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RESEARCH, PRESERVATION AND PRESENTATION OF BANAT HERITAGE



PROCEEDINGS OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE

RESEARCH, PRESERVATION AND PRESENTATION OF BANAT HERITAGE: CURRENT STATE AND LONG TERM STRATEGY

VRŠAC, SERBIA
17-19 NOVEMBER 2011



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2012

**HOME OF LONGEVITY FOR CULTURAL TREASURY OF BANAT
– ESTABLISHMENT OF REGIONAL CULTURAL CENTRE FOR
BANAT HERITAGE – “KONKORDIA”**

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DIGITAL ARCHIVE OF THE BANAT VERNACULARS AND CULTURE: FIELDWORK AND PERSPECTIVES¹

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Abstract: In this paper we will outline the key characteristics of the Digital Archive of the Balkan Institute of the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts, abb. DABI. The DABI is created on the basis of data being *collected* in the *fieldwork* over the course of *more than a decade*. The emphasis of our paper is placed upon the recordings made during the fieldwork in the Serbian Banat among different ethnic, linguistic and confessional communities. We will point at possibilities and perspectives regarding the DABI development and its utilisation for scientific, educational and museum purposes.

Key words: digital archive, Banat, anthropology, linguistics, ethnic, confessional and linguistic communities, vernacular, oral history

The research team of the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts has been dedicated for more than a decade to the field research of multiethnic, multilingual and multi-confessional communities in Serbia and its neighbouring countries. As a result, the Digital Archive of the Balkan Institute SASA – abb. DABI – has been created. Alongside interviews the fieldwork data includes numerous photographs and video recordings. The multifunctional and multilingual Digital Archive thus *represents* a unique *cultural heritage* of Serbia and the Balkans. *A significant part of the DABI is comprised of the recordings made in the Serbian Banat among different ethnic, linguistic and confessional communities in their native vernaculars, i.e. Serbian, Hungarian, Romanian, Romani, Croatian, Bulgarian, etc. We would like, hence, to give an overview of the Banat communities that have been thus far explored and incorporated into the DABI, as well as to point out different perspectives on the DABI utilisation for scientific, educational and museum purposes.*

1. Fieldwork of the Balkan Institute Research Team: Projects

The fieldwork of multiethnic, multilingual and multi-confessional communities in the Balkans has been carried out since 1998. It began more or less informally at the Institute of Serbian Language SASA. From 2002 it has continued as a systematic, institutionalised research at the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA within the projects funded by the Ministry for Science of the Republic of Serbia. Following the chronological order, we provide a list below of the Balkan Institute *projects dedicated* first and foremost to conducting anthropological and linguistic fieldwork:

(1) “Ethnolinguistic and Sociolinguistic Research of the Refugees and Multiethnic Communities in the Balkans”, 2002–2005;

(2) “Ethnic and Social Stratification of the Balkans”, 2006–2010;
(3) “Language, Folklore, Migrations in the Balkans”, 2011–2014, i.e. the current project.

A leader of all the above mentioned projects is Dr. Biljana Sikimić. The *projects* serve the creation of *interdisciplinary* and *multidisciplinary* digital database and scholarly studies which enhance the general awareness and knowledge on the Balkan multiethnic culture (cf. Vučković 2010; Sikimić 2012). Moreover, the projects are *carried out* by a *multidisciplinary team working which has so far* included more than thirty researchers, e.g. linguists, anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, historians, museum people, folklorists, literature scholars, etc.

Besides, a number of research projects funded by UNESCO’s Intangible *Cultural Heritage Programme* were based upon the same fieldwork methodology as the Balkan Institute projects. The researchers of the Balkan Institute also took part in the UNESCO projects, while the recordings made for those projects were consequently incorporated into the DABI. These were the following projects:

(a) “Slavic Vernaculars in Kosovo and Metohija”, carried out in 2003 by the Institute of Serbian Language SASA;
(b) “Serbian Epic Poetry and its Cultural Expression”, carried out in 2004 by the Institute for Literature and Arts;
(c) “Language and Identity in the Republic of Serbia” carried out in 2008 by the Institute of Serbian Language SASA.

