

THE ARCHIVES OF FOLKLORE AND ETHNOGRAPHY

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Contemporary culture includes the folklore as a component with specific expression, regardless of the level of technical progress or the social system. Folklore is the outcome of a history – controlled process and it is also a steady bipolar process. At present, it is expressed by great variety of forms, less identified in tradition, often atypical and confusing for specialists.

In the UNESCO Recommendation for protection of traditional culture and folklore (1989) “Folklore (or the traditional and popular culture) is the totality of tradition-based creations of a cultural community, expressed by a group of individuals and recognized as reflecting the expectations of a community in so far as they reflect its cultural and social identity; its standards and values are transmitted orally, by imitation or by other means. Its forms includes among others, language, literature, music, dance, games, mythology, rituals, customs, handicrafts, architecture and other arts.”

The “oral culture” occurs in the rural and the urban milieu, in all socio-professional groups, at all ages, in both sexes, in subordinated and dominant groups, in elites, middle classes or lower classes, in “primitive” and “advanced” societies.

The existence of a folkloric product is linked to the moment of performance since there is no folkloric product in a natural form to be found outside this framework. Genuine folklore exists only in a specific context. Folkloric reproductions in any other contexts than those immediately and operationally determined transform folklore as such into folklore as a topic for scientific research, folklore as a curricular subject, folklore as entertainment and special artistic information and folklore as a source of inspiration and processing. In none of

these situations does folklore work as such, becoming instead cultural merchandise used for other purposes than its own.

Folklore is not a lower or higher product of the human conscience within a culture. It is the outcome of cooperation, of a mutual exchange between the products of different classes, groups etc. The oral culture is the resultant of steady processes of interrelation between oral and printed creations, anonymous and “authored” works, the professional, the formal and the informal, the constant and the extempore.

An unavoidable process faces oral culture, innovation, which results in the partial or total modification of the traditional group patterns.

Oral transmitting provides the framework for occurrence of syncretism, characteristic of the folklore-type culture, together with other specific characters – variability, anonymous source, collective aspect. Once created, the folklore message is irreversible and cannot be repeated. The oral is usually opposed to the “printed” way of existence of a product of the “profound” and untouchable culture. We are confronted with a system of performing and receiving with audio-visual means, having precise and well differentiated consequences on the capacity to memorize and reproduce, to immediately re-consult and to stimulate the innovating capacity of the creative individual.

Being a system of systems, folklore expresses itself using many types of languages: sonorous – words, music; gestural, choric – dramatic etc. each being the object of an ethnological discipline: folkloristics, ethnomusicology, ethnography. Folklore is the object of study. Each created variant (a play, a product, namely the songs, the

dances, the tales, the charms etc) is an object of intellectual property on many levels:

1- the creator who has the conscience of the property, just like the whole group which is represented;

2- the specialist researcher who gathers the materials according to a precise methodology and to the rights of the creator and of the group;

3- the institute which creates and preserves the materials in the unconventional folk archive.

The study of popular culture turned to deciphering and explaining the elements associated with national ideas, ever since the eighteenth century. "National identity" has focused many efforts of research. At present, more and more countries witness a pregnant trend of ethnological research to dismantle the almost functional link – according to traditionalists – between the "national" concept and the study of oral culture. On the other hand, the reorientation of interest to new perspectives resulted in a genuine "obsession" with defining and specifying the coordinates that should be taken into account, when assaying the sphere of any identity aspects.

The contemporary society has a so-called "industrial culture", consumption-oriented, an outcome of the technological explosion of the latest decades. The ritual and non-ritual, the every-day facts and the ceremonial, the formal and the informal, the legal and the illegal, fundamental notions concerning life, cares, doubts, fear, hope, everything occurs under the form of an image with sound and movement.

The folk individual is submitted to an "informational bombardment" which results in the modification of many local, individual or group guide-marks.

That industry provides a channel network to contact the planetary narrative universe. Contemporary world is ruled by the "mass-media without borders"

The whole hiper-technologised society of our days is facing the processes characterised as essential folklore ones, using modern technologies to replace orally.

Folkloristics has two major targets in Romania, namely to collect and to study folklore productions. These two targets have been focusing the attention of men of culture and specialists as early as the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The principal directions are: scientific, academic collections for the Archives, studies and interpretations and achievement of scientific instrumentation of the ethnological disciplines, typologies, atlases, critical editions, general bibliography, monographic prospects.

The nowadays ethnological research has several objectives, such as working out documents for every element of oral culture, from the angle of every type of language, which expresses it. Documents should meet the requirement of most objectivity. They should be made so that "data banks" could integrate them, close to non-conventional sound and image archives of folklore. These "data banks" will provide typologically processed and systematized information on the present culture and on the process undergone by it, aimed at those interested in the next millennium. The ethnologist should observe the right to privacy of an individual or of a group, dignity and freedom of speech. His role should be a positive one, mediating between groups or individuals and the rest of the society, in moments of great diversification. The results of the activity of this kind should not turn into arguments favouring conflicting states, at national or international levels, between an



individual and a group, between categories or subunits of any type. If a specialist exceeds his qualification, or if he states value judgments pretending that they are absolute truth of a scientific authority concerning some aspects of the “intangible”, “profound” culture, which he is entitled to do, a subjective angle may be detrimental not only to the results of research, but especially to the subsequent stages of data taking over and turning to account, undertaken by other specialists or by the political, or economic decisions factors.

