
FOUR METADISCOURSES
ON ROMANIAN
FOOD RESEARCH

The Development of a Research Topic

Food in Ethnographic Surveys Conducted by Institutions

COSMINA TIMOCE-MOCANU

THE CURRENT article reflects on the ways in which food has been developed as a research topic in national and regional surveys undertaken by institutes specialized in the study of traditional Romanian culture, beginning with the end of the nineteenth century. I will analyze how ethnographic and folkloristic questionnaires deal with the issue of alimentation, in light of the aims and purpose of the specific project in which they were used. Thus, I will discuss what kind of information about food was gathered via these questionnaires, how the information was evaluated, and the impact each survey had on the development of the topic, and implicitly on the study of food as an emerging field of research.

The End of the Nineteenth Century: Introduction of the Topic

PROGRAMA PENTRU *adunarea datelor privitoare la limba română* (The program for the collection of data about the Romanian language), initiated by B. P. Hasdeu in 1884, marks the beginning of the development of ethnography and folklore as areas of research, in the period before the founding of research institutes dedicated to these subjects. “The Program” was conducted under the auspices of the Romanian Academy and with the support of King Carol I, who contributed a preface. The purpose of Hasdeu’s questionnaire was to gather data for the creation of the dictionary *Etymologicum Magnum Romaniae*, but it transcended strictly linguistic concerns with its broad interests, specified by the author as: “The personal beliefs of the people, their customs and occupations, their sorrows and joys, everything which today is designated—for want of a more suitable word—by the English term *folklore*.”¹ Indeed, over half of the 206 questions addressed to the correspondents reflect folkloristic concerns: beliefs, stories and customs related to mythological beings and the other worlds, special days

This paper will be published as part of the project titled PN-III-P2-2.1-PED-2019-5092: *A Romanian Digital Repository on Food: Turning Heritage Knowledge Towards Society (FOODie)*.

in the calendar (holidays) and in the family life cycle, folk astronomy and meteorology, folk medicine and magic, songs, games and musical instruments, as well as the main professions and occupations. “The Program” thus clearly established the foundations for folkloristic research, having identified and gathered data on the main components of Romanian folklore.

Although B. P. Hasdeu did not ignore the topic of food, he was interested almost exclusively in the linguistic aspects, reflected in the terminology used by different people. This is visible in questions about “more unusual terms” for food items and drinks (Nos. 120–121), crockery (No. 127: “vessels for preparing food, serving it, and taking it to the fields”) and food preparation (No. 128: “the cooking of food and everything connected with it”). Other questions relate to the terminology for staple food: fruit (No. 57), cereals (No. 61) and vegetables (No. 62). The vocabulary for activities which result in the acquisition of food is also addressed: hunting (No. 90), fishing (No. 93), shepherding (Nos. 94–100), tiling the land (Nos. 101–104), milling (No. 106), beekeeping (No. 77), and winegrowing (Nos. 58–59). Special attention is given to “terminology for different kinds of wine and words related to the color of wine, its taste, strength etc.” (No. 60). Only in relation to the dishes associated with shepherding, “cheese and dairy,” are questions formulated which do not only deal with terminology (“words”), but also with “their different kinds, and the ways in which they are prepared” (No. 94).²

Following this format, in most cases the answers from 773 localities consist of plain lists of food and dishes considered to be representative for their communities.³ A few meticulous respondents reorganize the information, based on the main ingredients, or function (e.g. distinguishing between food for fasting⁴ and for “regular” days),⁵ but this occurs very rarely. The handwritten questionnaires also document utensils and tools used for preparing food and offer rough descriptions of the process of preparing certain dishes. Here is an example of such a pseudo-recipe, provided by the teacher G. Voicu, from Stănișești–Tecuci: “*Lapte acru* [literally: *sour milk*, closest English equivalent: *buttermilk*] is made from boiled regular milk, to which cream (*smântână*) is added after it has cooled down, to thicken it. Then some boiled milk and some crude milk is added, until the jug is full and then we have sour milk.”⁶

Beyond the importance of the primary information about peasant food in itself, it is important to keep in mind that the questionnaire of 1884 also fulfilled a formative function in educating a generation of priests and teachers in Romanian villages as mediators and collectors in folkloristic research. As Ovidiu Bârlea observed, they “became folklorists under the impetus and in the school of Hasdeu’s questionnaire.”⁷ Many of them started to publish folklore in periodicals, to create small volumes with material they collected, and to respond enthusiastically to the countless questionnaires which they received from different institutions at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

A noteworthy example of these questionnaires is *Cestionariu despre tradițiunile istorice și anticitățiile Țerilor locuite de români. Partea II. Epoca de până la a. 600 d. Chr.* (The Questionnaire about historical traditions and antiquities of the territories inhabited by Romanians: The period until the year 600 CE) (part I, 1893, part II, 1895), created by Nicolae Densușianu with the aim of “bringing to light the historical dimension of these ancient

beliefs and traditions of the Romanian people.”⁸ For the practical implementation of his research, he used school inspectorates in the distribution of his questionnaire. The results of this research have been generally ignored by specialists for a long time, since N. Densușianu used them to create the contested work *Dacia preistorică* (Prehistoric Dacia).⁹ From the perspective of ethnography and folklore, the answers to this questionnaire constitute a qualitative leap, a huge step forward, compared with the results of the questionnaire devised by B. P. Hasdeu. This is due to the methodological instructions N. Densușianu provided to his correspondents (mediators),¹⁰ and to the character and structure of the questionnaire. In its second part, the topic of food gains prominence within the section dedicated to food given as alms, e.g. grains cooked and raw, *colaci* (a specific kind of bun), fruit, meat and dairy products (Nos. 176–184, 187, 189–191), and to fasting (Nos. 227–228). The topic is present in a more subtle way in the sections dedicated to holidays, which contain questions about festive meals (Nos. 53, 55–56), practices for ensuring a good harvest and the wellbeing of the livestock (Nos. 9, 75–76, 103) and even to the utensils for ritual meals, such as *paharul Cnăciunului* (a special glass from which everybody in the family drinks only on Christmas; No. 10).

