



Grigore Nandriș. Bridging the East and the West through the History of Language, Culture, Religion



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ABSTRACT

In a recent context in which Romania is confronted with the problem of emigration, this article portrays the life and works of Grigore Nandriș (1895-1968), university professor and patriot, who offers an example of devotion to his profession and country that could be set as a standard for all the following generations. He defended Romania in the war, as a soldier, and then at home in the academia, at the University of Chernivtsi and abroad, in France, at the Romanian School at Fontenay-aux-Roses, and in England, at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London. Brilliant linguist, speaking 14 foreign languages, he left a considerable amount of books, articles, reviews, conferences on linguistics, folklore, religion, and culture, being mainly interested in establishing links between language and place and culture and neighbouring nations. And above all, Grigore Nandriș's personality remains a landmark among scholars in his field and colleagues, friends, students, and followers, who admired his devotedness to the Romanian cause abroad.

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I. BIOGRAPHICAL REMARKS. DIRECTIONS OF THE SCIENTIFIC, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ACTIVITY OF GRIGORE NANDRIȘ IN ROMANIA AND ABROAD

Grigore Nandriș (1895-1968) was born in Mahala village in Chernivtsi, Northern Bukovina, at the time part of the Habsburg Empire. His mother, Maria, and his father,

Dumitru Nandriș, were well-off peasants, Grigore being their third son. He attended first the local school, then the German high-school in Chernivtsi, being supported by his maternal grandfather to pursue the rest of his high-school, university and even doctoral studies [1]. In 1916, he crossed the frontier to fight in the Romanian army against the wrongs in Bukovina. He spent three years on the front, an experience that he felt as

absurd, yet necessary taking into account the historical circumstances. Back in Bucharest, he graduated the University of Bucharest in 1919, with a degree in Comparative Philology [2]. He was hired to teach German and Latin at Gh. Lazăr High-school in Bucharest.

As early as these years, he was concerned with the Romanian language, literature and history in contact with those of the neighbouring countries, which is going to be one of the major guiding lines of his future scholarly research. Thus, he did postgraduate studies at the University of Vienna and then at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, where he took his Ph.D in 1922, with a thesis on the verbal aspects of *Putna Gospel* [3].

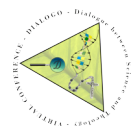
In the period 1923-1925, he went to Paris as a member of the Romanian School at Fontenay-aux-Roses, where he worked with the most distinguished French linguists, A. Meillet, A. Mazon, Mario Roques, G. Meillet, among others, from *École pratiques des Hautes Études* and *École des Langues Orientales vivantes*. The relations between the Romanian scholars of *École Roumaine*, whose Director was Nicolae Iorga, and the French linguists were very close, the support being double oriented, all with a view to enlighten certain topics about Romania in the Western research. The results of their work were published in *Mélanges de l'École Roumaine en France* journal (Grigore Nandriș, "Les rapports entre la Moldavie et l'Ukraine d'après la folklore ukrainien." 1924, pp. 1-36; "Les diplomatiques à liquides dans les éléments slaves du roumain, 1925, pp. 1-25). On his collaborations in France, Grigore Nandriș remarks that the best form of gratitude to the ones who supported him to get there was all his work for the benefit of the society everywhere else he was going to be sent [4].

Collaborating with colleagues in the humanities at home and in Austria, Poland and France, Grigore Nandriș made use of

the scientific methods acquired at all these stages and improved his knowledge of the over 14 foreign languages he knew (Latin, Greek, Old Slavic; French, Italian, German and English; Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Czech, Slovak, Bulgarian and Serbian-Croatian) [5], with the purpose to explain the evolution of the Romanian language, culture and spirituality in close connection with the ones of the peoples across the Romanian borders (Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, Bulgarian, Hungarian, etc.). Grigore Nandriș belongs to this generation of Romanian intellectuals trained in the West and who promoted this thesis according to which the Romanian people was essentially shaped in the confrontation between the Eastern and Western civilizations, which we consider he managed to bridge in a very profound manner.

In 1926, Grigore Nandriș returned to the university in Chernivtsi, as Professor of Slavonic Philology. In 1929, he also became chairman of the Society of Culture and Literature in Bukovina, which enabled him to organize a series of cultural activities: conferences, printing works, building a Cultural Palace in the city (1938), a boarding school and a cinema. The society was the core of the Romanian culture at the time. In his native village, together with his brother Ion, he founded a National House and a carpet factory [6]. He was the leader of the Young Liberal Party in Bukovina and then a member of the Romanian Parliament, with Gheorghe Brătianu as a leader. Thanks to his qualities of a winner and hard worker, he later survived away from home, carrying homeland in his soul.

