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FROM SANDU TUDOR TO THE MONK AGATON. BIOGRAPHICAL BENCHMARKS

Case
Study

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Abstract

It is already a well-known reality, proven by the numerous volumes, studies and research efforts, published after 1990 on this topic that the great personality and actions of Father Daniil Sandu Tudor, who has developed intellectually in the fertile and diversified environment of the inter-war Romania, still arouses debates and controversies. Researching the biography of Sandu Tudor during the Second World War, when, as it is known, he was mobilized, will follow the dynamism of the subject towards the knowledge of God, the spiritual progress, which undoubtedly corresponds to an increasingly bright ascetic work. In his endeavor to reconstruct the image of the Rugul Aprins (The Burning Bush) of that time as truthfully as possible, the author corroborated the documents from the Archive with the memorialistic literature, but also with the interview of the only person who can testify today about what did the prayer of the heart mean for the students, and also for the seniors integrated into the Movement – Father Nicolae Bordasiiu.

INTRODUCTION

As the author goes through the documents of that time, he understands that interwar Romania has oscillated between two apparently irreconcilable directions: autohtonism and universalism (Ciornea, 2017). Great personalities from the cultural, religious and political spheres channeled their energies around the imperatives of regaining identity values, but also of restoration and modernization, hence the spirit of active non-conformism of the intellectual of the interwar period. The search for landmarks in order to provide an identity healthy, spiritual response, becomes more problematic among the interstices of the World War II.

Father André Scrima considered that the thirst for the absolute, disguised in the need to rekindle the Tradition, divided a majority that initially gave it an ethno-cultural and folkloric meaning, so that it would gradually adapt to the demands of the community and would fail in politics, nurturing various ideologies of the nationalists, legionaries and so on (Scrima, 1996). There were very few of those who, thanks to the authenticity of their spiritual pursuit, sensed that the overlapping of the two dimensions, the political one and the religious one, is likely to alter the deeper, safer and more rigorous meaning of the Orthodox Tradition. And just from the ranks of this minority Sandu Tudor emerged. He is the one who succeeded in laying the foundations of the Rugul Aprins (The Burning Bush), a spiritual movement whose configuration, being unmistakable and difficult to encompass, was mainly related to the unprecedented symbiosis between the cult and culture. Moreover, his portrait, from the perspective of the clergy confessors, is that of a man who possessed an impressive culture and a formidable memory (Braga, 1995), a self-taught erudite (Vasilescu, 1999), a very good connoisseur of medieval Romanian literature and a passionate researcher of ancient Romanian manuscripts, particularly concerned with the Eastern Spiritual Tradition (a search essentially focused on the hesychast tradition), attending the Church and its representatives.

Father Roman Braga, the last of the surviving clerics of the „Rugul Aprins” group, who passed to the eternal life on April 29, 2015, outlined the profile of the founder of „Rugul Aprins” by the following nuances: „Sandu Tudor had an innate inclination towards the mysterious substrate of things, a fact that made him closer to the literature of the Holy Fathers and to the mystique of the monastic life” (Braga, 1995).

PRELIMINARIES: SANDU TUDOR – A HOMO RELIGIOSUS REACTIVE TO THE AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN VALUES

As it was also mentioned in the Abstract, the completion of the biographical picture was facilitated by the archive documents, by the memories of the leaders of Rugul Aprins, as well as by the information provided by the interview of the Father Nicolae Bordașiu – confirming the position of Sandu Tudor as the organizer, catalyst and founder of the „Rugul Aprins”.

In the spirit of the information disclosed in previous volumes – *The Image of the Rugul Aprins* (Ciornea, 2015), *Sandu Tudor and Christian student associations in the interwar Romania* (Ciornea, 2017) – the author sought to approach the aspects of Sandu Tudor's activity and implications in the issues of his time that were less frequently used, from which the image of this *homo religiosus* reactive to the spiritually configured authentic values would result.

The author has not lost sight of the inaccuracies related to the biography of Sandu Tudor, too. Therefore, if one would consider the data of his own Memoir, from 1939 Sandu Tudor was almost permanently concentrated, so that on November 12, 1942, his arrest (along with other left-wing journalists) by the General Security and the internment at Târgu-Jiu were arranged. He was released, however, shortly, thanks to the intervention of the Ministry of War, the Superior Directorate of the Moto-Mechanization, which requested him as a teacher at the Auto School of the Battalion IV (A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 205).

