
BOOK REVIEWS

MONICA NEGOESCU

**Cărturari saxo-români în Transilvania
secolului XIX**

(Transylvanian Saxon scholars in the 19th
century)

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THIS VOLUME describes and analyzes the vivid and complex intercultural relationship between the Transylvanian Saxon and Romanian rural communities during the 19th century, as seen and interpreted by the Transylvanian Saxon scholars. These scholars became interested in collecting and publishing their studies on the Romanian folk beliefs and traditions because of the increasing influence of the European folklore research trends that gained significant importance in the second half of the 19th century.

Monica Negoescu, the author of this extensive study, creates a new perspective on the ancient Romanian cultural values, focusing on the contribution of the Transylvanian Saxon scholars in collecting, analyzing and promoting the Romanian folklore and traditions across Europe, as well as the moral principles that shaped the identity of the rural communities in Transylvania.

Although the documents presented in the book contain much valuable information, they have never been mentioned in any other monograph or scientific work until now. This is another element that makes Monica Negoescu's volume so captivating and complex.

The readers are presented with a unique and extremely valuable collection of folktales, myths, incantations, wooing rituals, Christmas carols written down by the Transylvanian Saxon scholars, some of which have never been published in any other scientific works. Every text is accompanied by a stylistic and literary analysis and by a short biography of each scholar which includes a presentation of their individual historical and cultural background. Another element that makes this work interesting is the comparative parallel presentation of the Romanian and Saxon folktales.

The last section of Monica Negoescu's book consists of pictures of rare and extremely valuable manuscripts (letters written by the Transylvanian Saxon scholars, fragments from their studies, front pages of various volumes, tables of contents of folk tale books). This collection of documents adds a great deal of value and importance to this entirely original and comprehensive scientific study.

The book is structured in two main sections, according to the literary genre and to the central subject of the analyzed texts. Monica Negoescu describes the significant role of folklore in the process of establishing the national identity through the representation of *the self* as mirrored by the image of *the other*, emphasizing the fact that culture and national consciousness evolve at the same time. Thus, the literary text becomes a means of creating connections between different cultures.

The first section entitled "Folk Beliefs and Traditions" analyzes the distinction

between the two main categories of folk traditions (the ones that are celebrated on certain pre-established dates and the life transition rituals). The function of life transition rituals that include specific literary forms of expression was to protect the individuals who find themselves in hostile circumstances or environments.

The author of this comprehensive study minutely describes in this section the research activity of four Transylvanian Saxon scholars (Wilhelm Schmidt, Robert Prexl, Heinrich von Wlislöcki, and Tibolt Schmidt), offering information on their personal and cultural background. By showing the different perspectives and areas of interest of the four scholars, Monica Negoescu manages to create a complete and objective image of the cultural, anthropological, sociological and historical development process of the rural Transylvanian society.

The first Transylvanian Saxon scholar whose activity in the field of folklore is being analyzed is Wilhelm Schmidt (1817–1901), a secondary school teacher in Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben) in 1854. He wrote a study on the origin of the Romanians entitled “Die Geten und Daken: Ein historischer Versuch als Beitrag zur siebenbürgischen Landeskunde” (The Getae and the Dacians: A historical attempt to contribute to the description of Transylvania), published in *Archiv des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde* (Historical Archives of Transylvania) (1859), and a volume about Romanian folk beliefs *Das Jahr und seine Tage in Meinung und Brauch der Rumänen Siebenbürgens: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntniß des Volksmythus* (The importance and meaning of the year and its days from the perspective of the Romanian communities in Transylvania: A Contribution to

understanding the Romanian folk beliefs), released in 1866 in Sibiu.

Robert Prexl, the second Transylvanian Saxon scholar whose contribution to the cultural research on Romanian folklore and traditions is presented and analyzed in this section of the volume, had no formal studies in the field of philology and theology, but he wrote a few important studies on incantations. He was allegedly Wilhelm Schmidt’s student. His collection of incantations was published in German, in the first and second volumes of the *Zeitschrift für Völkskunde* (Journal of Folklore Studies) in Leipzig in 1889 and 1890. This comprehensive study was also published in 1891 in the *Convorbiri literare* (Literary Conversations) journal. He wrote two articles on wedding, birth and funerary rituals in the *Globus: Illustrierte Zeitschrift für Länder- und Völkerkunde* (The Illustrated Journal of Cultural Studies and Ethnology). The title of the first study published in 1889 is “Rumänische Brautwerbung und Hochzeit in Siebenbürgen” (Romanian wooing and wedding rituals in Transylvania). The second one is intitled “Geburts- und Todtengebräuche der Rumänen in Siebenbürgen” (Birth and funerary rituals of the Romanians in Transylvania), and was published the same year. His studies on incantations analyze a very wide range of rituals used for curing various diseases or for making people fall in love, find their match or bring back their beloved. Furthermore, Prexl describes in these papers different methods of preparing potions which were meant to drive away the evil spirits. All these fascinating rituals had to be accompanied by words and phrases, sometimes even poems which had to be uttered in a specific way, at a precise moment of the day or night, only by old

