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THE LITTLE WHITE / BLACK BOOK OF THE ETHNOLOGICAL ARCHIVE OF THE MUSEUM OF THE ROMANIAN PEASANT 2009–2019

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ABSTRACT

In the last 10 years, the Ethnological Archive of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant has gone through different stages during a period marked, on the one hand, by the settling down of the Museum, and on the other hand, by the passing of the torch from the “old” to the “new” generation. At present, the Archive is facing an ambiguous era: while the team blossoms, the lack of vision and financial resources in the wider Romanian cultural context pulls it back. We tell the journey of an Archive kept constantly alive by the people who managed, explored and contributed to its growth; we look back at the successes and the failures, in order to open up the Archive for reflection and possible solutions.

KEYWORDS

Museum, archive, ethnology, subjectivity, captivity, interdisciplinary team.



The past lives, it is alive, it changes depending on what happens.

Octavian Paler

The adolescent archive

The ethnological archive of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant (MRP) is made up of the fruits of field investigations carried out over time by researchers, together with acquisitions and donations as selected and appropriately conserved by archivists. Categorised in accordance with the demands of each period—its preferred academic areas, methodology, currents of thought and trends—these are subsequently studied and exploited in the course of individual and institutional projects. If we trace this process step by step we will be able to see that the supposed objectivity of the testimony provided by the physical items has to be set against the subjectivity inherent in the human factor—inevitably involved in the putting-together of the Archive.

The position of the Archive at the outset of the decade in question was as follows. The archive had finally been recovered in its entirety from the places of storage in which the avatars of its history¹ had dispersed it; it had experienced a visible and positive growth as a result of the research associated with the work of establishing the Museum of the Romanian Peasant, had taken on a distinct personality and was already on the way to attaining organic coherence in its efforts to achieve an identity of its own.

Thus, in 2009, the Archive was swinging in an adolescent way between enthusiasm at what had been achieved and the demons of entropy.

Enchantment and captivity

If the Archive were a person, it would be a young girl who had recently become an adult, inquisitive by nature and always open to what was new. Brought up in the city as one of a numerous family, her childhood would nevertheless have been shaped by the stories told by her countryside grandparents, with whom she spent her summers and holidays. She was compelled to move from house to house, always in search of a place to live and managing time and time again to make a home for herself in fresh surroundings. She wears fine jewellery and makes collections of small objects, scraps of life that she regards as valuable goods. She likes to put things in order and knows where each of her possessions is to be found—but this is an order known to her alone. To understand her you will need to arm yourself with great patience. She is reluctant to reveal her secrets, and not everyone is permitted to know them.

If the Archive were an object, it would be a colour-enhanced X-ray painted in layers. An image of everyday reality created using modern scientific recording techniques would be overlaid by a succession of subjective impressions produced over the decades by the spon-

1) The Museum's archive of ethnological documents came into being at the same time as the National Art Museum (1906); at the beginning of the 1950s, when the political order changed, it was moved along with the Museum – which became the Museum of Folk Art – when its building was requisitioned to house the Museum of the History of the Communist Party; in 1990 it returned to its former premises in Kiseleff Avenue, to the newly-established Museum of the Romanian Peasant, and at this point it also took under its wing a part of the communist archive.

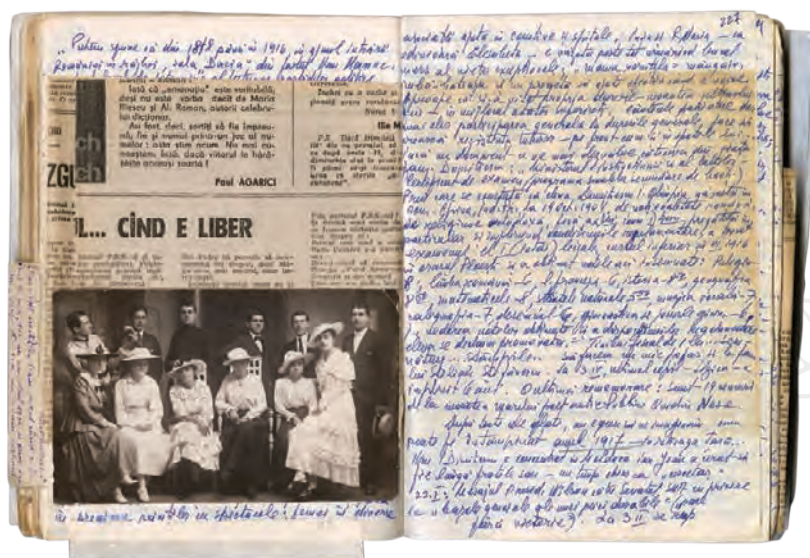
taneous actions, decisions and visions of the people who chose what should be produced, preserved and archived and how this should be done.