Consequently, while Hasdeu’s focus on terminology drove his correspondents to simply list kinds of daily food, those guided by Densușianu offer information at different levels of complexity about festive and ritual foods and also take notice of the rituals which are accompanied by abundant food. This can be illustrated by comparing the answers provided by Mihai Lupescu, teacher in Broșteni (Suceava County) to both questionnaires, preserved in manuscript form at the Library of the Romanian Academy: pages 298–306 of Ms. rom. BAR 3430 (answers to Hasdeu’s questionnaire) and pages 250–257 of Ms. rom. BAR 4559 (Densușianu). In the first case, he only lists some dishes, such as *măliga*, *mălai*, *pită*, *borș*, *zamă*, *papă* (*scrob*), *găluște*, *plachie*, *julfă*, *vărzări*, *plăcinte*, *mujdei de usturoi*. In contrast, in the second case (the manuscript of 1896) he outlines the preparation of some ritual dishes:

Pasca [a type of pastry made for Easter] is made from wheat flour; as follows: the flour is kneaded and left to rise. After it has risen, the dough is shaped into round loaves. The loaves are flattened with a rolling pin [*sucitorul*] like *azima* [flat bread] and dough in the form of a bun, round and flattened, is placed on top. The hollow within is filled with a filling made of fermented sheep cheese and a couple of boiled potatoes [*bulughene*]. The *Pasca* thus prepared is baked in the oven.¹¹

From his participation in the questionnaires until the end of his life, Lupescu dedicated great energy to researching the topic of food. Between 1899 and 1904 he wrote about peasant food (“The Peasant’s Kitchen”) in the journal *Șezătoarea* (Get-Together). In 1916 he submitted a substantial manuscript to the Romanian Academy for publication. Due to various causes (the First World War, the reorganization of the Romanian Academy and its publications etc.), the work of Mihai Lupescu was not published until 2000. The topic of food thus missed an opportunity of becoming part of the standard research topics within Romanian folklore early on.

Even worse, for three quarters of a century, the materials collected via the two questionnaires described here were only consulted by a very small number of specialists as they were available only as manuscripts in the Library of the Romanian Academy. The answers to Hasdeu's "Program" became more widely accessible in 1970, with the publication of *Tipologia folclorului din răspunsurile la Chestionarele B. P. Hasdeu* (Typology of folklore from the answers to the *Questionnaires* of B. P. Hasdeu), the result of the considerable efforts of Ion Mușlea and, after his death, of Ovidiu Bârlea. In his preface, Bârlea avoids the topic of food, considering it part of material culture and therefore belonging to the field of ethnography.¹² In spite of that, an attentive reader can discover some information about food in the chapters "Ciclul calendaristic" (calendrical cycle, special days throughout the year) and "Ciclul familial" (family life cycle, dealing with birth, weddings and death) and some occurrences, more sporadic than one might expect, in the section dedicated to small holdings (family farms) and daily life ("Gospodăria și viața cotidiană"). Adrian Fochi organized the material collected in Densușianu's survey in a similar way, and published it as *Datini și eresuri populare de la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea* (Folk customs and superstitions at the end of the nineteenth century) (1976). In contrast to Mușlea and Bârlea, he presented the entries alphabetically rather than thematically. Some of the entries, such as *alimentele ritual* (ritual food), *paharul de zile mari* (a glass, usually large and beautiful, which is used only on special days, filled with a drink and passed from hand to hand, so that all family members present take a sip) and *mucenicii* (martyrs, dedicated to the feast of the forty martyrs of Sebaste, 9 March) contain information related to food and culinary practices, particularly in its ritual aspect.

Ritual Food: A Female Topic in the Margins of Folklore Research in the Interwar Period

THE ESTABLISHMENT of the Folklore Archive of the Romanian Academy in Cluj in 1930 marks another important moment in the history of the development of institutions dedicated to the study of traditional Romanian Culture. Ion Mușlea formulated the research mission of the institute he founded as promoting the "collection, management, organization, publication and academic study of folklore material."¹³ In line with this aim and following the established practice of research via intermediaries (correspondents),¹⁴ he developed a series of thematic questionnaires to be used by the Archive in conjunction with its network of teachers (male and female), priests, and pupils (school children), covering all regions of the country. He also wrote an article providing instructions to his future collaborators (the mediators taking the questionnaires "to the people"), a kind of guide to research, in which he explained aspects of field research, such as how to transcribe what is heard and observed. Although this is not the place for a detailed analysis of this document,¹⁵ one element of Mușlea's guide is particularly relevant for the present study, namely, the involvement of female teachers in the collection of data. Food receives attention as one of the topics about which "a woman speaks much more open and with enthusiasm to another woman; a man will struggle to

obtain a good testimony” (as the woman being interviewed will be more restrained and not speak freely).¹⁶ From today’s perspective such an observation about the relation between gender and research topic might seem self-evident, but in 1928, women’s voices were hardly heard. Female researchers, such as Elena Didia Odorica Sevastos and Elena Niculiță-Voronca, were a marginalized minority. In the context of the time, it was thus a daring and courageous act to propose that:

