

Romanian Studies in the UK

A presentation given by Dennis Deletant, Professor of Romanian Studies at SSEES/UCL, at The British Library on 12 October 2005

Romanian studies do not have a long pedigree in the United Kingdom.¹ The earliest example of British interest in Romanian letters is a Romanian poem in English translation, and the first scholarly account of the Romanian language by a Briton – probably a Scot – can be found in M.A. Bruce-Whyte's *Histoire des langues romanes et de leur littérature*, published in Paris in 1841. The work was translated into French and published in France because the author was resident there and, according to Bruce-Whyte, the subject interested the French more than the English. In his chapter 'Analyse de la langue valaque', Bruce-Whyte gives a Romanian poem (with a verse translation in English and prose version in French) which he claims came from the mouth of a shepherd. It was in fact a poem written by an 18th-century Wallachian nobleman, Ienachiță Văcărescu and entitled 'Amărăta turturea' (The Moping Dove).

A stimulus to the British public's interest in the peoples and culture of south-eastern Europe was given by the Crimean War. Writers were quick to satisfy the demand for background information, and accounts of journeys made to the area were rapidly printed. It was at this time that Romanian literature received attention through the anthologies of E.C. Grenville Murray and Henry Stanley, both published in 1854.. Grenville Murray was an illegitimate son of the second Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, and he combined a diplomatic career with freelance journalism. He describes in his anthology *Doine, or the National Songs and Legends of Roumania*, how in the summer of 1853 he was convalescing on the island of Prinkipo and passed the time translating Romanian folk-ballads. The anthology contains prose versions of 33 poems, 18 of which are from the collection of folk-poetry gathered by Vasile Alecsandri and published in 1852 and 1853 in Paris. The collection has an appendix with six 'national' airs of Romania arranged for the piano.

More ambitious in scope is Henry Stanley's *Rouman Anthology*, containing the Romanian text of 45 poems with 16 English versions. Eight of the Romanian poems

are folk-ballads from Alecsandri's collection; the remainder include 17 original poems by Alecsandri, 9 by Dimitrie Bolintineanu, and 4 by Grigore Alexandrescu. The book, finely printed with vignettes and ornamental borders based on Byzantine manuscript decoration, was, in the words of Stanley's father, 'too dear and too little adapted for the general taste here to have much circulation'.

Further attention on Romania and south-eastern Europe was focussed by the Russo-Turkish War and its consequence, the creation of the Kingdom of Romania in 1881. In that year Mrs E.B. Mawer, the wife of an English physician long-established in Bucharest, published a small book *Roumanian Fairy Tales and Legends*. A certain Mr H.A. Jackson, who had gone out to the port of Galați in 1848 to work as a clerk and had stayed for several years, started a series of lectures on Romanian history and literature, the first of which, privately printed at Lower Norwood, is to be found in the British Library. These individual initiatives were soon to be consolidated at the official level. The first ambassador of Romania to the Court of St James, Ion Ghica, who had helped Murray and Stanley to assemble their anthologies, was anxious to expand the British Museum library's Romanian holdings, as the library's register of donations shows.. Ghica was also in touch with R. Torcianu, the author of the first Romanian grammar published in English, in 1887, under the title *The Roumanian Language*.

A formal, institutional basis for Romanian studies was first given as a result of the First World War. In 1915, The School of Slavonic and East European Studies was set up in King's College on the initiative of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Robert Seton-Watson and with the support of the British Government. Masaryk, who later became President of Czechoslovakia, inaugurated the School on 19 October 1915 with a Public Lecture on 'The Problem of Small Nations in the European Crisis'. The Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, was aware that the defeat of Germany and Austria-Hungary might permit the 'small nations' to realize their dream of independence - or, in the case of Romania, to consolidate its territory -, thereby creating new opportunities for trade and a need for expertise if Britain wished to promote its political and economic interests. The Romanians were one of the nations targeted.

A teacher of Romanian is first listed in the Calendar of SSEES of 1919-1920; he was Marcu Beza, a member of the Romanian legation. In 1926-1927, he is bracketed with Henry Wickham Steed under the title 'Lecturer in Roumanian'. After 1929-1930 Romanian disappears. There were no formal classes in Romanian, although a note announced that lessons could be arranged. However, Beza was industrious. In 1918, he had written a *Rumanian Grammar* which was published by the Bank of Roumania in London. Two years later, he printed *Papers on the Rumanian People and Literature*, three of which had been given as lectures at King's College. When SSEES was given its independence from King's College, in 1932, Beza, now Roumanian Consul-General in Jerusalem, was listed as a corresponding member.