In either case, by making it hard for its depths to be plumbed and by amassing over time secrets prepared to tell a story, any genuine archive becomes a captive world in the mind and heart of those who care for it. And the more honestly the Archive allows itself to be known, the more it will enchant its users by (in its turn) taking them captive.

Mish-mash and inspiration

Frustrated by the awareness of their own ephemerality, people often seek the purpose of life in leaving behind them something that will last. These pieces of evidence about the world—as experienced—have formed around the Archive a community of people who have entrusted it with the task of safeguarding an enormous variety of artefacts which they considered to be important ways of keeping alive the memory of their families or of the places and events that had shaped their lives. Some of these objects, donated together with their life stories, initially seemed to be of merely personal and emotional value but have been shown through research to be symbolic testimony to the urban and rural daily life.

The opening up of the Archive to a developing community has led to a diversifying-by-theme of materials held that is so “ex-centric” that it has at times become extremely difficult to manage. However, it has become clear that the users of the Archive not only enjoy the way surprises occur during the search process but even frequently feel inspired by their struggles to find their bearings. That being so, the way materials are organised by deposits and collections has been greatly refined over the past ten years, and search systems—including digital search engines—have been constantly rethought, although not in such a way as to rule out intuitive methods.



Eugenia Ionescu's journal. Excerpt from notebook no 01, 1976-1992.

Some facts and figures about the Ethnological Archive of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant

- ✕ One hermetically sealed 125 m³ container with movable, adjustable-height metal shelves;
- ✕ Over 80,000 artefacts, divided into three institutional funds inherited from the Museum of National Art, the Museum of Folk Art and the Museum of the History of the Communist Party, along with the Museum of the Romanian Peasant's current fund for anthropological and museum research;
- ✕ Over 60 collections that have been put together according to creator, provenance or recording technology;
- ✕ Eight categories grouped according to support medium:

② *Negatives collection* (1880-2000): over 20,000 negatives of various formats on glass, metal and film showing images taken during fieldwork recording, rural and urban scenes, family portraits, museum objects and museum halls. There is also a series of stereoscopic² slides showing photographs of city scapes and of the First World War;

② *Transparency collection* (1932-2000): over 18,000 colour slides, some from field research and other recordings exhibitions held at the Museum;

2) Glass transparencies giving a 3D effect (using two images viewed through a stereoscopic viewer).



② *Photograph collection* (1870-2000): original prints signed by famous photographers (Carol Popp Szathmari, Ianaki and Milton Manakia, Franz Duschek—father and son, Franz Mandy, Adler Leopold, Alexandru Roșu, Kiruleanu, Emil Fischer and others), contact prints, and enlargements of up to 100 x 200 cm intended for display;

② *Sound collection*: shellac and vinyl discs of propaganda speeches from the Communist period, audio cassettes and CDs of oral history interviews, recordings of traditional music and exhibition soundtracks;

② *Video collection*: rolls of 16 and 35 mm film of Communist era propaganda, video cassettes (VHS, SVHS, Hi8, UMATIC, Beta, DAT) of footage and edited recordings introducing the MRP; CDs and DVDs of visual anthropology;

② *Graphics collection* (1870 to the present day): old administrative documents, diaries, oracle books,³ peculiar written materials, correspondence;

② *Art collection* (1880 to the present day): paintings, drawings, architectural boards;

② *Born digital items* (2000 to the present day): photographic, audio and video documentary materials;

② *Objects*: vintage devices.

3) Notebook of a youngster, having a different question on every page, to be answered by friends.

Bucharest panoramic view, cca. 1872-1882, most probably made by Franz Duschek. Excerpt.



Irrespective of medium or scale, the contents of these collections stand as testimony to two interpenetrating worlds, rural and urban, captured over a period of more than 140 years.

✕ *The most overwhelming collection: Eugenia Ionescu*—the personal diary of a nun who used to be an accountant in a provincial town; it runs to 75 x 300 page volumes, in tiny handwriting, with family photographs and contemporary press cuttings. It would take us 10 years merely to transcribe this journal.

