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ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ



Constantin SECARĂ

Situația actuală a folclorului muzical în comunitățile românești din zona arcului intracarpatic

*valoare identitară a spiritualității
românești, în contextul multi-etnic
și multicultural european contemporan*



Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române



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Constantin SECARĂ

**SITUAȚIA ACTUALĂ A FOLCLORULUI MUZICAL ÎN
COMUNITĂȚILE ROMÂNEȘTI DIN ZONA ARCULUI
INTRACARPATIC**

***VALOARE IDENTITARĂ A SPIRITUALITĂȚII ROMÂNEȘTI,
ÎN CONTEXTUL MULTIETNIC ȘI MULTICULTURAL
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ADDENDA

Summary

" Any moment, the last repository of an agonising survival can disappear, either by moving someplace else or by dying."
(Constantin Brăiloiu)

Since the last decades of the 20th century, the study of musical folklore has faced many challenges and has undergone multiple methodological transformations dictated by the immediate and concrete state of its object. Traditional music, produced and played in the countryside, once a self-contained phenomenon with quantifiable parameters and known paradigms, has suffered several successive dramatic changes. The changes have affected both the form and the function of the different genres of musical folklore, whose potential energies, initially destined to ensure their permanence in time and space, have been correspondingly depleted. The "extinction" of the traditional Romanian cultural model (through its metamorphosis and assimilation into a cultural framework that has yet to achieve a distinct contour), announced with increasing urgency during the last two decades, is by no means a new phenomenon. It is subject to its own dynamics and can be neither controlled nor stopped, being an aspect of the dialectics and development of contemporary society (at least when it is not directly caused by external forces).

Traditional Romanian culture in the eastern and south-eastern part of Transylvania (as an important component of the culture developed in the Carpathian Mountains) has also been affected by this irreversible process manifest all over Romania. The salient differences from the rest of the country consist in the strength and the tenacity of the pressures, both internal and external, that influence the stability, the durability and the very existence of the Romanian communities in the counties with a dominant Magyar population of Székely origin, eliciting

in response a variety of defensive and adaptive reactions to the prevailing socio-cultural models. The characteristic (ethnic, religious, cultural, economic, social and political) features of the area are complex and its current situation is uncertain and tense, due to an array of causes ranging from external interference contrary to the national interest of the Romanian state to the discriminating (anti-Romanian) provisions of the National Education Law of 2011, and from the negative prospect of the adoption of a future law of the ethnic minorities (which would engender segregation if the exaggerated demands of the Romanian citizens of Magyar descent should be satisfied) to the incorporation of this territory into a sketchy future Euro-region with an unclear geography and political status. The effects of this uncertain situation have already become apparent: depopulation of the region whose remaining inhabitants are aging, confusion, and cultural and linguistic assimilation, all of which are considerable risk factors that have determined me to regard the study of the musical folklore in the region an urgent priority. The record and classification of the manifestations of the spiritual identity and cultural consciousness of the Romanian rural communities in the counties of Covasna, Harghita and partially Mureş could soon remain the only concrete means to observe and preserve the features and types of the traditional Romanian culture in this region.

Working from this perspective, I conceived the present study as an ethnological endeavour, taking its starting point from the existing folkloric texts and making use of both the methods and the tools of ethnology, such as the primary and secondary evaluation of the documents (fact cards, auditions, transcriptions, classification, files) collected in the field. The resulting study can also be read as an appeal on behalf of traditional culture, its critical views being far removed from the postmodernist perspective. The facts, realities and evidence highlighted in this work are presented in an academic manner, but the study is not limited to the presentation (and occasionally the elaboration in the margin) of the evidence but further developed through comparative analyses, wherever the number and the quality of the ethnographic sources have allowed it.

The methodological steps taken to complete the research underpinning this study were as follows: 1. compiling the essential bibliography of the region (including reference and specialized ethnological works); 2. consulting and extracting information from numerous public sources; 3. studying the national folklore archives in order to locate and collate the records and materials resulting from field work conducted previously (in different locales and at different times); 4. conducting fresh field work in order to compare previous materials with the current situation in situ and bring the report to date; 5. assembling a database of previous collections; 6. drafting a monographic sketch that integrates all the existing research and offers a global image of the Romanian folklore and spirituality in the targeted areas.

