

ON THE HORIZON OF BYZANTINOLOGY: VASILE GRECU

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***Rezumat:** Orice istorie culturală care se respectă reunește o serie de personalități care au punctat hotărâtor dimensiunea unui spațiu intelectual. Despre activitatea lui Vasile Grecu se poate spune că îi este specifică unitatea concertantă, asigurată de convergența planurilor în care s-a manifestat spiritul creator. Cercetările atente și îndelungi, ca și traduceri din limbile greacă și latină aveau să-l pună în situația de a scoate în relief marea înflorire artistică din bazinul Mării Negre, stimulată de contactul cu lumea bizantină. Coborând în lumea cronicarilor bizantini, cu dregătorii și preocupări diverse, care nu dezvăluiau sau nu aveau pretenția că scriu istoria vremii lor, Grecu avea să probeze intersectarea erudiției cu câmpul oportunității culturale, știut fiind faptul că orice cronicar vorbea din suflet, lăsându-se cuprins de patos. Există o oarecare fascinație a izvorului bizantin și al autorului său, povestitor, artist al portretului creionat adeseori subiectiv, maestru al scenelor dinamice și filosof de ocazie, reflectând la curgerea lumii. Încercând o minimă sistematizare a scrierilor aparținând lui Ducas, Laonicos Chalcocondil, Critobul din Imbros, Georgios Sphrantzes și Constantin al VII-lea Porfirogenetul, Vasile Grecu a continuat colecția „Scriptores byzantini”, făcând dovada filologului care îl însoțește în permanență pe istoric, pe cercetător și traducător. O deosebită temeinicie în cercetarea codicelor grecești a făcut posibilă pregătirea edițiilor critice, consacrate, de altfel, în domeniul bizantinologiei. Fiecare dintre ele dezvăluie imaginea unui cercetător mișcătos, preocupat de identificarea variantelor, de stabilirea paternității manuscriselor – ca etapă cea mai dificilă în constituirea unitară a textului, de corelarea informației în așa fel încât ansamblul să capete nu numai armonie, ci și temelie solidă.*

Each cultural history, which respects itself, reunites a series of personalities who have marked in a definite way the dimension of an intellectual space. What we can say about the activity of Vasile Grecu is that he had a concordant specific unity, ensured by the convergence of the plans on which his creative spirit manifested itself. Born on the 31st of July 1885, in Mitocul Dragomirnei, Vasile Grecu attended college in Vienna and Cernăuți, in an epoch where his teachers were Hans von Arnim, W. Kubitschek, E. Reich and Sextil Pușcariu. More than others, he had the chance of deepening and expanding his knowledge in Berlin, studying with Ulrich von Willamowitz Moellendorf, a well known Hellenist, and author of more specialty treaties. After the great universal history horizon, opened during college, the German scholars have ensured him the depth of more restricted specialty areas and taught him methodology. At the subjects' interference, taking from each master what suited him; Vasile Grecu made his own path, studying history in an area that requires full knowledge of Byzantinology.

He was meant to live the greatest events from the beginning of the century, followed, after huge efforts, by Romania's reunion and by a vast modernizing

program on all levels. During the First World War's years, Vasile Grecu was one of those who, in Chişinău and Cernăuţi, understood to join resistance, often speaking to a public who needed so much faith in the country's destiny. Embracing teaching, collaborating to different specialty magazines and participating in the organization of the Bukowina's archives, he knew how to fructify the accumulated experiences. Not by chance, on understanding history – as a complex discipline– he used to say that it requires a long specialization and a continuous appeal to facts in order to find the real balance between idea and action. The position of the Bukowina professor – inspired not only by the masters in Vienna and Berlin, but also by the critical Romanian school – was considering the needs of the national historiography, which was still studied less than necessary.

