

A TREASURY OF ETHNOGRAPHY AND FOLKLORE IN THE COVASNA AND HARGHITA COUNTIES*

Review

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Constantin SECARĂ, Ph.D., musicologist, ethnomusicologist, Byzantinologist (born in Bucharest, on September 24, 1962) belongs to the current generation of Romanian musicologists with multidisciplinary expertise both in (old and contemporary) Romanian music and in ethnomusicology and musical Byzantinology. Currently, he is a member of the research team of the “Constantin Brăiloiu” Institute of Ethnography and Folklore of the Romanian Academy, serving as senior researcher III in the ethnomusicology department. In 2008, he received a Ph.D. in music with *Summa cum laude* at the National University of Music in Bucharest, with the thesis entitled *The Irmologion. Typology, Evolution and Representation in the Manuscripts from Romania*, under the supervision of Prof. Ph.D. Sebastian Barbu-Bucur. He has produced radio broadcasts, has given public lectures in prestigious institutions and has presented scientific papers at national and international symposia of musicology, ethnomusicology and Byzantine music. Author of chapters in collective volumes of ethnological syntheses produced at the “Constantin Brăiloiu” Institute of Ethnography and Folklore, author of studies and articles on musicology, Byzantinology and ethnomusicology, published in Romanian collective volumes and periodicals. He is a member of the Romanian Union of Composers and Musicologists, of the Romanian Section of the International Society of Contemporary Music and of the Romanian Association of Ethnological Sciences. In 2011, he earned a postdoctoral research fellowship within the project “Valorisation of Cultural Identities in Global Processes”, POSDRU/89/1.5/S/59758.



* Nicolae Bucur and Constantin Catrina, *Tezaur de etnografie și folclor în județele Covasna și Harghita* [A Treasury of Ethnography and Folklore in the Covasna and Harghita Counties], Editura Eurocarpatica, Sfântu Gheorghe, 2012, 488 p.

In a world that seems to have lost its balance, talking and writing today about the Romanian spiritual treasures, deeply buried in the mists of time, may seem quite strange, if not at odds with the way of the world. Today, when new maps are being designed and created, when alliances are made and unmade, when strategies and interests serve obscure geopolitical competitions, often against people's spirit and will, when time and people have lost their peace, it seems inappropriate for someone to start digging through the bottom drawer of the Romanian spirituality, only to find, dust off and bring to light treasures carved on the bark of time, in silent discretion and order. A treasury buried deep in the dust of archives, libraries and museums is now brought to light through the efforts of two passionate people of culture who have met in the realm of the truth-revealing ethnological sciences. For, if oppressed by the times, people suffer in loud silence, the time has come for the "stones" of their history and tradition to cry out quietly and tranquilly from the place bestowed upon them by a dormant immortality.

The two authors, Nicolae Bucur and Constantin Catrina, having both reached the peak of their spiritual journey, conceived this cultural project many years ago, with a passion and dedication far beyond the range of ordinary human endeavours. But what would this "treasury of ethnography and folklore in the Covasna and Harghita counties" actually mean? First, we can consider it as a living testimony of a dormant tradition. Then, this impressive volume includes the most important studies written by the two authors about the Romanian people's literary and musical folklore, culture and spirituality and, perhaps most importantly, on its existence and vitality across the territories ruled by it during its 2000-year history on these lands. Finally, in the eyes of those who have a penchant for study, the volume includes an imposing *Selective General Bibliography*, covering exactly half the size of the volume and comprising all the writings on Romanian traditional culture, regardless of their size or significance, whether found among the pages of local periodicals, or among the less read ones of the literary and musical anthologies, monographs or folk typologies. In point of fact, this bibliography alone could in itself serve as a stand-alone volume revealing the richness of the ancient spirituality of the Romanian inhabitants of eastern and south-eastern Transylvania.

Endowed with strong and distinct creative personalities, the two authors have chosen their areas of competence based on their previous

interests and research studies. Thus has emerged a rich, complex and mutually complementary collection of studies, an important spiritual space, where the versatility and diversity of themes are naturally subordinated to a legitimate unity of the whole.

