

**The Ethnological Archive – Paradigms and Dialogues<sup>1</sup>**  
– Review –

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*The* volume coordinated by Eleonora Sava and published in English by Morlacchi University Press, Perugia (Italy) in 2011 is the result of research supported by the National Research Council of Romania, which ensured the financing of the project *New Perspectives on Ethno-Folkloric Documents*, conducted between 2009 and 2011.

The research undertaken in this volume amounts to a reflexive, recuperative and restitutive approach, which capitalizes on the fund of ethnological documents preserved in the Archive of the Folklore Society in Cluj, and interprets these materials from the perspectives of contemporary anthropology.

The volume comprises six studies written by the researchers who have participated in this project: Eleonora Sava, *The Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society. Ethnological Practices in Communist Romania and An Analysis of a Corpus of Archived Documents*; Silvestru Petac, *On the Relation between Folk Dance and Witty Couplets*; Eleonora Sava and Maria Candale, *Ethnographic Documents and Field Textualization*; Maria Candale, *Ethnological Questionnaires and National Identity Construction*; and Liviu Pop, *On the Digital Version of the Folklore Society Archive*. The studies have benefited from an excellent translation into English, penned by Carmen-Veronica Borbely and Monica Negoescu.

The texts aim to engage in a dialogue with the archival fund of the Folklore Society in Cluj, with a view to finding new perspectives and meanings of the documents it contains. Such a complex approach involves an interrogative perspective: “What can contemporary ethnologists do with the archived documents? How can these documents be given a voice (again)? What are the perspectives from which they can be approached? How can they be made accessible? These questions constituted the core of our research project.”<sup>2</sup>

The studies gathered in this volume provide answers to the questions they raise by launching multiple levels of analysis and reflection: the level of the content, the research methodology, the ideological and epistemological level, in relation to the historical, political, academic and cultural context of each period, and (last but not least) the level of the new information and communication technologies (the new media).

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<sup>1</sup> Eleonora Sava, ed., *The Ethnological Archive. Paradigms and Dialogues* (Perugia: Morlacchi, 2011), 200p. ISBN/ EAN: 978-88-6074-443-2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 9–10.

In terms of the content, the archived manuscripts have been selected and grouped according to several criteria: thematic, typological, chronological, methodological and territorial, and have been analyzed from various perspectives: ethnological, musicological, choreological, anthropological, etc.

The volume opens with the study entitled *The Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society. Ethnological Practices in Communist Romania*, in which Eleonora Sava proposes a reconstruction of the history of the Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society (CAFS), in relation to the construction of the ethnological disciplines in the Romanian education system during the second half of the twentieth century. The study outlines a historical overview of the Archive, from 1958, the year when the field research of the Students' Scientific Folklore Society from the Faculty of Letters started, until 1993, the last year when the "classical" instruments were used (to record the field data on paper/ in field notebooks). The researcher identifies three stages in the history of the Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society: the stage of folklore studies (1958–1973), the ethnological stage (1973–1992) and the anthropological stage (after 1993). She takes into consideration three analytical tiers: the researched period (in relation to the academic, historical and ideological context), the investigated themes and the field research methodology deployed by the students who worked under the coordination of their professors. The study reveals the interdependence of these three aspects. The scientific context imposed specific research themes and methodologies and, in turn, these themes and methodologies defined one another. What is remarkable is the author's extremely nuanced manner of highlighting the mutations registered on these three levels (contextual, thematic, and methodological), from one scientific stage to another.

The Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society contains over 12,753 documents in manuscript form, based on the field research conducted in various rural communities from Romania between 1958 and 1993.<sup>1</sup> The field work was performed in all the areas of the country, gathering ethnographic information from localities situated in 25 of the 41 Romanian counties. The research teams were made up of professors and students from the Faculty of Letters in Cluj. The students were coordinated by professors specialized in the field of folklore and ethnology, from the Faculty of Letters in Cluj: Dumitru Pop, Nicolae Bot, Ion Șeuleanu and Virgiliu Florea, to whom the volume is dedicated.