✕ *The most heterogeneous collection: Communism*—socialist-realist art, administrative documents, graphics, propaganda photographs and films, testimonies to everyday life.

✕ *The most famous collections:*

☉ *Iosif Berman* (730 glass and film negatives)—these images have been part of the majority of the Museum's editorial (<http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/martor-3-supplement/>) and curatorial projects and have provided the material for a film (*Omul cu o mie de ochi* / The man with a hundred eyes, directed in 2001 by Alexandru Solomon), the theme of a documentary exhibition (*Fotografia documentară interbelică între romantism și militantism* / Inter-war documentary photography between a romantic and a militant mentality) and of an event held in Helsinki and entitled *Strămoși în călătorie* [Forefathers journeying];

☉ *The Manakia brothers* (200 photographs on board, in their original cardboard mounts) featured in three exhibitions abroad (London, Tel Aviv, New York), on view throughout the Museum's displays and in projects concerned with cultural minorities, and published in an album, a booklet and a set of postcards.

✕ *The oldest collection: Carol Popp Szathmari*—graphic art from the second half of the nineteenth century (over 300 drawings, watercolours, engravings, chromolithographies).

✕ *The most recent donation: the archive of the Bucharest Institute of Fashion* (2019).

✕ *The longest archiving process: 20 years—Henrieta Delavrancea-Gibory*—over 5,000 architectural boards, originals and copies, along with field notes, sketches and the architect's personal writings and photographs.

✕ *The least-known collection: shellac records from the Bolshevik period* (the speeches of Stalin).

The team. The Rashomon effect

a. Ioana's story.

Even today I feel frustrated that I did not think right from the beginning, to keep a working diary as a tool that could be used by the future experts who will take over responsibility for the archive when we “old ones” have retired. Now I know what hard work it was for the current team to “declassify” this archive.

✕ *The most endangered collection: Iosif Berman*

This collection consists mainly of glass slides that are extremely fragile and in danger of deteriorating over time. Their survival depends both on the provision of a controlled storage atmosphere and on action being taken to stabilise their silver-containing coatings.

At the present time Romania has neither officially accredited experts with first-hand experience in the rescue conservation and restoration of glass plate negatives nor any centres for training such specialists. The Museum lacks the funds to send a young person to undertake the necessary training abroad, and the bureaucracy that such an endeavour would entail is a further discouraging factor.

Ensuring a controlled atmosphere in the Archive would require the installation of a suitable heating, ventilation and air conditioning system. The Museum does not have the money to do this.

Not only the Berman collection but all the Archive's glass and film slides are facing the same problems.

Damaged glass plate negative from Clișee Sticlă (Glass Plate Negatives) collection.



4) Irina Nicolau, 1947-2002, writer and anthropologist, doctor in philology, passionate about oral history and the city of Bucharest. Alongside with Horia Bernea, she laid the foundations of the Romanian Peasant Museum and of a new museology. She was also a book writer and author of numerous anthropology works that have stood out due to a very unique style of writing.

5) It may seem hard to imagine it today, but when the Archive was set up one could not think in terms of an electronic search system, which meant that in order to locate a single artefact you had to open the inventory register and scan an entire page. Irina Nicolau had made some cardboard lists, numbered from 0 to 9, thematically and topologically organised and easily interchangeable. A kind of Excel on playing cards?

6) Mihai Oroveanu, 1946-2013, art critic, passionate art collector, founder and manager of the National Museum of Contemporary Art. He curated extensive exhibitions of contemporary art, he published art catalogues and albums, and constantly lobbied for the establishment of a Museum of Photography.

7) Horia Bernea, 1938-2000, internationally renowned artist, possessor of numerous international awards, great connoisseur of the Romanian village and of European museums. Founder and manager of the Romanian Peasant Museum (1990-2000), he established an original style in European Ethnomuseography which he liked to call nascent or flickering museology and that brought the Museum the EMYA Award in 1996.