Between June and December 2011, the first round of research in the field was conducted, in order to update the information regarding the situation of the musical folklore and the forms of manifestation of the Romanian spirituality in the counties of Covasna and Harghita. A first stage involved the study of the representative Romanian ethnic communities. Situated at the intersection of large commercial routes and of seasonal paths used by shepherds, the territories in south-eastern Transylvania comprise, perhaps not by accident, a compact Romanian locality (around the area known as Întorsura Buzăului) or villages inhabited exclusively by Romanian natives (in a context of mixed ethnic settlements such as Brețcu, Zăbala, Zagon and Voinești-Covasna). Another noteworthy fact is the existence on the upper Mureș River, in the plateau situated between Căliman Mountains (to the north), Giurgeu Mountains (to the east) and Gurghiu Mountains (to the west), of a formerly thriving centre of Romanian culture that has long been on record. The city of Toplița, with its constituting villages (Călimănel, Zencani Măgheruș), the town of Gălăuțaș, the town of Subcetate, with its villages (Filpea, Hodoșa, Nuțeni), the town of Sărmaș, the villages of Platonești, Fundoaia, Runc (to cite only those located around Toplița), the towns of Bilbor, Tulgheș and Corbu, situated under the slopes of the Călimani Mountains and a short distance from the peak of Ceahlău, are all settlements that have been inhabited and governed exclusively by Romanians, who in previous centuries used to live under the protection of the Moldavian princes. Two

additional Romanian enclaves in the mountainous regions of Ciuc and Giurgeu are to this day the village of Livezi and the town of Voşlobeni in Harghita. Using the format of the case study, I compiled a collection of the traditional dances in the village of Livezi, by conducting current field work (the last research conducted in the village dating from 1967–1968). The collection was resumed a year later, between 7 and 9 September 2012, when I recorded the repertory performed during the village feast, coinciding with the annual feast day of the Orthodox Church in Livezi, dedicated to the Birth of the Virgin Mary (8 September). I also took part, observed and made recordings of two seasonal celebrations of the Romanian shepherds during the "Sântilia" or "Sintilia" (a feast day dedicated to the Patriarch Elijah) in Zăbala, 17 July 2011, and in Voineşti, 24 July 2011), as well as during the caroling festival "Crăciunul la români" – A Romanian Christmas celebrated in Sfântu Gheorghe, Târgu Secuiesc, Breţcu, 19–20 December 2011; this latter stage was later extended through a collections of Christmas carols from Araci, in the district of Covasna. The primary research activities consisted in making audio and video recordings as well as conducting and recording scientific interviews with the older villagers who had preserved some elements of their traditional culture, the result being a representative corpus of audio and visual records. In addition to the recording and the classification of the elements of the intangible cultural patrimony, I also endeavoured to put together a series of auxiliary illustrative documents pertaining to the distinctively Romanian material culture of this ethnic group: dwellings, tools, musical instruments, traditional costumes and fabrics, period pictures, etc.

The first and the most complex operational objective of the project was the creation and organisation of a functional database. This work was undertaken in two stages: a) the identification, correlation and indexation of all the existing records of field work undertaken in the target area in the Archives of the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore Constantin Brăiloiu of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest (AIEF) and in the Folklore Archives of the Romanian Academy in Cluj-Napoca (AFC); b) the updating of the existing documentation in the archives by providing additional data as a result of personal field work. The resulting database is a scientific

instrument that meets the most rigorous internationally-recognised criteria on archive and field research and its documentation.

After the comparison of the repertory on record in the archives with the recent recordings, but also as a consequence of direct observations made in situ, of discussions with local informants and information collected from them, several research direction emerged that became the basic elements in the articulation of the current work. One of my priorities was the classification of the existing material according to genre and area. The result became the two chapters at the centre of the whole work: Chapter 3 (*Traditional Romanian Culture in the Arch of the Carpathians. Ethnological Perspectives and Values*) and Chapter 4 (*The Music of Folk Dances. Perennial Constants and Contemporary Mutations*). The two chapters summarize and present in sequence the main elements of the traditional Romanian culture in eastern and south-eastern Transylvania, grouped by district, Covasna and Harghita. The chronology of the different collections is also presented in this context, and comments about their importance are also included, highlighting the main characteristics of the genres and the repertory and pointing out their specific identity marks through related case studies.