The Balkan Institute’s and UNESCO research projects were based upon fieldwork and scientific elaboration, i.e. interviews, audio and video recordings, archiving,

¹ This paper results from the projects *Language, Folklore, Migrations in the Balkans* (no. 178010) and *The Danube and the Balkans: historical and cultural heritage* (no. 177006) funded by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Serbia.



analysis and elaboration of the fieldwork data, writing and publishing research papers and monographs.

2. Methodology

Since the fieldwork methodology of the Balkan Institute researchers has been changed in the course of time, it can be distinguished between two phases: the first, influenced by the Russian Ethnolinguistic School and the second, influenced by the Anglo-Saxon Qualitative Research and the American Linguistic Anthropology. The Russian Ethnolinguistic School, established by Nikita Tolstoy in the second half of the 20th century, is oriented towards local vernaculars, dialect vocabulary, and narratives on the traditional way of life (cf. Tolstoj 1989; Tolstaja 2002). Accordingly, until 2006 the target group was predominantly the older population, which still embraces the traditional way of life and who might remember the past on which the researchers wished to focus.¹ The fieldwork thus initially started using an ethno-linguistic questionnaire as a guideline, which was created by a Russian ethnolinguist Anna Plotnjikova (2009 [1996] – the edition includes Russian original and Serbian translation). Thereby, narratives on traditional customs, beliefs and magic practices were most commonly elicited. The initial ethnolinguistic questionnaire, however, was modified and adjusted for each community under research. Besides, the interviews were semi-structured, whereby the interlocutors' comments and digressions were also recorded (cf. Sikimić 2005; Ilić 2010).

In the course of time, researchers of Institute for Balkan Studies tried to overcome shortcomings of the ethnolinguistic approach, such as its focus on ideal descriptions of local customs, its lack of context sensitivity and thematic limitation. The research, thus, switched to a modified methodology, which could be termed the second phase, that is a combination of the Russian School, Qualitative Research and Anthropological Linguistics.² The interviews hence came to be more open, digressions more tolerated, whereas the thematic scope has been broadened to include sociolinguistics, interethnic and language contact, oral history, views on contemporary society and politics, life stories, etc. The emphasis had completely shifted to personal perspective of an interlocutor.

3. DABI: Database Overview

One of the most noteworthy results of the more than a decade-long fieldwork is the Digital Archive of the Balkan Institute SASA – abb. DABI – envisaged as a collaborative project of the Balkan Institute researchers and associates. The DABI is stored on an external disc

¹ The questionnaire is designed for research on the Balkan Christian Slavic language area and divided into three major parts: (1) Life Cycle (birth, wedding, and funeral), (2) Ritual Calendar Cycle (calendar customs), (3) Mythology (myths, legends and beliefs about supernatural beings). The emphasis was placed upon generic perspective whereas the questions were concerned with the linguistic, societal and cultural specificities of a community under research (e.g. "Do you remember the old wedding rites?" "How do you celebrate Christmas?" etc.).

² Largely practiced in the social sciences, Qualitative Research uses participants' opinions and experiences by putting a strong emphasis on their personal view of life (cf. Wiesenfeld 2000; Sorescu-Marinković 2006). Along the same line, Anthropological Linguistics is "concerned with the place of language in its wider social and cultural context, its role in forging and sustaining cultural practices and social structures" (Foley 1997: 3).

which could be approached only in the building of the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts. It is, however, open for external users, who are in return asked to sign an user protocol which involves the following issues: if using a DABI recording the user is required to cite basic data about the recording (name of person who conducted the interview; date and place of the interview); user is obliged to follow the rules of research ethics which are aimed at protecting trust, dignity, privacy and anonymity of interlocutors, i.e. it is not allowed to cite full names of interlocutors; also, it is not allowed to cite private data about interlocutors and full names of places which they come from if this can violate the privacy of interlocutors, endanger at any rate their well-being or affect their private life. However, in the case that the user would like to cite full interlocutors' names, the special permission of the recording's author is required. The server is free of charge and requires a username and password.

