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ROMANIAN ETHNOLOGY; THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

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Since World War II, ethnographic and folkloric research in Romania has worked to expand its scientific horizons. Research has been organized by numerous cultural centers, each with its own task, while priority is allocated to the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, the various universities, and the Committee for Culture and Socialist Education. The projects carried out under this new organization can be characterized by their breadth, diversity, complexity, and depth. New theoretical and methodological foundations have been developed, as have new scientific criteria for determining the structure and meaning of the phenomena under investigation. This effort during the last four decades to eliminate amateurism, vulgarization, and mechanistic interpretation has been accompanied by the initiation of new programs, especially by the Institute of Ethnological and Dialectological Researches.

These programs have been developed in two principal directions: research into problems of traditional ethnographic concern, and investigations related to the new conditions of life in a socialist society. The first category includes ethnographic works related to the ethnogenesis of the Romanian people. Here special attention has been given, from a comparative-historical perspective, to the development of the basic lifeways of the Romanian people, and to the development of appropriate terminology. Consideration has also been given to the structure of linguistic stratification and to elaboration of an ethnographic atlas of Romania, designed to map the main aspects of the traditional material and spiritual life of the Romanian people.

Some of the most important subjects of study (besides paleoethnography and historical ethnography) which have been discussed in the past several decades include: archaic settlements; agriculture on mountainous land; viticulture; sedentary or transhumant shepherding; traditional trades; ancient handicrafts; home industries; national costume; and some contemporary problems such as new village trades and the "ethnographic" features of the work place.

In addition to specific studies of traditional and contemporary ethnology, recent scientific studies have also discussed a number of theoretical and methodological issues. Among these are: the ideological framework of research; the relations between ethnography, folklore, and related sciences; the history of Romanian ethnography; and the periodization of ethnographic research (according to form, genera and species of popular culture). Finally, the brief historical study presented here will also be useful to trace folkloric themes and subjects which have been dealt with in recent decades. Of primary importance in this respect is the great quantity of narrative and musical folklore which has been collected in the past fifty years, and which constitute a vast national archive

representative of traditional Romanian folk culture. This archival source is on deposit at the Institute of Ethnological and Dialectological Researches.

In the past few decades inquiry and direct observation have demonstrated the existence of many aspects of popular culture not previously considered by ethnologists. In order to formulate general laws to deal with this material, scholars have, with increasing urgency, been called upon more and more to employ the ethnological point of view. This orientation does not imply a return or backslide to a study of Romanian culture utilizing the global, intuitive, and less realistic vision of the past. In this country, as elsewhere, the contemporary ethnological perspective presupposes a superior stage of understanding in which initial ethnographic and folkloric research is necessary within the planned program and does not constitute a goal in and of itself. In other words, observation, description, analysis and classification remain procedures absolutely obligatory for ethnographic and folkloric research, but these remain preliminary steps which, in turn, lead to the formulation of valid laws. These laws are, naturally, the result of the plurality of individual experiences. Only then, in this way, is it possible to surpass the ideal of positivist epistemology within which the goal of specialization presupposes as profound and exact a knowledge as possible of each fragment of reality. According to a paradoxical formula of the contemporary ethnologist, it was necessary to know everything about very little or everything about nothing.

Material studied by classical methods of direct phenomenological observation, and presented as fragmentary details, systematized and classified within the very limited scientific confines of a purely ethnographic or folkloric point of view, could not reveal the profound message implicit in its structure. Historically speaking, the development of the ethnological point of view actually preceded the fragmentary, specifically ethnographic and folkloric orientation. This is true in the general European context as well as in the development of the science in Romania.

What are the most characteristic attributes of contemporary ethnological thought in the Romanian literature?

1. It involves a unified perspective within which all data and phenomena of civilization and traditional culture are integrated with respect both to time-space and to phenomenological structure.
2. Its conclusions are primarily an outgrowth of the comparative-historical vision which ethnological investigation assumes a priori.
3. By placing particular facts or datum in a comprehensive explanatory framework, ethnological study presupposes an approach to these different phenomena which is detached from the immediate and the concrete (i.e., the ethnographic and the folkloric), and projects these truths

within a sublimated, abstract, idealized framework. Such thorough processes demand, of course, a certain measure of philosophical reflection.

4. Comparative integration also presupposes an ability to establish distinctive ethnic features and, indirectly, to place them within a larger spatial framework, such as the region of Southeast Europe, that of Central Europe, or that of all Europe. Only then can the genesis, contamination, or loan of the characteristics of a specific popular civilization or culture be traced according to the conception, vision and techniques of regional ethnology.

5. At the same time, the ethnological perspective implies and requires the integration of different types of studies and their resultant conclusions into a complex whole which includes attention to the other socio-historical sciences (sociology, history, anthropology). The natural interdependence of these researches is assumed as a matter of course, making such complex investigation strategies the sole comprehensive and meaningful method by which to approach the data to be studied.

6. Ethnology as a science, in going beyond the limitations of simpler ethnographic or folkloric inquiries, stresses the discovery of laws which are largely obscured by the great array of observed phenomena and empirical data.

In this country, in the past few decades, ethnological studies have generally been of two types: individual thematic investigations and complex field investigations. The latter are performed by teams of specialists in zones regarded as characteristic in structure in order to examine the dynamics of contemporary transformations. The teams search primarily for perspectives on the form and phenomena of popular civilization and culture. Two groups, active in both theoretical and practical work, can be mentioned as prominent examples of investigations by large research teams. These are the Iron Gate Complex Research Group and the Commission for Anthropology and Ethnology. Both groups are members of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, but each is entirely separate in organization and activity.