The contributions of Nicolae Bucur (born on August 16, 1938 in Miercurea-Ciuc, author of important studies and articles on the Romanian traditional culture in the Harghita County) provide pertinent reflections and observations on major themes of Romanian folklore in the two areas. He brings forth "Considerations on several folk ballads from Harghita" (pp. 29-37), marking the main epic themes and providing comparisons with similar variants from the Székely folklore, along with "Aspects of pastoral folklore from Harghita and Voinești-Covasna" (pp. 39-53), as well as "Images and symbols in the pastoral folklore of Harghita" (pp. 79-93). These texts emphasize the profusion of old genuine customs, preserved in recent years only within the framework of spectacular festival performances. In a different register, the author's investigations range from exploring the symbolism of water and of its generative force (pp. 95-110), to revealing literary expressions that illustrate the vegetal elements reflected in the Romanian folklore of the Harghita area (pp. 61-77). The studies on the art of decorating eggs (pp. 111-129) and on "The folk creations and traditions of the Făgețel village – Harghita" (pp. 131-138) complete the analytical framework outlined by Nicolae Bucur.

In this volume, Constantin Catrina (born on November 6, 1933 in the village of Țiu, Dolj county, musicologist, ethnomusicologist and Byzantinologist of great repute in the Romanian cultural space) assembles no less than 12 studies that cover, to varying degrees of scientific and historical rigor, some of the most interesting thematic areas of the Romanian musical life in south-eastern Transylvania. The diachronic historical investigation of the existence of the musical phenomenon in this area during the past centuries lies at the heart of the series of studies through which the author undertakes to reveal the impressive array of relevant sources and resources available (many of which are unpublished). In studies exposing the ideas of "George Barițiu on topics related to the artistic creation in 19th century Transylvania" (pp. 143-147), or "Topics of ethnography and folk art addressed by the Transylvania journal" (pp. 149-155), Constantin Catrina provides a summary and synthesis of the diverse and disparate information from multiple bibliographical and

archival sources. The reader's attention is caught by the portraits and profiles of eight musicians, captured with utmost documentary accuracy: "The folklorists and the Musical Folklore of the Covasna County. A Historical Overview" (pp. 157-164), Dimitrie Cioflec (pp. 165-168), I. G. Bibicescu (pp. 169-172), Andrei Bârseanu (pp. 173-177), Alexandru Bogdan (pp. 179-186), N. I. Dumitraşcu (pp. 187-194), Horia Teculescu (pp. 195-202) and Matei N. Jurebiță (pp. 203-207). These concise albeit substantial studies are extremely important for revealing the personalities from Covasna who have contributed to the enrichment of the Romanian cultural heritage in south-eastern Transylvania. The last two contributions through which Constantine Catrina adds scientific value to this volume stand out through the relevance and quality of the synthesis studies including "Considerations on Several Folk Music Collections from the Covasna county" (pp. 209-214) and "Considerations on the Poetic and Musical Pastoral Customs from South-Eastern Transylvania (Țara Bârsei and Covasna). Circulation and Stratification" (pp. 215-221).

Last but not least, we should mention a few words about the second relevant part of the book, i.e. the remarkable bibliographic endeavour mentioned above. Far from being a mere act of "recording and categorizing the assets of folk culture" (p. 225), this vast bibliographic inventory (including 2080 entries!) constitutes a working tool of high scientific value, incorporating a list of (older and more recent) local and national periodicals, prestigious volumes of ethnography and folklore (catalogues, dictionaries, lexicons, anthologies, monographs, typologies), museums and collections, as well as forms and methods of "valorisation of the traditional folk art and artistic creation". An index of names and one of places complete this volume, enhancing its rigour and credibility.

Above all, however, this book has the great merit of managing to transcend the difficulty of talking about the past in the present tense. In other words, to "break the silence" of the music which, though spoken about, is no longer heard. The silent music of *doinas*, songs and dances, buried in the silence of folklore archives and reference collections, will have to quietly wait until it is rediscovered and restored to the former honour in which it was once held by the Romanian peasant.