THE GEOGRAPHY OF TRADITION. A CASE STUDY: "THE ROMANIAN ETHNOGRAPHIC ATLAS"

Ioan Dănilă

Prof., PhD., "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău

Abstract: The paper relies on the inventory of the localities from Bacău county included in the third volume of the "Atlas", regarded as a true scientific event in promoting folk art and food related traditions. Bacău seems privileged, owning 19 localities (Agăş, Bereşti-Bistriţa, Bereşti-Tazlău, Berzunţi, Cleja, Corbasca, Coţofăneşti, Dărmăneşti, Glăvăneşti, Ludaşi, Mănăstirea-Caşin, Mărăşti, Oituz, Onceşti, Plopana, Răcăciuni, Răchitiş, Răchitoasa, Roşiori), selected from different geographical points that cover the entire socio-economic structure of the region. Eating habits, food supplies and cooking devices are registered as dating from the latter half of the 20th century. The results of the ethnological investigation should be expanded and correlated both at the syntagmatic and paradigmatic level.

Keywords: folk technique, Bacău county, food traditions, syntagmatic and paradigmatic extension

"Atlasul etnografic român" (AER) / "The Romanian Ethnographic Atlas" (REA) is, along with linguistic atlases, a fundamental tool for research on national spirituality. Like any auxiliary used in the extensive process of investigating Romanian specificity, it has come a long way. In 1963, Romulus Vuia proposed "the development of an archive of documents of oral history"[1)], but the initiative had been older, since the 19th-century manifestation of "a natural reaction to the standardization of local languages and traditions, visible in the Western European countries"[2)]. In a session held on the 5th of October 1965 by the Academy of the S.R.R (the Socialist Republic of Romania), through the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore and the State Committee for Culture and Art, there were discussed the main theoretical and methodological issues related to elaborating the AER. In 1967, the *Atlas* was introduced in the research plan of the Institute, and two years later the profile publications[3)] hosted the presentation of the laboratory for the preparation of a process of an amazing scale. Originally, there were several questionnaires (one about "Food"), with 1,200 questions and 3,000 sub-questions, and by 1976 all the material had been limited to 8 volumes. In parallel to this, the *AER Bulletin* was published, with 9 numbers between 1977 and 1982. There were taken into account the particularities of the thematic manifestation among national minorities, being surveyed 60 villages inhabited by "Bulgarians, Czechs, Croatians, Germans, Hungarians, Székelys, Russians (Lipovans), Serbs, Slovaks, Tatars, Turks and Ukrainians"[4)], in order to elaborate an *Atlas of Ethnic Minorities in Romania* (AEMR). The ethnic structuring of Romania complied with the census data from March 15, 1966.

Between 1972 and 1982, there were conducted field investigations. The result was a documentary material of exceptional importance, which began to be published in the early years of the new millennium. In the AER, designed to include five volumes, to which several

BDD-A25618 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:48 UTC)

generations of researchers contributed, there was recorded the "spreading of Romanian words in all provinces inhabited by Romanians"[5], "because, as it is known, from Nietzsche onwards, the grammar of language expresses the grammar of spirit. This has been proven, for Romanian language, by the writings of Mircea Vulcănescu and Constantin Noica"[6]. In the same years, the Iaşi Centre for Linguistics, Literary History and Folklore of the Academy of the S.R.R. included, in the research development plan, the elaboration of *The Folklore Archive of Moldova and Bukovina*, for which a proper Questionnaire was developed[7]. The opening "Methodical Letter" comprises technical specifications such as: "The transcription of the informers' responses will be as faithful as possible to the informers' normal way of speaking. For example: *cîntic di jăli, discîntic di muşcătúrî di şărpi* etc. instead of *cîntec de jale*" etc.[8] The answers had to be submitted, by the appointed teacher, by March 20, 1971. In 1978, the same Centre, now called The Center for Linguistics, Literary History and Folkore of the Iaşi Branch of the Romanian Academy, edited a *Chestionar toponimic entopic general, cu un glosar de entopice onomasiologic / General toponymic questionnaire, with an onomasiological glossary of regionalisms*.