In 1938, he held a series of conferences about Romania at Londonderry, Cambridge, Oxford, London, about which we find out from Romanian newspapers (*Universul*) and English publications (*The Derry Standard*). The Anglo-Irish connection is doubled by a personal tie, as he met, in the 1930s,



his future wife, Mabel Farley, a Northern-Irish journalist, graduate of Letters and Philosophy of a university in Dublin. The story of the meeting between Grigore Nandriş and Mabel Farley Nandriş is vividly recounted in an article dedicated to great Romanian personalities, benefitting from their son's collaboration, Professor John Nandriş, from the University of London [7]. The latter recalls the romantic meeting of his parents on Ceahlău, his mother being in Romania for nine years by then, how the two got married in Chernivtsi and lived happily there, how his mother, baptized in the Orthodox religion, Maria, always loved Romania and translated stories by Creangă, Caragiale, Sadoveanu, Brătescu-Voineşti into English and how he grew up with these stories.

The story moves abroad since 1940 because Grigore Nandriş was sent in 1940 in a diplomatic mission in England and Northern Ireland, and while he was visiting with his wife and son their Northern Irish family, the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact was signed and Northern Bukovina was annexed. The Nandriş family, Aniţa, Grigore's sister and her three children, are deported to Siberia and their belongings and Grigore's manuscripts in Chernivtsi were all destroyed. The fact that he could not help his relatives in Siberia was extremely painful, so the rest of the years in exile were fully dedicated to the Romanian cause, enthusiastically supported by his wife, Mabel Maria Nandriş. He never had the chance to return to Romania for the rest of his life, but his entire scientific activity is centered on defining Romanianness. "I stay here as if in a prison whose cuffs tighten around me day by day," confesses Grigore Nandriş in exile [8].

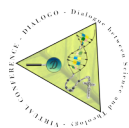
In 1942, he had a job in the Romanian Department of the BBC and he was also a visiting lecturer of Romanian at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at the University of London. In 1946-47, he gave

a series of lectures on Slavic Philology in London and Oxford. In 1947, he was elected chair of Comparative Slavonic Philology and then head of the Language and Literature Department of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London. There, besides teaching, doing research, he insisted on enlarging the collection of Romanian books and on founding the institution of Honours Degree in Romanian Language and Literature [9].

His stay at Mount Athos in 1959 is significant, being recorded later in his studies of paintings and manuscripts. He got sick, suffering from heart disease, worsened by the typhus contracted during the war and by his relentless work, and in 1962 he retired from the university but continued to write and to travel to deliver conferences in New York, Paris, Milano, etc.. In 1968, he died at King's College Hospital. He never grew roots in England, other than his wife and son, the rest of his Romanian family had been left in Romania. Mabel Maria Nandriş brought the urn with the ashes to the family tomb in Rădăuţi.

II. DEFINING ROMANIANNESSTHROUGH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

One major direction of research in the works of Professor Grigore Nandriş, eminent linguist, considers the relations between Romanians and their neighbours, as reflected in folklore, demographical and ethnographical data. He thus looks at the Romanian presence in the Polish and Czech Carpathians, studied through documents and the *Polish Linguistic Map*. According to his findings, Romanian shepherds had been present there since the 12th – 13th centuries [10]. Based on linguistic data and toponymy, the conclusion points towards a wide Romanian presence all over the Carpathians up to Moravia and Silesia. The typical pastoral terms used in the region are



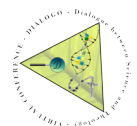
all Romanian.

Secondly, while a member of the Romanian School in Paris, Grigore Nandriș studied the historical, literary and linguistic ties between Moldavia and Ukraine. *Mélanges de l'École Roumaine en France* (1924) in a study dedicated to the folklore in the two places, he analyses popular songs and comments on the historical relations as they come out from these poems. The ages of Bohdan Khmelnytsky (1595-1657) and Stephen the Great (1433-1504) are focused on with references to their achievements and common struggles against the Turks and the subsequent decline of the political power of the regions [11]. The professor rejects the idea of a Russian domination in Moldavia, based on toponymy and in this sense, he publishes studies in journals in Paris and London. He brings as an argument the contribution to the Russian culture of the Romanian immigrants accompanying Dimitrie Cantemir (1673-1723) in Russia after 1711 [12].