In analyzing the first of the three periods identified in this study, the researcher focuses on the implications that the restructuring of education (based on the model imposed by the Soviet Union) had on the ethnological disciplines in the academic institutions. 1958 marked an opening in many areas of academic research, including that of the ethnological disciplines. In this context, the Students' Folklore Scientific Society was founded, aiming to collect the traditional repertoire through the field work carried out in the rural areas of Transylvania, as well as in other regions of the country. Eleonora Sava notes that after 1972, this educational liberalization came to a halt, nationalist ideology being placed at the forefront. The manuscripts archived in the period 1958–1973 transcribed the content of certain folkloric species: riddles, Doinas, ballads, fairy-tales, chants, laments, etc. These form a collection of literary folklore, which has no records, however, of the "biography" of the cultural data it contains. "The researchers'

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<sup>1</sup> Eleonora Sava, "The Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society. Ethnological Practices in Communist Romania," in Eleonora Sava, ed., *The Ethnological Archive*, 13.

main goal, as these field notes show, was collecting and archiving traditional texts, envisaging the possibility that, in the future, the entire traditional culture could be reconstructed from these different aspects.”<sup>1</sup> The ethnologist remarks the fact that the researchers’ outlook was shaped by the cultural, ideological and epistemological background of the time. She also reveals the strength of this period: the students’ initiation into ethnological practice, the inauguration of systematic research into traditional Romanian culture and, last but not least, the growing interest in conducting field work and the courage to carry out research under extremely difficult circumstances.

Referring to the second, ethnological stage (1973–1992), the researcher shows that the scholars achieved a twofold connection: with the past, by bridging the temporal gap and recuperating the methodology and epistemology of the previous period, and with other academics abroad, by overcoming spatial impediments and resuming their dialogue with the major West-European and American schools of thought. In the author’s opinion, “the important steps of this period were the transition from folklore collections to ethnological research and the use of a nuanced methodology, adapted to the subject.”<sup>2</sup> Eleonora Sava defines this moment as one of paradigmatic change, since it marked the transition from folklore studies to ethnology. Insofar as field research is concerned, the researchers were interested not only in the texts, but also in their performance contexts. Folklore began to be understood as a cultural fact or a fact of social communication, in a larger cultural, social and mentality context, revealing the adoption of a contextualist and holistic perspective. Research began to focus on the traditional *culture*, replacing and supplementing the studies that explored *literary* folklore.

The third stage, after 1992, marked another opening: one could speak freely about the interwar models, previously prohibited writings could be published, etc. This was the time for the institutionalization of ethnological and cultural anthropology, through the establishment of societies, laboratories, museums and academic study lines in these domains. “This stage marked the transition from the age of realism to the age of modernity in ethnology, by opening fieldwork towards the anthropological approach – once the emphasis had been transferred from objectivity to subjectivity, from the general to the particular and from grandeur to ephemerality – by focusing on life histories, on the dynamics of cultural facts, on the internal tensions of a community and on the individuals that created them.”<sup>3</sup>

The reflexive approach proposed in this study was applied after a careful reading of the field notes in the Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society, combined with an interpretation of the manner in which they were defined in the indexing catalogues, of the meanings that field research acquired in the specialized literature of the various scientific periods, and of the way in which the field work experience was discursively rendered, in 2011, by former students and professors who had participated in this field research. What is absolutely remarkable is that the researcher succeeds in providing a synthetic overview of an archive of over 12,000 field notes, correlating their content with the epistemological context of their production and providing important starting points and pathways for further research.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 41–42.

Another study by the same author, *An Analysis of a Corpus of Archived Documents*, undertakes the content analysis of a corpus of documents from the Archive of the Folklore Society in Cluj. The approach relies on two criteria: regional and thematic. Following the first criterion, the author has selected manuscripts from the research conducted between 1974–1977, as part of a comprehensive monographic campaign in the Oaş region from North-Western Romania. The second, thematic criterion entailed a limitation in the amount of material analyzed and the selection of a corpus of 70 texts containing narratives with a mythological content, recounting encounters with the supernatural, in its particular instantiation as the ghoul figure. The archival body examined here contains documents from 10 localities in the North-West of Romania, located in the region of Oaş. Eleonora Sava juxtaposes two different perspectives on the same cultural construct: “My study aims to explore representations of the ghoul (called *borsocoi* in Oaş) as they are featured in the archival fund, as well as in the narratives collected during the fieldwork conducted in 2010 and 2011, when there was a return to the previously researched area in the Oaş region.”<sup>1</sup>

Starting from etymological references, the author demonstrates that the clues etymology offers are also confirmed by the field documents, supporting the idea that the mythological image under discussion has prevalently feminine features: of the 70 selected texts, 28 show that the ghouls are female, 20 recount events featuring men, and the other 22 do not reveal the gender of these creatures or consider them to be of both genders.