The Coordination Committee of the *Atlas* (N. Nistor, Georgeta Stoica, Romulus Vulcănescu, Tancred Bănăţeanu, Gheorghe Focşa, Cornel Irimie, Corneliu Broche, Paul Drogeanu, Nicolae Dunăre, Ion Ghinoiu, Radu Maier, Paul Petrescu, Paul Simionescu, Ion Vlăduţiu and Boris Zderciuc) comprises only one "provincial" person – Cornel Irimie, Director of the "Bruckenthal" Museum from Sibiu – as the task was entrusted to the Institute of Ethnology and Dialectology in Bucharest. Between 1972 and 1975, there "were printed 22 thematic questionnaires, which were successively resized and, as such, experimented and applied during field surveys"[9]. (The Chapter "*Food of the rural population*" was elaborated between 1969-1972, by M. Sadoveanu[10].) There were expectations, in 1969, that "the AER would be issued during the years 1974-1977, on condition that the material-technical basis for this synthesis work would be ensured"[11].

Zoning of the territory imposed the "defining or outlining of the concept of ethnographic area[12], a particularly complex operation and the sampling followed the experience resulted from consultation of a large number of similar works published in the country and the world, including the USA[13]. The mapping relied on the model of linguistic geography, being cited its founder, Jules Gilliéron[14], but also on the *Sociological Atlas of Romania*, elaborated in 1940. The selection of the localities investigated relied on the experience of linguistic atlases. There was preferred the same inventory as in the geographic, archaeological, anthropological and, of course, linguistic atlases. In general, there were selected localities with an average number of inhabitants, but also with a significant past: "Choosing ancient settlements for AER is especially valuable as sedimentation of the elements of material and spiritual culture has been constant over time"[15]. The working team consulted the major ethnographic atlases issued in the world, observing that the "Swedish, the Austrian and the Swiss atlases were concerned with the specific of national food to a relatively wide extent"[16]. Regarding the content of the network-survey for the AER, the 2003 coordinator (and the following ones) of the *Atlas* will review it[17], like his colleague Radu O. Maier who, inter alia, raised the issue of exploiting materials existing in "different memorial-museum houses"[18].

It is necessary to make one specification: given the historical context in which the drafting of the *Atlas* took place (1965 and the following decade), when the pressure of the ideological factor was visible, researchers from the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore had the courage to admit the force of model of research teams from Western countries: Sweden, Switzerland, the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, Portugal, Netherlands, Greece, Finland[19], connected with the Soviet bloc countries: Poland, the Russian SFSR, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia etc. At that time, there was drafted the *Ethnographic Atlas of Europe*, for which meetings had taken place in Zagreb (1966), Bonn (1968) and Helsinki

BDD-A25618 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:48 UTC)

(1970). It goes without saying that the "themes from the *Ethnographic Atlas of Romania* included all the themes from the *Ethnographic Atlas of Europe*"[20].

The work has a downside: "white spots", which claim a right to representation for one reason or another, missed the entrance into the *Atlas*, and "future generations of ethnographers will not be able to fill these gaps with regard to our folk traditional culture"[21]. This does not mean that the application of the questionnaires will be stopped, even if the results will relate only to the dynamics of the scientific discipline at the national level. Perhaps the most comprehensive presentation of the requirements, risks and responsibilities of elaborating the *Atlas* was made by Ion Vlăduţiu. Regarding the conditions that a locality would have to meet in order to be selected, he pinpoints three of them: completeness ("to contain, on its territory, most and, if possible, all of the selective aspects of traditional folk culture that are the object of the *Atlas*"[22]), continuity ("the locality should be old and rich in tradition"[23]) and truthfulness ("the selected locality should possess, even today, as much as possible, traditional complexes of culture – both material and spiritual – in order not to be forced to resort to reconstruction in all cases"[24]).

The items described so far have constituted a focus of the team members of the Project *Digitization of cultural food heritage. The region of Bacău – eCULTFOOD* (PN-III P2-2.1-BG-2016-0390), assumed by the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău, in partnership with the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi and the Cultural Association "Art - Traditions - Heritage without Borders" from Bacău. The objectives are mainly cultural (collective mind inventory on habits, customs, prejudices, daily rhythms etc., as marks of national identity), also including the economic component (identification of healthy and sustainable food resources). It was taken into account the reality that the food act achieved, "in time, the connotations of a cultural act with relevant meanings for knowledge and understanding of human life"[25]. Under these circumstances, "it may express different facets of the cultural identity and alterity of a group, helping to shape a nuanced image of it"[26].

The starting point was the third volume of the *Romanian Ethnographic Atlas* (2008), subtitled *Traditional Techniques. Foods*, which comprises the concentrated ethnographic information collected between 1972 and 1983. There are marked three distinct periods of manifestations of such phenomena: 1900, 1900-1983, respectively 1983. Our focus was the final part of the *Atlas* on "Food" (pp. 172-287), "regarded as a sign of ethnic or regional status, age or gender of the person, but especially of the socioeconomic condition, customizing cultures, countries, areas, individuals"[27]. Diachronically, constant adaptation to often austere living conditions led the locals to make progress in the great adventure of existence at the mouths of the old river, so "between cracking wheat grains with one's teeth and grinding at the mill, the Carpathian-Danubian people underwent an impressive technological and spiritual process"[28].

