

FOLKLORE ARCHIVES – WITNESSES OF THE HISTORY OF ETHNOLOGICAL STUDIES

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ABSTRACT. *Folklore archives – witnesses of the history of ethnological studies.* This study proposes a rereading of the documents kept in a folklore archive from Romania, with a focus on the methods used by those who drafted and archived these documents. The research demonstrates that, in the absence of testimonies regarding the manner in which fieldwork was conducted, the documents of the archive can provide valuable information on the field research and the vision on folklore of several generations of researchers. Thus, archives of folklore are seen as witnesses of the history of ethnology.

Keywords: *folklore studies, ethnological studies, folklore archive, fieldwork, archiving, research methodology, history of ethnology, Romanian Ethnology during Communism and Post-Communism.*

REZUMAT. *Arhivele de folclor – martori ai istoriei disciplinelor etnologice.* Studiul de față propune o relectură a documentelor păstrate într-o arhivă de folclor din România, din unghiul metodelor utilizate de cei care au redactat și au arhivat aceste documente. Cercetarea demonstrează faptul că, în lipsa unor mărturii cu privire la modul în care s-au desfășurat cercetările de teren, documentele arhivei pot oferi informații valoroase despre practica de teren și despre viziunea asupra folclorului pe care au avut-o mai multe generații de cercetători. Astfel, arhivele de folclor se constituie în martori ai istoriei etnologiei.

Cuvinte-cheie: *folcloristică, studii de etnologie, arhivă de folclor, cercetare de teren, arhivare, metodologia cercetării, istoria etnologiei, etnologia românească în comunism și post-comunism.*

When we think of folklore archives, what we have in mind are ethnographic and folklore data banks, genuine “lieux de mémoire”, in the

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terms of Pierre Nora². This study proposes changing the angle of approach: I am interested in what the archives can tell us not so much about the documents' content, but about their authors' angle. What was their vision on tradition and how were their writing practices influenced by this vision? How did Romanian ethnographic culture and Romanian ethnography evolve, in parallel?

This study proposes a rereading, from this perspective, of the field notes from the Folklore Society Archive at the Faculty of Letters, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj (FSAC). The history of the Archive started 60 years ago, in 1958, when Professor Dumitru Pop initiated the students' fieldwork, and it ended in 1993, the last year when handwritten field notes were drafted. Over the next period, sound and, later on, video recordings were also made.

The activity of the archive coincided, to a large extent, with the period of communism in Romania. Ethnological research cannot be understood outside of relations with this context. For the socio-humanities, the establishment of communism meant a break with the previous scientific tradition. The authors of the archive were forced to start from a "ground level" of scientific practice. Their main merit was that, despite major difficulties, hard to imagine today, they managed to reconstruct, step by step, an intellectual course that had been interrupted by the Second World War and the installation of the new regime.

"Seen globally, folklore, ethnographic and ethnological studies were fairly diverse in the communist period, both thematically and methodologically [...], but one can identify only with great difficulty texts in which the authors gave concrete details about the way in which they conducted their research, about the fieldwork and the conditions in which they worked."³ In the absence of diaries or memories from the field, the documents in the archive can provide important information about the practice of ethnological disciplines. More precisely, they reveal the two stages of Romanian ethnological research, which I will call *classical* and *modern*, making visible a paradigm shift.

Let us open the catalogue of the archive and see exactly how this change occurred.

The register which indexes the field notes is thoroughly organised, following a particular template⁴.

² Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", in *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), pp. 7-24.

³ Otilia Hedeşan, "Povestirea vieţii şi reconfigurarea profesiei" ["Life story and the reconfiguration of a profession"], in *Emberek, Életpályák, Élettörténetek*, ed. Jakab Albert Zsolt, Keszeg Anna, Keszeg Vilmos, Cluj-Napoca, Asociația Etnografică "Krizajános", 2007, p. 131.