*Female teachers should conduct interviews with women about the beliefs and occupations which concern them. In the first instance, addressing topics related to birth, the period after birth (“confinement”), baptism, the upbringing of children, superstitions common among women, days when no work is to be done, love potions, folk medicine (charms and remedies), beliefs connected with the preparation of food, clothes and housekeeping. Concerning with folk literature, the female teacher will ask about nursery rhymes and funeral laments. This does not mean that the female teacher cannot also collect general material, covering the entire domain of folklore . . . I just wanted to point out that they are especially encouraged to work in this specific area as they are more likely to obtain excellent results, while male teachers will struggle.*¹⁷

The topics addressed in the questions and the structures of the questionnaires developed and distributed by the Folklore Archive of the Romanian Academy between 1930 and 1942 reflect a desire to complement earlier research and thus create a corpus of data representative of Romanian folklore. It builds upon earlier research: the outlines and main points as addressed in the questionnaires by Hasdeu and N. Densușianu, followed by several large research projects supported by the Romanian Academy, resulting in monographs by authors such as Simion Florea Marian, Lazăr Șăineanu, Iuliu Zanne, Elena Niculiță-Voronca, Tudor Pamfile, Gheorghe F. Ciușanu, Artur Gorovei, and others. Two issues in Mușlea’s writings related to the surveys via questionnaire which aim to highlight several cultural phenomena “among the Romanians” developed at the Folklore Archive are particularly relevant for the present study. The first is the aim of his questionnaires to outline a national identity within traditional culture, by bringing together unrelated material collected from all provinces inhabited by Romanians.¹⁸ This way, via the generic mode in which questions were formulated, the instruments of inquiry generalize and create artificial norms. Although they draw attention to all aspects of the tradition they present, all the beliefs and stories which support it and the meaning it has for participants,¹⁹ regional differences do not receive sufficient attention. The second point is the marginal position of food in Mușlea’s questionnaires. It is explicitly mentioned as part two (entitled “Food”) of the tenth questionnaire, *Casa, gospodăria și viața de toate zilele* (Home, family farms, and everyday life), which was sent to the correspondents in the beginning of 1936. To be more precise, the specific questions which address food concern aspects such as: practices and sayings related to specific food consumed for the first time; table manners; food and drink offered as alms at funerals and beliefs, customs and stories related to water, bread and salt in daily and ritual contexts. Precise questions related to food also occur in the context of customs related to special days in the calendar,²⁰ of events in the family life cycle,²¹ and of mythology and folk rituals.²²

The manuscript collection of the Folklore Archive of the Romanian Academy contains 34 answers to the section dedicated to food of *Questionnaire Ten*, from just as many localities in the counties Alba, Arad, Argeş, Baia, Bacău, Bihor, Buzău, Hotin, Hunedoara, Ilfov, Lăpuşna, Maramureş, Mehedinţi, Neamţ, Orhei, Râmnicu Sărat, Roman and Someş. Written meticulously and with a fine sense of observation by long-term correspondents (mediators), these manuscripts contain valuable information about the types of practices and traditions related to food addressed in the questionnaires at the time between the two world wars, as preserved in the memories of those answering the questions. As already indicated, the nature of Muşlea's archival project causes food to be one of the topics encountered throughout the almost 1,200 ethnographic documents resulting from the survey.

Even at a first glance, their contents shows that, first of all, like the answers to Densuşianu's questionnaire, the interwar material deals particularly with food for special occasions: festive, ceremonial and ritual foods and practices. In most cases, information is provided about: the kinds of baked food (pastries etc.) made in the contexts of customs related to birth, baptisms, weddings and funerals, baked goods given to carol singers and for the commemoration of the souls of the departed at special occasions (*Mucenici*: feast of the forty martyrs) and *Moşi* (literally: *old men*; special days for the commemoration of the departed at the transitions between seasons); eggs painted red and *pască* (special pastry for Easter); lamb and types of cheese eaten on feast days such as St. George, *Arminden* (St. Jeremiah, 1 May, celebration of spring), *împreunărea turmelor* (celebrating the assembly of a flock consisting of sheep from all the families in the village, which will be pastured together over the summer); wine with wormwood (*pelin*, *Artemisia absinthium*) for the spring celebrations in the fields; pie on the Saturday of Lazarus; fish on the Feast of the Annunciation; *covaşă* (a lightly fermented slightly sour drink made of grains and water) on the feast of St. Andrew etc. With a similar frequency one encounters notes about healing or magical properties attributed to certain dishes or ingredients.

Everyday food is hardly treated in detail, but some information can be deduced from the descriptions of the propitiatory rituals performed on the occasion of major holidays, to ensure the good functioning of the household and farm, the health of the animals (including cattle, poultry and bees), and a good harvest of the fruit trees, garden and vines. Another important source are the references to the main items of daily food, *mămăliga* (polenta, corn flour cooked like porridge) and bread. There are several descriptions of the ways in which they are prepared, focusing on ritual prescriptions and interdictions to ensure a good outcome. Here is an example from the manuscript of Olivia Sturzu, a teacher in Târzia-Baia:

*Do not sift flour on your arms, because you will sift (riddle, cloud) your brain. Knead the dough until you are sweating. Do not drink water while kneading dough, lest the dough would be too moist. With making bread, when you finish kneading and want to leave the dough to rise, make the sign of the cross over it, take a bit from the top and lift it up, like this, and smack it with your lips, making a sound, so that it will rise.*²³