women who had learned these magic practices from their female predecessors.

The third Transylvanian Saxon scholar whose activity is presented in this work is Heinrich von Wlislöcki (1856–1907). His main area of expertise was the gypsy culture, but in 1889/1890 he also published in Hamburg, in *Sammlung gemeinverständlicher wissenschaftlicher Vorträge*, a work entitled “Aus dem Leben der Siebenbürger Rumänen” (Aspects from the life of the Romanians in Transylvania). The main aim of this scholar was to draw the attention of Western Europe to the quasi-unknown Romanian culture, to make it part of the universal cultural heritage. Wlislöcki offers a rare glimpse into the daily life, the social climate and the unspoiled rural traditions, although he considers them quite uncivilized. He describes the relationships among the members of Romanian peasant families. Although he initially speaks about the uniqueness of the Romanian rural traditions, he later mentions the fact that the Romanians are reluctant when it comes to accepting new ideas. All these aspects are presented in a condescending tone, with subtle irony and with references to Lessing’s and Leibniz’s ideas. Still, Wlislöcki fails to take into consideration the political context of the period.

Tibold Schmidt, the fourth scholar whose contribution to a better understanding of the Romanian rural culture in Transylvania is regarded as very significant, published six studies, four of which are analyzed in this volume. His writings prove a thorough knowledge and understanding of the collected materials describing various rituals, such as *turca*, a folk play which was performed at the end of winter and the beginning of spring. He also describes the ev-

eryday aspects of life in the Romanian communities, expressing a balanced and objective point of view on these matters.

The second section of the book, “Folk Tales and Legends,” is dedicated to the Transylvanian Saxon scholars who focused their attention on the Romanian folk tales and legends (Franz Obert, Joseph Haltrich, Friedrich Müller, Joseph Carl Hintz-Hințescu, Adolf Schullerus and Pauline Schullerus). Monica Negoescu explores their studies and presents the individual contribution of all these cultural personalities to the establishment of a realistic image of the Romanian civilization.

The first scholars who began to record folk tales and legends in written form were the Schott brothers (Arthur and Albert) from Stuttgart. It was Arthur Schott, together with his collaborators who managed to collect a large variety of literary treasures, while he travelled to Transylvania and Wallachia, participating in occasional works. The result of this extensive research was comprised in a volume entitled *Walachische Märchen* (Romanian folk tales) (1845), which was highly acclaimed in Germany and Romania.

Franz Obert (1828–1908) is the most important ethnologist of the sixth decade of the 19th century. He was also considered one of the most prominent writers and pedagogues in Transylvania and an outstanding member of the Transylvanian intelligentsia. His article, “Die Mokbanen und ihre Heerden” (The mountain shepherds and their flocks of sheep) (1856) depicts the daily routines, cooking and work habits of the Transylvanian peasants living in the mountains. Along with this information, he mentions the results of the census, giving account on the real number of families living in the area during that pe-

riod. Obert also describes the practices of shepherding, the main occupation of the Romanian inhabitants in that region. Due to his notes and observations, the readers can imagine and understand the rural atmosphere as if they were direct witnesses. During his research work he collected 35 folk tales, published between 1856 and 1859 in several foreign and Romanian journals. After a few more years, Obert's collection of tales reached an astounding number: 85 folk tales and anecdotes, published in 1908, after his death.

Another Transylvanian Saxon scholar who studied the Saxon-Romanian folklore is Joseph Haltrich (1822–1886). He studied theology, classic and German philology in Leipzig. He was mainly interested in the Transylvanian Saxon folklore and folk tales, which he collected in a volume called *Sächsische Volksmärchen aus Siebenbürgen* (Transylvanian-Saxon folk tales). Joseph Haltrich gathered a group of students from the School of Pedagogical Studies and Theology in Sighișoara (Schäßburg, Segesvár), and he organized meetings, encouraging them to tell the folk tales they had heard from the elders. Consequently, he managed to create a scientific community that continued to popularize the folk heritage of Transylvania.