A separate chapter is dedicated (Chapter 2, *Multicultural and Plurilinguistic Realities in the European Cultural Context*) to the experience acquired as a research fellow affiliated with institutions of education, research and promotion of the traditional culture in the Autonomous Provinces of Bolzano (Südtirol) and Trento, after research and documentation conducted in the Autonomous Region of Trentino–Alto Adige in Italy. The chapter offers essential information about the orientation, types, models, organisation and direction of musical education, the tendencies and methodologies of ethnomusicological research, the aspects of promoting and valuing traditional musical culture, the models and forms of expression of national culture and spiritual identity in this region. With Southern Tirol considered to be a successful European model of regionalisation based on ethnic criteria, in this chapter I have put forth a personal critique, in which I am proposing the dismantling of utopian autonomist ideologies, as a result of both the ethno-musicological studies

undertaken in the region and the comparative analysis of the *de facto* discrepancies that would make this model non-applicable in Transylvania.

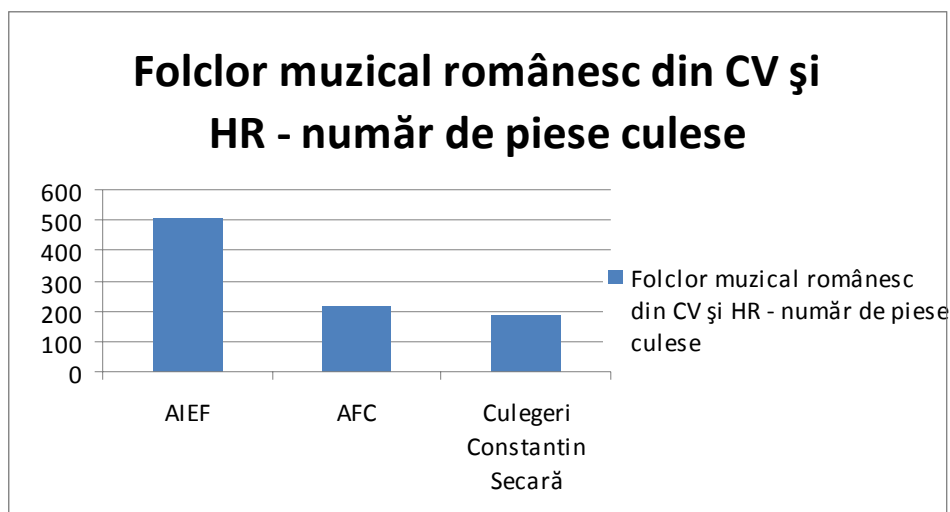
The synthesis of the materials in the two large national archives of folklore proved to be one of the greatest challenges of this project, with a large quantity of existing materials dispersed among different files, collections and categories of resources, some previously published and some still in manuscript form. In addition, the complexity and disparity of the bibliographic sources, the heterogeneity of the repertory, the cultural loans and interferences created more difficulties that were successfully overcome. Last but not least, field work was not easy to conduct, some of the challenges being the geographic isolation of the targeted localities and the lack of transportation to and from, the timing of the research work so that it would not coincide with the seasonal occupations of the villagers, and the lack of cooperation and/or indifference of the local authorities. The research, which was essentially prospective and conducted by only one individual, focused almost inevitably on the collection and selection of a sample of repertory materials whose quality and representativeness were to a great extent determined by the aforementioned objective factors, but also, perhaps to the same extent, by chance. Despite all these difficulties, I believe that the research work done in the archives and in the field attained its main objective, which was to create a record of the *coordinates and symbolic values of the spiritual identity and cultural consciousness of the Romanian communities in the districts of Covasna and Harghita*, as well as to offer a chronological sketch of their evolution.