The analysis outlines a complex picture of the ghouls, as it emerges from the field notes, and points out their morphological and functional overlaps with other mythological beings, such as: Marțolea, the Maid of the Forest, werewolves, vampires, solomonars, witches, etc. The researcher illustrates thus the complexity and power of the ghouls in the folkloric imaginary of the area: “At the same time, the migration of certain structures or functions (from one narrative to another and from one character to another) is one-way only. They are attracted from the other mythological beings towards the *borsocoi*, which functions as a complex entity ready to assimilate highly dissimilar features, roles, and narrative elements.”<sup>2</sup> Eleonora Sava inventories and exemplifies the ghouls’ functions, as they are revealed by the narrative and descriptive texts of the field notes, and remarks their regulatory function for cases of deviation from behaviours regarded as normal, on several levels: erotic relations, customs pertaining to birth and baptism, violent deaths and prohibitions about time and space. Of particular interest is the analysis of the rapport between the real and the fictional in the narratives about *borsocoi*, as well as of the narrators’ attitudes to the events they recount. Moreover, the author constructs a typology of the texts that refer to *borsocoi*, following the grid proposed by Ileana Benga.<sup>3</sup> The analysis of the quantitative distribution of the texts into these four categories shows, in the author’s opinion, “a distance between the narrator and the narrative’s referent.”<sup>4</sup> Finally, Eleonora Sava correlates the narrators’ attitudes, as revealed by the archived field notes, with those of contemporary narrators, noticing “a

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<sup>1</sup> Eleonora Sava, “An Analysis of a Corpus of Archived Documents,” in Eleonora Sava, ed., *The Ethnological Archive*, 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>3</sup> Ileana Benga, *Tradiția folclorică și transmiterea ei orală* (Folklore tradition and its oral transmission) (Cluj-Napoca: Ecco, 2005), 80.

<sup>4</sup> Eleonora Sava, “An Analysis of a Corpus of Archived Documents,” 61.

certain fragility of the direct relationship with the supernatural.”<sup>1</sup> In this study, the author proposes a reading and an analysis of the field notes, with a view to building a nuanced picture of the *borsocoi* in the imaginary of the Oaş Region, relating and ordering contents and forms that are extremely diverse and dispersed in the 70 field notes subjected to her analysis.

Silvestru Petac’s study, *On the Relation between Folk Dance and Witty Couplets*, performs a typological selection from a body of archived texts that are grouped under the name of witty couplets, collected in the same region of the country between 1974–1978. The manuscripts are associated with the field research undertaken in this ethnographic area between 2008–2011 for the purpose of contextualizing the archived documents and highlighting the relationship between the musical, literary and choreographic aspects of witty couplets. Among the solutions suggested is a return to the research field that underlay the establishment of the archive, in order to recover the contextual elements (corresponding to the archived field notes) and to reconstruct a diachronic perspective on the cultural facts investigated therein.<sup>2</sup>