3.1. DABI: Archival Preservation

The archival preservation of records includes the following issues: the author of the recording, generally the researcher who conducted the interview, contributes to the DABI a digital recording and its thematic protocol. The thematic protocol consist of basic informative data (name of the researchers, interlocutors; basic data about interlocutors (age, gender, education, occupation, marital status); date, place where the recording took place; the basic characteristics of the recording (duration, general quality, remarks on any peculiar circumstances which may have occurred during the recording and affected it): short thematic description of the recording. Alongside protocols, some recordings are provided with integral or fragmentary transcripts of the interviews.

The basic principle of the Balkan Institute fieldwork methodology is to use, when it is possible, interlocutors' native vernaculars while communicating with them. The team is therefore composed of researchers who use different native and non-native languages. Thus, the DABI is a multilingual database: Serbian is most represented language within it, but there is a lot of audio-material in Romanian, Valachian, and less parts is in Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Hungarian, Romani language. Given that the DABI has not been yet fully systematised, it is difficult to estimate the exact number of recorded hours. A rough estimate would probably be over 2,000 hours of audio-material, more than 100 hours of video-material and over 1,000 photos.

3.2. DABI: Geographic Area

The geographical area covered by the DABI is a vast one, and practically embraces whole Serbia: mixed Serbian-Bosniak (Muslim) settlements were particularly researched in Western Serbia (e.g. the vicinity of Valjevo, Priboj and Nova Varoš); in North-Eastern Serbia – settlements inhabited by Banyash,³ Bulgarian, Roma,

³ The ethnonym Banyash designates a Romanian speaking ethnic group which has lived scattered for at least two centuries across present-day Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria and Macedonia. According to many cultural characteristics, they are regarded as being close to Roma in identity, although they themselves do not speak the Romani language and refer to themselves by various names: *Banjaši, Rudari, Romanians, Koritari, Romanian / Valachian Gypsies, Boyash, Banyash* (cf. Sikimić 2005a).

Serbian and Valachian communities (e.g. the vicinity of Petrovac na Mlavi, Negotin, Bor, Zaječar, Knjaževac); in Central Serbia – Banyash, Bulgarian, Serbian and Roma population (e.g. in Belgrade and its vicinity, in the vicinity of Lazarevac, Mladenovac, Jagodina and Paraćin); in Southern Serbia – Roma and Serbs (e.g. in the vicinity of Prokuplje and Vranje). The large part of the DABI comprises audio-recordings made during the field research among the Kosovo Slavonic communities, above all the Serbian enclave communities and the refugees in collective centers in Serbia. The DABI also includes fieldwork recordings from Hungary (e.g. Serbian and Catholic Slavonic communities), Romania (e.g. Banyash, Roma, Romanian, Serbian communities), Croatia (e.g. Banyash communities), Bosnia and Herzegovina (e.g. Banyash, Roma and Serbian communities), Slovenia (e.g. Serbian communities), etc.

The significant part of the DABI is comprised of recordings made during the fieldwork in Vojvodina, i.e. in Bačka and the Serbian Banat. In Bačka, the Bunjev and Banyash communities have been mainly examined. The fieldwork in the Serbian Banat particularly focused upon a wide variety of ethnic groups and involved the systematic data collection as will be discussed in more detail below.

4. Fieldwork in Banat

4.1. Serbian Speech Communities

Given that the most of the fieldwork has been conducted in Serbia, it comes as no surprise that most of the data has been collected among the Serbian speech and ethnic communities. Since research has been mainly focused upon multiethnic and multilingual settlements, the subjects of the research were mainly those Serbian communities which live alongside other ethnic groups. In regards to the Banatian Serbs, the research conducted in Southern and Central Banat has been especially productive. The research was carried out in the municipality of Pančevo (Dolovo, Omoljica), Kovin (Mramorak), Alibunar (Dobrica, Novi Kozjak, Vladimirovac), Bela Crkva (Banatska Palanka, Crvena Crkva, Vračev Gaj, Jasenov), Vršac (Izbište, Uljma, Vlajkovac), Boka, Neuzina, Radojevo.

