

**„BABEŞ – BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY
CLUJ – NAPOCA**

FACULTY OF LETTERS

**TRANSYLVANIAN GERMAN
SCHOLARS’ CONTRIBUTIONS TO
THE STUDY OF THE ROMANIAN
FOLKLORE IN THE 19TH CENTURY**

Summary

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SUMMARY

Key-words: Romanian traditional culture, culture as translation, Transylvanian German scholars, hybridity, identity, culture as text, 19th century

Within the context of the interest increase for the humanistic sciences, especially for the beginning of the 19th century traditional literature, due to Herderian philosophy's influence, the Transylvanian German scholars turn first to the Saxon folklore collection to demonstrate what has been preserved of the German spirit in Transylvania but also to define a certain identity. Even around the end of the 18th century Herder spoke about the difficulties this 'island of German culture' had to overcome.¹ Besides the Saxons' origin, who reach the Eastern and Southern parts of Transylvania from Germany, North-Eastern France and Belgium in the 12th and 13th centuries, their attraction towards Germany is justified both by their education in German universities where the progressive movements were in full blossom starting with the beginning of the 19th century and the protestant religion dominant among them. As sons of parsons it was only natural for the young Saxons to study the protestant theology in Berlin and Leipzig, being well-known the fact the dominant religion in the Austro-Hungarian Empire was Catholicism; consequently, during their studies they would establish relationships with the important German intellectuals, according to the valuable mail exchanged between them and Grimm Brothers.² Leipzig is also important to the study of the Romanian and Saxon traditional cultures due to the convention these students made with one another shortly before the middle of the 19th century. Influenced by Romanticism, five of them, at the initiative of Fr. W. Schuster would agree to collect Saxon folklore at their return home. Thus, J. Haltrich would collect folk fairy tales, Fr. Müller, legends, Fr. W. Schuster, traditional songs and Johann Mätz, traditions, so the entire cultural area established by Grimm Brothers.

On the other hand, the variety of the Saxon dialects that existed in Transylvania compelled the Romanian-Saxons (as Gh. Bodgan-Duică called them) to decide upon one common language, German, which was taught in schools from the middle of the

¹ Protze, Helmut: *Leipzig und Siebenbürgen. Siebenbürger in Leipzig*. În: *Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, 19 (1996), caiet 2, p. 157.

² Vlaicu, Monica (editor): *Briefe an Georg Daniel Teutsch*, Wien: ed. Böhlau 1994.

19th century. During their struggle to officialize the German language, the Saxon communities got together to obtain certain rights within the Empire. In time, they became stronger by developing economical and political relationships with the Romanians in Transylvania. Due to this cohabitation, the intercultural influences quickly appeared, from the loan words from/into the languages spoken in this area to the mutual influences in the folk costume, all these leading to the deepening of the relationship between the Transylvanian Germans and Romanians.

As for the cultural relationships between the two nations, these were quite strong and here we have to mention the contributions of German scholars to certain Romanian grammar books (Andreas Clemens)³ and of Romanian scholars (Ioan Piurariu-Molnar) to certain bilingual German-Romanian textbooks (*Deutsch-Wallachische Sprachlehre*, Viena, 1788). The 19th century Transylvanian media had an important role in the approach of certain social and cultural problems within both nations. Thus, we have to mention here the German newspapers *Siebenbürger Bote*, *Siebenbürgische Provinzialblätter* or *Siebenbürgisches Intelligenzblatt*,⁴ but especially *Archiv des Vereins für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, whose motto was: „Noi vrem să unim, nu să despărțim – noi vrem să împăcăm, nu să dezbinăm”⁵ (“We wish to unify not to divide – we wish to reconcile not to tear”) and to whose sessions the Romanian intellectual periodically participated. It was a Transylvanian Saxon, Johann Gött, the one who would print the Romanian newspapers *Gazeta Transilvaniei* and *Foaie pentru minte, inimă și literatură* in Brașov, and he was more than a simple printing press owner; he had an important role in supporting the Transylvanian Romanian media every time the Imperial authorities created problems.