⁴ The theoretical rules for fieldwork and data archiving were laid down by Dumitru Pop, who in 1957 printed *Romanian literary Folklore. Notes on the course delivered in the academic year 1956/1957*. Containing a comprehensive chapter devoted to fieldwork, the course represents the only methodological point of reference for the first decade of the archive. It was only towards the end of the 1960s that canonical textbooks of folklore fieldwork appeared in Romanian literature: M. Pop,

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Nr.	Titlu	Specie	Regiune	Raionul	Satel	Numele informan	Vrsta	Număr catalog	Data	Observații
780	Știri-a povată după masă	obștărească	Blaj	Huedic	Sfârșas	Pop Siroasa	48	Nicola Ionescu	3.5.58	
781	S-a lufă de reymotiu	c. dialogată	"	"	"	Mărcuș Ana	36	Rebreanu D.	4.2.58	
782	Du-mă doamnă și mi bău	c. dialogată	"	"	"	Coama Vasile	53	Rebreanu D.	"	
783	Valincuță " și jinaș	"	"	"	"	Jedroșan M.	36	"	"	
784	Valincuță a mînduș mas	"	"	"	"	Pop Siroasa	48	Rebreanu D.	"	
785	Bănuțuș-a bănuțuș	c. satirică	"	"	"	Bujor Bogaliv	30	Nicola Ionescu	24.5.58	
786	Palincuță cu chipuri	c. petecare	"	"	"	Bujor Vasile	33	Rebreanu D.	3.7.58	
787	A meu bărbat nu-i curv	obștărească	"	"	"	Leuște Lucrăș	36	"	23.7.58	
788	A meu bărbat nu-i bărbat	c. satirică	"	"	"	Mărcuș Ana	36	Bejan Cămin	3.7.58	
789	A-o mureșcă mama de jiu	"	"	"	"	Bărbăș Lucrăș	27	Șirvoș M.	3.7.58	
790	Jocăci mă pășă mîndușă	obștărească	"	"	"	Bărbăș Lucrăș	36	Șirvoș M.	6.7.58	
791	Povată mă pășă jiu	"	"	"	"	Gămluț Flămar	48	Muraruș M.	3.7.58	
792	La vispa și bota	c. satirică	"	"	"	Lăzăruș Ilieș	40	Călugăreș M.	7.7.58	
793	Povată vîndușă și mîndușă	obștărească	"	"	"	Gămluț Flămar	48	"	5.7.58	
794	Te cunoști lele pă povă	c. satirică	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	
795	Intră-măști sat puștă	obștărească	"	"	"	Pop Siroasa	48	"	7.7.58	
796	Bărbat și mureșcă de jiu	c. satirică	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	
797	Bărbat și mureșcă de jiu	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	
798	Intră-măști sat puștă	obștărească	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	
799	Mă și gîndușă mîndușă	c. satirică	"	"	"	Moldovan Maria	36	Călugăreș M.	5.7.58	
800	Mă și uita după vîndușă	obștărească	"	"	"	Crăjan Ana	51	"	7.7.58	
801	Cioabășă la oi am fost	c. dialogată	"	"	"	Coama Vasile	26	Bejan C.	3.11.58	
802	A meu bărbat nu-i bărbat	c. satirică	"	"	"	Bujor Bogaliv	30	Victor Ionescu	24.11.58	
803	Mă Joane mă și jiu	c. de lume	"	"	"	Bujor Vasile	37	Taga Al.	9.11.58	
804	Teată lumă-mă și jiu	"	"	"	"	Șirvoș M.	19	D. Pop	23.11.58	
805	Teată lumă-mă și jiu	"	"	"	"	"	68	Taga Al.	"	
806	Intră-măști lumă-mă și jiu	"	"	"	"	Mitor Anu	9	Ciurea M.	24.11.58	
807	La mureșcă și mureșcă	"	"	"	"	Bujor Vasile	45	Rebreanu D.	28.11.58	
808	Să mureșcă și mureșcă	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	
809	Crăjanușă, mureșcă și jiu	"	"	"	"	Meghan Ioan	54	Taga Al.	3.11.58	

Page from the Register of the FSAC, 1958.