With regards to linguistic studies, Corlăteanu mentions other important contributions from the Polish and Chernivtsi period, a study of the origin of name of our national poet, Mihai Eminescu (1850-1889) and a lecture on the methodology of teaching Romanian, presented with Al. Procopovici at the 3rd Congress of Romanian specialists in Philology (Chernivtsi, 20-22 May 1927). About Eminescu's name, while he was in Poland, he looked at the local archives for the name Eminowicz and established that it comes from the Tatar root Emin, which became Eminowicz in Poland and then Eminovici in Moldavia [13]. Interestingly, the Professor's publications as well as lectures and seminars at the University of Chernivtsi could be regarded as embedded within this ideal of spiritual and national unity of the Romanian people, a goal he pursued later in exile as well. "All the nationalities will live a free national life according to their

ethnic background. They will be able to flourish within the Romanian national state. Romanians will not inflict onto others the injustice done to them" [14].

While in London, after 1940, when he could not return to Romania, Grigore Nandriș continued his teaching and research activity as chair of Comparative Slavonic Philology and then head of the Language and Literature Department of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London. There are numerous contributions in the *Slavonic and East European Review* (e.g. "The Development and Structure of Rumanian", 1951; "The Relations between Toponymy and Ethnology in Rumania", 1956). On the development of the Romanian language, Nandriș remarks that it is "the only Romance language which continues the Latin of the Eastern Roman Empire," in some respects an older language than the Western Romance languages. It is spoken "in the Danubian Principalities, Transylvania, Bucovina and Bessarabia, i.e. the ancient Dacia Traiana. Outside these lands, Rumanians are to be found East of the Dniester river, along the southern banks of the Danube in Bulgaria, in Old Serbia (in the Timok valley), and scattered over the Balkan Peninsula: in Macedonia, on Mount Olympus, in the Pindus, in the mountains of Karashova, in Epirus, in Thessaly and in Albania" [15]. In order to facilitate the learning of Romanian, he published *Colloquial Rumanian*, in three editions 1945, 1953, 1961, considered for more than three decades the most authoritative textbook in English for the study of Romanian. In the preface of the grammar book, he mentions, besides the 16 million Romanians speaking it as seen above, the two million abroad, many of them in the US. He also tackles again the conservative nature of Romanian in the context of its evolution separated from the Romance languages in Western Europe and the neighbouring Slav influences it received,



which had been exaggerated for political reasons [16]. In 1959-1960, he published *The Handbook of Old Church Slavonic I*, which is considered to be the most complete work of its kind [17].

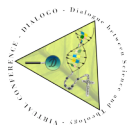
As a matter of fact, the interest for Romanian studies in Britain was rekindled by the constant and devoted efforts of Professor Grigore Nandriș. He somehow comes in a tradition, but a rather frail one. The first translations into English of Romanian folk songs and literary texts by Romanian writers date back to mid-19th century. With the appointment of the first Romanian ambassador to the Court of St. James, Ion Ghica, the expansion of the British Museum's collection of Romanian books and the first Romanian grammar published in English in 1887 by R. Torcianu, Romanian Studies started being better represented. An institutional basis for the study of Romanian in Britain is offered by the setting up, in 1915, of The School of Slavonic and East European Studies at King's College, meant to allow "small nations" to promote their interests, e.g. consolidate its territory in the case of Romania. After a decade-long break in the presence of Romanian Studies, in 1941 the activity is resumed and Grigore Nandriș takes it over since 1942 as we have described above. Not only does he teach and publish in The School of Slavonic and East European Studies, but he also gathers around him a group of students, colleagues, friends, who will work with him and then continue his projects up to the present [18].

Besides Eminescu, our Romantic national poet, Grigore Nandriș was interested in the creation of our greatest national sculptor, Constantin Brâncuși (1876-1957). He met the brilliant sculptor and his memories from 1951-1952 are captured in an article. The professor's interpretation of the perfect shape found by Brâncuși explains the fascination of an entire world with the latter's works: "*The Perfect Egg* [...]"

is the most accomplished achievement of creation, the beginning and ending of it all. Then I understood the recurrent use of the oval shape in the sculpture of Brâncuși. This shape brings him closer to the infinite mystery, to the First Creator. And then I thought of the philological confirmation of this meaning of the egg (Lat. *ovum*, Gr. *oon*). In all the Indo-European languages, the word is derived from the verb *to be*, *to exist*, so, it expresses the idea of original life, of existence, the principle of being in itself ... I only know of a parallel case, in our fellow citizen Ion Creangă, who molded into words what Brâncuși carved in stone, metal, wood and marble" [19].