The Romanian folklore appealed to the Saxons as a consequence of the cohabitation with the Romanians; as a result, the Transylvanian scholars would wish to clarify the problem of Romanians’ origin and their affinity with other peoples besides identifying common ideals. Generally, the collection of Romanian folklore was always regarded as a duty of honor even if it had political implications. Thus, these German intellectuals would start by collecting Romanian traditional songs as this was more accessible and easier to write.

³ Pancratz, Arnold: *Beiträge von Siebenbürger Sachsen zur Erlernung der rumänischen Sprache*. În: *Forschungen zur Volks- und Landeskunde*, vol. III, Sibiu: Editura Academiei Române 1960.

⁴ Pervain, Iosif; Ciurdariu, Ana; Sasu, Arelu: *România în periodicele germane din Transilvania. 1778-1840. Bibliografie analitică*. București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică 1977-1983.

⁵ Göllner, Carl: *Die Siebenbürger Sachsen in den Revolutionsjahren 1848–1849*. București: Editura Academiei R.S.R. 1967, p. 38.

The present paper is meant to be a complex analysis of the contributions the Transylvanian German scholars had to the study of the Romanian traditional culture in the 19th century, from several perspectives, i.e. anthropological, political, historical and social ones.

Structurally, the thesis is divided into five chapters, according to the modern anthropological theories but also to the approached genres. The first chapter's title is *Theoretical Aspects of Cultural Anthropology* and includes, besides a short history of the Saxon colonists in Transylvania, cultural anthropology theories on the following concepts: ‚culture‘, ‚culture as text‘, ‚cultural turn‘ discussed by Doris Bachmann-Medick, as they are applied in the literary text with the result of identifying the traditional culture aspects. For the material's analysis, concepts like ‚contrapuntal reading‘, ‚culture as translation‘, ‚liminality‘, ‚hybridity‘ as discussed by Clifford Geertz, James Clifford, Victor Turner, Homi Bhabha, Arjun Appadurai have been used. The chapter ends with the presentation of the 18th century personalities who had a serious impact on the European culture, i.e. Johann Gottfried Herder and Grimm Brothers, or, locally, who played an important role in the 1848 events, i.e. Stephan Ludwig Roth.

In the second chapter, *Traditional Romanian Lyrics and Epics*, those Transylvanian German intellectuals are analyzed who collected Romanian traditional songs. Besides the fact that the collecting of the Romanian folklore was done parallel with the one of the Saxon folklore, the Romanians' traditional song appealed to them through exoticism, beauty and musicality. The scholars analyzed here are Martin Samuel Möckesch with his short volume of Romanian traditional and literate poetry from 1851, *Romänische Dichtungen*, Johann Karl Schuller, Josef Marlin and their writings, Friedrich Wilhelm Schuster, Emil Sigerus and Ludwig Vinzenz Fischer. Some of the above mentioned dealt both with the collecting of the Romanian traditional songs and with the theoretical studies (Friedrich Wilhelm Schuster, Josef Marlin), novel and story writing (Josef Marlin), so that they have been fully analyzed in this chapter.

Folk Beliefs and Traditions is the title of the third chapter in which we attempt to emphasize the idea that starting with the middle of the 19th century, the approach of certain Romanian traditional cultural aspects becomes more mature. Besides Wilhelm Schmidt and Heinrich von Wlislocki, well-known scholars, in this chapter Robert Prexl and Tibolt Schmidt are also analyzed. The novelty here is given by R. Prexl's two studies which have been completely ignored or even unknown until now. Their titles are *Rumänische Brautwerbung und Hochzeit in Siebenbürgen* and *Geburts- und*

Todtengebräuche der Rumänen in Siebenbürgen, besides the study regarding the incantations. As for Tibolt Schmidt, his manuscript, *The Romanian Carol-Singing in Transylvania*, is analyzed here. The author of the present thesis found the manuscript at Arhivele Naționale din Sibiu (The National Archives in Sibiu); besides this manuscript, there are also three articles, of which two are novelty, being mentioned in the bibliographical book by Teofil Bugnariu, published in Cluj in 2013. Even if all the articles by T. Schmidt have been published in Romanian and Hungarian, there is reason to believe that he was Saxon, if we take into account his name and certain details in the letter attached to the manuscript. The lack of biographical data in the case of three scholars is due to the fact that they were completely ignored by all the specialized dictionaries and lexicons.