In the answers to these questionnaires, food also appears as a motif in stories told at crucial times in the calendar. For example, the *Story of Ignat*, which is told before slaughtering a pig (before Christmas);²⁴ several well-known stories about taking milk from cows and about the multiplication of flour in the bag of the person who has cast a glance at the game of ghosts (*strigoi*) connected with *Sângeorș* (St. George, 23 April).²⁵ Other examples include stories which explain the consumption of fried rooster or the painting of eggs for Easter (red), either via retelling the story of Christ's crucifixion,²⁶ or by making a connection with the dragons gnawing at the pillars of the earth,²⁷ and stories about the failed attempt of *Baba Dochia* at taking a flock of sheep up a mountain, sometimes to look for wild strawberries,²⁸ in contrast with the successful man who went plowing (tilling the earth) on *Mucenici*, blessed by God and St. Peter with forty bushels of wheat.²⁹ Both of these stories aim to educate about the appropriate/inappropriate time for certain agricultural tasks. In other instances, multifaceted descriptions of practices and behaviors related to food on special days are presented together with stories which explain and legitimize these practices for the community.³⁰

The early questionnaires, "The Program" of B. P. Hasdeu and the questionnaire initiated by N. Densușianu, were formulated and structured in such a way that the result (the written answers preserved in the Library of the Romanian Academy) transmits the vision of the correspondent (the mediator), always male. In contrast, in the documents collected via the survey conducted by the Folklore Archive half a century later, female perspectives are included. The voices of female interviewees started to be heard and transcribed, mediated mostly by female teachers. Due to the traditional role divisions, female interviewees are best placed to share their know-how about the preparation and serving of meals, and as the main actor in the rituals and ceremonies which have an alimentary component. In this way the ethnographic discourse becomes richer and more nuanced, gaining in precision and complexity. This can be illustrated with an example:

On the day before certain holidays (St. Basil, Epiphany, St. George and St. Nicolas), a girl who wants to see her future husband in a dream goes to the well and takes water in her mouth, which she mixes with flour and salt into a ball the size of a nut. She uses this ball to make a small loaf of bread and, in the evening before going to bed, she eats half of it, and places the other half under her pillow. After eating, she should not talk with anybody, nor drink water. If she does as I just explained, she will see her future husband. Before eating the bread, she should say the following: "I bake you bread, I turn you around. You go after my future husband, and bring him now! If not, I will stay here, and I will throw you in the fire." (From Maranda Mocanu, from Vâlcele, 66 years old)³¹

For a long period, this data was only available in manuscripts in the Folklore Archive in Cluj and has been consulted by specialists interested in different aspects of traditional Romanian culture. The results of the surveys have been published only recently, 85 years after its collection. So far volumes have appeared with material from the Republic of Moldova, Romanian Moldavia, and Bukovina, based on questionnaires II, IV, VII and the questionnaire entitled *Șezătoarea*. Words related to food have been included the

index to each volume, so that readers interested in this domain can easily navigate to topics related to traditional alimentation.³²

The 1970s: An Important Period in the Development of Research Methods in the Study of Food

HAVING THUS arrived at the period of state communism, it needs to be pointed out that the 1970s mark a crucial period in the development of ethnologic disciplines, the study of food included. Such a crucial period is always characterized by innovation, in the form of a new archival project with a special focus on food. At the same time, there is also an eye on the past, which is visible in the publications by Fochi, Muşlea and Bârlea of the results of the surveys by N. Densușianu and Hasdeu (already mentioned) and the continuation of older projects, with an improvement of the methodologies and regional applications by newly established institutes.

More concretely, in 1970 the *Chestionarul etnografic și folcloric general* (General ethnographic and folklore questionnaire) appears, developed by Professor Ion H. Ciubotaru at the Center of Linguistics, Literature and Folklore in Iași as “a pilot project.”³³ Its initial results were later verified and completed in field research by young researchers from the Folklore Archive of Moldavia and Bukovina. In the view of its author, the questionnaire is “the most thorough one conducted so far, with a comprehensive character and resulting in a multivalent study of traditional folk culture.”³⁴ The questionnaire was published as a volume of 252 pages, accompanied by an introduction which explains the methodology. The 1,175 questions were organized into nine chapters: I “Beliefs and Superstitions,” II “Folk Medicine,” III “Rituals and Related Customs” (A. Birth, B. Weddings, C. Funerals), IV “Customs Related to Special Days in the Calendar and Magical Practices,” V “Folk Poetry and Prose,” VI “Childhood Games,” VII “Folk Customs,” VIII “Rural Architecture” and IX “Main Occupations.” The topic of food occurs in five of the chapters. First of all, there are questions about ritual and ceremonial food in the context of customs related to birth (Nos. 529, 591, 596, 605, 606), weddings (Nos. 671, 673, 675–688, 693, 698–700) and funerals (Nos. 736, 747–750, 783, 786–788), as well as in the chapter dedicated to customs connected with special days in the calendar (Nos. 71–77, 143, 843, 870). The topic of food can also be recognized within questions about medicinal plants (No. 267) in the chapter on folk medicine, and practices for protecting the harvest, animals, poultry and beehives (Nos. 29, 36, 40–42, 44, 47, 56) in the first chapter. The ethnographic orientation of the questionnaire from Iași is visible in questions about the spaces dedicated to cooking (Nos. 1001–1002), different types of stoves (Nos. 1011, 1160), kitchen furniture (Nos. 1014–1017), containers for measuring and preserving food (Nos. 1149–1152), and questions related to obtaining food items via activities such as gathering herbs (medicinal plants; No. 1028), hunting (Nos. 1029–1030), fishing (Nos. 1034–1036), milling (Nos. 1141–1142), shepherd-ing (Nos. 1037–1045), a section of questions dedicated to dairy products (Nos. 1055, 1061–1085) and winegrowing (Nos. 1162–1166). Information about food from the