There followed a decade-long hiatus in the presence of Romanian studies at the School. In 1941, the name of Victor Cornea appears as lecturer in Romanian in SSEES's *General Information for Students* but his activity seems to have been brief. When courses for teaching Central and East European languages to service personnel were started in SSEES in 1942, Grigore Nandriş was offered the post of teaching Romanian.² The product of Nandriş's Romanian classes was his *Colloquial Romanian*, published in 1945, which for more than three decades was the most authoritative manual of the language in English. When a chair of Comparative Slavonic Philology was founded in the University of London in 1947, Nandriş was elected to be the first holder. In 1948, a Lecturership in Romanian Language and Literature was established, to which Eric Tappe was appointed in April.³

Nandriş continued to take a close interest in the development of Romanian studies in SSEES. He and Tappe took the initiative, with the support of Dr George Bolsover, Director of SSEES, in securing a special grant from the University Grants Committee in 1952 to acquire the Gaster collection of Romanian printed books – some 3,500 in number – for the School's library. Their purchase greatly enriched the Romanian section.⁴ A second achievement of this tandem was the institution of an Honours degree in Romanian language and literature. Since 1946, Romanian had been offered as a subject in a General degree, but Nandriş in particular was keen to see its status enhanced, as an Honours degree subject.⁵ The degree was introduced in 1955. It was not until four years later that the first students enrolled on the course – two in fact – one of whom, Ronald Whitworth, became the School's secretary-registrar. Between

1959 and 1964, Romanian was only taken as a subsidiary subject, mostly by students doing a degree in Italian at University College. One of these, Michael Impey, went on to become Professor of Italian at the University of Kentucky and was an indefatigable promoter of Romanian studies in the United States.

In 1964 began the succession of degree-registered students of Romanian which has continued uninterrupted to the present day. It was in that year that I began the degree, graduating in 1968 under the guidance of Eric Tappe and Professor R.C. Johnston, holder of the Chair of French and Romance Linguistics at Westfield College, London. In the following year, after tenure of a British Council postgraduate bursary in Bucharest, I was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Romanian language and literature at the School. Professor Johnston's interest in Romanian led him to propose a Combined degree in French and Romanian, taught jointly at Westfield and SSEES, and the first candidates graduated in 1972. A Combined Degree in Italian and Romanian, with teaching shared by UCL and SSEES, was set up shortly afterwards. A seamless transition of both degrees to UCL took place with the merger of SSEES in 1999.

It was also in 1964 that a major impetus was given to the teaching of Romanian in the UK. Under the terms of a British-Romanian Programme of Cultural Exchanges the Romanian authorities sent a lector to assist in the teaching of Romanian. Based at SSEES, the lector also spent one afternoon a week at Westfield College and at Cambridge respectively. At the same time, the Romanian authorities gave generous support to these three centres by providing books and specialist periodicals. They included dictionaries, Romanian literature in the original and in translation, and studies of history. SSEES alone received, according to my rough calculation, more than 4,000 such items in the period 1964 to 1990. The lectors devoted themselves whole-heartedly and with good humour to their teaching, and it gives me much pleasure to join two of them, Adrian Niculescu and Virgil Stanciu, on the programme this evening. Sadly, and ironically given the collapse of Communism in Romania, the provision for providing a lector under the British-Romanian Cultural Agreement was allowed to lapse in 1996, and last year the Foreign and Commonwealth Office decided – short-sightedly in my view – to reduce the invaluable support it had given to talented young scholars and civic-minded professionals from Central Europe – including Romania – by ending the programme of Chevening Teacher-Fellowships

tenable at SSEES. An outstanding testimony to the success of the Teacher-Fellowship programme in respect of Romania is Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu, the Foreign Minister (2004-2007), who was a Chevening Teacher-Fellow at SSEES in the academic year 1996-1997.