Very briefly, this is more or less how things happened. The Museum was (re)founded in February 1990. By 1993, hundreds of items of photographic, audio and video documentation had already been brought together, as a consequence of research activities and of the work of installing the permanent exhibition. These documents had already been deposited in wooden chests of drawers and glass-fronted display cabinets in a room in the basement of the building, together with inventories created ad hoc. Possibly because Irina Nicolau⁴ had shared with me her vision for an original (how could it not have been?) system for organising the archive and carrying out searches in it, an adaptation of the cross⁵ indexing system, it was decided that I should take over and manage the Museum's intended documentary ethnological archive. In the drawers of the cabinets we had inherited from the fittings of the Museum of the History of the Communist Party, I discovered the Iosif Berman negatives collections and another one of 6x6 film negatives showing the permanent exhibition of the former museum. Mihai Oroveanu⁶ regularly brought in huge donations of glass plates depicting country life—the fruit of his weekly visits to antique fairs, where he used to discover these and haggle over the price. Two photographers had been taken on, and they, along with Horia Bernea,⁷ were busy documenting field research and recent acquisitions. At the same time, an ever-increasing volume of donated official documents, photographs, and all sorts of old informal written materials were waiting to be sorted and recorded. We started to receive already-formed collections, family histories, old documents about which there was no longer any complementary information, and black and white holiday snaps. Our policy was to refuse nothing—thus arousing the indignation of some colleagues, who rightly called for the use of selection criteria. I, however, was of the opinion that our eagerness to collect evidence that was at last honest and non-falsified was coinciding with the donors' wish to emerge from anonymity and find a voice. If only to document that moment of enthusiasm, it was a barricade worth keeping.

It was not long before problems began to appear. Many items had arrived without any accompanying information. It was clear that a genuine archive was starting to take shape, but the need to organise it faced us with a new question: was it to be an ethnological archive? Should it be a social history archive, or a museum-style one? Given that the priority in that initial period was to facilitate rapid searching, the simplest compromise was to name collections by provenance/donor. It was at this point too that the archives of the Museum of National Art and the Museum of Folk Art were recovered from the darkness of exile. Extensive collections, accompanied by inventory catalogues in webbing bound A3 cardboard covers, very hard to consult. We tried to simplify things, to copy out in a fragmentary way the series of documents that the Museum made most frequent use of in this phase of establishing the concept and deciding on the layout of the exhibition halls; we kept the codes of the large catalogues, but stored them in a separate place so as to be more accessible. Meanwhile our attention was repeatedly drawn to new piles of documents that had been left to the mercy of fate; we would rescue them in the nick of time but did not have a moment to also conserve and inventorise them. We would become attached to every item and began to keep even those that were “sick,” showing signs of degradation or already in fragments. This was the origin of the collection called *Quarantine*, which we put in a place of its own, known only to us, in the hope that one day a specialist conservation or restoration expert would be taken on.



Studio photograph from Popescu Nicolae collection (author, date, place unknown).

In the absence of any centre where one could specialise in learning how to restore old photographs, the Museum sent a prospective conservator of paper documents on a higher-level course.

8) A professional training course at the Police Academy School of Advanced Archiving (*sic!*).

Even in this initial period, the Archive, as constantly enriched, was used as an illustration by the print media of the day and began to exhibit and publish material from its collections. Finally, in the decade after 2000, the artefacts in the archive were given a space designed specifically for them and some state-of-the-art furniture that had been designed to provide storage units of the correct size for the entire range of materials and shapes. Once again, the way the collections were organised had to be fine-tuned and new places assigned to the items.

Throughout this period of heart-in-one's-mouth activity there was not a single archivist working in the team. It was as if the multidisciplinary make-up of the department was a reflection of the diversity of themes and materials to be found in the documentary collections. Those working in the archive were an ethnologist (coordinator), an ethnomusicologist (researcher), a physicist (photographer), a musician (treasurer), and a chemist (photographic technician). Over the decade 2009-2019 the team expanded, became more specialised and achieved its present equally diverse form: an anthropologist with a particular interest in the urban world (who has been in turn, stock controller-custodian, research assistant and office chief, while along the way doing a course in archiving⁸), a sound artist (sound technician), a director of documentary films (archivist), an architect (curator), a student doing a Master's in Image Studies (graphic artist), and a technician (treasurer), together with an assistant professor at the Music Academy (ethnomusicologist) and the founder of a group that plays traditional music (ethnomusicologist). They have been aided by collaborators with a very extensive range of interests: an architect who loves Bucharest (adviser), a poet (events organiser) ... and the list could continue.