690 returned questionnaires from villages of Moldavia and Bukovina were analyzed in studies by researchers from Iași, including monographs³⁵ and typologies and anthologies of regional texts.³⁶

By the middle of the seventh decade of the previous century, the Romanian Academy and the State Commission for Culture and Art started to discuss the creation of the *Romanian Ethnographic Atlas*.³⁷ Starting in 1968, the project was implemented by a team of researchers from the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore in Bucharest. After a process of orientation in working and research methodologies, in 1972 they published twenty thematical questionnaires, including one with the title *Food*. In 1976, after the completion of field work in the county of Oltenia, the working instrument (the twenty questionnaires) was restructured. *Food* became a section within the questionnaire entitled *Occupations*, along with sections dedicated to agriculture, beekeeping, animal farming, silk worm cultivation, gathering (collecting plants, mushrooms etc. in the wild), the cultivation and production of plant-based textiles, transport, the cultivation of fruit trees and vegetables, fishing, hunting, and winegrowing.³⁸ In its final form, the section about food was edited by Ion Vlăduțiu, Romulus Vulcănescu, and Mircea Sadoveanu, who organized the questions in ten sub-sections: 1. Plant-based Products Used for the Preparation of Food, 2. Fruit Used for the Preparation of Food, 3. Preparation of Food from Animal Products and Fish, 4. Dishes Prepared from Dairy Products and Eggs, 5. Flour-based Food, 6. Sweets, 7. Ways of Preserving Food, 8. Dishes for Ordinary Days and for Holidays, 9. Ritual Food (connected with birth, weddings and funerals) and 10. Traditional Drinks.

This instrument of enquiry can be characterized as the first questionnaire dedicated to food within a survey conducted by ethnological research institutes in Romania. Previously, similar surveys had been undertaken only within other fields of research.³⁹ In contrast with the other ethnographic surveys mentioned so far, which relied on correspondents (mediators), with differing levels of preparation for folkloristic field research, the survey undertaken for the *Romanian Ethnographic Atlas* was conducted between 1972 and 1983 by researchers of the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore in Bucharest, in 536 localities selected based on well-defined criteria. Regarding the content of the questionnaire, it can be observed that questions deal not only with practices and behaviors related to festive food (as was the case in the questionnaires from N. Densușianu onwards), but also address aspects related to daily foods. The questions concern not only the current practices, but also those of 50–60 years earlier, as far as they can be reconstructed from people's memories. This way, the questionnaire of the *Ethnographic Atlas* draws attention to the dynamic nature of the phenomena under investigation, and to changes in customs related to food. Similar to the previous archival projects, the field research has resulted in an enormous amount of material, which took several decennia to be analyzed and systematized. Relatively recently, information about food was published by researchers at Constantin Brăiloiu Institute for Ethnography and Folklore, in the third volume of the *Romanian Ethnographic Atlas* (2008)⁴⁰ and in the volume 1, *Oltenia*, of the book *Alimentation* (2018), part of a series of monographs under the title “Documente Etnografice Românești” (Romanian ethnographic documents).⁴¹

Reinvention of the Subject After State Communism: The First Digital Collections

AFTER 1990, projects about food in rural Romanian communities continued to mark the academic landscape; no longer as part of surveys conducted by research institutes, but as expressions of the research interests of ethnologists, anthropologists and linguists from the main universities in Romania. They develop their projects according to the criteria specified by national or international funding bodies. To be more precise, the availability of funding in the current climate has shaped the direction of research in such a way that the topic of food has been studied within the contexts of cultural heritage, (eco)tourism, sustainable development education, policies about food and consumption, etc. The teams which implement these projects transgress academic boundaries and include, besides junior and senior researchers, also local authorities, non-governmental organizations, members of the communities, business people and other organizations of various kinds. The period of funding, and with that, the duration of the projects, ranges from 6 to 36 months, which determines the limitations of the scope of the research, usually focusing on a specific region. The preferred research methods are participant observation and interviews, usually organized around a specific theme. Usually it is no longer possible to publish the questionnaires in the form of a book, as was done in the past. The contracts often specify that the results have to benefit society and should be made available quickly, often even within the duration of the project. The outcomes are extremely varied, developed to meet the interests of the general public and of specialists. They include academic publications, online databases, anthologies of recipes, albums, calendars, exhibitions of photographs with a gastronomic theme, tasting sessions of traditional food, etc.

For example, in 2012, the Administration of National Funds, a department of the Romanian Ministry of Culture, financed the project *La masă cu oamenii Deltei—cercetare gastronomică tradițională din Delta Dunării* (Around the table with the people from the Delta: Researching the traditional gastronomy from the Danube Delta), led by the anthropologists Vintilă Mihăilescu and implemented by the Cultural Association “Ivan Patzaichin—Mila 23,” in collaboration with the Sociology Department of the National School of Political Science and Administration in Bucharest. The aim of the project was to document the culinary experience, the knowledge about and the attitudes toward food of the inhabitants of the Delta, via observation and personal interviews and by researching reports of “local associations concerned with the natural heritage which serves as a resource for food.” The information has been dissimilated on a very rich website with “stories about gastronomy and identity,” “narrated recipes,” reports and photos,⁴² and in the form of an edited volume.⁴³