The title of the fourth chapter is *Fairy Tales and Legends*, and here, again, some of the German scholars have been fully analyzed regardless whether they collected something else besides fairy tales. It's the case of Johann Carl Hintz-Hințescu, Adolf Schullerus and especially Pauline Schullerus, others being Franz Obert and Friedrich Müller. Obert's Fairy Tales book could have been the most important collection of this kind not only by dimensions but also by originality, had it been published in its time; unfortunately it was published much too late to stir any interest.

The chapter five's Conclusion includes the research results, the ways through which the aspects of Romanian traditional culture are illustrated by the literary text, the construction of their own identity by presenting *the other's* image, the Transylvanian culture as hybrid culture, the ways in which concepts like 'contrapuntal reading', 'common space of creation', 'culture as translation' have been used.

Bibliography and *Appendices* are the two parts that end the thesis. The Bibliography, divided into three includes *Bibliography of the Studied Works* contains the writings of the Transylvanian German intellectuals, *Secondary Bibliography* with the critical works and *Electronic Bibliography*.

The modern anthropological perspective suggested by the present paper emphasizes possible explanations for the 19th century German scholars' interest for the Romanian traditional culture. The ways by which the Transylvanian cultures form a hybrid culture since the 19th century is shown here, using the concepts of modern cultural anthropology; in a common geographical area we can speak about a national consciousness. The concepts of 'contrapuntal reading', 'liminal area', 'culture as translation' and 'culture as text' represent a real help in emphasizing the cultural aspects in the studies and Romanian

folklore collections written/drawn up by the Saxon intellectuals, and in building a specific Transylvanian identity.

The traditional culture in Transylvania raised the scholars' interest from the 18th century due to the European movement of folklore collecting, started also by Johann Gottfried von Herder's philosophy who saw the cultivation of national languages as media for the identification and development of the peoples' specific elements; consequently, the collecting of folk song was, in his opinion the preserver of the national thesaurus specific to each and every people. If his ideas were admired, commented on in Western Europe, in Eastern Europe they started serious movements within nations meant to awake a national consciousness. Thus, the folklore includes also a political aspect, and Marlin emphasized this idea probably the best. He was of the opinion that his writings had to have a political goal, that is why both his story *Wanderungen...* and his study on the Romanian traditional song published in *Österreichische Blätter* in Viena represent real political manifest. A century and a half later the researcher Marianne Mesnil would emphasize the political character of the folklore, stating that the interest for folklore appears together with the national consciousness and political existence revendication, and those who collect folklore become the voices of the independence demands.⁶

The Transylvanian German scholars always wished to be accepted as part of the German people, and this idea can be found in all the Saxons' writings of this area. The majority published in magazines in Leipzig, Berlin and Hamburg and rarely in local ones, which made the search of their articles sometimes difficult or even impossible; that is why some of them were ignored by the specialized dictionaries and lexicons.

With Josef Marlin one can talk about a cultural turn due to his study on the Romanian traditional song, study that he turns into a self-ethnographical one by his self-definition as a ‚geborne Siebenbürgen‘, (‚Transylvanian born‘), hence representing himself through the presentation of the *other*. The same goes for Pauline Schullerus with her study on plants in the Saxons' culture, a study-within-study actually, if we take into account the pages with footnotes about plants in the Romanian traditions. Thus, culture can be defined as a social process in which people with the help of the text build identities and communicate meanings, so we can talk about ‚culture as text‘.

The tensions that appeared naturally due to cohabitation of the Romanians and Saxons in Transylvania, suggested (J. Marlin, R. Prexl, W. Schmidt) or emphasized

⁶ Mesnil, Marianne; Popova, Asia: *Etnologul între șarpe și balaur. Eseuri de mitologie balcanică*. București: ed. Paideia 1997.