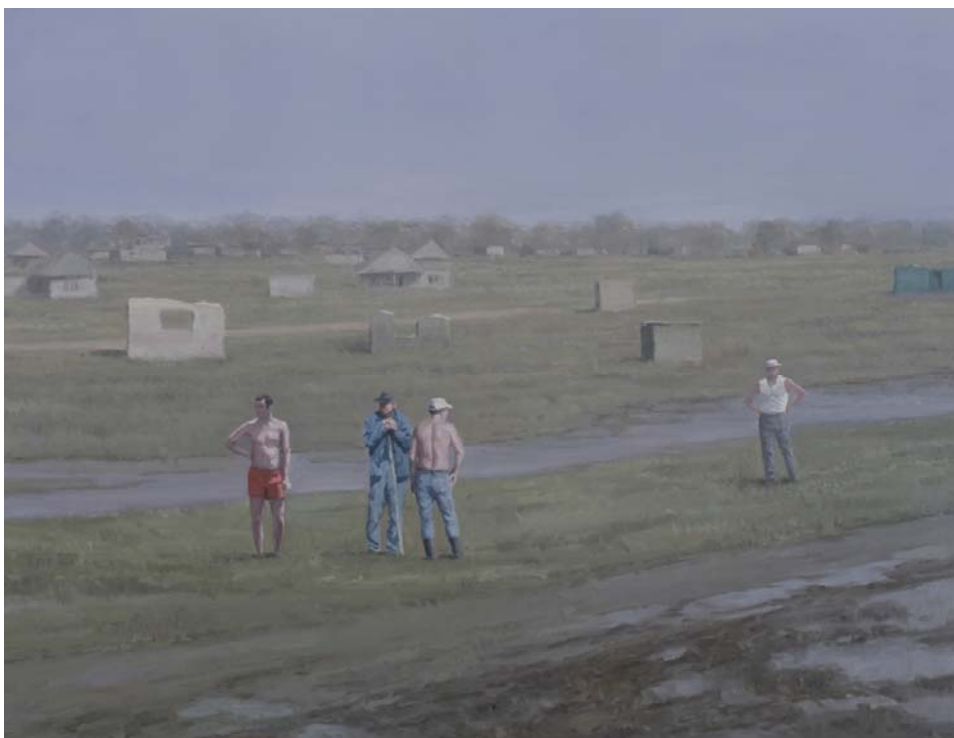
The author proposes three analytical approaches. The first has as its starting point a corpus of texts gathered under the generic name of witty couplets, collected in the Oaş Region through the field research campaigns that led to the establishment of the Cluj Folklore Archives Cluj (CAFS). The image of the dance-couplet relation is then completed with two other contexts in which it develops: the wassailing performed by the group of *călușeri*, with a case study on the *călușeri* in Boșorod village, Hunedoara County, and the ritual of *Căluș*, with a case study applied to the group in the village of Izvoarele, Olt County. The author presents several observations on the functioning of the relationship between dance and witty couplets. The most important observation is related to the manner in which accents are distributed in the two forms of artistic expression; it also highlights the fact that the degree to which witty couplets are present in a dance may be an index of the evolution of choreographic culture. Following research undertaken in Oaş in 2011, the ethnologist concludes that witty couplets are much less frequent today than several decades ago in those contexts in which dance is naturally accommodated. The researcher adopts a highly specialized approach to this subject, permanently discerning the dynamics of the cultural events he examines. The study is complemented by choreographic scores: the *Călușer*, the *Marș*, the *Căluș*, the *Sârba*, etc., which are all transcribed in accordance with the specialized choreologic system, using the Laban notation.

From a methodological perspective, the author examines the research methods that led to the gathering of field notes and their relation to the conceptual manner of organizing the archive. He also unravels the complex relationships between the content of the field notes and the methodology students applied in the field. On the one hand, the research methods and instruments shaped the content of the field notes, and on the other hand, the field work configured the modalities of transcribing the field realities in the archived notes. These relations are examined in the studies entitled *Ethnological Questionnaires and National Identity Construction*, by Maria Candale, and *Ethnographic Documents and Field Textualisation*, by Eleonora Sava and Maria Candale.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 61–62.

<sup>2</sup> Eleonora Sava, ed., *The Ethnological Archive*, 10.



**Șerban Savu, *After the Flood*, 2009, 123 x 160 cm, oil on canvas**

In *Ethnographic Documents and Field Textualisation*, Eleonora Sava and Maria Candale propose an analysis of the documents in the Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society, from the Faculty of Letters, Babeș-Bolyai University, adopting the perspective of reflexive anthropology. The study focuses on the modalities of textualizing the field research, starting from the assumption that the archived material does not comprise mere transparent reports of the reality, but constructions thereof.<sup>1</sup> The authors start from the premise that the documents convey not only the socio-cultural facts from a particular space-time context, but also the subjectivity and the methodological and epistemological pre-text of their authors. The analysis of the selected documents contends that, like any type of text, ethnographic texts are also the product of a subjective perspective, which relies on a peculiar rhetoric, specific to the domain and the methodology of the period.<sup>2</sup> The attention is directed not so much to the content of the field notes as to the scriptural rendition of that content. The focus is on the transfer of the folkloric fact onto a scriptural level, under the circumstances of its translation from its original socio-cultural context into secondary contexts (in this case, the ethnological archive). The concept that is commonly used to describe this process is *textualization*. The archived field notes are

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<sup>1</sup> Eleonora Sava, Maria Candale, *Ethnographic Documents and Field Textualization*, in Eleonora Sava, ed., *The Ethnological Archive*, 121.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

complex documents, in which all the important stages of ethnological research coexist: methodology, the sources of ethnographic data (observation, participation, oral accounts, etc.), data collection (recording, field notes, organization) and their analysis *via* ethnographic writing, as an analytical instrument. The authors propose for analysis five archived documents, written by three different researchers.<sup>1</sup> The analysis of these three tiers, *who writes?/ what does one write?/ how does one write?*, reveals their interrelation in the process of textualizing the experience of field research. The discursive stance adopted and declared in the field notes is consistent with the contents of the notes. In the textualization of the field experience, the rhetoric is, in turn, related to the discursive stance and to what, out of the continuum of events, is recorded in each field note, through the grammatical persons used, the sequence in which events are recounted, etc.