Funding possibilities provided by the *Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Romania–Republic of Serbia* has facilitated the study of food as part of immaterial cultural heritage of Banat (a region which crosses national borders), which has implications for tourism, and can thus contribute to the sustainable development of a region. Two projects financed by this program and carried out by multi-disciplinary teams coordinated

by Prof. Otilia Hedeşan from the West University of Timișoara are *Living Heritage—an Unlimited Resource for Tourism Development MIS ETC 1324* (2013–2015) and *Local Heritage for Active Tourism in Banat (HerA) EMS RORS 20* (2017–2018). Their outcomes include two books with traditional recipes,⁴⁴ a travel guide in three languages (Romanian-English-Serbian) with a chapter dedicated to “Banat for Gourmands,”⁴⁵ and a digital resource (hera.uvt.ro) which also contains information about food collected with participation of local communities and validated by researchers.⁴⁶ Another online database, created to support educational programs for heritage, was developed within the project *Digitalizarea patrimoniului cultural alimentar: Regiunea Bacău—eCULTFOOD* (Digitalization of the alimentary cultural heritage in the Bacău region). This project was undertaken by Petronela Savin, a linguist at Vasile Alecsandri University in Bacău, and financed by the program *Bridge Grant* of the Department for Funding of Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFSCDI), between 2017 and 2018. The database ecultfood.ub.ro provides the user with 1,278 recipes, collected via interviews in 34 villages in the county of Bacău. Each recipe contains a description of the content (type of recipe, ingredients used and the explanation of the preparation process), and information related to the context of the research.

The most recent project mentioned here is also coordinated by Otilia Hedeşan, with the involvement of a team of academic researchers, bearing the code PN-III-P2-2.1-PED-2019-5092 and the title *A Romanian Digital Repository on Food: Turning Knowledge Towards Society (FOODIE)*. The present work is part of this project, which aims to create connections between the two previously created digital databases, and to enrich their contents with new resources, obtained via field research in all parts of Romania and among the Romanian population in other countries.

Conclusions

SEVERAL OBSERVATIONS emerge with clarity from this survey. The history of research in the field of Romanian ethnology is characterized by projects, carried out approximately every forty years, which document and research traditional Romanian culture in national or regional dimensions. For a long period, these were supported and financed by the Romanian Academy and more recently, after the period of state communism, via research programs of national and international funding bodies.

The topic of food benefits from a constant presence in Romanian ethnologic research undertaken via research institutes. In the early questionnaires by B. P. Hasdeu and Nicolae Densușianu food appears in passing references, it is limited to its ritual aspects in the surveys conducted by the Folklore Archive of the Romanian Academy in Cluj and the Folklore Archive of Moldavia and Bukovina in Iași, and gains prominence in the research for the *Romanian Ethnographic Atlas* and in a reinvented way in the last decade. As a consequence of all these research projects, documentation exist about practices and attitudes related to food in Romanian rural contexts covering over a century and a half (considering the fact that the participants in the survey initiated by Hasdeu report on their memories of the years 1830–1850).

For over a century, the data has been collected by correspondents (mediators) with different levels of training in ethnographic fieldwork, members of the communities who report about different types of traditions, culinary ones included. This is followed by a period of several decades in which the archival data was collected only by specialists. Several of the more recent projects again involve members of the communities in the creation of ethnographic documents and materials about food, granting to some of them the status of local anthropologist, in methodological and technical contexts which differ from those of the past.

Although the collection of information about food started at the beginning of the development of the study of Romanian ethnology, being included in archival projects already at the end of the nineteenth century, the study, interpretation and publication of data collected via these surveys always suffered large delays. The periods in between the field research and the publication of the results vary from forty to ninety years. These delays might be one factor which at least partly explains the marginality of the topic of food within Romanian ethnological research.



(Translated from Romanian by MARLA CIOATĂ)

Notes

1. B. Petriceicu-Hasdeu, *Etymologicum Mangnum Romaniae: Dicționarul limbei istorice și poporane a românilor*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Stabilimentul Grafic Socec & Teclu, 1887), XVIII.
2. Ibid., VIII–XVIII.
3. For a detailed analysis, see Ovidiu Bârlea, “B. P. Hasdeu și folclorul,” in Ion Mușlea and Ovidiu Bârlea, *Tipologia folclorului din răspunsurile la Chestionarele B. P. Hasdeu*, 2nd edition, rev. and enl. by Ioan I. Mușlea, foreword by Ion Taloș (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2010), 65–80.
4. The dietary component of fasting in Christian Orthodoxy roughly corresponds to a vegan diet (with the inclusion of honey).
5. To give an example, the teacher G. Voicu from Stănișești–Tecuci neatly distinguishes between “dishes for fasting” and “dishes for *câșlegi* (days in which meat is eaten),” see Ms. rom. BAR 3431, *Răspunsuri la Chestionarul lingvistic al lui B. P. Hasdeu* XIII, 1885, 452–453 (Xerox copy consulted at the Folklore Institute of the Romanian Academy, Cluj).
6. Ibid., 449.
7. Bârlea, “B. P. Hasdeu și folclorul,” 70.
8. Nicolae Densușianu, *Cestionariu despre tradițiunile istorice și anticitățiile ȣerilor locuite de români. Partea II. Epoca de până la a. 600 d. Chr.* (Iași: Tipografia Națională, 1895), 3.
9. Nicolae Densușianu, *Dacia preistorică*, with a foreword by C. I. Istrati (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice “Carol Göbl,” 1913). Vasile Pârvan describes this work as “a phantasy novel, full of imagination and absurd philology and mythology,” in his work *Getica: O protoistorie a Daciei* (Bucharest: Cultura Națională, 1926), 1–2.

