

# Life in the spinning room 'Fono'



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The spinning room 'Fono' used to serve in Szekely Land<sup>1</sup> from the end of November until the beginning of March as the platform of communal life of the youth living in villages, offering them practically the only opportunity to go out.

In order to organize the 'Fono' event, the young girls would regularly seek contact with an old lady in the village, who, being a widow already, had a separate room in her house to 'rent out' as the place of the event for the youth. It was, however, pivotal for the owner of the house to have a virtuous and respectable background and be widely esteemed. She was namely the one supposed to keep an eye on the young girls and the village lads who were going to meet and enjoy. At that time young girls did not generally use to be allowed to go out on their own. Usually girls between the age of 14 and 18 used to go out to the 'Fono' where they would stick around from 5 pm to 10 pm. 'Fono' was the place for them to spin materials such as hemp-tows and flax into yarns so they could make homespun linen cloth out of it.



There was however no time for any break allowed until two spools of yarn had been made ready. Even the lads denigrated and scoffed at those girls, who did all talk but no action during spinning time. The 'Fono' served as venue for both hard work and entertainment where one could not only make new friends but even find their loved one. There was no young girl happened to drop her spool during spinning that could

not get help from a lad around, who then hastened to pick it up. Reclaiming the spool was, however, only possible if the girl offered a kiss to the lad for his generosity.



After six it became time for the girls to start singing authentic songs, which invited the lads from the village to show up soon on the premises. They came and settled down to join the music with the girls ending up at telling jokes, sharing funny stories, playing games, posing riddles and warbling little tunes. They never failed to fully enjoy the cheerful event at the ‘Fono’.



Celebrating events such as Katalin's day<sup>2</sup> and Saint Lucia's day as well as the nativity fast were remarkable festivities in the life of the 'Fono' too. On Saint Luca's day<sup>3</sup> spinning was forbidden, however, instead the young girls and lads brought maize with themselves to the Fono to make pop corns. If there were more 'Fonos' in a village, the different groups used to visit each other on a regular basis. On these occasions the village lads hired folk musicians to party, to sing and dance with the young girls. On 24 December, as part of the Nativity Fast, they would gather to crack nuts in the 'Fono' and then set out to the Church together to attend the midnight mass.

In the spinning room the favourite game of the youngsters was the play called: Kútba estem (I fell into the well ). Children make a circle and one of them ( a girl ) squats in the middle. A girl says: I fell into the well. The others ask: and who would you like to pull you up? The girl names a boy loudly (who pulls her up in the end).

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1.

*A historic and ethnographic area in present time Romania, inhabited mainly by the Székelys, a subgroup of the Hungarian people from eastern Transylvania.*

2.

*A traditional celebration of St Catherine's Day, a name day was (and still is) a tradition in many countries in [Europe](#) and [Latin America](#) that consists of celebrating the day of the year associated with one's [given name](#).*

3.

*Saint Lucia's Day is the church [feast day](#) dedicated to [Saint Lucy](#) and is observed on 13 December. In Hungary this was a widely celebrated event in villages. The folk custom on St. Lucy's day was accompanied by various activities related to prevailing superstitions.*