The entries of the catalogue reveal the researchers' *philological perspective* on folklore. The first two: *Title* and *Species* indicate that they wrote down *texts*, as they understood folklore to mean *oral literature*. That is why they were interested in texts with *artistic value*, by virtue of the primacy of the *aesthetic criterion*, as stipulated in the textbooks of that time. This perspective emerged in the early nineteenth century (we find it for instance in the work of Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, who is considered the founder of Romanian scientific folklore studies), and continued throughout the twentieth century.

The following headings: *Region, district, village* show that, on the field, the researcher had to identify aesthetically valid texts, which fit into the literary typologies, and to record them so as to fill in the "blank spaces" on the Romanian territory, meaning those areas or localities where those texts had not yet been collected, "the final goal being to compile a *collection of national folklore*."⁵ The purpose of such a collection was to highlight the notion of cultural homogeneity by pinning on the map the spiritual products common to

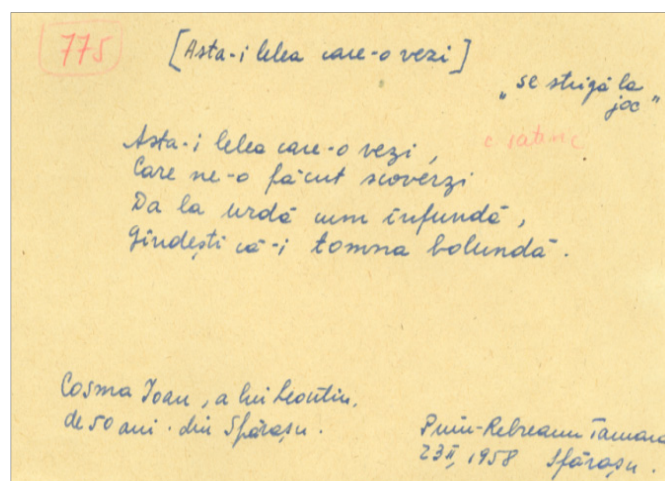
Îndreptar pentru culegerea folclorului [Guidelines for Collecting Folklore], 1967; O. Bîrlea, *Metoda de cercetare a folclorului* [The Folklore Research Method], 1969.

⁵ Mihai Pop and Pavel Ruxăndoiu, *Folclor literar românesc* [Romanian Literary Folklore], București, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1978, p. 27.

all Romanians and to outline the national specificity of folklore creations. We recognise here Herder's idea according to which folklore is the soul and the voice of the people. The village is the hearth of this soul. That is why researchers turned exclusively to rural areas.

The entries *Name of the Informant* and *Name of the Collector* express the norm of complete *objectivity*, a guarantee of *authenticity*: "A first concern is the adherence to authenticity, that is, the exclusion [...] of any subjective element"⁶. The intention was to *accumulate* data, the folklorist being seen as a passive entity, who "collected" some "objective" "data", delivered by the "informant".

I will select a few of the field notes drawn up in that period. By way of example, I will refer to dance couplets, because they are, numerically speaking, the most amply represented in all the records of the archive. Here are four such examples, which express gender relations through food. They were all recorded in 1958, in the village of Sfârșea, in Transylvania.



Field note 775 of the FSAC, 1958.

In the first example, the student noted a dancing couplet about ricottapies, whose local name is *scoverzi*: *That's the wench you see, scoverzi did make she, but the ricotta's all too glazy, you might think she's downright crazy.* She added the information "*this is chanted during dances*". Using a red pencil, a professor squared the text under the category of *satirical song*.

⁶ Ovidiu Bîrlea, *Metoda de cercetare a folclorului [The Folklore Research Method]*, București, Editura pentru Literatură, 1969, p. 38.

767 [Strigătură]

[Antai lele vachise] c. satinc

Nu şti face leveşe
 Nici sara, nici dulce
 Nici la mîter nu şti duce
 Mîter mere, mîter vină
 Mîter mince pe rămînă

Man (Vircana), 74 ani

Costin L.
 Sfîrş. 205 P58

Field note 767 from the FSAC, 1958.