The Iron Gate Complex Research Group, employing a method of investigation which is new to our country, has redefined and outlined the concepts and the concerns of ethnology in both its theoretical and methodological dimensions. As a result of this work, the problems of ethnology became, for the first time in the history of Romanian specialist literature, the subject of a national plan. This occurred when, in 1962, the Commission for Anthropology and Ethnology of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania was founded and began its activity. With the organization of the Iron Gate Complex Research Group, and particularly with that of the Commission for Anthropology and Ethnology, ethnological research was stimulated appreciably and raised to a new level of understanding.

The fourteen working teams of the Iron Gate Complex Research Group are divided into two sections, one dealing with the natural sciences (geology, geography, hydrology, speleology, fauna, flora, and natural monuments), and the other oriented toward the socio-historical sciences (anthropology, archaeology, history, economics, ethnology, ethnography and folklore, linguistics and historical monuments). At this time, the Group has published a Complex Atlas and two thematic monographs, one by the hydrology team and the other by economics scholars.

Because of the nature and objectives of their researches, the Iron Gate scholars suggested that, from a theoretical and methodological point of view, it might be possible to move from collective to complex investigations in areas where there was a community of interest to various disciplines. The anticipated result would be the development of a unified scientific theory, represented by a uniquely generalized plan which would mark a distinct departure from earlier monodisciplinary research. The emphasis was placed, in other words, on multidisciplinary research in which particular scientific views should be proposed in a spirit which stressed the unity of views par pro toto.

The large team which is attempting the elaboration of an ethnological synthesis on the basis of the ethnographic and folkloric material collected in the Iron Gate zone has made the following principal observations:

(1) The Iron Gate zone was part of the territory which was the nucleus of the ancient Dacian state as well as of the Roman colony founded here in the first centuries of our era.

(2) Since these initial beginnings, other ethnic elements have been introduced; some of which have been assimilated and others of which have been partly preserved. Some ethnic elements of more recent introduction (during the last two or three centuries) still form "ethnic islands" (for instance the Pem-Czech island and the Adaly-Turkish island). These make the ethnological study of this zone especially interesting.

(3) In this border zone certain elements may be frequently found which are shared by the Romanian people and their neighbors and which are remnants of ancient life in Southeast Europe.

Current investigations enable us to discover (in ethnological terms) the protracted processes of interaction, influence, contamination and mutual ethno-cultural bans in the structure of this zone, especially between the "ethnic islands" and the rest of the Romanian population. The researchers have occupied themselves, naturally, with discovering the spatial distribution of each particular cultural element or complex, and subsequently with defining the coherent, continuous and distinctive features of various lifeways. The team has sought to distinguish both typological patterns or traditional cultural models, and the clearly simultaneous process of integration of ethnographic relics and folkloric reminiscences into contemporary life. The Ethnographic Atlas of Romania is

being developed through parallel mapping of the various types, models, and representatives of traditional popular civilization and culture. To the present time, our ethnographic research section (from the Institute of Ethnology and Dialectology) has published four bulletins addressing theoretical problems associated with the elaboration of the ethnographical-thematic maps. One of these is devoted especially to the region of Dobrudja, and we are presently preparing a volume concerning the region of Suceava.

Some thematic problems currently being discussed or published are derived from the work of scholars associated with the Commission of Ethnology and Anthropology and with the Institute of Ethnology and Dialectology. Professor Stefan Milcu has made contributions to philosophic anthropology, genetic anthropology, medical anthropology, social anthropology, anthropology of culture, and applied anthropology, and has made tangential references to anthropogenesis in Romania, and to the ethnogenesis of the Romanian people. V. Sahleanu's research includes investigation of the dialectical interaction between biological and social factors as manifest at the level of the species, of peoples, and of the individual. He has established that social influences are so compelling that they affect even human tissues. Thus, biological factors acquire a new social significance. C. Nicolaescu-Plopsor, working both individually and at times in collaboration with others, has documented the existence in Romania of human life and labor prior to the lower paleolithic, belonging to the Epaleolithic and the Prepaleolithic. Dr. C. Maximilian's studies in anthropology have involved genetic issues which go beyond classical anthropological concerns to address new problems and approaches and innovative perspectives for the study of man. Dr. Horia Dumitrescu shows that genetic anthropological practice in Romania has two principal directions: the first involves the recording of typological profiles on the basis of the phenotypical mapping of populations, and the second consists of research into genotypic structure by cytogenetic analyses.

Our Institute and the above-mentioned Commission have published some especially important studies. One is a volume on Romanian popular art, in which the authors have followed the rich tradition of Romanian popular art in its Daco-Getic origins and in the Greco-Roman and later Byzantine influences in architecture, ceramics, costumes, ornament, and other areas. This volume is the first attempt at a large-scale synthesis of the specialist literature in this field. Other studies include contributions by R. Vulcanescu on popular masks, juridical ethnology, and "the column of the sky;" by Adrian Fochi on aspects of Romanian ballads in South-East Europe; by Zamfira Mihaeil on terminology of the Romanian popular costume; by I. Vladutiu on ethnolinguistic study; by Paul Simionescu on ethnohistory, and together with P. Cernovodeanu, on the traditions and legends concerning Bucharest. We are now preparing a volume entitled Introduction to Ethnology which will include articles on the most important methodological aspects of ethnological research and interdisciplinary relations.

The projects and perspectives described above, it should be noted, suggest only some of the many areas of contemporary scientific research with which Romanian ethnology is actively concerned.