The overview of the DABI with regards to the Banatian Serbs shows that Northern and Central Banat remain underexplored, which may point towards the future research strategies. Also the database may be further developed by expanding the research on the Serbian communities in the Romanian and Hungarian Banat. Although the DABI stores a lot of fieldwork material which was collected amongst the Serbian communities, surprisingly not many scholarly studies on the Banatian Serbs have been written to this point by the Balkan Institute researchers and associates (cf. Đorđević 2008). Therefore, these topics remain to be elaborated in the future.

4.2. Hungarian Speech Communities

The research on the Hungarian communities in the Serbian Banat involved mainly Southern Banat, i.e. the village of Vojlovica (Hun. Hertelendyfalva), Skorenovac (Hun. Székelykeve) and Ivanovo (Hun. Sándoregyháza). The interviews were mainly conducted in Hungarian

and some in Serbian. Part of the research on Hungarian speakers included also the urban area of Belgrade (cf. Wasserscheidt 2010; Balla 2009, 2011; Balla et al. 2012).

The database with regards to Hungarian speech communities could be widened to include also the Hungarian communities living alongside Serbian in the Romanian and Hungarian Banat. However, the Hungarian research team associated with the Balkan Institute is currently in its initial phase, so we can expect that this research will expand its outreach.

4.3. Romanian Speech Communities

The field research on the Romanian speech communities is a very heterogeneous, since it includes ethnic Romanians and Romanian speaking Banyash communities. In the Serbian Banat, the research on the Romanians and the Banyash communities started at the end of 1999 lasting until today. Since the research team of the Balkan Institute has three Romanian speaking researchers and a number of external associates, a very rich Romanian fieldwork material has been thus far collected.

4.3.1. Geographical Localities of the Romanian Speech Communities

The Romanians of the Serbian Banat are not unique by their origin; we can distinguish between three groups: the Romanians from the Banat, Ardeal and Oltenia. All of the above-mentioned communities were the subject of research by the Balkan Institute researchers. The fieldwork thus covered the following localities: the municipality of Pančevo (Dolovo, Omoljica), Alibunar (Vladimirovac, Nikolinci), Bela Crkva (Greibenac), Vršac (Ritiševo, Kuštilj, Sočica, Mesić, Jablanka, Mali Žam, Markovac, Vojvodinci), Plandište (Barice), Zrenjanin (Ečka), Žitište (Veliki i Mali Torak). Field research on the Romanian communities from Ardeal has been carried out in all settlements of the Serbian Banat which are inhabited by these communities (e.g. Mali Torak, Jankov Most, Ečka, Klek, Ovča, Glogonj, Jabuka, Banatsko Novo Selo). The research included also the settlements of the Serbian Banat which are inhabited by Oltenian communities (e.g. Banatsko Novo Selo, Lokve i Straža). Although the settlements where Romanians form majority and live in a fairly homogenous groups were mostly the subject of research, the settlements where they make up minority and live in ethnically mixed areas were also explored, i.e. Omoljica and Vlajkovac. Beside audio recordings, very valuable visual recordings of carnival customs have been made in the village of Grebenac in the Southern Banat, as well as of Christmas customs in the village of Nikolinci.

The research has shown that the Romanians of the Serbian Banat are very diverse with regards to dialects, costumes and traditional culture (cf. Đurić 2007; Sikimić 2001). Thus in the DABI database there are recordings in three different dialects of Romanian language, which could be of great interest to specialized linguistic and ethnographic research (cf. Sikimić 2011; Sorescu-Marinković 2006a, 2007). It is important to emphasize that the research included different religious communities of Romanians: Romanian Orthodox, Greek-Catholic (Uniats) and neo-Protestant communities (e.g. Nazarene,

Baptist, Pentecostal, Adventist). The research on the Romanian religiosity has been enriched by recordings of religious services and interviews with priests / pastors and believers (cf. Đurić-Milovanović, Maran, Sikimić 2011; Đurić-Milovanović 2009, 2011, 2012).