Bacău county has 19 localities (Agăş, Bereşti-Bistriţa, Bereşti-Tazlău, Berzunţi, Cleja, Corbasaca, Coţofăneşti[29] Dărmăneşti, Glăvăneşti, Ludaşi, Mănăstirea-Caşin, Mărăşti, Oituz, Onceşti, Plopana, Răcăciuni, Răchitiş, Răchitoasa, Roşiori), located in (sub)hilly and mountainous areas, with varying economic potential and combined religious composition (Orthodox and Roman Catholic). The technical data of the county are, for the year 1966: area of 6630 km^2; 608.319 inhabitants; 65.8% rural population; 91.8 inh./km^2 density; 80 communes; 491 villages; 16 – the representation norm of the communes in AER (1/5); 98 – the number of AER villages, the representation norm (1/5)[30]. Located in the top quarter of the counties by area and number of communes, in the top seven by number of inhabitants and in the top two quarters by share of rural population and population density, the Bacău county ranks fourth by number of villages (after Alba, Argeş and Vâlcea), which earned it one of the highest shares of representation in the AER[31]. An area of the county provides an illustration for the balance changes between urban and rural areas, with regard, inter alia, to "the moving of the

BDD-A25618 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:48 UTC)

active forces of the population towards areas of industrial and constructive focus" (the Iron Gates, the Steel and Mining Company of Galaţi, the offshore petrochemical platforms Trotuş and Argeş etc."[32)].

Reconstructing the route of ethnographers, we began our thematic surveys and noted our initial observations, which will coagulate with our subsequent findings to form a general picture of the cultural food heritage, for example Shrovetide – November 14 – and the first day of fasting, November 15, 2016 at Glăvăneşti, Muncelu and Frumuşelu. A real dispute arose, at Balcani, on the etymology of a word in the culinary domain: stew (Rom. *tocană*), "whose Latin etymology – as Ofelia Văduva argues – had been clearly established - DLR, tome XI"[33)].) The certification in *Lesicon romanesc – latinesc – unguresc – nemţesc.../Lexicon valachico – latino – hungarico – germanicum...*, Buda, 1825, reveals it as being of Hungarian origin, *tókany*)[34)]. Its meanings belong to the culinary field (meanings 1-8) and domestic industry: "dough made of flaxseed and bran, which are used to coat the hemp warp threads to avoid teasing during weaving" (reg.)[35)]. Another category of speakers considered that the meaning was quite the opposite: it entered the Hungarian language from Romanian. In this case, we say that the word may be derived from the verb 'to chop' (Rom. *a toca*, from the Latin *toccare), plus the suffix *-an(ă)* [36)].

The *Romanian Ethnographic Atlas* is a necessary support for further research in the field. The maps (that we have processed to extract data on Bacău county, organized under a new heading) record the "components of the food of peasants: raw materials, their processing (thermal or mechanical) and finished goods (dishes)"[37)]. The themes and sub-themes are:

EVERYDAY FOOD

A.I. Cereals used as foods
A.I.1. Wheat. Wheat dishes
A.I.1. Bread. Composition, ferments
A.I.2. Pasta
A.I.3. Wheat flour pies. Fillings
A.I.4. Wheat flour sweets
A.I.2. Corn and other cereals dishes
A.II. EDIBLE PLANTS
Edible plants collected from the wild
A.III. VEGETABLES
A.III.1. Raw vegetables
A.III.2. Thermally processed vegetables
A.III.3. Thermal processing of vegetables with eggs, dairy products and animal fats
A.IV. FRUITS
A.IV.1. Fruits collected from the wild, used raw
A.IV.2. Cultivated fruits, used raw
A.IV.3. Fruit dishes
A.V. MEAT
A.V.1. Domestic animals and poultry
A.V.2. Meat dishes
A.V.2.1. Domestic animals
A.V.2.2. Poultry
A.V.2.3. Special dishes made of domestic animals meat
A.V.2.4. Wild birds and animals
A.V.2.5. Fish, crayfish, clams, snails
A.V.2.6. Regional names

BDD-A25618 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:48 UTC)