Two events from this period were susceptible to diversified (mostly erroneous) interpretations: the first one relates to the war experience when, miraculously, he was saved, and the second one is related to the first detention of Sandu Tudor when, as it is well known, he was already Monk Agaton. The analysis of the documents from the CNSAS Archive, included for the most part in this volume, is capable of elucidating both aspects.

The sure thing is that the pursuit of the route travelled by Sandu Tudor implies the effort to make distinctions in the sphere of values. Moreover, even the multitude of names that attest his identity throughout his becoming – Alexandru Teodorescu (the real name, from civil status documents), Sandu Tudor (the pseudonym), Monk Agaton, Hieroschemamonk Daniil – conditions a recognition of the stages of his spiritual ascent.

If, during the inter-war period, the research approach focused on Sandu Tudor from the first inter-war decade provided the author with his presentation in the position of a member of the Christian Student Association of Romania, this time (Ciornea, 2017) the author will follow the

becoming of Sandu Tudor, from the 1940s until 1952, when Sandu Tudor switched to Monk Agaton.

SANDU TUDOR - THE LAST ACT OF WORLDLY LIFE

Regarding the separation from his secular hypostasis, this, the author believes, must be related to another separation – the divorce from his last wife, Cornelia Dristoreanu. According to the Report no. 180, drawn up by S.S.I.- C.I. - Agenture I, on February 11, 1944, Sandu Tudor is the „natural son of the Archimandrite Tit Simedrea (A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 11, f. 149, passim) [sic!], Bachelor of Letters and Philosophy, former naval officer, resides in Aleea Alexandru no. 35. He is married to Cornelia Dristoreanu, born on May 2, 1918 in Bacău”(A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 650).

A careful browsing of the various Informative Notes written by newly recruited agents – mostly representing people with modest, easy-to-manipulate intellectual conditions, who, most likely, saw the issue as a chance to promote – proves the precariousness of the socio-professional condition of Sandu Tudor, an exponential identity of a society deprived of elementary security instruments, in general, but, especially, of a writer who was found unable to issue any free, ideologically unregulated publication (A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 74): „The journalist Sandu Tudor, former director of the newspaper „Credința” („Faith”) and of the literary magazine „Puncte de foc” („The Fire Points”) (A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 74), states that it is not yet the time to release any publication, because the freedom of writing does not exist under today’s regime and the attitude of the Russians leaves very much to be desired”.

Another informant did not forget to point out, in the Note of May 16, 1945, the aspects related to the adaptation and the consequences caused by the dispossession of the „chiaburi” (wealthy peasants): „[Sandu Tudor] was evacuated by the Russians from the apartment he occupied in a central block in the Capital and moved to his brother-in-law in Cernica street no. 11” (A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 74). In other words, the communist ideal of an egalitarian society, without social classes, was translated by passing the private ownership of Sandu Tudor to the country's patrimony. The evacuation of the Teodorescu spouses from their own place occurred, according to the data of the Note of November 20, 1947, „on May 5, 1945, when the house was requisitioned by the Soviet command”

(A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 76, f. 149), when they had to move to the relatives of Cornelia Teodorescu (former Dristoreanu). Agent „Gh. Toma” (conspiratorial name) confirmed, with equal meticulousness, with a difference of few months, in the Note of August 31, 1945, the new residence of Sandu Tudor: „Cernica street, no. 11, together with Cornelia, his wife, housewife, born in Bacău in 1918, Romanian and of Orthodox religion” (A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 75).

The author owes the same archival source the information regarding the divorce between Alexandru and Cornelia Teodorescu, which was pronounced on April 20, 1947, when Sandu Tudor „moved to the Antim monastery, on Antim street, in a cell of the church bell tower” (A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 76, f. 149), while his former wife „moved to Bd. Dacia, no. 49, floor III” (A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 76, f. 149).

Being convinced that the path of conjugal love will not bring him spiritual fulfillment, Sandu Tudor increasingly feels his call to the monastic life, whose temptation was confessed to his first wife in the difficult moment of separation:

„All the waves of mirage are broken. Everything is as it is and I recognize it as such. As for me, from the childhood I understood that my purpose is to lively and fully serve the living and full Truth, which, by an outdated word, is called God. But I betrayed Him. When I met with you, signs and circumstances showed me that I must go and serve Him. But I betrayed again. Although, I put myself back together then and tried to transform our connection, which was started from an initial mistake, from a bodily appetite, into a service of His. But the road was wrong, it contained the sin in its seed, and I was too human, too weak, too sinful” (Ciornea, 2015).