On the next field note, another student wrote down a similar dancing couplet about chicken soup, locally called, under the influence of Hungarian, *leveşe*: *This pretty wench is a fake, leveşe she cannot make, neither sour, nor too sweet, even dumb folk could not eat it. Dumb man goes and dumb man stays, dumb man eats just what remains.* Again, the red pencil shows the “correct” category of the field note.

744 c. satinc

[Le solos badle de zcoală]

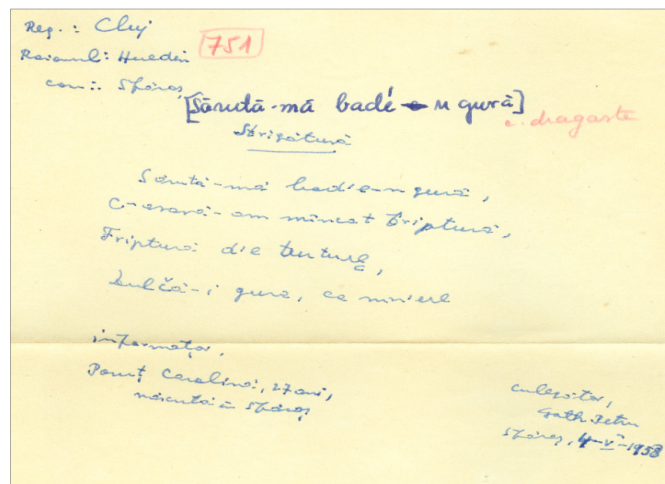
dacă n-ai zo domnişoară
 să-ţi faci de prinţ cafe
 şi de-amînzăţi tîrîţai
 şi de cină-un cocoz fript
 să dormiţi mai hodînit.

Holtoran Maria (nasc. Petran)
 36 ani

Rebreanu Dan
 3 II. 1958
 Sfîrş

Field note 744 from the FSAC, 1958.

The following example records a dancing couplet about somewhat more refined dishes: coffee, noodle and fried chicken: *What's the use, laddie, of learning, if no lassie makes you coffee, or for lunch some scrumptious noodles, or for dinner roasted chicken, so you'll get a good night's sleeping.* Someone added, again, in red pencil, that this was a *satirical song*.

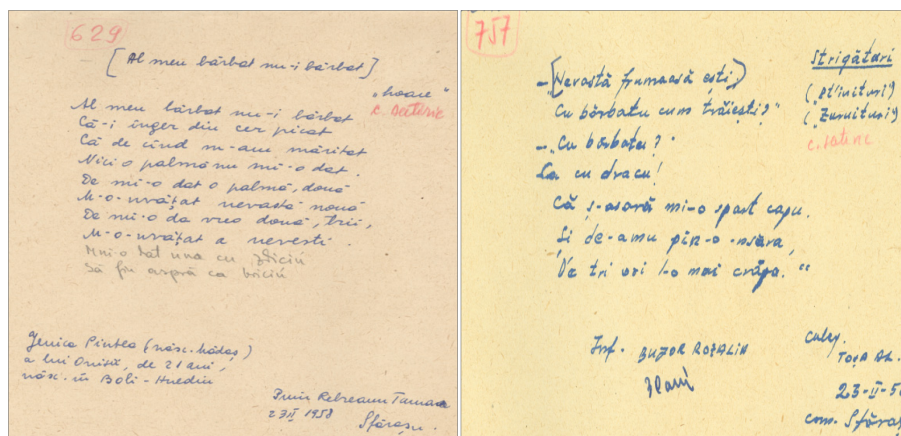


Field note 751 from the FSAC, 1958.

The last example from this first batch reproduces a dancing couplet about a special steak: *Kiss me laddie on the mouth, cause last night I had a steak, roasted sweet dove in the oven, almost as sweet as my loving.* The person writing in red pen renamed it a *love song*.