10. Nicolae Densușianu instructed his collaborators to present the questions only to the illiterate elderly, to take note of their family name, first name, age, and village. He also stressed the importance of literal transcription, avoiding “any kind of modification or addition on the part of the correspondent to the answers received” (Densușianu, *Cestionariu*, 6).
11. Ms. rom. BAR 4559, *Răspunsuri la chestionarul istoric al lui N. Densușianu. Partea a II-a, până la anul 600 d. Chr.*, 1896, 253 v. (Xerox copy consulted at the Folklore Institute of the Romanian Academy, Cluj).
12. Cf. Ovidiu Bârlea, “Prefață la prima ediție,” in *Tipologia folclorului*, 23.
13. Ion Mușlea, “Memoriu adresat Academiei Române (1929),” in Ion Mușlea, *Arhiva de Folclor a Academiei Române: Studii, memorii ale întemeierii, rapoarte de activitate, chestionare 1930–1948*, critical edition, notes, chronology, commentaries and bibliography by Ion Cuceu and Maria Cuceu (Cluj: EFES, 2005), 114.
14. For more details see Ion Talos’s study dedicated to the European tradition of folklore research via questionnaires with the help of correspondents, “Culegeri de folclor cu ajutorul corespondenților în Europa: Stadiul valorificării lor,” in *Tipologia folclorului*, 5–18; Cosmina Timocea-Mocanu, *Antropologia ritualului funerar: Trei perspective* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2013), 138–153.
15. For such a detailed analysis see my introduction in Ion Mușlea, *Schimburi epistolare cu respondenții la chestionarele Arhivei de Folclor a Academiei Române*, vol. 1, A–L, edited, notes and introduction by Cosmina Timocea-Mocanu, foreword by Ion Cuceu (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2014), 11–83.
16. Ion Mușlea, “Învățătorii și folclorul,” in *Arhiva de Folclor a Academiei Române*, 106.
17. Ibid.
18. Otilia Hedeșan, “Studiile de folclor și construcția naționalului,” lecture at Babeș-Bolyai University (Cluj-Napoca, 12 March 2009).
19. This is visible, for example, in the instructions for the completion of questionnaire four related to birth, baptism and childhood (customs and beliefs): “For every belief and custom you describe, please add something about why it is done like this, in the view of the person you interview.” Mușlea, *Arhiva de Folclor a Academiei Române*, 303.
20. In questionnaires I: *Calendarul poporului pe lunile ianuarie-februarie* (Folk calendar for the months January and February); II: *Obiceiuri de vară* (Summer customs); IV: *Obiceiurile de primăvară* (Spring customs); VII: *Calendarul poporului pe lunile octombrie-decembrie* (Folk calendar for the months October–December) and XIV: *Cnăciunul: Credințe, obiceiuri și povestiri* (Beliefs, customs and stories related to Christmas).
21. VI: *Nașterea, botezul și copilăria. Obiceiuri și credințe* (Customs and beliefs related to birth, baptism and childhood); IX: *Moartea și înmormântarea: Obiceiuri și credințe* (Customs and beliefs related to death and funerals) and XI: *Nunta: Obiceiuri și credințe* (Customs and beliefs related to weddings).
22. III: *Animalele în credințele și literatura poporului român* (Animals in Romanian beliefs and folklore); V: *Credințe și povestiri despre duhuri, ființe fantastice și vrăjitoare* (Beliefs and stories about spirits, imaginative beings and witches) and VIII: *Pământul, apa, cerul și fenomenele atmosferice după credințele și povestirile poporului* (Earth, water, the sky and natural phenomena in folk beliefs and stories).

23. Ms. AFAR 855, *Răspuns la Chestionarul X. Casa, gospodăria și viața de toate zilele (Credințe, obiceiuri, povestiri)*, made by teacher Olivia Sturzu, Târzia (Baia), 1936, 25. (The English translation focuses on communicating the content, no attempt is made to convey the orthographic and lexical characteristics of the original.)
24. Ms. AFAR 487, *Răspuns la Chestionarul IV. Obiceiuri de primăvară*, made by Florica Vodă, Feneș (Alba), 1933, 8–11.
25. Ms. AFAR 478, *Răspuns la Chestionarul IV. Obiceiuri de primăvară*, made by Astra Macaveu, Râciu (Mureș), 1933, 3–4.
26. Ms. AFAR 407, *Răspuns la Chestionarul IV. Obiceiuri de primăvară*, made by teacher Iuliu Coroiu, Bistra (Turda), 1932, 31.
27. Ms. AFAR 360, *Răspuns la Chestionarul IV. Obiceiuri de primăvară*, made by teacher Pompeiu Hossu-Longin, Poroșeni (Hunedoara), Tămășești (Sălaj), 1932, 7–8.
28. Ms. AFAR 487, 6.
29. *Baniță*: an archaic unit of measuring grains, varying from 21 to 34 kg. Ms. AFAR 541, *Răspuns la Chestionarul IV. Obiceiuri de primăvară*, made by teacher D. Ahrițculesei, Căndești (Dorohoi), 1934, 41.
30. Ms. AFAR 852, *Răspuns la Chestionarul IV. Obiceiuri de primăvară*, made by teacher Constantin Pâslaru, Vâlcele (Bacău), 1936, 9–11: “The first red egg you receive from somebody outside the family on the first day of Easter should be kept until the first day of Easter of the following year. Then the egg spoils. If there are worms, the person will be lucky, if not, the person will be unlucky. This person told me the following memory of his childhood: when he was at home with two brothers and a sister, their father told them to keep the eggs they receive on Easter Sunday, to see whether or not they will be lucky. They did as they were told. Each made a linen bag in which they put their eggs. They attached a string and hung the bags in the best (clean) room. The next year at Easter, when they came home from church, each went to get their eggs. The storyteller told me that as soon as he entered the room he saw that his bag looked as if somebody had broken it, it had fallen on the floor. When he opened the bag, he found his eggs teeming with worms. The eggs of his sister and his youngest brother also had worms. Only the egg of his middle brother was good to eat. Their father, seeing his, explained that he would not be lucky. And so it turned out, all brothers and the sister are good householders, but this one, Matei Ciobanu, has a very difficult life. (From Ioan Ciobanu from Vâlcele–Târgu-Ocna, 52 years old).”
31. Ms. AFAR 923, *Răspuns la Chestionarul XI. Nunta (Obiceiuri și credințe)*, made by teacher Constantin Pâslaru, Vâlcele (Bacău), 1937, 7–8.
32. So far the following volumes have been published: *Corpusul răspunsurilor la Chestionarele Ion Mușlea*, vol. 1, *Basarabia și Bucovina: Chestionarele II, IV, VII*, critical edition, introduction, notes and indexes by Ion Cuceu, Maria Cuceu, and Cosmina Timocea-Mocanu (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2015); vol. 2, *Moldova și Bucovina: Chestionarele II, IV, VII și Șezătoria*, critical edition, introduction, notes and indexes by Ion Cuceu, Maria Cuceu, and Cosmina Timocea-Mocanu (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2017).
33. Ion H. Ciubotaru, “Un proiect temerar,” in *Arhiva de Folclor a Moldovei și Bucovinei: 50 de ani de la înființare: În onoare Prof. univ. dr. Ion H. Ciubotaru—80. Întemeie-*