The collapse, the precariousness of the human condition, the cleavages that appeared on social, political, ethnic, religious level etc. after the occupation of Romania by the Soviet troops, can be foreseen from the accelerated increase of the number of agents and, implicitly, of the informative notes on the one hand, and from the information, often contradictory, contained in the documents drawn up by the agents of the intelligence services on the other hand.

On April 6, 1946, the Secretariat of the Bureau 1, within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the General Directorate of Police, the Directorate of the Security Police (fresh beneficiaries of the consulting services offered by NKVD experts on Sovietization) addressed to the Prefecture of the Capital Police (PCP) in order to request, as a matter of urgency, the data related to Sandu Tudor's activity, in the sense of confirming / denying his belonging to the legionary movement, participating

in the January 1941 rebellion, possible convictions and so on. Well, here is a reversal of a situation that would be somewhat comical, if it was not tragic. If, in the notes of the Security Service, as the director of the publications „Floarea de foc” („The Fire Flower”) and „Credința” („Faith”), Sandu Tudor was investigated for anti-Hitler, anti-fascist activity and communist sympathies (A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, ff 26-27) (a vision shared by the guild colleagues – for a broad treatment of the subject, see the virulent attacks against Sandu Tudor by the right-wing politicians who published in the interwar newspapers „Porunca Vremii” („The Commandment of the Time”), „Apărarea Națională” („The National Defense”), „Facla” („The Torch”), „Universul” („The Universe”) or „Țara Noastră” („Our Country”), after August 23, 1944, he became suspected as a former fascist / hitlerist and anti-communist. Another aspect, apparently minor, but which becomes relevant in context of the superficiality and the lack of professionalism of those who now held positions in the state apparatus is that in the above-mentioned documents the residence of Sandu Tudor would not have been Cernica street, no. 11, but the Jianu Road, no. 6 (A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file No. 013495, vol. 2, f. 154 bis, f. 155).

The intimidation, the threats, the serious violations of the legislation prepared the tragic outcome of the establishment of the totalitarian regime. In this context, a 1946 episode, preceding the parliamentary elections, invites reflection. As the archival documents proved, the 1948 elections were falsified by the communists. Again, Sandu Tudor's attitude is likely to configure the dimension of political repressions:

«Around the parliamentary elections of November 19, 1946, Teodorescu Alex. was noted in various discussions in front of the Military Circle, in which he involved the audience. In these discussions, the said supported the PNT, attacking the current regime. In those discussions he also recommended the newspaper „Dreptatea” („Justice”) to be read. Due to his activity in this regard, he was arrested and placed under the arrest of PCP. Due to the fact that the said uses the pseudonym Sandu Tudor, the investigation could not reveal the truth about him. Thus, Teodorescu Alex. managed to escape from the accusations of the citizens who brought him to the PCP” (A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, ff. 78-79, f. 151).

The note of August 8, 1946, completes the picture of the scandal caused by Sandu Tudor, the first-rate criminal who allowed himself the insolence to disregard the reprisals of the police apparatus of the regime: «On the evening of August 7, current year, at 7.30 pm, the well-known Sandu Tudor caused a scandal in front of the Military Circle, defending the sellers of „Dreptatea”. A police officer asked

the above-mentioned one to go, but he refused and wanted, instead, to legitimize and take the name of the PCP official. [...] It is worth mentioning that Sandu Tudor ranks among the first offenders of the recent PCP Ordinance, by which it is forbidden to „stand in groups on sidewalks”, because by the insolence of pleading for the newspaper representing the symbol of the internal reaction he provoked a scandal and a occasion to criticize some officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs” (A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 78, f. 142).

Fortunately, the repressive bodies became entangled in the intersections of the Penal Code, so that the above history did not lead to the trial and, obviously, to the inevitable conviction that would have resulted from bringing to the Contravention Court of the instigator Sandu Tudor. Basically, the proposal in the Report of August 10, 1946, is an example of how these cases were worked. If the situation did not allow the „fabrication” of the evidence, in order to throw the enemy of the class behind bars, it was required to keep the „eyes open”, so that, with the advent of the right moment, the action in the proper direction could be ordered in order to annihilate (exemplary, if possible) any destabilizing element to the national security etc.: „Since there is no signed complaint against the said Sandu Tudor, stating that he contravened the PPC Ordinance, he cannot be sent to the Contraventional Court for the trial, therefore we suggest the closing of the file and keeping the record of the said Sandu Tudor, journalist” (A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 78, f. 141).