The examples reveal that, in compliance with the methodological principles of that time, researchers were concerned not about the problem of the Romanians' *cuisine*, nor about their *culinary imaginary* or *gender relations* expressed through food, nor about the *real contexts* in which the couplets were chanted, that is, performed, but about the *literary quality* or category of the texts.

The following selected field notes speak about gender roles: *My man is not just a man, but an angel dropped from heaven, for ever since married we got, many a slap he gave me not. He did give me a slap, or two, taught me to be good and true. If he gives me two or three, he'll teach me how a wife to be. He slashed me with his whip, to be sharp like a chip* (Field note 629); *Wife, you're as pretty as the sea, how's your husband treating thee? Him I fear and I dread, cause last night he cracked my head. And before the night sets in, he'll crack it three more times, to win* (Field note 757).

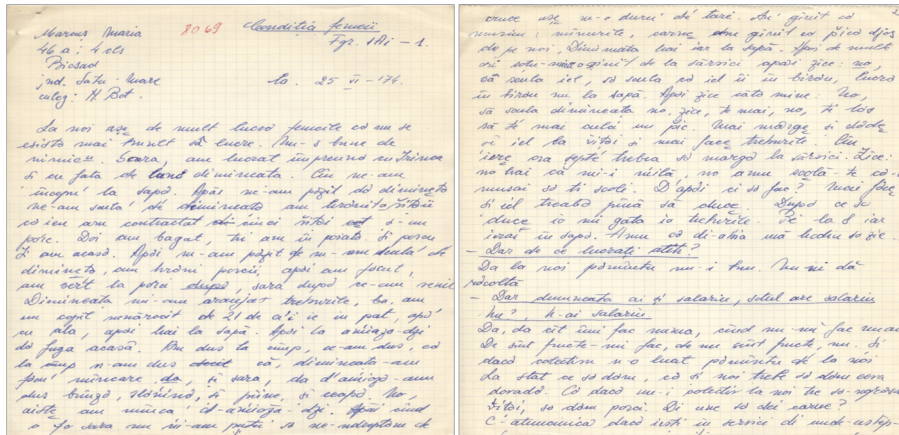


Field note 629 of FSAC, 1958.

Field note 757 of FSAC, 1958.

We can notice that the authors of the field notes did not have in mind the *condition of women*, but *literary categories*: on the edge of the text, they wrote down the local names of *hoară* (dance), *strigătură* (chant), *ptiuitură* (yell), *zuitură* (saying), which a supervisor (probably a professor) described as *satirical songs*, using a phrase from the textbooks of folklore.

The interest in the *condition of women* appeared only in the 1970s, with the change of paradigm, due to the different perspective on folklore imparted by Professor Nicolae Bot. Let me reproduce, in what follows, a fragment from a field note from 1974, entitled *The Condition of Women* and drafted by Nicolae Bot: *In our village, women work so hard, there's no way anyone could work harder. They're downright exhausted afterwards. I worked together with Irinca and the lass from Monday morning. We started by doing some digging. Then, we waited for the morning to come, got up early in the morning, fed the calves, for I'd purchased five calves and a pig. I put two of them inside, three were in the stables. [...] Then, when evening came, we couldn't straighten our backs. We thought we were going to die: our hands, we felt like our flesh was going to flake off our bodies. In the morning, back to tilling the land. Then my husband often comes from work, saying: well, he stood up, he stood up, for works in an office, not in the field. So he says to me: well, he got up in the morning, so, he says, I'll let you go back to sleep for a little while longer. He also goes and feeds the calves and does the chores around. At 7 o'clock, he has to leave for work. He says: oh, dear, poor you, do get up now, you really must get up now. So what can I do? He does the chores around before he leaves. After he leaves, I finish the chores. At around 8 I was tilling the land. I barely get any rest, what can I say...*



Field note 8069 of FSAC, 1974.