A.V.3. Fats
A.VI. EGGS
Eggs as food
A.VII. MILK
A.VII.1. Milk as food
A.VII.2. Dairy products
A.VII.3. Dairy products as daily food
A.VII.4. Milk and cereal dishes
A.VIII. PRESERVES
A.VIII.1. Preservation and storing of vegetables
A.VIII.2. Preservation of fruits
A.VIII.3. Meat preservation
A.VIII.4. Fish preservation
B. RITUAL FOOD[38)]
B.1. Festive meals
B.2. Christmas and Easter doughs
B.3. Old fasting dishes
B.4. The Easter pie. Geographical distribution
B.5. Soft honey breads (Rom. *mucenici* – literally, martyrs)
B.6. Birth bread rings
B.7. Wedding bread rings
B.7.1. Decoration shapes and decoration procedures
B.7.2. Ritual and ceremonial destinations
B.8. Bread rings and dough shapes for funerals
B.8.1. Shapes
B.8.2. Decoration procedures
B.8.3. Ritual and ceremonial destinations
B.9. Persons specialized in modelling dough
C. DRINKS
C.1. Homemade alcoholic drinks
C.2. Brandy (Rom. *ţuica*). Local names
C.3. Homemade non-alcoholic drinks

By vertically arranging the 19 localities of Bacău county, repeated for each theme and sub-theme, there have resulted several findings regarding the zoning of certain dishes or the sporadic presence of one of them. For example, only at Cleja (a village with a Csango majority) there is prepared "cabbage water with wheat, corn flour"[39)], but this dish is also encountered in other areas of the country: Dulceşti (Neamţ), Braniştea (Galaţi), Valea cu Apă (Gorj), Jina (Sibiu), Căpuşul de Câmpie (Mureş), Fântânele-Rus (Sălaj), Poiana Stampei (Suceava) etc. Therefore, if interpreted at the level of the county, one may deduce that the dish is specific to Roman-Catholic communities, when it is, in fact, spread at the national level.
Similarly, one may interpret the presence only at Oituz (a community with mixed population in religious terms: Orthodox and Catholic) of soft honey breads (Rom. *mucenic* – literally, martyr) in the form of a "circle (ring)"[40)]. This dish from the family of bread rings may also be found at Albac (Alba, the only locality in the entire Transylvania), Lieşti (Galaţi), Siliştea (Constanţa), Cireşu (Mehedinţi) and throughout the Southern Carpathians and Greater Wallachia. The immediate conclusion would be that in Csango settlements (predominant in Bacău), the soft honey breads have a circle shape (ring), especially since on the neighbouring page 266, there is reproduced the photograph of an oven, with the explanation: "In Moldavia, there are prepared baked soft honey breads: Moldova, Bacău county, I.H. Ciubotaru"[41)]. (Ion H. Ciubotaru is

BDD-A25618 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:48 UTC)

known as a researcher of Roman-Catholics from Moldavia; he authored three volumes of the series *The Catholics of Moldavia and their Traditional Culture*).
What the *Atlas* records as mapping and encoded in a system of symbols was designed in a cycle of ethnographical documents consisting of the same collection of the Institute of Bucharest and in the *AER Bulletin*, which complements and supports the main stage of the profile research. By identifying other subjects, narrativizing habits sedimented in the collective mind and recording everything in video format, the team of the Project *Digitization of cultural food heritage. Bacău region* proposes an augmentation of the same special archive and, implicitly, a new perspective on the realities that are caught in a dynamics related to the very human nature.