Although the large history treaties were popular to the Western world, the partial and monographic restitutions were still paid attention to by the Bukowina's historians, who were loyal to the examination of each detail. During a half century career, Vasile Grecu firmly persisted on the respect historiography owes to the facts and the necessity of those being more strictly defined, arranged before synthesis. Of each scientific work's three steps, the one definite research most appealing to him, was in relation to a spirit thirsty of knowledge. Expressing his method options, at the same time with the gratitude towards his professors, Vasile Grecu declared from the very beginning his adhesion to the Byzantine history and literature, as a means of knowing better the ancient values. The careful and long researches, as well as the translations from Greek and Latin were going to make him discover numerous new elements and to highlight the great artistic efflorescence in the Black Sea area, stimulated by the contact with the Byzantine world.

The idea that the Byzantium had not disappeared artistically along with the Turkish occupation of Constantinople, but survived in the marginal provinces, especially in the Romanian countries, was to be consecrated by Nicolae Iorga in *Byzance apres Byzance*. Vasile Grecu had expressed it too, connecting the artistic development in these countries in the epoch mentioned with the Byzantine neighborhood. He needed years of hard work in the archives and silent libraries, in which time seemed to have a slower pace in order to write the studies concerning the Byzantine history and culture, the influence exerted by the Byzantine and post-Byzantine heritage on the Romanian one. Vasile Grecu participated at various international congresses and lectured on the values of the ecclesiastic Romanian art in different cultural centers on the continent. In the country, he evoked in the academic environment, but also for the public, the monuments through which the national genius *stands out* in the world¹. Collaborator for many Romanian publications, he was closer to the group around „Codrul Cosminului”, the one that had provided a new vigor to the Bukowina cultural life.

The iconography is, from this point of view, the best proof. But the hasty generalization, the aesthetic divagation as well as the speculative attitude towards the object of research had to be replaced with an exhaustive severe study, capable of revealing the unity of conception and style of the studied epoch. From the stylistic and technical analysis, the scholar was able to reach aspects particular to the area in

which those specific creations had been created. It was not a coincidence when he stated about the paintings that they “present in fact and translate in lines and paint spots, figures and compositions, rituals, text interpretations, church history and laic history, hymns and religious practices. The one who looks will be unaware of all these unless he knows how to read the paintings”². Works on the Byzantine iconography and the medieval Romanian paintings, on the origins of the old Romanian art had appeared both in publications in the country as well as in international magazines: „Byzantion. Revue internationale des études byzantines“, „Byzantinische Zeitschrift“³.

The colours, the model, the structure were the elements on which Vasile Grecu established the authenticity, as well as the direct relationship between the Byzantine art and the Romanian one. The discovery of some manuscripts from the XVIIIth and XIXth in the Romanian Academy allowed him the identification of three Romanian versions of the Ermines (manuals of church painting)⁴. Grecu had also insisted on the report among them in a series of conferences lectured at the University of Cernăuți, and then in Bucharest. A series of writings, dated 1932-1935 and published in the „Candela” magazine, were reunited in the volume *Cărți de pictură bisericească bizantină. Introducere critică a versiunilor românești după redacțiunea lui Dionisie din Furna, tradusă în 1805 de arhimandritul Macarie, cât și după alte redacțiuni mai vechi, [Books of Byzantine Church Painting...]* appeared in Cernăuți in 1936⁵. Convinced that the main problems are not to be avoided or solved improperly, Grecu insisted on the iconographical contribution to the understanding of the art monuments and, through these, of the historical context itself. He considered that the specialist cannot limit himself to summary elements, of erudition, but has to tend to the configuration of the idea. In a similar way, the popular art researches, indispensable, cannot be reduced to the naive creations’ descriptions, but have to lead to analysis and artistic determination. They represent ideas, feelings and life; they represent documents and historical sources.

In the same category of the historical sources were placed the writings of Ducas, Laonicos Chalcocondil, Critobul of Imbros, Georgios Sphrantzes and Constantin al VII-lea Porfirogenet. Trying to systemize them a little, Grecu continued the collection „Scriptores byzantini”, demonstrating that the philologist is always accompanying the historian, the scholar and the translator. The rigorous study of the Greek Codices made sure the preparation of the critical editions, consecrated, actually, in Byzantinology. Each of them presents the image of an attentive researcher, preoccupied by the identification of the variants, by the paternity of the documents – the hardest step in the unitary construction of the text, correlation of the information in such a way that the whole gets not only harmony, but a solid ground too.