This part of the story should have been recorded on the black page, but in fact the large number -----
Each person's area of expertise constantly opens up new perspectives on the researching, -----

b. Iris's story

I remember the absolute silence in the office when I started my job: glass-topped slightly sculpted wooden tables bearing numerous inventory numbers, imposing—and extremely uncomfortable—chairs upholstered in green velvet, metal cabinets with multiple locks—all recycled from the Museum of the History of the Communist Party. It was fascinating and totally static. The colleague with whom I shared the office used to pass the time reading job adverts or news on religious sites. She was bored, and wretchedly paid, as one is in cultural work. But I did not understand how anyone could be bored when, in the next room, there was a wall of special cabinets filled with things arranged in an order that I did not yet understand but which was waiting to be challenged, like Aladdin's lamp.



Even if dangerous/toxic,
working with the Archive
can be fun at times.

----- of disciplines that the members of the team are experts in makes the strength of the Archive.
----- exploring and exploitation of the Archive.



My first monthly salary was 777 lei, like those low-quality batteries, the cheapest brand on the market called “777” (and this was in 2015, not sometime BC). Only a passion for it keeps you in cultural work...

My then boss, Simina Bădică—the person responsible for the strategy of actively opening the Archive to the public and for much besides—gave me a very clear job description: *The Archive is all stored in Ioana's mind. Your role is to help her out.* An archive can be held captive in many ways: under lock and key, for fear that being touched by the public will harm it, or shut up in a box, for fear that the slightest contact with artificial light will contribute to its gradual deterioration; kept away from artists, researchers and the wider public, for fear that archival evidence will be interpreted in an inappropriate way; or by being taken into possession like a piece of personal property, so that it can only be accessed by a handful of experts. And there is one more form of captivity that any archivist worth their salt will tell you is one of the greatest dangers. And this is one that we, in our enthusiasm as museum workers, were unaware of how to avoid, for years on end: the captivity of exclusively oral sharing. Moved from building to building, dispersed and then reassembled, constantly being enriched with new documents, the Archive today resembles a puzzle whose user manual (rolls, registers and other forms of documentation) is unintelligible. You can be happy when you succeed in matching up a few pieces of puzzle here and there, but you are happiest when you can put all of them together. Every researcher and artist is like someone involved in doing a puzzle; they need written instructions and cannot manage the task simply by relying on the accounts of those who have previously made sense of the plot of the brain-teaser in its entirety. Captivity can also be caused by lack of interest, by lack of strategic investment in storage systems and modern digitising equipment, or by lack of research.

I like to talk. I like to talk a lot. So I began to tell everyone everywhere I went about the Archive. I created guided tours, I invited a variety of experts, acquaintances, and potential collaborators from all kinds of fields who I knew might be interested in what the Archive has to offer. Students doing their internships, volunteers... lots and lots of them!

I went on with my strategy: open up the Archive, invite people in, open up the Archive, invite people in. There was one day when it became impossible for us to continue with our usual activities because we were swamped by the teams of students and volunteers who had been invited in to get to know the Archive and work with it. For several hours there were too many protective gloves and masks, too many exclamations of excitement, and too much movement. But it was so alive!



What use is an archive if no one knows what it contains or can enjoy the stories it has to tell?
What use is an archive if everyone leafs through it and it ends up being destroyed too quickly?



Finding a compromise between these two extremes is what I have been concerned to do.

Inviting people to work with the Archive and find new meanings in it was not simply a personal whim. It was an extremely practical strategy. When you do not have sufficient specialists in a museum to know about - or be interested in - all the subjects represented in the Archive, when you do not have the money to pay extra helpers when the volume of work keeps growing but the team does not, bring in enthusiasts. Pay them in enjoyment. Promise them that in the Archive every image, recorded sound and document is a way of learning about recent history, promise them that if they read Bernea and Nicolau they will be unable to stop until they have devoured their complete works, promise them that they can paste, cut out, exhibit alongside us, promise them that their expertise will find its place in the Archive, promise them honesty and reciprocal learning. Promise them that their ideas will surely somehow, somewhere be put to work, because spontaneity is honoured in the Museum. Later I was to learn that in Irina Nicolau's time this was called "eating clouds."

Guided tours into the Archive.