The change of paradigm is visible in the following nodal points: first of all, folklore no longer means oral literature. The abandonment of the aesthetic perspective entails an expansion of the sphere of folklore to encompass the whole traditional culture, vaster and more complex than artistic manifestations. Accordingly, interest is no longer exclusively focused on ceremonial, on words or gestures ritually used at weddings, funerals or calendar feasts, but on daily life. At the level of writing, we can notice the change of grammatical person: from the impersonal *se* (e.g. *se strigă la joc*, they yell while dancing), the sentences have a definite human subject: *I, my husband*. As regards methodology, the researcher gives up the illusion of objectivity and assumes subjectivity in the communication between researcher and interlocutor. The consequence is that the researcher abandons the idea of compiling a corpus of national folklore.

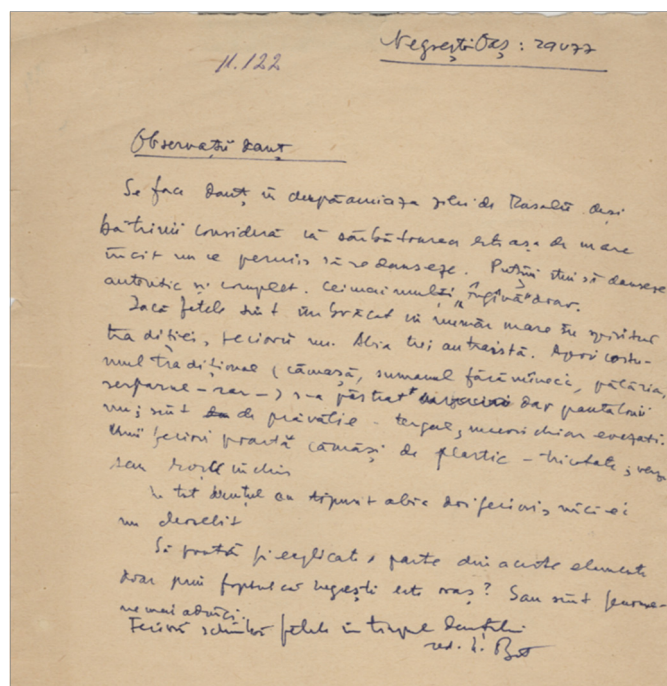
Unfortunately, neither in 1974 nor later, in the era of communist nationalism, could one talk openly about this paradigm mutation. This is made clear by the index of the archive: the student who archived the document reproduced above renamed it in a manner that was more acceptable for that time: the field note called *The Condition of Women* was renamed *Information on Aspects of Life*.

Leafing through the catalogue of the archive, we may also notice other methodological changes: although the headings of the table remained the same (with the exception of those concerning the administrative-territorial division, where some changes had occurred in the meantime), they sometimes became inoperative when a new understanding of folklore gained ground.

Researchers continued to record *texts* (lamentations, carols, dancing couplets, etc.), but, in addition, there also appeared *questionnaires* and *direct*

observation. As regards the latter, instead of the name of the informant there was either a dash (because direct observation involves the recording of *facts*, not of a *text* delivered by an *informant*), or an explanation about the context of the observation (e.g. *At the funeral of Moiş Ioan, 20 years old*. Field note 7389). Failure to respect the entries in the index of the archive derived from the changed methodology: the researcher no longer recorded just what people *said*, but what they *did*.

Here is such an observation field note, drafted by N. Bot, in 1977, in the village of Negreşti, from Oaş Region.