4.4. Banyash and Roma Communities

Beside the ethnic Romanians, very extensive research on the Banyash communities has been conducted. The Banyash are native speakers of different dialects of Romanian language and regarded as being close to Roma in identity were (cf. footnote 3). In the DABI database, the Banyash fieldwork material covers whole territory of Serbia, parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Field research of the Banyash in the Serbian Banat included villages of Uljma, Grebenac, Mali Torak, Malo Središte i Ečka (cf. Ćirković 2006; Sikimić 2005, 2006, 2007; Sorescu-Marinković 2010, 2011).

In the DABI database there are also recordings of the Roma from the villages of Straža, Ritiševo, Lokve and Veliki Torak (cf. Ćirković 2007; Mandić 2007; Sikimić 2007).

4.5. Slavonic Catholic Population

The field research on the Slavonic Catholics in the Banat included several communities: Krashovani, Croats (Kaikavians), Bulgarians (Pavlikians) and Czechs. Croats (Kaikavians) have been actively researched from 1999 until 2004 in settlements of Boka, Neuzina and Radojevo, as well as in urban settlements of Zrenjanin, Pančevo and Novi Sad. The recorded material has been analysed in several sociolinguistic studies (cf. Vučković 2000, 2001, 2004, 2010a). The DABI also included the recordings of a very small community of the Bulgarian Catholics, so-called Paulicians or Pavlikians. The field research on Bulgarians from 2002 to 2005 included villages of Ivanovo, Skorenovac, Belo Blato and Konak (cf. Sikimić 2007, 2008; Vučković 2008). The research on Czechs from includes the recordings from the villages of Češko Selo, Kruščica, Dobričevo, Jasenovno and Gaj.

4.5.1. The Krashovani

The field research on the Krashovani in the Serbian Banat was conducted in 2010 in the villages of Izbište and Uljma where the descendants of the Krashovani still live. Although the descendants did not speak Krashovani vernacular anymore and got assimilated into the other Catholic and Orthodox communities of the Southern Banat, the fieldwork elicited the oral history narratives which commemorated tradition and the community history. The significance of the data being collected is to be found in narratives on migration routes of the Krashovani from the Romanian Mountain Banat, in the archaic linguistic features of their vernaculars and of their Catholic rites.

5. Perspectives

Perspectives on the DABI use can be viewed from two distinct angles:

(1) Necessitate of new field research focused on the communities in the Serbian as well as in the Romanian

and Hungarian Banat which have so far been underexplored.

(2) The possibilities of the DABI utilisation for scientific, educational and museum purposes in order to represent this cultural heritage to the wider audience.

With regards to future field research in the Banat, there is obviously a need for fundraising and field research grants which would support collaborative regional fieldwork projects. Namely, although a very range of ethnic communities has been the subject of research in the Serbian Banat, there are still some communities who have not attracted the scholarly attention they deserve, e.g. Slovaks, Slovenians, Macedonians and Germans. Furthermore, there is a necessity to conduct systematic research of all the Banatian communities in the time characterized by transition and profound social and cultural changes.

The DABI, as already stressed, can be utilised for scientific, educational and museum purposes. The fieldwork data archived in the DABI could serve as a source in various disciplines, e.g. linguistics, anthropology, history, cultural and folklore studies, sociology, etc. Based on the DABI, several monographs, papers collections and more than a dozen of research papers have so far been published (cf. Vučković 2010; Sikimić 2012). Furthermore, the DABI utilisation for museum and educational purposes fits very well into the programmes which create a sense of regional identity and support interregional and international cooperation. We think that exhibitions and archives of the potential Regional Centre for Banat Heritage should include the authentic audio and video fieldwork material. By representing vernaculars, narratives, songs of the Banatian people, we could give a new breath of life into static museum displays. Furthermore, such a center could give a plenty of opportunities for modern education to pupils. The digital age center, as we like to think about the prospect Regional Centre for Banat Heritage, may thus become an indispensable regional and national asset.

List of References

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