Endnotes

1. Ion Ghinoiu, *Preface* to "Atlasul etnografic român", vol. I, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Române, 2003, p. 15.
2. *Ibidem*.
3. *Revista de etnografie şi folclor* (Editor-in-chief, Mihai Pop; Managing editor, Ion Goliat) has published, starting with 1969, articles on zoning, sampling, mapping and inventorying as preliminary operations to conducting research in compliance with the rigours imposed by specialized works in Europe and across the globe. The editors issued a thematic number (6/1969) dedicated to the topic of the *Atlas*.
4. Ion Ghinoiu, *op. cit*., p. 16. We have tacitly replaced *ucrainieni* by *ucraineni*.
5. Eugen Simion, *Argument* to the "Atlasul...", *op. cit.*, p. 11.
6. *Ibidem*.
7. The Academy of the SRR, The Center for Linguistics, Literary History and Folkore, *Chestionar folcloric şi etnografic general*, Iaşi, 1970.
8. *Ibidem*, pp. VI-VII.
9. The Council for Socialist Culture and Education, The Institute of Ethnology and Dialectology, *Atlasul etnografic al României. Chestionar*, 3, "Ocupaţii", Bucureşti, f.e., 1976, p. II. On the cover page, "The Institute of Ethnology and Dialectology".
10. The name does not appear in the dictionaries of folklorists Iordan Datcu and S. C. Stroescu. Of course, this is not the writer Mihail Sadoveanu. Equally, the name of Ion Goliat is not mentioned in these documentation works. In no. 6/1971 there is mentioned the full name: Mircea Sadoveanu.
11. Ion Goliat, *Atlasul etnografic al României*, in "Revista de etnografie şi folclor", tome 14, no. 6/1969, p. 432.
12. Cornel Irimie, *Aspecte ale zonării în "Atlasul etnografic al României*", in "Revista de etnografie...", *op. cit*., p. 437.
13. Cornelia Belcin, Alexandru Popescu, *Aplicaţiile eşantionării în realizarea A.E.R.*, in "Revista...", *op. cit*. The method of "the main components" was borrowed from American ethnographers (p. 458).
14. Cf. Paul Simionescu, *Cartografierea – sistem de reprezentare a fenomenelor corelate, în unele discipline sociale*, in "Revista...", *op. cit*., p. 467.
15. Ion Ghinoiu, *Criterii de selectare a localităţilor de anchetat pentru A.E.R.,* in "Revista...", *op. cit.*, p. 484.
16. Ioana-Maria Milcu, *Despre structura tematică a atlaselor etnografice naţionale şi internaţionale*, in "Revista...", *op. cit*., p. 509.
17. In "Revista...", *op. cit.*, tome 16, no. 3/1971, pp. 237-246.
18. Radu O. Maier, *Unele probleme ale cartografierii în „Atlasul etnografic al României"*, in "Revista...", *op. cit*., nr. 4/1971, p. 330.

BDD-A25618 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:48 UTC)

19. Cf. Ion Vlăduţiu, *Principii şi metode de realizare a „Atlasului etnografic al României”*, in “Revista...”, *op. cit.*, no. 6/1971, p. 433. Note that Sweden is ranked first.
20. *Ibidem*, p. 441.
21. *Ibidem*.
22. *Ibidem*, p. 453.
23. *Ibidem*.
24. *Ibidem*.
25. Ofelia Văduva, “*Paşi spre sacru*. Din etimologia alimentaţiei româneşti”, Bucureşti, Editura Enciclopedică, 1996, p. 7.
26. *Ibidem*.
27. Ofelia Văduva, *Alimentaţia. Prezentare generală*, in “Atlasul etnografic român” (coord., Ion Ghinoiu), volume 3, “Tehnica populară. Alimentaţia”, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Române, 2008, p. 172. The work carries the heading of the Romanian Academy – the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore “Constantin Brăiloiu” and is published by S. C. *Magic Print* S.R.L. Oneşti, with very high graphic quality.
28. Ion Ghinoiu, *Prefaţă* to “Atlasul...”, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
29. In *Atlas*, “Coţofăneşti”; phonetism from Greater Wallachia, like the “localities from the Petroşeni Depression” (instead of *Petroşani*), in an article on the *Atlas*, in “Revista de etnografie şi folclor” (no. 6/1969, p. 483).
30. Cf. Ion Ghinoiu, *Probleme ale fixării reţelei-anchetă..., op. cit.,* p. 244.
31. *Ibidem*. The data refer to the year 1966.
32. Paul Petrescu, *Despre înregistrarea construcţiilor în atlasele etnografice*, in “Revista...”, *op. cit.*, nr. 6/1969, p. 496.
33. Ofelia Văduva, *Alimentaţia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 172.
34. The Romanian Academy, the Institute of Linguistics “Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti”, *Micul dicţionar academic*, *Pr-Z*, Bucureşti, Editura “Univers enciclopedic”, 2003, *s.v.*, DLRM (1958), NDULR (2006), DEXI (2007), DEX (2016), DEI (1931; Candea and Adamescu) mention the same etymology.
35. *Ibidem*.
36. Cf. Giorge Pascu, *Sufixele româneşti*, Bucureşti, Ed. “Socec”, 1916, p. 291.
37. Ofelia Văduva, *Alimentaţia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 173.
38. We have replaced the syntagm “food for celebrations” from the *Atlas* with “ritual food”, to include funeral rites as well.
39. *Atlasul...*, p. 265. On the same map, *coleaşa* is written with a parasite *c* (**coleaşcă* - carriage), but on the next page (264) one can read its correct form, twice.
40. *Ibidem*, p. 267.
41. *Ibidem*, p. 266.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research and Innovation, CNCS/CCCDI – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P2-2.1-BG-2016-0390, within PNCDI III.

BDD-A25618 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:48 UTC)