Entering the world of the Byzantine chroniclers, with their various jobs and preoccupations, who had the thought of writing the history of their epoch, Grecu was to prove the interaction of the erudition and the cultural opportunity, being known the fact that a chronicler was talking from his heart, with pathos. There is a certain fascination of the Byzantine source and of its author, narrator, and artist of the portrait

often drawn subjectively, master of the dynamic scenes and occasional philosopher, reflecting on the world's passing.

After more than a decade from publishing some studies inspired by the work of Ducas⁶, Vasile Grecu elaborated the critical edition of the *Istoria turco-bizantină [Turco-ByzantineHistory]* (1341-1462) pertaining to the Byzantine chronicler⁷. It was not the first edition of the above-mentioned work, as the European libraries had already four versions of it in „Corpus Byzantinae Historiae” (Paris – 1649 and Venice 1729-1733), „Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae” (Bonn – 1834) and „Patrologia Graeca” (Paris – 1866). It was only that in those libraries there were also manuscripts and translations which, reconsidered, could reunite the text. Maybe, in his action, Grecu wanted to complete some lacunas and the scholar might have wanted to overpass what was realized before. However, beyond the idea of the „competition”, the sense of research and the quality of the intellectual effort paid off, adding value to the act. Without entering the details concerning the text's analysis of the given source, we have to underline the priority given by Grecu to the critical material, as well as to the way in which the questionable lines have been marked in the work. There are explanations offered to each word, expression or a completely historical situation. Moreover, each time it was necessary, the text was supported by quotations with the author's name, title and year of appearance. This is why, this type of work, as it can be seen from the organic relationship of the two parts – text and critical apparatus – has its own identity. With the modesty that advises science and the love towards the thing done, the scholar's realization feeds itself from the pattern of the specialty's critic, showing at the same time what Vasile Grecu realized: a triple effort as an editor, translator and commenter. The critical edition of *Istoria turco-bizantină [Turco-ByzantineHistory]* (1341-1462) increases its identity by its own addition. It is the complete bilingual index (Romanian and Greek): “Index Gramaticus” encloses phonetic and morphologic particularities (nouns, adjectives, pronouns, numerals, verbs, reduplications, accord, accusative and constructions with it, constructions with participles, accusative and nominative, with the infinitive, infinitive in genitive); it can also be added the “Index Verborum” (in Greek) and “Index of names and places” (in Romanian).

In the year of the appearance of the critical edition to Ducas' writing, Vasile Grecu published, in volume II of the “Scriptores byzantini” collection, a translation after the version of E. Drako⁸, on *Historiarum demonstrationes* by Laonic Chalcocondil. It was not a simple linguistic transcription⁹, as the numerous text difficulties were requiring the solution through interpretations and through the juxtaposition of the information existing in the German edition by Immanuel Bekker¹⁰ and from similar works, both in subject and approach, pertaining to Akdes Nimet¹¹ and Gyula Moravcsik¹². As expected, the interest towards the chronicle of Chalcocondil¹³ came also from its usage as a primary source for the Romanian history, for the description of the campaigns against the Turks from Nicopole (1396), Varna (1444), Kossovopoljje (1448), of those led by Iancu of Hunedoara, as well as the expedition of Mohamet the Second against Vlad the Impaler. The scholar's fertile initiative paid off through the longevity of the translation and, most of all, through its

efficiency.

Another outstanding realization has been the critical edition of the text belonging to Critobul of Imbros, *Din domnia lui Mahomed al II-lea. Anii 1451-1467 [From the Reign of Mahomet the Second. Years 1451-1467]*¹⁴. The reason standing behind this project was supported by the “negligent and arbitrary” trial to publish the document in the „Monumenta Hungariae Historica” collection and by the „consequent classical presentation” given to it by a professor from the Göttingen University, Carol Müller. In an article published in 1957, Vasile Grecu insisted on the veracity of his name, explaining the transformation of „Mihail Critopul” in „Kritobulos” (meaning „the one that is well advised”, „wise”) and Critobul from Imbros, after the antique model¹⁵. As the re-editing of the chronicler’s creation was a courageous act, it could have been assumed only with the conscience that the last version is not the final one too. Appeared in 1963, the Grecu edition to the work of Critobul respected both the exigencies implied by philology and concept, and the critical apparatus meant to offer an image as complete as possible, from the history’s perspective on the reports between the chronicler’s thoughts and his sources or the epoch’s influences.

