical facets.

The *homo religiosus* world is populated by numerous vegetal elements, having sacred resources, among these finding the Romanian peony (*Paeonia peregrina*). Growing in the garden or in the wildness of the plains, the peony is associated with sanguinity, rebirth and resacralization, a reflex of the sacred as the omnipresence of the human existence, opposed to the profane, which is obliterated by rituals considered as a way to establish a contact with it. Along time, the peony received ambivalent connotations, being also an elixir for immortality,

as the Phoenix, and also, abusively derived from the Romanian word for blushing (bujor - a se îmbujora), as a symbol for shyness. (see Chevalier J., Gheerbrant A., 1994). But, the Romanian tradition is „to put a peony in the water when a newborn boy is baptized, to be ruddy as the peony” (Candrea, A., 1999). Despite its precious appearance, the peony is not among the desired flowers, its place being aside the daisy and the other rustic flowers. The inflorescence is constituted from a series of petals tightened around a core, a symbolic transfiguration of the structure of the Universe, reiterating the „wrapped world” theory of David Böhm, a philosopher that stated that there is only one reality, called „wrapped order”, in which everything is in the same place and time, whilst the human being is experiencing nothing else but the „unwrapped order”: „The fabric of the Universe is the same everywhere and, on every level, the difference is the degree of wrapping or unwrapping of the unwrapped plenitude” (H. R. Patapievic, 1995). Referencing the shape of the peony to this theory, we are allowed to state that the universal greatness and perfection can be found amongst the smallest vegetal elements and structures.

The studied plant is long known in the Balkans to have two varieties: *typica* and *romanica*. Our research is centered on the second variety, spreading along Dobrogea (near

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Constanța, at Basarabi, between Tuzla and Mangalia, Babadag, Baia Niculițel, Tulcea County) and the south of Moldavia (Târgu-Bujos, Breana Forest Reservation, Roșcani, Galați County). The botanist Dimitrie Brândză was a pioneer, describing in 1879 the *romanica* variety. (Constantin Pârvu, 2000). The oldest reference regarding the peony was discovered in 1972, inside a first century chinese tomb. Written on a bamboo tablet was a recipe containing peony. The peony is invoked in literature, in songs, in chronicles and present in paintings, tapestries and porcelains. The wild peony flowers are fascinating because of their colouring, performing an obvious fascination upon the tourists and the viewers. The plant is now extinct from many areas, the only things that reminds of its existence being the toponyms such as: Bujoru, Bujoreni, Bujoreanca, Târgu-Bujor. Currently, the plant is declared monument of nature and is protected by law. Furthermore, the peony is protected in natural reservations, like the ones in Roșcani (Galați County) or Fântânița (Constanța County).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Herbaceous plant, perennial, geophyte, xeromesophyte, mesothermal towards mildly thermophyte, basophilic neutral, the Romanian peony is phytocenological classified in *Querncetalia pubescentis* and can be found in plain region, in glades and in the vicinity of the forests. The plant is constituted from tuberised, oblong-ellipsoidal fibers, an upright and unbranched stalk, 50 to 80 cm in height, with petiolated, highly and deep divided leaflets. The flowers are large, single, red as the colour of the blood, having a calyx with 5-6 uneven subfoliaceous sepals, a corolla formed from 7-11 independent obovate petals, 5-7 cm in length, an androecium with numerous stamens, short anthers, a gynoecium with 2-3 tomentose carpels, with a long, purple stigma (Pârvu, Constantin, 2000).

There are several legends related to peony, some of them recounting about a Dobrogean king, who, in order to save his people and his kingdom from a terrible disaster, was forced to sacrifice his only offspring, a beautiful boy with ruddy cheeks, named Bujor. The innocent boy being thrown into spears, a single drop of blood was spilled and, soon as it touched the ground, it transformed into a flower much alike the child's face. The scientific name of the flower reminds of the greek god Paeon, who gave birth to the peony out of his own flesh. The god was instructed by Leto, Apollo's mother, how to find a magic root that was growing on Mount Olympus and having the

power to lessen the birth pain. Apollo became envious with Paeon and tries to kill him, but Zeus saved the young god transforming him into a peony.

The peony was used for healing purposes, as antibiotic, tranquilizer, analgesic and antispasmodic. During the Middle Age, the common belief was that it had the power to fight bad dreams and bad thoughts, as indicated in a herbarium from the XVIIth century. The colour has an important role in magical symbolism and, when used in magical medicine, acting through analogy, the red colour is a symbol for the vital fluid.

Situated about 70 km far from the city of Galați, on the road connecting Băneasa and the village of Roșcani, Breana Forest harbours a reservation with Romanian peony (*Paenonia romanica*), a protected plant that became rare in our country. The peonies that grow here can be found in compact glades, turning the northern part of the forest into a natural reservation.