A special issue is that relative to “copyright” in the case of sound or image documents, made by the folklorists, ethnomusicologists, or ethnologists. Specialists acting within various ethnological disciplines are morally responsible for the collected data and for their interpretation. If previous research was based on the full record of sources and data, modern research would be entitled to use information with respect for confidentiality, to extend that this does not influence the objectivity of the work result. A code should be accepted, to turn to account data by the specialists, so that their value should not be harmed and individual or group rights be respected. Work should not be distorted or harmed by biases and the group estimations on the “value” which act as identity marks should be accurately presented. The bias of the ethnologist who would consider his own experience as a value reference point in marking estimation makes it possible to create a kind of “hegemony” of certain cultural models, quite dangerous for the future. An important factor is the exploitation of oral culture in politics, ideology, tourism etc.

Life styles, conceptual patterns, moral system, rules related to jurisdiction, every day life and the archaeological view of spirituality normalized and disturbed behaviour, in a world the diversity of forms of cultural patterns and their relationship, represent principal topics for ethnologists today.

The National Folklore Archive is a repository of national cultural values. It is an “institution” called to preserve

folkloric facts in their original, specific form; it is an efficient objective social instrument for the collective memory whose function is to make scientific selections and collections; it has the capacity to put to better uses these products of man’s conscience, so that the great national assets could be protected and used in a more rational manner. This institutionalization should have an active character, it should keep pace with what is going on; it should be in permanent progress: it should be capable to store in time what the evolution of society is producing and what is worthwhile being stored. To this end, one must distinguish the principles underlying the systematization of materials, so that researchers could find them structured and organized in advance. The archives shall illustrate the real situation of the folkloric phenomenon from a historical and geographical perspective, and the structure of the folk cultural phenomena in what regards folkloric “dialects” and “languages”.

For Romanian culture the folk production did exist as a well-individualized phenomenon, perceived as such by the people of the time, is sporadically attested by 16th -17th century information. With the publication of the first Romanian folklore collection (the very first belonging to Vasile Alecsandri, *Poesii populare. Balade (Cântece bătrânești adunate și îndreptate- Folk poems. Ballads. Old songs, gathered and adjusted*, Iassy, 1852), people became acquainted with the prerequisites of folklorism.

All through the 19th century and the early 20th century, men of culture strived to make accurate and comprehensive records of folklore productions. They put out numerous collections of lyrical poetry, versified epic, prose, poetry of incantation, of the ceremonial of traditions, etc. It is again the 19th century that witnessed the establishment of folklorism as a discipline, a century so much indebted to the encyclopaedic mind of Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu. A number of cultural personalities like

Lazăr Șăineanu. Simion Fl. Marian, Artur Gorovei, G. Dem. Teodorescu, Grigore Tocilescu and others have made fundamental contributions to the study of folklore. Those who intend to deal with the folkloric phenomenon grew aware of the imperative for synthesis works, but at the same time, they realized the importance of a strict specialization.

Folklore studies enjoyed the attention of the Academic Society, turned into the Romanian Academy in the year 1879. In the period spanning the interval between 1881 and 1931 the Romanian Academy published 85 works, among which the numerous collections judiciously gathered support the search and print of folk culture materials. Carrying out a science-based activity constituted a major concern. I. Bianu proposed in 1908 the elaboration of several publications entitled "From the life of Romanian people". His proposal was accepted and this forty-volume work continued until 1931. The subjects broached are wide-ranging: folklore texts, monographs, ethnographic studies, regional or local collections. Bianu realized that collections and publications should underscore the syncretic character of folk productions and he insisted upon gathering and publishing music accompanied texts. The first wax cylinders are from 1912.

Once Ovid Densusianu was elected a member of the Academy in 1919, a new research trend in folkloristic, going by the name of philological, emerged. He was one of the first men of culture who advocated the establishment of a folklore Archive of the Romanian Academy, the publication of an Encyclopaedia of the Romanian Folklore, a Folklore Atlas, an Ethnographic Atlas and also a Linguistic Atlas. He also insisted upon regional monographic studies.

Densusianu emphasised that what should be gathered are not only the facts of tradition, but also the facts of the new, the creations of various groups, of that which is characteristic of everyday life, because "one does not live only on one's inheritance, but also on what is added day by day", and "it is this side that is especially worth exploring". This principle is highly topical and one of our

archive's concern is to record the complexity of the contemporary folkloric fact.