SSEES has been the centre of Romanian Studies in the UK since their inception – hence my focus upon it - and is still, as part of UCL, the only British university institution to offer a BA degree course, courses at the MA level, and doctoral supervision in Romanian language and literature. But it would be misleading of me to fail to mention the teaching and research into the Romanian language conducted by Professor Glanville Price at the University of Aberystwyth for more than four decades, by Professor Paul Russell-Gebbett at Queen’s University, Belfast, and by Professor Martin Maiden, first at Cambridge and now at Oxford. A predecessor of Professor Maiden at Oxford, Frank Barnett, taught the language for more than twenty years – in the 1960s and 1970s – at Trinity College, while during the same period Professor Dennis Green at Cambridge encouraged the presence of the Romanian lector who travelled up from London regularly on Wednesday afternoons. Until his recent retirement James Mullen offered Romanian with considerable success as a subsidiary course at Birmingham University. Tom Gallagher, Professor of Peace Studies at Bradford University, is an acute observer of the contemporary Romanian political scene and produced a major work last year⁶, while Alex Drace-Francis, who completed his postgraduate research at SSEES and has been recently appointed to a post in the history department at Liverpool University, is awaiting the publication of his thesis on the development of a national consciousness amongst the Romanians in the early nineteenth century.

New scope for studying Romania and Romanian was opened up by the merger, in 1999, of SSEES with University College London. Placed for the first time in a multi-faculty college in London, Romanian language, literature and history became available ‘in house’ to a large student body. Another ‘first’ will be achieved next week. On 19 October, SSEES will celebrate its 90th anniversary with the inauguration of a new building, in Taviton Street, close to the heart of the UCL campus, and just a few hundred yards from the British Library. For the first time in its history the whole of SSEES will be under one roof. The felicitous proximity of SSEES and its library to

the British Library offers the student of Romania, in these two institutions combined, access to the largest and richest collection of Romanian books, manuscripts and study-aids in the English-speaking world. Such a resource underpins the study of Romania in SSEES, from the teaching of the language to the cultivation of literary analysis, and to the critical evaluation of the past and present. For if the purpose of Romanian studies is to understand what makes the Romanians who they are, to test assumptions about them, and to gauge their future, then a critical analysis of their literature and their history is fundamental. This belief has driven the teaching and research of the Romanian section in SSEES – which includes my colleagues Dr Rebecca Haynes and Ramona Gonczol-Davies - and I am grateful to Sânziana Dragoş, the Romanian Cultural Attaché, for the opportunity this evening to restate it.

¹ Some of the ground in this talk has been covered by Eric Tappe in ‘Rumanian in Britain’, his inaugural lecture as Professor of Romanian Studies in the University of London delivered at The Senate House on 10 March 1975.

² The following biographical details are taken from Eric Tappe’s obituary of Nandriş (*The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol.47 (1969), pp.5-8). Nandriş was born into a family of peasants on 30 January 1895 in the village of Mahala close to Cernăuţi. From 1907 to 1915, he attended school in Cernăuţi. As Bucovina was then part of the Habsburg Empire, he and his family were Austrian subjects and when Romania entered the war on the side of the Allies, Grigore and his brothers were faced with a painful dilemma. Two of them, in fact, fought in the Austro-Hungarian army, while Grigore escaped in a hay cart to join the Romanian army with his brother Ion. Nandriş took a degree in Comparative Philology at Bucharest University in 1919, after which he went on to complete a doctorate at the University of Cracow in 1922. After a period of research at the newly-founded Ecole Roumaine at Fontenay-aux-Roses, he returned to Cernăuţi in 1926 as Professor of Comparative Slavonic Philology at the University of Cernăuţi. It was there that he met, Mabel Farley, a correspondent for *The Balkan Herald* and the daughter of Professor W.J. Farley of

Magee University College, Londonderry. They married in 1937. At the beginning of May 1940 Nandriş was sent to Britain by the Romanian Ministry of Propaganda on a lecture tour. Before starting the tour he went with his wife and son, born in 1938, to visit her family in Northern Ireland and it was while they were there that France fell, thereby making it impossible for them to return to Romania. For two years he was an impecunious exile, and after Britain's declaration of war on Romania in December 1941, an enemy alien as well. He was rescued from penury in 1942 by the BBC where he was taken on in the Romanian section. A few months later, SSEES offered him the post of visiting lecturer in Romanian.

