

AN ACADEMY FOUNDED AND PROTECTED BY A MUSEUM – THE ACADEMY OF TRADITIONAL ARTS OF ROMANIA

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By last mid-century, the Museum of Traditional Folk Civilisation has organised in Sibiu's "Dumbrava" a magnificent project of recovery and emphasising of the traditional folk culture and civilisation, finalised with *The Fair of Folk Artisans in Romania* (1983), *The Galleries of Folk Art* (1991), *The Association of Folk Artisans from Romania* (1992), *The National Olympiad Traditional Artistic Crafts* (1992), *The Academy of Traditional Arts from Romania* (1993).

Within the frame of this authentic national programme, realised in a systematic conception, catalysing capacities, energies and potentials from all over the country, The Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania is the keystone of this work. Conceived to be and represent "the national forum of the most valuable and famous folk art artisans from our country, selected by our best specialists in the field of ethnology, reunited at the same time in a concrete, analytic, open, democratic and permanent dialogue, regarding the past (the tradition), the present and the future of artistic creation of all sorts"¹, the Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania does not take the inspiration from the traditions and functions of the Romanian Academy; it is meant to be more a semantic paraphrase of what the ancients called "The Academy of Athens", and the contemporaries of the spiritual phenomenon called "The Garden of Akademos".

The object and task of the Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania consist, among others, in exhibiting the real individual values of the traditional folk culture and civilisation and their promotion in the national and universal

Nation means ethno-cultural memory
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consciousness - as elements of the capacity of superlative creative in the field of art and folk artefacts, expressions of our ethno-cultural identity.

Lucian Blaga and Liviu Rebreanu referred, within the "reception speeches" in the Romanian Academy, to the sacred character, fundamental for the destiny of a national culture, of the cultural values of the Romanian village - the matrix of our historical existence and the cradle of our multi-millenary culture and civilisation. Both, Blaga and Rebreanu became members of the Romanian Academy on places newly created, having the possibility to choose their forerunners. If Lucian Blaga reserved himself the right to bring an homage to the Romanian village as an "immortal presence that has never had a seat in this noble precinct"², Liviu Rebreanu spoke highly of the Romanian peasant, of his "aboriginal spirit"; without it one cannot "create valuable authentic and universal writings"³.

Therefore, what is the folk culture, what is its significance and historical importance in the development of the national being, of the ethno-identity culture, in the conception of that eternal and inalienable cultural specificity of a people, the effigy of its cultural originality?

Through its historical culture, a people can come to know itself and, especially, can try to overcome itself. We cannot ignore it, as well as we cannot run away from our own consciousness. The traditions that are incumbent on us impose the continuity as the criteria of an axiomatic permanence for a people's identity.

1. *The Statute of the Academy of Traditional Arts from Romania*, 1st article.

2. Lucian Blaga, *Homage to the Romanian Village*, reception speech in the Romanian Academy, uttered in the solemn meeting on the 5th of June 1937, in "The Romanian Academy. Reception Discourses", Bucharest, 1937, p. 3.

3. Liviu Rebreanu, *Praise to the Romanian Peasant*, reception speech in the Romanian Academy, uttered in the solemn meeting on the 29th of May 1940, in "The Romanian Academy. Reception Discourses", Bucharest 1940, p. 14.

The time of each nation proves its passing in and through history, reporting the fluidity of its "running" to the perennity of some national essences, among which the folk culture must not be evoked only because of a pious conventionality. Its role is not only to make the national specific subjective in itself, but to legitimate, through its originality, or, on the contrary, through the community, in the universal plan, of the cultural values of the ethnic space which it defines.

The folk culture belongs to the primordial nature of the determinations and interdependences comprised in the difficult alchemy of the constitution process of a national culture. Born from the absence of time references and the rural world archaism, in which the customary constancies overlap and merge to the natural ones, the folk culture got something from the fidelity of expression of the cosmic rhythms, owning the intimacy of a confession in which the consciousness of a people cannot refuse to itself the sincerity. Child, witness, founder, and, in the same time, judge of its duration, to folk culture, one can offer the credibility of an historical source, because it represents the capacity of styling the millennial experience of a community, the projection of its mental predispositions, in the celestial sphere of the artistic creation. Unsubmissive to the pedant canons of chronology, it refuses itself to the moment, and it avoids the impetuous objective-historical becoming, in order to consecrate itself to a long

hermeneutics of the national "self". A little bit sensitive to the caprices of the staff-room history, it selects the particular significant, depositing it in essences of ethnicity.