Doing away with dilettantism and establishing an adequate methodology implied institutionalizing research. So, a Phonogram Archives, attached to the Ministry of the Cults and Arts and a Folklore Archives belonging to the Romanian Composers Society were set up in 1927 and 1928, respectively. Head of the former was George Breazul, while Constantin Brăiloiu undertook the direction of the latter. In 1949, the two archives merged into the Institute of Folklore, constituting the nucleus of the present Ethnography and Folklore Archives within the Romanian Academy's Institute of Ethnography and Folklore. Folklore Archives of the Romanian Academy was set up in Cluj in 1929. From that time on, collections acquired a rigorously scientific character. Many monographs pursued the folkloric phenomenon in all its complexity. Monographic research is specific to the interwar period. It was initiated by the Romanian Social Institute led by D. Gusti. They used to work out comprehensive system of carding, recording, storing and holding the gathered data providing thereby a scientific methodology of studying the phenomenon. The folkloric phenomenon used to be searched in the light of its many regional, local and individual variants and it was viewed as a part of the community's spiritual manifestation. C. Brăiloiu would maintain a close collaboration with the Institute and with its team of researchers: ethnographers, philologists, folklorists, anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, physicians and economists. He succeeded in producing the first science-based collections (held in the data of the present Ethnography and Folklore Archives). From the very beginning, the archives were conceived as an institution called to provide research with an objective presentation of the folkloric fact. Accurate recording meant eliminating a possible prejudice to the folkloric product caused by the irreversibility of the act of performing.

Another interwar personality, to whom folkloristics owes a great deal, is Prof. D. Caracostea. As head of the History of Modern Romanian Literature and Folklore Department he promoted the elaboration of a “corpus”, a “dictionary” of motifs grouped by families, which was to highlight similitudes and disparities and show the motif’s geography.

The basic notions of this disciplines and its terminology had already been fully clarified. Several synthesis works were being produced. An exhaustive and systematic corpus, comprising ethnographic and folkloric sources and collections was historian N. Iorga’s idea as well.

In the year 1946, the Literary Folklore Commission of the Romanian Academy came into being. It was charged with supervising the Academy archives’ works. Among its members ranked M. Sadoveanu, T. Capidan, Șt. Ciobanu, D. Caracostea, I. Mușlea and, of 1947, C. Brăiloiu, P. Caraman, I. Diaconu, Al. Rosetti. Its president was D. Caracostea. A priority task was the development of that Corpus Carminus Romaniae, consisting of typologies and bibliographies.

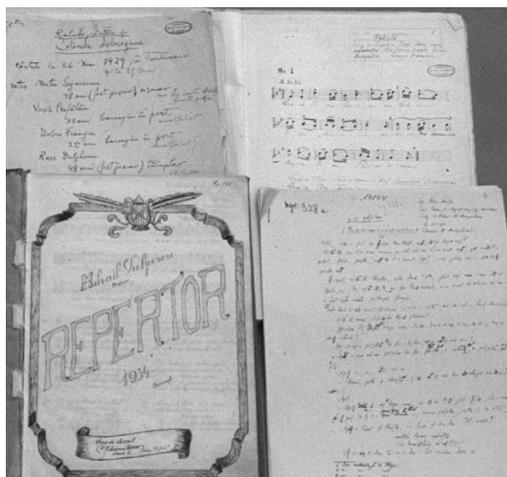
The first Romanian institution assigned the study of syncretic manifestation of the folklore was the Institute of Folklore, set up in 1949. It grew into the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore through the development of

an ethnography section; in 1974 its name was changed to Institute of Ethnological and Dialectological Research. It regained its former denomination, namely Institute of Ethnography and Folklore “C. Brăiloiu” of the Romanian Academy in 1990. It is the institution that shelters the Ethnography and Folklores Archives.

The Folk Archives as a creator and a preserver of the audio-visual documents of the untouchable culture (folklore) has to use different kinds of materials for recording the sound, the image and the text. Related to the level of the technological development which is involved in the process of the recording of the untouchable culture, in a Folk Archive there are: wax cylinder, magnetic tapes, discs, audio-cassettes, records of different types, slides, glass slides for photos, films (16 mm), video cassettes, CDs, CD-ROMs, sketches, manuscripts. Any category related to the support material needs special preservation conditions but the integrity and identity of a collector has to be ensured. The easiest system is the use of the inventory number in a chronological order that is used for all the funds and in between them cross-references has to be made. The existence of one or two copy for each piece and at least two deposits are necessary. The transcriptions and the periodical control are necessary.

One of the task of the archives’ workers is, among other things, to make literary, musical, choreographic transcriptions and to elaborate critical editions which is the soundest and most efficient science-based from of preserving the material.

A most efficient modern means for the functioning of an archive and for the preservation of materials is to have several systems fed into a computer. Folklore archives, that is, non/conventional archives, should be equipped with the latest technology in order to detect the process through which traditional models, cultural patterns are changing in the wake of most unexpected and strange contacts. In the fast-going process we live in, time and space appear to acquire different dimensions. Therefore, besides contributing to



preserving traditional models, folklore archives must detect the emergence of new, trans-cultural and trans-national models.

It seems compulsory an international legislation for the protection of the documents' property to protect the main meaning of the documents and the perception of the creator individual and group of that document's significance against any kind of distortion, exploitation and ideological manipulation. In nowadays society with such a large offer and different possibilities of options for the individual the Folk Archives are as important as the national archives of historical and political documents.

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