(Pauline Schullerus) lead to the idea of a hybrid culture defined not only geographically but also by a common space which leaves its mark on the artistic creation, that mioritic space (identified by Lucian Blaga) that keeps together all nations living here.

Some writings by the German scholars, apparently referring to Saxon folklore, if we take into account only the titles, contain real studies on Romanian traditional culture, introduced in parallel, this demonstrating their desire to establish an identity by representing *the other's* cultural aspects. It's the case of Pauline Schullerus with her study on plants, *Pflanzen im Glauben und Brauch der Siebenbürger Sachsen*, of Adolf Schullerus with his book *Short Ethnographical Treatise of the Transylvanian Saxons*, of J. Haltrich's with his collection of Saxon fairy tales, of which a number of 31 can be considered Romanian variants. Regarding the generalizing titles like *Siebenbürgische Sagen* by Friedrich Müller, *Siebenbürgisches Märchenbuch* by Adolf Schullerus etc., they represent arguments that from the middle of the 19th century in Transylvania we could speak about a Transylvanian national consciousness, argument for the existence of a hybrid culture.

The translations by these scholars played an important role in the construction of their own identity by presenting the *other*. That grey area between the initial text and the final product is full of tensions and conflicts depending on the translator's culture of origin and language, respectively on the culture into which the text is translated. Each Saxon scholar solved these conflicts in his/her own way according to the talent or the intention to illustrate a certain aspect. The way they do it is remarkable in some of the cases, and we have to mention here Fr. W. Schuster, R. Prexl and Pauline Schullerus. In Fr. W. Schuster's translations can be regarded as exceptional due to his poetic talent; not only gives he the meaning of the original text but he also keeps the versification. Opposed to this is Pauline Schullerus without any talent for translation or versification; moreover, she apparently makes translation mistakes. Her merit is the way she uses these apparent mistakes to illustrate the Romanian mentality, the way a nation thinks through the way of expression construction. Eventually, she solves the conflict by giving the correct meaning of the proverbs or Romanian phrases. This is a different modality of presenting *the other*, which can be well represented through the phrase *culture as translation*.

The anthropologist Victor Turner defines the ritual as part of the social dramas which include conflicts structured in a certain way; according to this the British researcher differentiates between ceremony and ritual, the former indicates, the latter

transforms. Symbolically, the three main events in the human life, birth, wedding and funeral represent the passing from one condition to the other, which involves a state of liminality between the two, well emphasized by the Transylvanian scholars interested in presenting the Romanian traditions, i.e. Robert Prexl, Wilhelm Schmidt, Tibolt Schmidt, Pauline Schullerus. The state of liminality requires a weak existential situation; the human being is in an unsafe area, full of danger that can hurt it; from this point of view, the rituals have the role to protect the beneficiary subjected to the passage. The two studies by Robert Prexl analyzed here for the first time (*Rumänische Brautwerbung und Hochzeit in Siebenbürgen* and *Geburts- und Todtengebräuche der Rumänen in Siebenbürgen*) underline also the state of liminality through a detailed description of the birth, wedding and funeral traditions with Romanian folk rhymes, translated also into German.

When analyzing the relationship between cultural identity and literature Edward Said's contrapuntal phenomena offer a different anthropological perspective, i.e. the ones of the dominant and dominated histories. While their intentions of making known the Romanian traditional culture abroad and not only are good, Adolf and Pauline Schullerus illustrate Romanian cultural aspects using sometimes irony. Heinrich von Wlislöcki and Friedrich Müller are other examples; they build their Transylvanian identities by despising the *other* using the *me-and-him* paradigm.

Besides though the conflicts and tensions that appear as a consequence of cohabitation within a common area, not only geographic but also full of intercultural influences, inherent for a hybrid culture like the Transylvanian one in which the defining of identity is vital, the Transylvanian German scholars of the 19th century through their works drew the European attention upon the traditional Romanian culture bringing thus an important contribution to its study and also defining their identity as Transylvanians.

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