In 1966, in the fifth volume of „Scriptores Byzantini”, appeared in the Academy’s Publishing House, could also be found the critical edition to the *Memoirs* of Georgios Sphrantzes, „a unique writing”, „natural and fascinating through its sincerity”, „similar to *Strategikon* by Kekaumenos”, but „which hasn’t been appreciated to its right value”¹⁶. This was the result of the discoveries made in the archives and libraries, as the manuscripts proved to be numerous and varied as content: „Codex Vaticanus Ottobonianus Graecus 260”, „Codex Taurinensis 246”, „Codex Vallicellianus CLXXII”, „Codex Barberianus Graecus 175” and „Codex Barberianus Graecus 176”. Starting from the text considered to be the closest to the original, Grecu managed to provide a Romanian version. The translation had proved out to be extremely difficult since Sprantzes conceived his work in the popular language, not in the literary one. The efforts to decipher the text correctly, to provide all the lexical and conceptual nuances of the Byzantine chronicler’s style needed a rich documentary material, starting with the most sophisticated philosophical instruments up to the famous texts and encyclopedias of the XVth century. Later, the results of the research have been published in another two works: *Das Memorienwerk des Georgios Sphrantzes*¹⁷ and *Georgios Sphrantzes. Leben und Werk. Makarios Melissenos und sein Werk. Die Ausgabe*¹⁸.

The organization in Bucharest, in September 1971, of the XIVth International Congress of Byzantine Studies facilitated the publication of a new volume (the seventh) of the specialty series already consecrated. It was not a critical series, but a new translation, this time after the work belonging to the emperor Constantine the VIIth Porfirogenet, *Carte de învățătură pentru fiul său Romanos [Teaching Book for his Son Romanos]*¹⁹. Without showing the historical character of the work, Vasile Grecu insisted only on its originality and on its content that once approached in a systematic research offered „a vast panorama on history, geography and ethnography of the world known by the Byzantine and, especially, of the lands pertaining or that had

pertained to the empire”²⁰.

Greco’s contribution to the revelation of the Byzantine aspects of the Romanian history and culture configured also through the publishing of the volume *Izvorul principal bizantin pentru Cartea cu Învățătură a diaconului Coresi din 1851; Omiliile patriarhului Ioan XIV Caleca (1334-1347)*²¹. It was not an exclusively consecrated action to history, but a useful tool in interpreting the historical evolution, a model to the interdisciplinary research. From a different perspective was approached the Greek version of the *Învățăturilor lui Neagoe Basarab [The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab]*²². Beyond the controversial paternity of the work – this generated the polemics Greco-Panaitescu²³ – it is distinguished through a Christian lyricism, humanitarian utopia and advice necessary in the historical context, through the specific model of construction, more likely to the oriental culture rather than the Western one. In the same manner based also on the manuscripts discovered at Athos, in 1939, was edited the volume *Viața Sfântului Nifon. O redacție grecească inedită, editată, tradusă și însoțită cu o introducere [Life of St. Niphon...]*²⁴. The linguistic argument in comparing the Romanian and Greek versions, the information from various sources and the rigorous critical apparatus (accompanied in the end by the usual Index in Greek, German and Romanian) have provided the medieval document a broad opening.