Another example of a topic of interest in the West and East, discussed at length by Professor Grigore Nandriș is that of the fascinating Dracula. In his 1966 article, he deals with the history and the legend of the character and the origin of his name; the theme in folklore; the psychological significance of the theme in the West and its historical significance in the East. The first section of the article recounts the story of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), of the haunted castle in the Eastern Carpathians from where Dracula, count of Bistriz, prepares an invasion of England. The beginnings of the "operation vampire" in England; the attraction – repulsion principle uniting vampire and victim; the undeadness quality acquired by the victim once with the bite are emphasized in the presentation of the story as one of the greatest "successes in the English horror literature" of the 20th century [20].

The historical personage who features as Dracula is Vlad V, the Empaler, ruler in 1456-1462, and the in 1476, in Wallachia. In Romanian, a connection has been established between Dracula and the word "devil" (Lat. *draco*, *dracuillu-*) and Stoker made it a vampire. Vlad V's father, Vlad III, had the epithet Dracul (the "Devil"),



his son, Vlad V, being only known as Vlad Tsepesh “Empaler.” Dracul was an epithet for a member of the Order of the Dragon, created in 1418, to defend the Church of Rome against the Hussites [21]. Historical and ethnographic accuracy was not the aim of Stoker, who wrote a horror novel, based on info gathered in the British Museum and blending it. From the Romanian folklore, the Irish author seems to have taken the undeadness of Strigoi, the supermanly strength and wickedness of Zmeu, the mystery of Balaur and the attraction of Făt Frumos [22]. Grigore Nandriș looked at English, German, Romanian, Russian and Hungarian sources, blending literary criticism and psychoanalysis to decipher the meaning of the Dracula theme. The Western sources seem to be divided between an image of Dracula doing justice in his country and against the invading Turks and an image of a cruel sadistic monster in the Saxon chronicles just because the Romanian ruler interfered with their trade monopolies in Wallachia. The Russian chronicles portray him in the context of the defence of Orthodoxy. The conclusion of the article by Grigore Nandriș mentions several aspects: a novel built on the 19th century mass psychology, Romantic historicism and folklore, anticipating 20th century psychoanalytical desire to uncover dark underground instincts in the human soul; a brief bio of Bram Stoker (1847-1912); the legacy of the story in the press, the film industry and many other types of rewritings and responses.

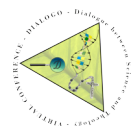
III. DEFINING ROMANIANNESSTHROUGH RELIGIOUS WRITINGS

Grigore Nandriș was a brilliant author and translator of religious art and history writings. The works of religious art appeared in Romanian in a volume entitled *The Humanism of Post-Byzantine Mural Painting* [23]. This posthumous work, published in

1985, includes in volume I: *Mural Painting in Bukovina*, which is the English translation of the first 2 parts of the work of the Polish professor Wladyslaw Podlacha, *Malowidla scienné w cerkwiach Bukowiny*, by Grigore Nandriș, the third part translated by Anca Irina Ionescu, after the Polish original, and in volume II: *Humanism of post-Byzantine Mural Painting in Eastern Europe*, the English translation of Grigore Nandriș’s book *Christian Humanism in the Neo-Byzantine Mural Painting of Eastern Europe* by Anca Vasiliu. It is enriched with notes by Anca Vasiliu, under the supervision of Professor Vasile Drăguț. In 1940, Grigore Nandriș confesses the reasons why he decided to translate Wladyslaw Podlacha’s studies into English. According to him, these works are absolutely necessary for understanding the old Moldovan art, its origin and transformations, claiming at that time that, regardless of the multitude of scientific works published on the subject of mural painting in Bukovina, those of Podlacha are valid in an absolute manner [24].

Mabel Nandriș, Grigore Nandriș’s wife, wrote in the foreword to the English translation of the first two parts of W. Podlacha’s work that “reading the study of the Polish art historian, Professor WP - *Malowidla scienné w cerkwiach Bukowiny* -, my husband realized that, although it had been published in 1912, no other work comparable to it on post-Byzantine painting in Bukovina had appeared before or after that date, so that, with the permission of Professor Podlacha, he translated it into Romanian” [25]. This translation was lost during WW II. Grigore Nandriș did not give up the idea of publishing it and even though it appeared after his death (1968), the English version was published, under the care of his wife, in Germany, in 1970 [26].

Wladyslaw Podlacha’s work can be considered the first monograph of post-Byzantine paintings in Bukovina that were



“rediscovered by historians only at the beginning of the twentieth century, first by local amateur researchers ...” [27]. Viennese art historian Strzygovski, Podlacha’s professor, began the systematic study of these works of art.