One of the most difficult segments of the laborious research process was the selection, the reading, the systematization and the scrutiny of a massive but heterogeneous bibliography. When this stage was finally completed, the situation was assessed in terms of the degree to which the repertory in the field had been reflected, represented and analyzed in anthologies and taxonomies. Reference pieces belonging to the folkloric categories and genres enumerated and represented in the print materials on hand were identified, including but not limited to children's folklore, lullabies, lyric songs, ballads, carols, and folk dances. By presenting the existing research and repertories in the targeted areas in a systematic and

diachronic manner, I have endeavoured to sketch a complex panorama as well as a synthesis of the repertory and its dynamics. This synthesis can also be read as a critical reading of the diverse styles, types and methods used in approaching folklore, each a reflection of the personality and creativity of the authors that put these pieces on paper and integrated them in ample works of a general type.

A brief comparative analysis of the raw figures denoting the number of pieces on record could lead to the conclusion that the situation is somewhat stable or, at any rate, acceptable, from the point of view of these quantitative parameters: there were 509 pieces in the AIEF, 219 in the AFC and 186 were collected by me between June 2011 and September 2012 (see the bar graph). A closer interpretation of this bar graph, based on an examination of the collections in the archives and of those done by me and on a detailed analysis of types and categories included in both, can be read in Chapter 3 (*Traditional Romanian Culture in the Arch of the Carpathians. Ethnological Perspectives and Values*) and Chapter 4 (*The Music of Folk Dances. Perennial Constants and Contemporary Mutations*).

Statistic Indices of the Number of Recorded Pieces



In the above-mentioned chapters, I demonstrate that the quantitative status quo that can be noticed in the bar graph is only a superficial reality, since behind the raw numbers, the repertory is severely depleted and, in some areas, partially or totally extinct (genres, species and categories). The current situation proved without a doubt the evanescence of the majority of the parameters of the repertory that had been documented in previous collections. In its present stage, the dynamics of the repertory is governed by several directions: a) a state of conservation that is relatively stable but has little chance of long-term continuity (Gălăuș, HR); b) a state of partial conservation, with most of the pieces belonging to the repertory of the same informant, now of a venerable age (Zăbala, CV); c) a state of partial but musically altered and degraded conservation, (Livezi, HR); d) the total disappearance of the genres, species and/or categories of musical folklore from the collective memory of the Romanian rural communities in the districts of CV and HR (in most places). All of these situations are a reflection of the same perspective affecting the transmission of the repertory, which is practically non-existent, for reasons that have to do primarily with the younger generations' lack of interest in learning it and carrying it on. Only one exception was recorded, at Vâlcele and Araci, CV, where the traditional custom of Christmas caroling has been revalued in the context of the contemporary revival and "revamping" of the category. These contemporary aspects could of course take different forms and therefore, due to the time constraints of the field work conducted between 2011-2012, generalisations cannot be made at this point, nor can categorical conclusions be drawn. Ideally, the research campaign should be continued and extended over a period of several years.

A special case that I hope to be able to study further in future endeavours is the institution of the local festival, be it the feast day of a town or village (usually the same as the day of the patron saint of the local church) or the reconstruction of an old shepherding gathering or caroling custom under the form of a local show. These occasions give the ethnic Romanians who live among the Magyar an outlet for their national identity, the "village sons" who have long taken up residence elsewhere, the possibility to reconnect with their home culture, and the organisers of these event, clear economic benefits. Collecting materials through