- torul Arhivei*, edited by Ioana Repciuc and Adina Hulubaș (Iași: Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza,” 2020), 51.
34. Ibid., 47.
 35. Ion H. Ciubotaru, *Catolicii din Moldova: Universul culturii populare*, vol. 2, *Obiceiuri familiale și calendaristice* (Iași: Presa Bună, 2002); id., *Ouăle de Paști la români: Vechime, semnificații, implicații ritual-ceremoniale* (Iași: Presa Bună, 2012).
 36. Silvia Ciubotaru, *Obiceiuri nuptiale din Moldova: Tipologie și corpus de texte* (Iași: Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza,” 2009); ead., *Obiceiurile agrare din Moldova raportate la spațiul național* (Iași: Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza,” 2017); Adina Hulubaș, *Obiceiuri de naștere din Moldova: Tipologie și corpus de texte* (Iași: Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza,” 2012); ead., *Arhitectura țărănească din Moldova: Tipologie și corpus de documente* (Iași: Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza,” 2020); Ion H. Ciubotaru, *Obiceiurile funebre din Moldova în context național* (Iași: Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza,” 2015).
 37. *Revista de etnografie și folclor* (Bucharest) 14, 6 (1969): 429–524 was entirely dedicated to issues related to the *Romanian Ethnographic Atlas*. It addressed diverse issues such as a general introduction, the delimitation of the topics, the methods of cartography, and a comparison with other national atlases, already published ones and those in progress.
 38. Ion Ghinoiu, gen. coord., *Alimentația: Răspunsuri la chestionarele Atlasului Etnografic Român*, vol. 1, *Oltenia* (Bucharest: Editura Etnologică, 2018), XXIV.
 39. Namely, *Chestionarul VIII: Mâncări și băuturi* (Questionnaire VII: Food and drink) of 1937, developed by the linguists Sextil Pușcariu and Ștefan Pașca, supported by the Museum of the Romanian Language; and “Plan pentru cercetarea obiceiurilor alimentare țărănești” (Plan for the research of peasant food), published by Traian Herseni and Witold Truszkowski, in *Îndrumări pentru monografiile sociologice*, edited by D. Gusti and Traian Herseni (Bucharest: Institutul de Științe Sociale al României, 1940), 101–107.
 40. Ion Ghinoiu, ed., *Atlasul Etnografic Român*, vol. 3, *Tehnica țărănească. Alimentația* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2008), 170–287.
 41. See note 38.
 42. <https://deltagastronomia.wordpress.com/>
 43. Monica Stroe and Bogdan Iancu, eds., *La masă cu oamenii Deltei: O cartografiere a practicilor gastronomice* (Bucharest: Coresi, 2012).
 44. Nicoleta Mușat and Andreea Lișiță, *Pocărnii și meșpaysuri: Dulciuri din Banat/ПИТЕ И КОЛАЧИ: СЛАТКА ТРПЕЗА БАНАТА*, translated by Eufrozina Greoneanț (Timișoara: Editura Universității de Vest, 2015).
 45. Otilia Hedeșan, ed., *Banatul în zece feluri* (Timișoara: Editura Universității de Vest, 2018), 76–81.
 46. <https://hera.uvt.ro/groups/5b16855980ea9f001616703a>.

Abstract

The Development of a Research Topic: Food in Ethnographic Surveys Conducted by Institutions

The current article reflects on ways in which food has been developed as a research topic in national and regional surveys under taken by institutes specialized in the study of traditional Romanian cultures. I analyse how questionnaires deal with the issue of alimentation, in light of the aims and purpose of the specific project in which they were used, beginning with the end of the nineteenth century. I draw attention to what kind of information about food was gathered via these questionnaires, how the information was evaluated, and the impact each survey had on the development of the topic, and implicitly on the study of food as a developing field of research. I have come to the conclusion of the marginality of this topic for long periods of time in the history of the Romanian ethnology.

Keywords

Romanian ethnology, food, questionnaire, survey, fieldwork, methodology