How did Sandu Tudor manage to act like this? How did he disregard the feared reputation of the police apparatus of the time, which, moreover, was built precisely on the efficiency of eliminating any potential danger to the communist ideology and to strengthening the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) position? Is this a proof of lack of moderation, an uncontrolled, furious emergence? If one would consider the spatio-temporal context, he would understand that the interpretation of this act as mere impulsivity is not plausible. On the contrary, it connotes a vision, a plan. Sandu Tudor realized that here, in the middle of Bucharest, in front of the Military Circle, where there were fierce struggles for the imposition of socialist ideology, it was practically a national necessity, in the context of the preparation of the parliamentary elections, to publicly support a political point of view that would be divergent from the crypto-communist government imposed in Romania. Moreover, his gesture was not in vain. Sandu Tudor aroused reactions, not only among police officers, but also among the passers-by in front of the Military Circle, who, according to the archive documents, took over the criticism to the officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. His word moved

people so far that they, being spirited, gained the power to defy, in their turn, the imminent danger, making a common body in this testimony of the truth, and strengthening his word.

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

Thus, here is another episode that is part of the series of refusals to be *lukewarm* of the temerarious Sandu Tudor, willing to jeopardize his freedom and even his life in the name of telling the truth. After all, not being a *lukewarm* one implies assuming the path of Golgotha, weighing the value of earthly life, not in years, but in living for others, as Nicolae Berdiaev emphasized, „The capacity for sacrifice is always noble, it is always aristocratic” (Berdiaev, 1992).

The first condition for assuming the recent history, its moral lesson and the inspirational sacrifices, is, naturally, the knowledge of the content of those decades of totalitarian regime. But here Romanians have a big deficit. Three decades after the fall of communism, the memory still seems to be arrested, because people are silent too much, they are guilty silent, not talking enough about those people who were crushed in a time when, of course, the right not to be *lukewarm* was censored.

If one was to do a quick test among young Romanians to determine the level of knowledge of the topic of resistance in the communist prisons, how many of them would shrug? How many of those who compose the civil society are familiar with the facts / creations of the personalities who have fully realized their value in the interwar Romania? Not to mention the results of opinion polls in the media, in which the share of Romanians who positively evaluate the installation of communism after the World War II outweighs that of Romanians who consider it a bad thing. What are the causes of this state of affairs? How could this forgetfulness be explained?

Romanians can take into account the theories of their numerous thinkers and historians regarding the dark side of the Romanian soul, permanently haunted by defeatism, resigned to an inescapable destiny, compensated only by an amazing power of adaptability to the vicissitudes of history. But this whole philosophy of nothingness is contradicted by the verticality of the Christian faith of Romanian people. And also, Greater Romania remains the reality that proves, without a doubt, that the Romanian, whether he was from Bucovina, from Transylvania, from Maramureș, from Basarabia etc. carried the call of the same original matrix.

One could take into account that Romania has experienced a regime of terror (collectivization, nationalization of agriculture etc.) incomparable with the phenomenon in Poland and even in Hungary, where, however, no massive and forced

displacement of the peasant population took place. It is known that the Securitate (Security) forced people to be silent through heterogeneous methods of coercion. In the '50s you could hardly find a family that did not have a relative in prison. A huge number of people were kept behind bars, but nonetheless everybody remained silent.

Certainly, all these constraints, to which the Romanian society was subjected like any other victim of a totalitarian system, could not leave no trace. The current decline of postmodern society, which refuses any kind of authority, especially moral authority, can be interpreted as a symptom of the decades of oppression which still keep Romanians as prisoners of old patterns of thinking, in a permanent oscillation between the repressive temptation and absolute laxism. It is possible that the disinterest, this low appetite for knowing the recent history, for the values related to the national specificity, represents a consequence of the chauvinism and the demagoguery of the dictators.

As one can see, the communism left at least two paradigms of power: illegitimate, fallen power – an inheritance of the Securitate (Security) – which imposes and maintains its domination by delusion and purely coercive methods (involving physical, primitive force), but also the power of sacrifice, martyrdom – an inheritance of the top personalities of the political, military and economic class, of the elite of secular and clerical intellectuals, of those who responsibly assumed human freedom and even the authentic reality of Christian martyrdom.