³ Eric Tappe was born in London on 8 July 1910, the son of a banker of German extraction. In 1928, he won an Open Scholarship in Classics at Oriel College, Oxford and upon graduation in 1932 was appointed Sixth Form Classics master at Brighton College. Four years later he moved to a similar post at King Edward VII School in Sheffield. In October 1940, he was called up to the Royal Signals and commissioned, serving in 59 Division in Northern Ireland before being posted in April 1942 to Oxford to organize the Signals Unit of the University Senior Training Corps. Two years of signals work in wartime Oxford prompted him to look for a more adventurous role and in March 1944 he answered a call for volunteers to learn Romanian. This decision was to have a profound implication for his post-war academic career. While following Nandriş's course at SSEES he received orders to undergo parachute training for a drop into Romania, where he later learned that he was expected to link up with the anti-German resistance. The Romanian *volte-face* produced by King Michael's coup against Marshal Antonescu on 23 August 1944 pre-empted this mission and he was assigned instead – after arriving more conventionally by plane in Bucharest from Bari - to the British Military mission which was sent that autumn as a component of the Allied Control Commission, set up to supervise the implementation of the armistice agreement between the Allies and Romania signed in Moscow on 12 September. Tappe served with the mission chiefly as Staff Officer, but with occasional duties as interpreter to its Head, Air Vice-Marshal Donald Stevenson. This period of service in Romania, from October 1944 until February 1946, was the most eventful period of Tappe's life. He witnessed the imposition of Communist rule in Romania and the heavy-handed behaviour of the Soviet authorities towards the Romanians, among whom he made several friends. Whenever he could he used his official position to protect them; an example of this was his habit on off-duty periods of pinning Union Jacks to Romanian-owned cars to prevent their being commandeered by Soviet officers. He himself experienced the lawlessness of the Soviet authorities in Bucharest when one night, as the senior officer on duty at the HQ of the British Mission, he foiled an attempt by Soviet troops to kidnap General Nicolae Rădescu, the former Romanian Prime Minister,

who had taken refuge there to escape arrest, by firing warning shots over the heads of the advancing soldiers. In February 1946, Tappe was recalled to Britain and demobilized. He resumed his position at King Edward VII School until his appointment to the Lecturership in Romanian language and literature in April 1948. Tappe's distaste for the ruthless methods employed by the Communist authorities to subjugate Romania made him a keen supporter, academically and financially, of émigré scholarly journals. He never forgot the friends he left behind in Romania. Despite his being banned from the country by its government until 1964 (and when he did return he was placed under overt surveillance), he maintained discreet links with some of his friends and worked to obtain the release from prison of those who had been jailed. In 1962, he received word of a former Romanian employee of the British Military Mission in Bucharest, Maria Golescu, who had been arrested in 1949 for working with the British. The lady's release from prison could be secured, he was told, by payment of a 'ransom' of \$4,200 (a considerable sum at the time) to the Romanian government. Since Maria had no family in Romania capable of raising such a sum, Tappe took it upon himself to raise the bulk of the monies after unsuccessfully seeking a contribution from the British government, and upon payment of the ransom Maria was allowed to travel to Britain with her aged mother. With material assistance from Tappe both lived out the rest of her life in Eastbourne.

⁴ Moses Gaster (1856-1939) was born in Bucharest, the son of Abraham Gaster who was attached to the Netherlands legation there. After graduating at the University of Bucharest, he continued his studies at the Rabbinical seminary in Breslau (Wroclaw). In 1881, he was appointed lecturer in the history of Romanian literature and comparative folklore at Bucharest University. He was active on behalf of the Jews in Romania who were entitled to Romanian citizenship under the Treaty of Berlin (1878) and this, together with the personal hostility towards him of the Minister of Education, Dimitrie Sturdza, led to his expulsion from the country in 1885. Although this decision was later revoked – and Gaster revisited his birthplace in 1921 – he never resettled in Romania but spent the remainder of his life in England, having been naturalized in 1893. He became Chief Rabbi (Hakham) of the Sephardic communities of British Jews in 1886 and remained in that office until he retired in 1919. A pioneer in the study of early Romanian literature, Gaster assembled an invaluable collection of Romanian and Slavonic manuscripts and printed books, and an extensive library of Hebrew and Samaritan manuscripts. He sold the most valuable of the former, – almost 750 - for a token sum to the library of the Romanian Academy in 1936. Most of the Hebrew and Samaritan manuscripts were purchased in 1954 by the John Rylands library in Manchester. The Romanian printed books in the Gaster collection that had not been sold in 1936 – some

3,500 items – were purchased in 1952 by the library of London University's School of Slavonic and East European Studies for the sum of 2,300 pounds.

⁵ Nandriş retired in 1962, after spending three months in hospital in 1960 suffering from heart disease. He continued, in ill health, to pursue his research and died on 29 March 1968.

⁶ Theft of a Nation. Romania since Communism, London : Hurst, 2004.