The main institution created for the scope of the nominal devotion of individual, superlative values, from all the fields and genres of culture and traditional folk art, The Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania is "expected" to take the seat, under the tutorial mission of The Romanian Academy, as a representative cultural forum at a national scale, meant to emphasise, to recognise and to morally reward the authentic values of the national culture. The most important manifestation dedicated to the nominal evaluation of those capable to acquire this honourable investment, their qualities being admitted by the authentic managers of the national consciousness next to the perpetuance of tradition and its value in the field of contemporary folk creation, is the *Days of the Academy of Traditional arts from Romania*, which are taking place trimestrially, since 1993.

The structure of The Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania comprises the sections: Fine Arts (craftsmen constructors and genius artefactors in all fields of the traditional folk civilization), Ludic Arts (choreographers), Musical Arts (folk singers and instrumental interpreters), Literary Arts (poets and folk narrators), and Culinary Arts (famous woman-cookers from the traditional communities).

The *Days of the Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania* are not "festive" events; they have a conscious, scientific exponential-demonstrative character. The activity of the folk artisan is prayed not only taking into account the local or regional prestige, it is also nationally recognized, following: the respecting of the tradition in the functionality, creativity and authenticity of the production process; the technical procedures and the work instrumental; the ways of expression; the morphotypological structures; the innovations adopted; the integration of some traditions in the realities of the present.



Since its foundation, in august 1993, The Days of the Academy of Traditional Arts from Romania took place 52 times, counting 211 members in the six various sections: Fine Arts -145 members, Mechanical Arts - 13 members, Ludic Arts - 10 members, Musical Arts - 35 members.

The selection of the individual values and the elaboration of the whole programme for all the events that are taking place during *The Days of the Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania* suppose a sound bibliographical documentation, the study of the collection for finding the traditional objects from the centre or the ethnographical region belonging to the artisan, field research developed in the same place where the artisan carries on his activity (taking photos, making a film, recording audio cassettes, object acquisitions - if the budget allows it), the filling in of the register card for folk artisans, all these documents being then registered to the Centre of Information and Documentation "Cornel Irimie".

In order to organize the "Personal Exhibition" of the candidates, when they are accepted in the Academy of Traditional Folk Arts of Romania (which will treat, in a comparative way, aspects of the contemporary and traditional creation), the most representative pieces of the collection are selected.

By using all ways of local and central media, the event is brought into attention, in order to attract a varied public (specialized or interested). At the accepting in the Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania there participate the prayed artisan, members of his family or collectivity, disciples, some other folk artisans, curators, officials of the regional Centres of preservation and capitalisation of the folk culture and tradition, the access being allowed to all categories of public.

The "ASTRA" Museum of Traditional Folk Civilization becomes, taking into account the expressions, the dialogues and the utterances carried on in this occasion, an "agora" - or, following Kenneth Hudson's opinion "a public tribune" - which emphasises the capacity of the modern museological institution to

integrate itself in the new type of dialogue - interactive museum, able to respond to the necessities of the "generation of questions". Thus there is created a consensual universe, in which each of them reacts as a "curious observer" or as an "amateur", who can freely express his opinions, thus the thinking is exteriorised, becoming a public activity that can satisfy the need for communication.

The discussions between the artisans, or between artisans and specialists, or between the public, artisans and specialists, contribute in an efficient way to the establishing of the program and the motivations regarding the active preservation of traditional crafts in a permanent changing modern society.