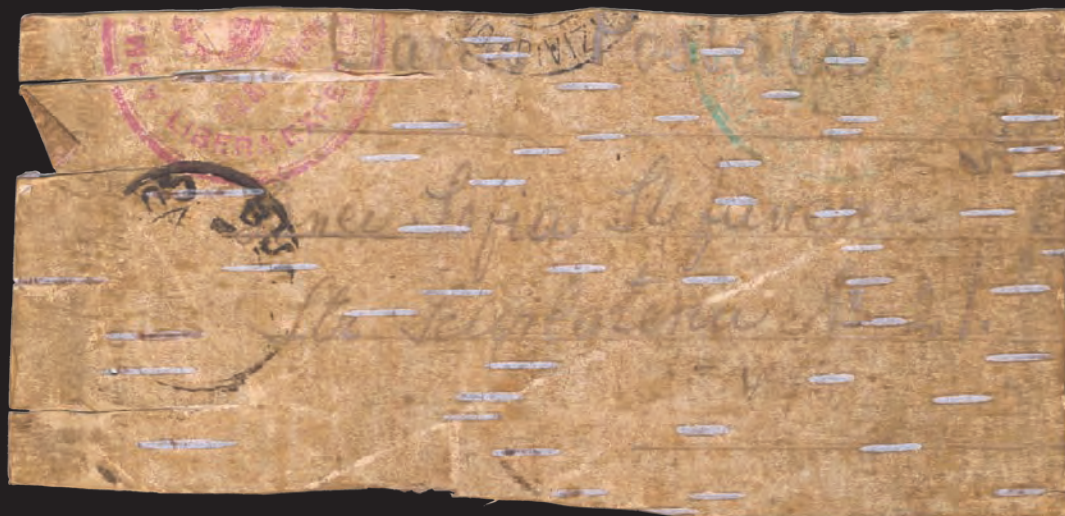


Donations and acquisitions

In the past 10 years the Archive has received:

- ✕ *In 2019*—from the closed down Bucharest Institute of Fashion, 8,078 slides and prints documenting peasant attire and cottage industries; from Oltea Pârvulescu, 10 family photographs;
- ✕ *In 2017*—from Peter Jacobi, 95 digitally processed collages and framed photographs of fortified churches;
- ✕ *In 2017, 2015*—from Vasile Mănăstireanu, 468 colour slides, strips of negatives, black and white prints, a VHS cassette, a DVD of field recordings;
- ✕ *In 2016*—from Andrei Pop-Jora, five files of biographical papers that had belonged to Professor Mihai Pop; from Cristian Mărșanu, six digital copies of family testimony, donated as part of the “Letters from the Front” project, among which we should mention one of the most striking letters ever seen, written on tree bark and dating from the time of the First World War (see next page);
- ✕ *In 2015*—from Bogdan Plecan, one photograph; from Elena Almăjan, 50 drawings of village life by Eugen Drăguțescu;
- ✕ *In 2014*—from Teodor Răducan, 10 drawings;
- ✕ *In 2012*—from Aurelia Bălan Mihailovici, three paintings by Ioan Isac and one exhibition catalogue; from Cornel Mirescu, 222 black and white photographs, copies of images from *Musee de l’Homme* in Paris; from Eduard Lazăr, two framed photographs;
- ✕ *In 2011*—from Roxana Mihaela Tincu, excerpts from a scanned copy of a notebook of folk motifs as collected by Olimpia Tincu;
- ✕ *In 2009*—the Museum acquired from Elena Ghițiu 1,860 glass plate negatives of Mărginimea Sibiului, taken by Mircea Iuga.





✕ In 2017 we set in train the process of acquiring a new major collection of prints developed by Iosif Berman in his own laboratory. Expert advice was taken, the most favourable price possible was negotiated, but subsequently, although the vendor was persuaded to wait a long time, the necessary funding did not become available. We thus lost a rare opportunity to grow an already renowned collection.

And we are constantly facing similar situations...

✕ We are still receiving generous donations of collections of documents. Unfortunately, these are building up in an area which we have dubbed *the black hole*, because the team is too small and there are too many calls on its time, besides the demands of an over-bureaucratic system, for us to be able to devote ourselves to examining, cataloguing and conserving this slice of recent history.

✕ Working with new donations is becoming more difficult, as the protective equipment (gloves, disposable overalls, masks etc.) is now a luxury that the Museum cannot afford.

Researching, staging exhibitions, publishing

Between 2009 and 2019 the Archive ran permanent programmes and annual projects, both in-country and internationally.

Its ongoing research programmes have concentrated on the enrichment of our collections of artefacts by documenting contemporary rural and urban life, with all this implies, from changes in mentality to details of the way local realities are evolving:

1. *The Archives of the Present Time* focus on studying the “recent countryman” and the local heritage.

