

A TRUE ANTHOLOGY OF ROMANIAN FOLKLORE FROM EASTERN SERBIA

Slavoljub Gacović, Virginia Popović (eds.), *Literatura populară a românilor din Serbia de răsărit* (Folk literature of Romanians from Eastern Serbia) (Timișoara: Editura Universității de Vest, 2022)

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This book can be considered the true anthology of the folklore of the Romanians from the Timok Valley, who have kept the oral culture particularly alive. The project was initiated by Slavoljub Gacović, historian and archaeologist from Eastern Serbia, in collaboration with Virginia Popović, university professor at the Department of Romanian Language and Literature of the University of Novi Sad. The authors managed to put together a large part of the rich folk creation of the Romanians from Timok, which was collected by the great Romanian and foreign scholars, philologists and ethnologists, as well as by amateurs who are part of the Romanian community on the territory of Serbia from risen.

The book is divided into five volumes, which in turn are divided into chapters, and these into sub-chapters according to the concept that the authors adopt and present in the Introduction.

The first part of volume one is the *Introduction*, in which the authors thoroughly explain the transcription system used in each volume. The authors bring the differences related to the way of writing the sub-dialects and dialects of the Romanian language in this area. The material, being extracted from different sources, previously published in both alphabets (Latin and Cyrillic) with several solutions regarding the same graphemes, is transcribed in these books according to the orthography accepted by the Romanian Linguistic Atlas and with the AFI alphabet (apart from the first volume, where the authors have decided to reproduce the material in the form in which it was originally published). The sources from which the material is extracted and all necessary fiddler/informant data are also presented. The introduction contains information about previous research in relation to Romanian folklore in the area of eastern Serbia, and the most important part is the detailed elaboration of the genres and species of poetry and prose contained in the volumes, which are divided in an original way by thematic.

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The first volume includes the material published in various books and articles between 1889 and 1942, collected by Romanian researchers from Romania, Serbs and foreigners, who collected the dialectal and folklore material, such as Emil Petrovici, Ion Pătruț, Gustav Weigand, Émile Picot, Stevan Mačaj, Tihomir Đorđević, Jovan Đokić. The first volume consists of the following chapters: *Ritual and Ceremonial Poetry*, *Poetry of Enchantments*, *Epic Poetry (Ballads)*, *Lyrical Poetry*, the fifth chapter is devoted to stories, and the sixth to proverbs and riddles. The folk creation presented in this volume informs us about the worldview of the Romanian people from the above-mentioned land, who, like the Romanian people across the Danube, believe in mythological beings such as the Forest's Mother (Muma Pădurii) and the fairies (ielele), sing about the pastoral life and evoke that mioritic space about which the greatest Romanian scholars, Lucian Blaga, Mircea Eliade, et al, wrote.

The second volume of this book is devoted to the poetry of annual and calendar customs and the poetry of the anthropological cycle of customs. The first chapter includes the winter repertoire, where carols appear as the most representative poems, then the winter-spring repertoire, where there are poems about the Annunciation, the awakening of nature and life, which comes with spring and is celebrated on Lazarus Saturday, the poems about the invocation of rain through the deity Păpăruda with the aim of fertilizing the earth during drought, etc. The anthropological cycle includes the poems of the birth cycle, the poems related to raising children, the wedding repertoire and the funeral repertoire. The funeral repertoire includes parties, testimonies, wails and laments from different localities of eastern Serbia, most of them from the area inhabited by so-called “rumâni ungureni” whose subdialect is the Banat one. This volume includes the material collected and published by many collectors from the area of Eastern Serbia - many of them being ethnologists, ethnomusicologists, but not only that. This volume also includes the original material collected by Slavoljub Gacović.

The third volume is entitled *The Poetry of Enchantments* and contains incantations against mythological beings, for love charms and against them, charms for banishing charms such as the blind eye, especially of children, various diseases and situations in everyday life, especially in relation to interaction with people, but spells made with the aim of harming animals are not excluded either. Charms for the dying and the dead are also found in this volume, where a large number of poltergeist (‘moroi’) charms are present.

The fourth volume comprises two parts – epic poetry and lyric poetry. The epic part is divided into several sub-chapters: *Fantastic ballads*, which tell about the “making” of the Earth and contain cosmic elements such as the sun and the moon, but also include poems with reference to different saints, especially Good Friday; *Valiant ballads*, among which are the “voinicesti” ones, include a wide range of characters, some of them also present in Serbian folklore (Dojčin); *The outlaw songs* tell about the important characters in the history of the Romanian people (Ștefan-vodă), but also the Serbian one (Gruia lui Novac, the son of Baba Novac, an important hero

in the history of Romanians and Serbs, who fought against the Turks, and is originated from Eastern Serbia). Besides these heroes, the poems also feature some local characters; *Patriotic ballads*, which contain many poems dedicated to Haiduc Velcu; *Pastoral ballads*, where the Miorița variants found among the Romanians of the Timok Valley also appear; *Ballads of the Feudal Court* also includes the legend of the Master Manole and the creation myth, where there are many variants of this ballad, and this part of the book also contains poems dedicated to the Balkan hero during the Ottoman occupation, Marko Kraljević. In addition to such ballads, this volume also includes family ballads. The lyrical part consists of songs of love, longing and mourning (doine), brokenness, but also satirical songs and the so-called songs of shame, folk poems that refer to sexual life and abound in obscene words.

The fifth volume of this work is divided into the following chapters: *Stories* and *Aphoristic, enigmatic literature and other literary forms*. Among the many stories, taken from the sources described in the *Introduction*, we can find many fables, stories about the creation of the world, about the antagonism between God and the devil, many of them containing fantastic elements from mythology ('zmeu' - dragon, Baba Marta), cosmic (moon, sun), religious (God, the saints, the creation of the world, the Tower of Babel), but also others related to different segments of reality. This chapter of the book also includes some humorous stories.

The folk literature of Romanians from Eastern Serbia is an enormous contribution to the culture and literature of the Romanian people in this area. Language, customs and oral creations are the most important elements for preserving the culture and identity of the Romanians in Eastern Serbia, who are facing a violent process of Vlachization, interpretation of the Romanians from this area as a separate group, or a Slavic/Serbian population romanized over time. The folk creations of this group are inspired by Romanian folklore, Romanian and Slavic mythology, Christian and pagan faith, the historical-political and social context of the Balkans.

Slavoljub Gacović and Virginia Popovici, two researchers with extensive education in the field of Romanian history and literature, prove through this enterprise that the culture and history of Romanians from Timok are particularly rich, and this richness is also manifested through the language - on the one hand archaic, but on the other enriched by many Slavic elements, especially Serbianisms. Through this book, the beliefs of the Romanian people in Eastern Serbia, their fears, magical practices and rituals, as well as Christian practices, can be reconstructed. This book reveals the world image of the archaic Romanian man from the lands of eastern Serbia.

This great project of a true anthology of Romanian folklore from Eastern Serbia can serve as an excellent basis for future research in the field of literature, ethnology and linguistics, especially dialectology, given that it also presents original material collected and transcribed by Slavoljub Gacović and his collaborators, at the same time putting together the material already published, and certainly little known to the general Romanian public in Serbia, who will now have the opportunity to get to know their own culture better.

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