Starting from all these facts, our goal is to study the socio-economical impact of the Peony Festival, held when the flower is blossoming, each year, in May, using the comparative research method as the most convenient, because we are interested in the manner which the peony became an economical and a social pretext in our pragmatic modern society. The data presented in our study were gathered during the festival, over a three year period, between 2011 and 2013.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The local tales are saying that peonies have emerged from the blood of the moldavians soldiers fallen during the battle of Roșcani, in 1574, when the army led by Ioan Vodă cel Viteaz has been defeated by the turks, only because they lacked water. The protagonists of the Festival are artists from „Doina Covurluiului”, a folkloric band, part of the „Lower Danube” Cultural Center, from „Nae Leonard” Musical Theater and artistic bands from the cultural centers situated in cities as Tecuci, Berești and villages as Băleni, Băneasa, Cavadinesti, Cuza-Vodă, Frumușița, Oancea, Rădești, Rogojeni, Tulucești. Over time, at the Festival attended, as guests, numerous celebrities such as: Sergiu Nicolaescu, a well-known actor, movie director and politician, the folk singer Victor Socaciu, the violonist, orchestra conductor and politician Mădălin Voicu, the folk singers George Nicolescu and Sofia Vicoveanca, celebrities that attracted a lot of spectators from Galați County and nearby counties: Brăila, Buzău, Vaslui and Iași.

Each year, along the road that connects Roșcani to the glades where songs and dances are performed, there are reserved locations for various merchants. Craftsmen and traders are placed in key points inside the glades, so there is plenty of food, served cold or right out from grills, and also beverages. The local authorities usually install inflatable slides for children or similar attractions. In 2011, the Festival took place on the 22nd of May, marking the 28th edition. This circumstance allowed the promoters to unveil the adjacent

objectives: to access European financing through the Operational Programme for Romania and Republic of Moldova, to develop the environmental protection project initiated by the Elementary School from Rediu (ecological suits parade, the Peony's race), to promote the Roșcani Forest as an international touristic attraction.

Table 1 (fig. 1) displays the revenues obtained by the local authorities from Târgu-Bujor during the Festival, compared with the expenditures, for a three year time interval:

Table 1

2011 - 2013 revenues and expenditures				
Revenues and expenditures (thousand ROL)		2011	2012	2013
Expenditures related to the Festival arrangements		317,0	340,0	390,0
Revenues	income tax	313,6	328,4	365,2
	taxes for usufruct, authorizations and permits	67,3	82,8	103,8
	subventions	50,0	50,0	60,0
	Total	430,9	461,2	529,0

CONCLUSIONS

Having in view the socio-economical importance of the Peony's Festival, we can conclude that it became:

- a starting point for economic growth in the region;
- a viable method to cultivate passion for ecology, right from the first years of attending the school;

- a homecoming toward popular traditions, in order to uphold the national identity;
- a social cohesion element for Romanians and Moldavians across the river Prut;
- a promoter for European financing;
- a way to become aware of the important role that plants hold in medical therapy;
- a bridge between man and nature.

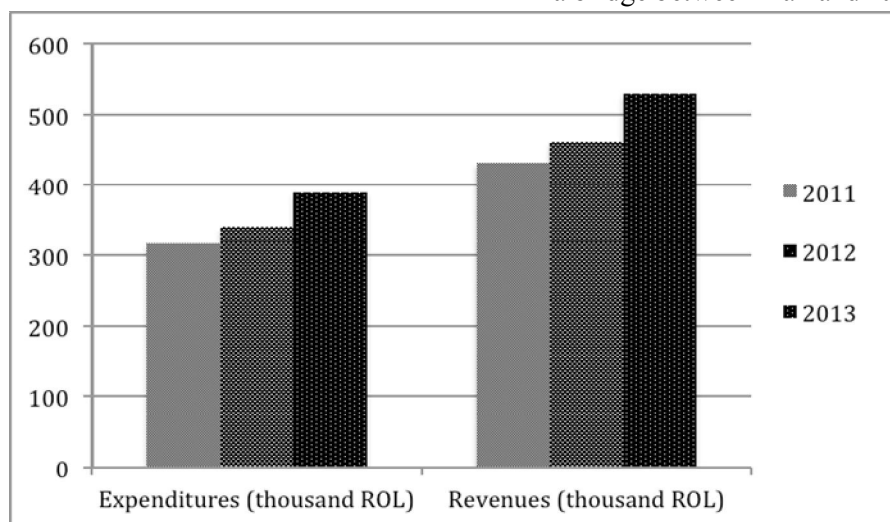


Figure 1 Comparative financial report 2011 - 2013

The following chart shows the economic growth, pointing out that tradition can mix with opportunity.

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