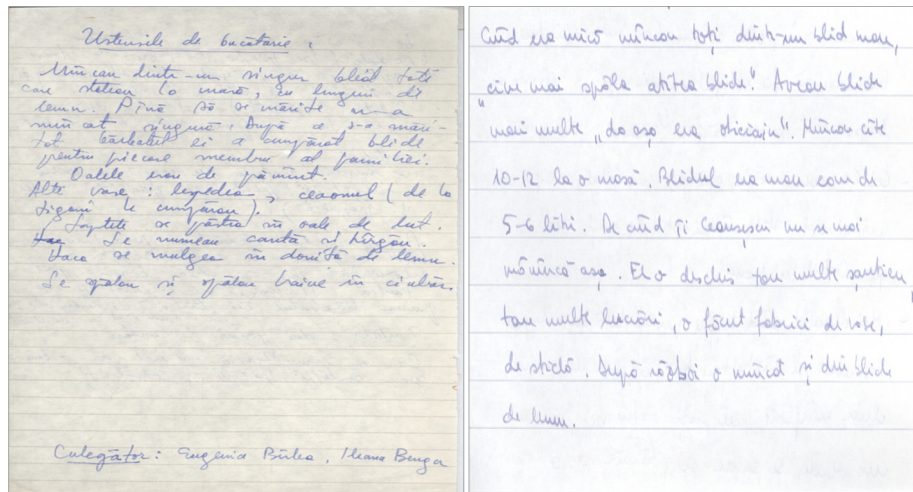
Field note 11.122 from the FSAC, 1977.

People dance in the afternoon of the day of Pentecost, although the elders consider that the holiday is so important that dancing is not allowed. [...] While most of the women are dressed according to tradition, the men are not. Only three have bags. Then the traditional costume (shirt, coat without sleeves, hat, belt – rare –) have been preserved, but the trousers have not; they're bought from the store: made of terylene, sometimes flared. Some of the lads wear lycra shirts – knitted, green or dark red. Only two lads chanted during the dance [...]. The lads changed their partners while dancing.

The field note makes visible the change of methodology: compared to the first examples reproduced above, which recorded exclusively what people *said*, here the researcher notes down what they *do*.

While the field notes from the 1970s still belonged, to some extent, to the classical register, the ones from the 1990s are fully consistent with the modern paradigm. They were not indexed, because they did not fit in the old rubrics. They are no longer folklore documents, but ethnological researches.

Here are a few examples. A series of field notes revolve around the theme of the transition of the rural world in Romania: *From the traditional to the modern in the world of villages*, indicating a change in perspective, in the sense that the village is no longer regarded as existing in the timelessness of tradition, but as a living organism. Researchers are concerned not with the past but with the present, with the phenomena of social and cultural change. The field notes mention the context in which the conversation occurred, adding then information about the mode of preparing ritual meals [sweet breads for Christmas, Easter, Epiphany, Palm Sunday, funeral sweet breads; other dishes at funerals, fasting foods for funerals] and daily meals [the making of bread, pogace (type of bread), turtuța (type of cake), potatoes, the preservation of pork, foods made from milk: buttermilk, sour cream, cheese].



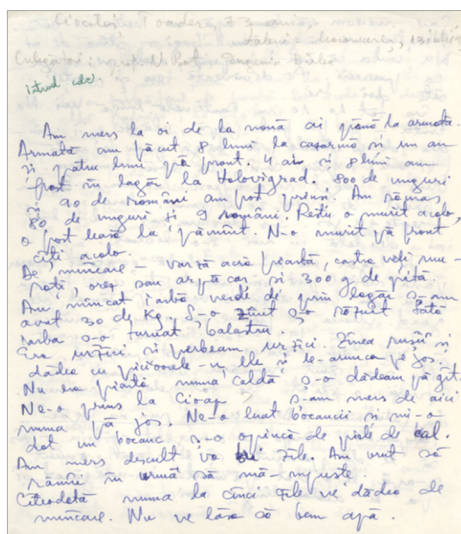
Field notes not indexed in the Folklore Society Archive, Cluj, 1993.

After festive and everyday food, there followed a description of the kitchen utensils: *When I was little, we all ate from a big bowl. Who would wash so many bowls? We had more than one bowl, but that was the custom: we used*

to be 10-12 at table. The bowl was big, it held about 5-6 litres. Since Ceaușescu, they no longer eat like that. He opened very many building sites, many projects, made crockery, glass factories. After the war we ate from wooden bowls, too.