participative observation on four distinct occasions – the seasonal celebrations of the Romanian shepherds during the "Sântilia" or "Sintilia" in Zăbala, 17 July 2011, and in Voinești, 24 July 2011, as well as during the caroling festivals celebrated in Sfântu Gheorghe and Târgu Secuiesc – I have drawn a few conclusions regarding the contemporary mutations of the repertory. These involve the change in the function of the musical folklore, no longer understood as a ritual but performed as a spectacle, the formalisation of the repertory, the digitisation of the sound sources, and the absence of the typical informants as they were known to ethnologists in former times. Cultural paradigms are quickly evolving! The performing styles have changed considerably under the influence of the interactive model of "tunes on request," as have the audience's expectations and mentality with respect to the musical qualities of the pieces in the repertory: their tempo, intensity, sonority and complexity. A diachronic progression can be observed that is a perfect illustration of all the modifications of the musical parameters and genres, from the lyrical song to the dance tune and from the singular and single timbre of old musical instruments to the "cool" complexity of electronic instruments. Last but not least, it can be inferred that the phenomenon is closely related to the general process of dissolution of traditional culture, marking a complete break between the "old" and the "new," between "tradition" and "modernity," between "authentic" and "counterfeit" as well as an utter confusion of terms, in the absence of value-based criteria. This major crisis of spiritual identity causes traditional music to suffer changes, mutilation and losses with far-reaching consequences.

Another direction in which the research ought to be continued further is an investigation of the role and the place of the Church in the spiritual life and the national consciousness of the Romanian inhabitants of eastern and south-eastern Transylvania. In the absence of previous material, the current field work was prospective in this direction as well. Nevertheless, I did collect a few representative samples of the current repertory of *priceasnă* (religious, non-liturgical song that is a form of expression of popular piety), a genre that has started to develop quickly since the 1980s. The preliminary observations and analyses have confirmed the previous hypotheses and research regarding the high level of orality in

the transmission of church chanting in Transylvania, including the Romanian Orthodox churches in the Bishopric of Covasna and Harghita. In a few isolated situation I was also able to note the place and the role of the local Orthodox priests in promoting certain repertory types that they deem appropriate. The phenomenon can be observed especially in the case of Christmas carols and religious lay songs and can be compared to a similar phenomenon in previous centuries, when the priests and the church cantors were also responsible for introducing religious carols and carols on the Star of Bethlehem. A future project will continue to document and analyse this phenomenon as well.

Lastly, the orientation of the future study of Romanian traditional music in eastern and south-eastern Transylvania is dictated by the large quantity of the recorded material, extant in the AIEF, the AFC, the folklore archives of the National University of Music in Bucharest and of the Music Academy Gheorghe Dima in Cluj-Napoca, as well as in private collections. The special importance of the repertory requires the compilation of a new and complete catalogue of all these recordings, classified by period and zone, followed by the selection of a representative corpus that is an integral reflection of its qualities. The selection would involve the following steps: a) listening to and comparing this initial fund of transcriptions with the rest of the recorded material; b) studying and analysing all the recordings from the area (existing in the AIEF, AFC, and publications); c) transcribing the previously unpublished pieces ; d) making a triage of the material and eliminating the pieces that do not meet standards of scientific rigor (incomplete or occasional recordings, conducted in poor conditions, lacking a minimum of information, improvisations, falsifications, etc.; e) compiling a complete "typical repertory" of "representative villages"; f) provisionally organizing the entire body of transcriptions; g) organizing the material by zone, with the goal of offering a model of geographic distribution of the different genres, species and categories of folklore.

It is my hope that this synthetic work on the Romanian musical folklore in eastern and south-eastern Transylvania should represent a humble homage paid to the previous generations of folklorists and of all those who collected, classified and carefully analysed all of these elements

of the Romanian patrimony and spirituality. Even if the situation of the ethnic problem and the political equilibrium of the Romanian and the Magyar communities is precarious, the folklore of the Romanians who live in Covasna and Harghita has been given the chance to survive, be it in the "conserved" form of documents in archives and monographic works. Above all, this work aims to overcome the inconvenience of talking about the past in the present tense and to "break the silence" of a music that is being talked about but not heard. The "silent music" of the doina, of the folk dances and songs, accumulated in the quiet seclusion of archives and reference books, will have to continue to wait patiently before it is rediscovered and returned to the dignity it once had among the Romanian peasantry.

Finally, I believe that the cultural policies of the Romanian government need to be articulated in coherent and concerted programmes that actively involve the decision-makers and are constantly overseen by competent specialists. This is the only way to achieve a durable progress towards safeguarding and developing a specific and strong Romanian culture that could be a genuine cultural model in Europe.

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