2. *The Oral Archive* involves a systematic approach to recording oral memories, with an emphasis on collecting the life stories of country people.

3. *Ethnophony* is concerned with the researching, in situ recording and subsequent publication of traditional songs, both Romanian and from ethnic minorities.

4. *The Image Salon* is the programme under whose auspices exhibitions of documentary images are held. Apart from wanting to make visitors more aware of the rich diversity of meanings to be found in the images, this programme also aims to encourage debate about principles connected with the archiving, conservation and communication to the public of the artefacts held in the Archive.

5. *Digitisation and the creation of an online platform for presenting the Archive*. Throughout the period 2009-2019, the team has given thought to finding methods for the digital conservation and secure communication of the Museum’s archival heritage. In order to keep in step with European practice in the relevant methodologies and technologies, the programme has undergone changes, modifications and fine-tuning.

For all these programmes linked to the particular vision of the Museum and its plans for future development, the Archive has been working under the aegis of a number of domestic and international projects, of which we will mention only the major ones. These have found concrete expression not only in the enrichment of the Archive’s collections via the recording of field work but also in the displaying and publication, in a variety of ways, of the highly complex associated research findings.

Ultimii povestitori [The Last Storytellers]—audio-visual study and recording of the phenomenon of storytelling as it still survives on a local scale. An illustrated children’s book⁹ and a documentary.

Ivire din privire [Appearing from watching]—discussing the relationship between the documentary image, the context in which it was made and the contemporary viewer/receiver. Publication of a set of three small-format albums: *Înfățișările țaranului*,¹⁰ *Dincolo de oglindă*,¹¹ *Coconi și copii*.¹²

Ethnophonie [Ethnophony]¹³—the production of four CDs of recordings of traditional music: *Traditional music of Transylvania*, *Church music from Transylvania*, *Music from Gorj* (two CDs).



9) Pascu, Ana. 2012. *Moșul-cu-Trupul-de-Flori-și-Barbade-Mătase* [The Old-Man-With-Body-of-Flowers-and-Silk-Beard]. Bucharest: Martor.

10) Popescu, Ioana, and Sebastian Sift. 2007. *Înfățișările țaranului* [Faces of the Peasant]. Bucharest: Martor.

11) Popescu, Ioana. 2010. *Dincolo de oglindă* [Beyond the Mirror]. Bucharest: Martor.

12) Popescu, Ioana. 2012. *Coconi și copii* [Infants and Children]. Bucharest: Martor.

13) <http://www.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/etnophonie.html>



The *Visual Observer* was conceived as a programme of visual anthropological research of contemporary realities, the ultimate aim being the enrichment of the MRP's image archive. Sadly, visual research cannot be undertaken without high-quality equipment for recording data and processing results. Therefore, after a number of years of proposing projects but being unable to access funding for them, the programme was shelved.

Although the scanning of the negatives collection had begun as long ago as the late 1990s, it was only after 20 years that we were able to hammer out a coherent plan to create a digital store. What held us back was a lack of strategies and of ring-fenced infrastructural and financial resources.

In 2019 we finally received sponsorship to purchase a high-quality graphic scanner. The sum needed was obtained with help from Samsung Romania and Gemini Solutions and from the friends of the Archive, with a contribution from the Museum.

In 2009-2019 we had repeatedly submitted requests to the Ministry of Culture to approve and finance the purchase of a high-quality graphic scanner.



14) Popescu, Ioana.
2013. *Privește! Frații Manakia*
[Look! The Manakia
Brothers]. Bucharest:
Martor.

15) <http://childhoodmuseum360.ro/en/>.

16) <http://www.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/acasa/imaginea-martor-ateliere-de-arhivare-performativa-ro.html>.

17) <http://www.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/acasa/la-fotograf-ro.html>.

*Privește! Frații Manakia*¹⁴—an album of the *Manakia Brothers* collection of old photographs.

Childhood. Remains and Heritage—an European project under the umbrella of the Culture 2007-2013 programme. Creating a virtual museum of childhood.¹⁵ Seven exhibitions, a brochure, a CD, an album, three international exhibitions, a colloquium, a website and a virtual tour, and an animated promotional film. During this project the Archive gained 10 interviews with collectors, 10 digital collections of toys and 20 toys from rural and urban contexts, donated to the Museum.