Monica Negoescu brings to light Friedrich Müller's (1828–1915) observations on the Romanian rural legends, which he published in an extensive volume—as well as his perspective on the historical and social development of the Romanian peasant communities in Transylvania. She also presents his contribution to society (he inaugurated a hospital and rebuilt an orphanage). Müller wrote a comparative study on the Romanian and Saxon legends, offering a new perspective

on the differences and similarities between them. He believed that every legend and myth is based on true historical facts, and he thought that legends are the ideal way of shaping the national identity and traditions.

This section of the volume also contains a pertinent analysis of Joseph Carl Hintz-Hințescu's (1828–1900) works in the field of folklore studies. He is the author of the first cookbook written in Romanian, entitled *Bucătăreasa națională* (The national cook), published in 1874. Hintz-Hințescu's collection of folk tales, proverbs, fables, stories and myths were published in several brochures, translated from German into Romanian. His largest volume (1877) contains 3,000 proverbs that were meant to teach moral values. Another significant work written by Hințescu contains 293 folk tales collected in Romania, Banat, Bukovina, Transylvania and Moravia.

Next, the readers are presented with an overall view on Adolf Schullerus' (1864–1928) scientific works and cultural activity. He was interested in the study of folklore, ethnography, literary history, theology. He inherited the passion for the Romanian language and folk tales from his mother, who was very devoted to the study of the Romanian folklore. His collection of translated tales (*Siebenbürgische Märchenbuch*/Transylvanian fairy tale book) was published posthumously in 1930 in Sibiu. Schullerus believed that tales are not meant only for children, but also for grown-ups, because everyone has something to learn from them. He is the first scholar who managed to sort the themes of folk tales into distinct categories.

Pauline Schullerus (1858–1929) is the last important scholar whose remarkable

research methods and results are examined by Monica Negoescu in this book. The author analyzes the new perspective opened by this female Transylvanian Saxon scholar on the Romanian traditions and rituals. Pauline Schullerus witnessed many religious processions during her childhood years in the countryside and consequently she wrote several studies on incantations, the use of herbs in healing procedures or in different rituals. All her first-hand experiences and the way in which she presented them in her works contributed to the creation of a genuine picture of the Transylvanian village life.

All these cultural and anthropological, social and historical facts are brought together in a captivating manner, efficiently combining the results of scientific research with the fascinating writing style. The book is very interesting and compelling, very well-documented, being suitable for readers who wish to get acquainted with the Transylvanian rural traditions, rituals and cultural life.

In our opinion, Monica Negoescu's work should become a coursebook for philology students who are interested in the Transylvanian intercultural Saxon-Romanian relationship and in the social and historical context of the 19th century. □

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MIRCEA-GHEORGHE ABRUDAN

Protopopul Aurel Munteanu (1882-1940), martir al poporului român și mucenic al Bisericii Ortodoxe

(Le Doyen Aurel Munteanu, 1882-1940, martyr du peuple roumain et de l'Église orthodoxe)

Avant-propos par ANDREI ANDREICUȚ,

postface par VASILE PUȘCAȘ

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LES EXPÉRIENCES de huit décennies qui nous séparent du soi-disant arbitrage de Vienne et de la série de tragédies individuelles et collectives qui s'ensuivirent n'ont pas conféré à l'écrit historique sur ce thème la propension au détachement objectif, élément indispensable à toute recherche en quête de la vérité. La dimension militante du discours historiographique des auteurs issus des deux nations impliquées est le résultat d'un cumul de circonstances objectives. Il s'agit, d'une part, de l'impact de ces événements sur deux réalités qui continuent à générer des défis dans le mental public contemporain, l'État et la Nation, de l'autre, du subjectivisme imposé par les affiliations ethniques et étiques des auteurs ainsi que de la pression que l'intégration de ces thèmes du passé récent dans le patrimoine de l'acte de propagande officielle a exercée sur l'effort honnête de reconstitution du passé. La succession des événements et la conduite des acteurs politiques et diplomatiques impliqués sont connues en détail, et la dynamique de ces événements est éloquente pour l'histoire du droit international ou pour la réflexion sur les conséquences que la Grande Guerre a eues sur les évolutions politiques et ethniques en Europe centrale-orientale. Par contre, leur impact au niveau de la perception des communautés roumaine et hon-