As far as the temptations of the Byzantine literature are concerned, the philological method imposed in the specific researches of Vasile Greco the attentive study of recovering the original or the closest version to it. The reason for which the Byzantine literature had to be known was not exclusively part of the literary productions’ aesthetic value, according to Greco’s opinion; from the aesthetic point of view they are inferior to the antique Latin and Greek ones. „We will not find in it that harmonious and organic literary evolution, specific to the classical Greek literature, developing from poetry to prose, from the epical poems to the lyrical ones and then dramatic and we will not find the literary genres as presented in the modern literature”. The explanation was found in the Byzantine authors’ option for the „scholar imitation”. If the Byzantine literature determinates the interest, this is due to „its historical value” and its content tightly related to the antique Greek creation. We may add to this the influences exerted by itself on the „oriental, Syrian, Armenian, Copt and Arabian literature”²⁵. In fact, on the Byzantine literature, Vasile Greco wrote that it had its own popular saga, „coming out of the rural life” or „military, border like”. As far as the Byzantine hagiography is concerned, often put in a submissive report towards the laic literature, it intermingles with this last one and participates, in an equal measure, to the historical reconstruction, having a meaning, completely integrated²⁶. The research of these two, with an equal competency and fervor – said Vasile Greco – favors the whole assembly of history, as an expression of the creative spirit. The artistic values that highlight are, at the same time, documents, life testimonies, decipherable only with multidisciplinary means.

If, according to H. Focillon’s definition, „history is the study of the relationships established among facts, ideas and forms”, Vasile Greco is, through his works a historian who knew how to serve various disciplines. Invigorating the strict

historical registration with a vital tonus, of the research's active sense, he reported, permanently, the panorama of ideas to the theoretical, historical and historiographical climate of the epoch in which they were expressed, but also the selective verdict that only time can offer on the human being.

NOTE:

¹ Vasile Grecu, *Din frumusețile marilor noastre biserici* [From the beauties of our great Churches], "Calendarul Glasul Bucovinei", VIII, Cernăuți, 1927, pp. 12-25; Idem, *Din pictura vechilor noastre biserici*, [From the Painting of our old Churches], "Junimea literară", XIV, Cernăuți, 1925, pp. 401-406.

² Idem, *Cărți de pictură bisericească bizantină* [Books of Byzantine Church Painting], "Candela", 53, Cernăuți, 1934, p. 83.

³ Idem, *Influențe sârbești în vechea iconografie bisericească a Moldovei* [Serbian influences in the Old Church Iconography of Moldavia], "Codrul Cosminului", IX, Cernăuți, 1935, pp. 103-108; Idem, *Die Hermenia*, "Byzantinische Zeitschrift", 30, 1929/1930, pp. 619-622; Idem, *Byzantinische Handbücher*, "Byzantion. Revue internationale des études byzantines", IX/2, 1934, pp. 675-701.

⁴ Idem, *Versiunile românești ale Erminiilor de pictură bizantine* [Romanian Versions of Byzantine Painting Erminies], "Codrul Cosminului", 1924, pp. 273-289; Idem, *Erminii de pictură bizantină* [Byzantine Painting Erminies], "Candela", Cernăuți, 1942, pp. 489-515.

⁵ Idem, *Cărți de pictură bisericească bizantină. Introducere critică a versiunilor românești atât după redacțiunea lui Dionisie din Furna tradusă la 1805 de arhimandritul Macarie cât și după alte redacțiuni mai vechi* [Books of Byzantine Church Painting. Critical Introduction of Romanian Versions according to Dionysius of Furna, translated in 1805 by Archimandrite Macarie, and according to another older Elaborations], Cernăuți, 1936.

⁶ Idem, *Istoricul bizantin Duca. Omul și opera sa. O ediție critică a cronicii lui. Importanța lui Duca pentru istoria românilor* [Byzantine Historian Ducas. Man and his Work. A Critical Edition of his chronicle. The Importance of Ducas for the Romanians History], "Analele Academiei Române". Memoriile Secției Istorice, seria III, tom XXIX, București, 1947, pp. 591-662; Idem, *Pour une meilleure connaissance de l'historien Doukas*, "Memorial Louis Petit", Paris, 1948, pp. 128-141.

⁷ Ducas, *Istoria turco-bizantină (1341-1452)* [Turco-Byzantine History], ed. Vasile Grecu, București, 1958.

⁸ *Historiae Demonstrationes*, ed. Eugenius Darko, Budapesta, tom I, 1922, tom II, partea I – 1923, partea a II-a - 1927.

⁹ Laonic Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice* [Historical Exposures], ed. Vasile Grecu, București, 1958.