This analytical and interpretive approach adheres to the idea upheld by Paul Atkinson,<sup>2</sup> according to whom ethnographic writing may be associated with literary writing, in the sense that an ethnographer will textually recreate the world by using the models of literary writing. Thus, the researcher will always tend to act as an interface between reality and the ethnographic text. This idea is often encountered in specialized literature today, but what is extremely interesting is the manner in which the authors apply this type of comparative reading to the archived field notes, highlighting the analogies between ethnographic and fictional writings. The study also examines aspects of the research methodology prevalent in the 1970s, drawing comparisons with the methodology of interwar ethnology and sociology, on the one hand, and contemporary methodology, on the other hand.

The study authored by Maria Candale and entitled *Ethnological Questionnaires and National Identity Construction* is an excellent reflective analysis of field notes from the Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society, revealing the manner in which the field data were shaped by the research instruments, as well as by the methodological and epistemological principles that prevailed during the period under examination. The key terms on which the analysis focuses are *questionnaires* and *archived ethnological field notes*. The premise underlying Candale's approach is that the data recorded in the ethnographic documents represent textual productions. The study undertakes a thorough analysis of the questionnaire for funeral rites. In her interpretation of the field notes selected for analysis, the author shows, on the one hand, that in the 1960s, the coordinators of the Cluj Folklore Society adopted the interwar research model (evinced a nationalist bent in the orchestration of research principles) and on the other hand, that they succeeded in overcoming this model and drawing nearer to the practice of modern ethnological research.<sup>3</sup> The ethnologist demonstrates that as they had been conceived by researchers from the first half of the twentieth century, questionnaires envisaged "the

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<sup>1</sup> The selected field notes were elaborated on the basis of direct observation, in the village of Cămărzana, Satu Mare County. The cultural fact examined was one and the same: funeral rituals. The approach was conducted following the fundamental coordinates of the field reality investigated and of writing: *who writes? what does one write? how does one write?*

<sup>2</sup> Paul Atkinson, *The Ethnographic Imagination. Textual Constructions of Reality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Maria Candale, *Ethnological Questionnaires and National Identity Construction*, in Eleonora Sava, ed., *The Ethnological Archive*, 161.

collection of data” for the systematization of information and the construction of a complete and unitary ethnic image, as corroborated by the documents. According to Maria Candale, questionnaires represented an appropriate research instrument for building the identity profile of the Romanian people, meeting thus the objectives of national ethnology. Similarly, the initiative of establishing archival funds containing ethnographic documents and “data” “collected” with the aid of these methodological tools were directly related, according to the author, to the orientation of the discipline during the interwar period. Through this analytical and interpretive approach, the author of the study reveals the decisive character of methodological instruments in configuring the results of field research.

Another perspective of analysis is that of the relationship between the *new media technologies* and the *ethnological archive*. Liviu Pop’s study, *On the Digital Version of the Folklore Society Archive*, presents the digitisation of the Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society, emphasising both the technical aspects involved in the transformation of the classical archive into a digital one and the long-term implications of this transformation. The study examines the development of the new communication and information technologies over the recent decades and their direct impact on ethnographic materials. This approach can be useful for all the specialists working in the domains of the restoration, protection, documentation, archiving and monitoring of the intangible cultural heritage.

This text explicitly presents the compelling reasons that led to the urgent digitization of the archival fund, but also discusses the careful and sustained work that the research team implicated in the project carried out thoroughly and responsibly. The author points out the advantages of implementing the new technologies for the conservation, accessibilization and valorization of the manuscript documents, particularly given the contemporary background of modernization and globalization.

The studies gathered in the volume *The Ethnological Archive – Paradigms and Dialogues* propose a dialogue between scientific generations and between different epistemologies, exploring, from various perspectives, the documents from the Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society. The researchers’ approach is generally based on *comparison*, as the analytical principle of choice, between: the archived documents, belonging to several scientific periods; the portrayal of mythological beings on a thematic, diachronic level; the rhetorical strategies for textualizing the experience of field work; the results of research conducted within different scientific paradigms by using the same research instruments; the relation between dancing and chanting, examined both diachronically and spatially, etc. The authors of the studies included in this collection provide complementary overviews of the Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society and, at the same time, illustrate, in the subtext, the scientific profile that is characteristic of the present, defining themselves as its unquestionable adherents.

Translated by Carmen-Veronica Borbély