The honorary title of "member of The Academy of Traditional Arts from Romania" creates a new socio-cultural identity to those who entered the forum of the "selected people" and therefore new responsibilities, in their social and professional manifestations. There are many examples of rural communities where old crafts were re-born, because of the total involvement of the Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania's members (such as: Nicolae Suciu, Cincu, the region of Brasov - icons on glass; Dan Gherasimescu, Valea Danului, the region of Arges - icons for fire places; Constantin Nitu, Poboru, the region of Olt - weaving; Victoria Berbecar, Botiza, the region of Maramures - weaving; Silvia Tecoanta, Altana, the region of Sibiu - weaving; Nicolae Purcarea, the region of Brasov - the artistic processing of wood).

The exhibition for sale of the potter Cornel Sitar (Baia Mare) belonging to the *Days of the Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania* contributed to the education of the public's taste, showing, discretely, to the visitor, the way to appreciate authentic values, awakening the interest for acquiring objects made in the spirit of tradition.

In dealing with the problem of active preservation, the accent goes on the subjective component of the creation process as a decisive factor of everything that is traditional in our folk art.

4. Recommandation sur la sauvegarde de la culture traditionnelle et populaire, adoptee par la Conférence générale à sa vingt-cinquième session, Paris, 15 novembre, 1989.

The Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania had the opportunity to present its activity on an international scale, when in February 1999, the general manager of the "ASTRA" Museum of Traditional Folk Civilization, Corneliu Bucur, Ph. D., took part to the debates of the International Workshop of Training, in Venice, organised within the framework of the "Living Human Treasures" programme, initiated by the Department of Cultural Heritage – intangible heritage in UNESCO, since 1989⁴. The Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania also benefited by an exceptional chance to affirm itself on an international scale, due to the participation of 11 of its members to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, in Washington D.C., in July 1999.

Due to the intervention to the debates of the International Workshop from Venice and to the colloquium brought about by the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, where there were presented the initiatives and the programmes initiated 20 years ago, by the "ASTRA" Museum of Traditional Folk Civilization, regarding the amassing and the modern preservation of the Romanian folk culture, there could be outlined one of the policies of defining the own ethno-cultural identity. However, a good image "outside the borders of our country" depends, unconditionally, on the inside physiognomy of the phenomenon, on the way in which this cultural policy functions "inside", it is programmatically assisted by a minister, by the Romanian Government and on the way it is legislated. Given these commandments, it is necessary to discuss the integrative strategies within large cultural series.

An essential problem for the revalorisation of the national values (as well as for the cultural national programmes), on an international scale, is that of the integration of the Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania in the formal and informal system of cultural values, abroad.

The visit of the initiator of the Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania to the International Workshop of Training in Venice and to the glass workshops of

Archimede Seguso, in Murano, lead him to a very important decision, taken under the revealing shock of the universal values of the great craftsman and glass artisan. On the occasion of the 32nd edition of *The Days of The Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania*, it was taken the initiative to award the title of *honorary member* of the Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania to craftsmen from abroad, the first one being Archimede Seguso (born in 1909). This initiative must continue.

At the beginning of the 21st century, we can also recall what Dimitrie Gusti said in his reception discourse in the Academy: in order to respect their mission "as a national institute" and to "get even closer to the perfect Academy", the Romanian Academy "must do some retouches"⁵. It is in the spirit of such a project, with such an opening to the reaffirmation of the integrality of our national culture and spirituality, that we can reflect to its multiple meanings, to the superior semantic register that could be offered by organising some festive meetings to re-unite members of the Romanian Academy and of the Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania. It would be for the first time that an event of such importance, and with such an important significance for the national culture, would take place in the Romanian academic area.

We owe the folk culture the chronicle of a *time that never passes*: it is the pen of the word, the grammar of gesture, the parchment of memory...

The Academy of Traditional Arts of Romania is the proof that future needs to discover something that is well known by many of us, but which it's less admit it: the fact that the beauty of life is inside people, because truth is built now, just like some other time, with the same means: skill, perseverance effort, trust. The existence of this institution, in a period of transition for the Romanian society, proofs that we can defeat our incertitude and fear of words' trivialisation for a critical and impartial confronting regarding the values of the Romanian village.

5. Dimitrie Gusti, *The being and the mission of Academies*, reception discourse in the Romanian Academy, uttered in the solemn meeting from the 10th of June 1923, in "Writings", vol.VIII, Buzau, 1997, p.121-145.