Podlacha manages to draw attention to the need for a comparative and complementary analysis of different fields of artistic creation: architecture, sculpture, painting, embroidery, etc., as a change of the scientific approach different from that of the times when the fields were researched in a clearly separate way. As stated by the translator of Wladyslaw Podlacha’s work, Grigore Nandriș, the former manages to offer the mural paintings in Bukovina, through his descriptions, a recognition of the value that places them next to those from Mount Athos. The detailed descriptions he left us, together with the accompanying photographs, represent an archive that helps to reconstruct the original image of certain monuments, later restored or even destroyed. This is the case of the church of Saint Procopius in the village of Bădăuți, founded by Prince Stephen the Great, destroyed by the Austrians in WW I [28].

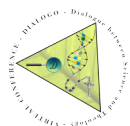
The themes approached by W. Podlacha: the painting elements in the altar, the nave, the narthex, the porch, the apse and the exterior walls of the churches in Bukovina; those with historical and technical content of the art of the icon were the challenge underlying the work by Grigore Nandriș, published in English in 1970.

From the beginning of his work, Grigore Nandriș declares his intention to approach two themes “that illustrate the cultural-historical aspect of Byzantine art: The Tree of Jesse and the Last Judgment” [29]. After making a presentation of the general characteristics of post-Byzantine iconography, his philology background leads him to identify the names of Greek philosophers represented in the fresco

The Tree of Jesse. He states that “the art historians who dealt with this chapter of Byzantine art were handicapped by the fact that some 12 names of Greek philosophers had not been deciphered and they were obliged to consider only those who were known from the theological viewpoint. This also led to a misinterpretation of the theme of the Last Judgment, closely related to the representation of the Tree and the philosophers and prophets” [30]. After clarifying this subject, he ideologically and historically interprets the iconographic themes of the Last Judgment and the Tree of Jesse, comparing them with Western representations. He does not overlook topics such as the influences of hesychasm on post-Byzantine painting as well as mural painting in Poland, Lithuania and the Russian lands. A special chapter was dedicated to the connection between Bukovina and Mount Athos, analyzing the representation of some common themes: Sofia, the Divine Liturgy, etc.

In 1959 Grigore Nandriș and his son visited Mount Athos for 6 weeks. During the visit he photographed the foundations of the Romanian princes [31].

Grigore Nandriș’s connection with Mount Athos dates back to the fourth decade of the 20th century when he published the work *Romanian Documents in the Slavic Language from the Monasteries of Mount Athos (1372-1658)*. Published by Grigore Nandriș after the *Photos and Notes of Gabriel Millet*. Forty of the documents found in the Monasteries of Mount Athos represent donations of the Romanian rulers to the settlements at Athos. Historian Pierre Năsturel, in his review of the work, after making critical references to the scientific writing techniques, remarks the importance of Grigore Nandriș’s contribution to Romanian history by bringing to light these documents that demonstrate the essential contribution of Romanian rulers to the support of the



monasteries at Athos [32].

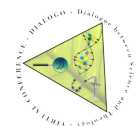
Too give one more example in what concerns Grigore Nandriș's preoccupations with folklore, in *Les rapports entre la Moldavie et l'Ukraine, d'après le folklore ukrainien*, which we have already introduced in the previous section, he analyzes the historical connections between Moldova and Ukraine, reflected in Ukrainian folk poetry. Many of these creations contain religious messages, being Christmas carols or historical poems in which divine protection is required. This is how language, culture and religion are intertwined and reveal in an essential manner characteristics of a nation in relation to the neighbouring ones, according to Grigore Nandriș.

CONCLUSION

As proved above, various forms of acknowledgment prove the encompassing dimension of the professor's activity. Grigore Nandriș published articles, studies and reviews in 17 periodicals at home and in 19 abroad. He was awarded by the Literature Academy in Poland the silver laurels and "Polonia restituta" order and the title of Professor Emeritus by the University of London. At the International Congress of toponymy at Salamanca in 1953, he was elected president. Professor Norbert Reiter from the University of Berlin mentioned 69 titles on the history of culture and 89 titles on the history of language by Grigore Nandriș. Many other colleagues, collaborators and former students, Romanian and foreign, wrote warmly about the personality of the Romanian intellectual. In 2014, a memorial plaque was uncovered at the School in Mahala village, which since then, together with a street, bore the scientist's name, Grigore Nandriș. Thus, he may have found his peace back home in Bukovina.

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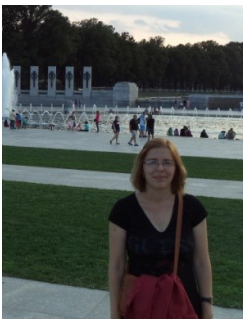
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