Imaginea-Martor [The Image as Witness]¹⁶—an interactive exhibition, with hands-on workshops that led to visitors creating approximately 100 mini-exhibitions. This was followed by a book *Mic tratat de dezarhivare* [Little treatise on de-archiving] discussing dilemmas that arise in connection with conserving and communicating the archival heritage.

La Fotograf [At the Photo-studio]¹⁷—an interactive exhibition and workshops based on a series of contemporary-design objects, created in collaboration with a team of young designers and artists that draw their inspiration from the collections in the Archive. This has produced 36 boxes whose contents illustrate fragments of daily life and include objects specific to four cultural communities who live in Romania: Aromanians, Hungarians, Romanians and Saxons. This project was co-financed by the Embassy of the German Federal Republic in Bucharest.

To enable this project to take place, the main financial contribution came from the sponsor. Every project we have undertaken in recent years, whether large-scale or otherwise, has obliged us to seek funding from outside the Museum.

Rețelele Privirii [Networks of the Gaze]—the first interactive digital platform to be devoted to a museum archive in Romania, an innovative curatorial experiment that explores the new media and makes available to the public a virtual space designed for collaborative exploration and research. In its pilot stage, users can consult, through an interactive layout and a number of digital special functions, over 200 photographs, audio and video excerpts, and written documents from the Archive.



<https://arhiva.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/>

Ever since 2015 we have been providing *guided tours* of the Archive, an opportunity to invite the public to come and discover what a museum archive involves and how we work with the artefacts.

Sadly,

this publication is still in pdf format, for lack of funds to print and distribute it;



the platform has not been sufficiently advertised, due to the absence of funds.





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Day-to-day housekeeping activities

A week in the Archive begins early in the morning with the aroma of freshly-brewed coffee and a short planning meeting at which we decide on the priorities for the day's work and each person's duties. Activities are divided into either pleasant, or, more accurately, creative (for example, devising a concept for an exhibition, studying a collection, writing a curatorial or promotional text, producing graphics, audio-video montages and so on) or unpleasant, i.e. administrative (obligatory summaries, lists of acquisitions, reports, analyses, Excel tables, replies to requests and writing letters asking for funding). We share all these out in a brotherly way and do them together, but each of the large-scale jobs has its person in charge or project manager. We work in a quite large room divided into an office area and another area designated for access and research. As it is an open space, we do not have much privacy: all of us, users and researchers alike, work alongside each other. At times this becomes tiresome; at other times a spontaneous exchange of ideas gives birth to a project. Near this multi-functional space, but separated from it by a fire door, lays the Archive itself.

On a standard day, there is archiving going on at one desk, at another someone is sketching an installation that will put the Archive in a new perspective, at another a sponsorship request is being composed, in a corner people are negotiating how to change the official admission charges for access to the Archive, in another digitising is taking place, and, finally, on the central table there's something spread out—perhaps a collection in the process of being investigated, or maybe a large piece of cloth soon to become a banner, on which we all sew and write our contributions in turn. And some unexpected visitor is sure to turn up—a student or intern, a researcher, a colleague, a technician...

The working day ends at 4 pm, 8 pm or 1 in the morning. It depends on the day...

Archives... sleeves black up to one's elbows... overalls in colours that do not show the dirt... white cotton gloves, or blue or black rubber ones... face masks... liquid disinfectant that smells of hospitals... all kinds of protective equipment, far from attractive, but compulsory.

Archives... stacks of yellowed paper... faded images... shelves, drawers, boxes, files... silence... padlocks.

The Ethnological Archive of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant... boredom? By no means! When we're on holiday we miss our gloves. Our minds are consumed by impatience to decipher as-yet-unresearched documents. We enjoy taking people on tours round the cabinets, drawers and boxes. And opening the padlocks.

"Archives embody the mystique of boredom [...]. Boredom is a front cover preserving archives from intruders looking for easy excitement: you have to fight your way in a flattening environment, which puts the context above the individual value."¹⁸

18) Dan, Călin, and Iosif Kiraly. 2006. "Politics of Cultural Heritage." *The Archive*. London: Whitechappel Gallery, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press. (First published in *subREAL – Art History Archive*, Venice: Romanian Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 1999, n.p.).



The system for fixing admission charges, which operates according to broad categories of documents, is less than functional since it does not take into account either the value of the artefact or the specific needs of the user.