¹⁰ *Historiarum Libri Decem*, ed. Immanuel Bekker, în "Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae", Bonn, 1843.

¹¹ Akdes Nimet, *Die türkische Prosopographie bei. Laonikos Chalkokandyles*, Hamburg, 1933

¹² Gyula Moravcsik, *Sprachreste der Türkvölker in den Byzantinischen Quellen*, „Bzyantinoturcica“, Budapesta, 1943.

¹³ Vasile Grecu, *K voprosu o biografii i istoriceskon trude Laonika Halkokondila*, „Vizantijski Vremennik“, XIII, Sankt Petersburg, 1958, pp. 198-210.

¹⁴ Critobul din Imbros, *Din domnia lui Mahomed al II-lea. Anii 1451-1467 [From the Reign of Mahomet the Second. Years 1451-1467]*, ed. Vasile Grecu, București, 1963. Before the critical edition, another document attributed to Kritobul was published by Vasile Grecu: *Scrisoarea de dedicație a istoricului Critobul către Mahomed al II-lea Cuceritorul [Letter of Dedication of Historian Kritobul to Mohamet the Secon, the Conqueror]*, București, 1940.

¹⁵ Vasile Grecu, *Kritobulos aus Imbros. Sein wahrer Name. Die Widmungsbriege. Die Aufgabe. Das Geschichtswerk*, „Byzantinoslavica“, XVIII, Praga, 1957, pp. 1-17.

¹⁶ Georgios Sphrantzes, *Cronica 1401-1477[Chronicle 1401-1477]*, ed. Vasile Grecu, (anexe *Pseudo-Sphrantzes, Macarie Melissenos – Chronicon maius 1258-1481*), București, 1966, pp. 1-4

¹⁷ Vasile Grecu, *Das Memorienwerk des Georgios Sphrantzes*, Belgrad, 1964.

¹⁸ Idem, *Georgios Sphrantzes. Leben und Werk. Makarios Melissenos und sein Werk. Die Ausgabe*, „Byzantinoslavica“, XXVI, Praga, 1965, pp. 62-73.

¹⁹ Constantin al VII-lea Porfirogenetul, *Carte de învățătură pentru fiul său Romanus [Teaching Book for his son Romanus]*, ed. Vasile Grecu, București, 1971.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p.1

²¹ *Izvorul principal bizantin pentru Cartea cu Învățătură a diaconului Coresi din 1851; Omiliile patriarhului Ioan XIV Caleca (1334-1347) [The main Byzantine Source for Teaching Book by Deacon Coresi from 1851; The Homilies of Patriarch John XIV Caleca (1334-1347)]*, ed. Vasile Grecu, București, 1939.

²² Vasile Grecu, *Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab, domnul Țării Românești (1512-1521). Versiunea grecească editată și însoțită de o introducere și traducere în românește [The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab, the Voivode of Wallachia Greek Version....]*, București, 1942.

²³ Idem, *O versiune nouă a unei învățături a lui Neagoe Basarab [A new Version of a Teaching of Neagoe Basarab]*, vol. *Omagiu lui Ioan Lupaș la împlinirea vârstei de 60 de ani [Homage to Ioan Lupas at 60]*, București, 1943, pp. 295-316; Idem, *Și totuși învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab [Nevertheless, the Teachings of Neagoe Basarab]*, extras, „Convorbiri literare”, iulie 1944, Cernăuți, 1944; Dan Zamfirescu wrote a synthesis on the debate: *Neagoe Basarab și Învățăturile către fiul său Theodosie. Probleme controversate [Neagoe Basarab and the Teachings for his son Theodosie. Controversial Issues]*, București, 1973.

²⁴ *Viața Sfântului Nifon [Life of St. Niphon]*, ed. Vasile Grecu, București, 1944.

²⁵ Vasile Grecu, *Curs de istoria literaturii bizantine [Course of History of Byzantine Literature]*, București, 1939, p. 17.

²⁶ Idem, *La valeur littéraire de oeuvres littéraires historiques byzantines*, „Byzantinoslavica », XIV, Praga, 1953, pp. 55-81.