The field notes illustrate the subjective perspective of the narrator and the shift of focus from the topic of rites and ceremonies to that of everyday life, of little gestures (activities of daily living and eating, kitchen utensils). Another priority was the attempt to capture the dynamics of social facts: when and how people switched from just one bowl for the entire family to individual plates.

Other field notes recorded contemporary storytelling practices, revealing the fact that subjects relating to the personal experience of the storytellers were now more numerous than the traditional species of the narrative genre (fairy tales, legends, etc.). There are recorded individual stories of some of the men who participated in the Second World War: *I was a shepherd from the age of nine until I joined the army. I served in the army for 8 months, in the barracks, and spent a year and four months on the front. For four years and eight months I was in the camp at Volgograd. 800 Hungarians and 90 Romanians had been captured. Only 80 Hungarians and 9 Romanians survived. The rest died and were buried there. More people died there than on the front.*



Field note not indexed in the Folklore Society Archive in Cluj, 1993.

The methodological change is visible also in the sense that researchers provide interlocutors with more freedom of expression. The questionnaires are replaced by interviews or conversations on general topics, such as memories of war.

Rereading the field notes and the catalogue of the Archive from a diachronic perspective reveals that the same themes (food, gender relations, the condition of women) were written down using two fundamentally different codes: the code of folklore studies, imparting a philological perspective, and the code of ethnology, associated with an anthropological perspective on folklore. Summing up the comments made so far, the two codes are configured as follows:

The code of folklore studies

folklore = literary texts
aesthetic criterion
appeals to the sense of hearing (what people say)
the goal of objectivity
interested in eternal, timeless folklore
→ ritual and ceremonial

The code of ethnology

folklore = folklore culture
cultural and social criteria
hearing (what people say) + sight (what people do)
the assumption of subjectivity
the dynamism of cultural facts
→ small, everyday facts
PAST
The corpus of national folklore
PRESENT
Folklore culture in its dynamics
The classical paradigm

The philological perspective

The modern paradigm

The anthropological perspective

In the analysed archive, the classical paradigm is visible on the field notes drafted by the students coordinated by Professor Dumitru Pop, while the modern one emerges in the research conducted by Professor Nicolae Bot.

Rereading these field notes has revealed that the documents of the folklore archive represent *subjective constructs*, because the archived materials are not objective reproductions of reality, but subjective textualisations of some Romanian socio-cultural aspects (food, gender relations, etc.). Formulated in

the 1970s by the anthropologists of the interpretive approach, the idea according to which “what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to”⁷ has become a thesis endorsed by contemporary ethnologists: “ethnographic description is never a simple exercise of transcription or “*decoding*, but an **activity of construction and translation**, in the course of which the researcher produces rather than reproduces”⁸. “The reconstruction is detectable even in the field notebooks of the ethnographers. They are never pure ‘testimonies’, raw reports collected by an imperturbable and anonymous observer”⁹.

Analysing the methodology of ethnological field research, as suggested by the documentary fund of the Folklore Society Archive, Cluj, I can formulate the following observations, which can also serve as conclusions:

1. Ethnologists write in the historical, ideological and intellectual context in which they were trained: specialised vocabulary, textual conventions; the patterns of writing are derived from participation in a specific professional culture. In their writings, they reveal the world outlook of the age in which they live, their scientific training and the bibliography that structures their methodological approach. They shape the “research data” (for a long time regarded as objective), in a discourse conceived according to certain methodological and rhetorical rules, specific to each period, a discourse in which subjectivity plays an important role.

2. In the absence of ethnologists’ testimonies with regard to the way in which research was conducted, the documents of any archives of folklore can provide valuable information about fieldwork, representing witnesses of the history of the ethnological disciplines.

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⁷ Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture”, in *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, New York, Basic Books, 1973, p. 9.

⁸ François Laplantine, *Descrierea etnografică [The Ethnographic Description]*, trans. Elisabeta Stănculescu and Gina Grosu, Iași, Polirom, 2000, p. 68.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

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