Consequently, the (re)cognition of the paradigm configured by the latter ones – people who have retained their autonomy of thought, acting exclusively by the virtue of their conscience, according to principles they have acquired from the accumulated culture – can save Romanians from imposture, superficiality, incompetence, ignorance etc., and can clarify the answers to the questions that matter (related to oneself, truth, freedom, good, beautiful). Moreover, the confrontation with this sacrificial spirit, hardened by the evidence of courage, protects Romanians from the danger of ignoring / altering the true values and of overturning the ladder of principles, abundantly justifying the tribute of admiration, gratitude and respect that Sandu Tudor had deserved.

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- [5] Braga, Arhim. Roman (1995). *Rugul Aprins* [The Burning Bush]. In *Pe drumul credinței* [On the path of faith]. Mănăstirea Adormirea Maicii Domnului, Rives Junction, MI, SUA: HDM Press, p. 172: “Sandu Tudor was not a systematic man. He was, in the expression of Professor Alexandru Mironescu, “a disturbed library”, but every word of him was a theme for meditation. (...) But he was pursued with interest by the symbol hunters, because Sandu Tudor had an innate inclination towards the mysterious substrate of things, a fact that made him closer to the literature of the Holy Fathers and to the mystique of the monastic life”.
- [6] Ciornea, Carmen (2015). *Chipul Rugului Aprins* [The Image of the Rugul Aprins]. Bucharest: Ed. Eikon.
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- [8] A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 205.
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- [10] The regime of the information provided by the various informants was adapted to the mission, so that they offered a corrupting intellectual and spiritual indigence. The speculation that Sandu Tudor was the result of an illegitimate connection with the metropolitan Tit Simeedrea originated from the profile of a practicing believer of the Sandu Tudor’s mother, but also from the son’s predilection towards cultivating this notable personality of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The craze (the illegitimate son of the Metropolitan Tit Simeedrea) was peddled through many informative notes (ACNSAS, Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 11, f.149, *passim*), representing an evidence of the disgusting way in which the reality was distorted, the stake being always pugilistic: the disqualification of the subversive subject.
- [11] A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 65.
- [12] A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 74.
- [13] The author points out the inaccuracy (a sample of the precarious intellectual training of the zealous informants): Sandu Tudor was the director of the newspaper “Credința” (“Faith”) and of the literary magazine “Floare de foc” („The Fire Flower”) (not „Puncte de foc” („The Fire Points”)).
- [14] A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 74.
- [15] A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 76, f. 149.
- [16] A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 75.
- [17] A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 76, f. 149.
- [18] A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, f. 76, f. 149.
- [19] Ciornea, Carmen (2015). *Chipul Rugului Aprins* [The Image of the Rugul Aprins]. Bucharest: Ed. Eikon, p. 282.
- [20] A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, ff. 26-27: „As I mentioned above, at the end of 1933, the „International Association of Anti-Hitlerist Jews”, through the lawyer Mihail Stern, gave Sandu Tudor a grant of 3 million lei, on which basis the newspaper with a religious name „Faith”, having the subtitle „An organ of political and spiritual struggle” appeared. Sandu Tudor avoided giving precise indications, even to the main editors, but he gave only vague general indications, as general directives, showing them that their purpose was the „universal Christian love”, consequently it would be necessary to attack Hitlerism, the propagator of hatred. This anti-Hitlerist attitude, which was progressively pronounced, attracted the sympathy of the Jews, who are faithful readers of the „Faith”, increasing its circulation to about 40,000-50,000 copies daily, which, however, cannot cover the editorial expenses, which are sustained from other grants, as we will see (...).

It is suspected that the lawyer Stern, the representative of the International Association of Anti-Hitlerist Jews, is the same person with the lawyer Stern who, immediately upon the arrival of the Polpred Ostrovsky, contacted him and, recently, was appointed as the legal adviser of the Soviet Legation in Bucharest. The rapidity his hiring by the Soviet Legation in a position of responsibility legitimates the suspicion that lawyer Stern's ties with the Soviets are of older date. These connections of the lawyer Stern, in their turn, justify the suspicion that there would be some links between the newspaper „Faith”, which was declared anti-Hitlerist, and the Soviets, which are leading a strong campaign against Hitlerism”.

[21] For a broad treatment of the subject, see the virulent attacks against Sandu Tudor by the right-wing politicians who published in the interwar newspapers „Porunca Vremii” („The Commandment of the Time”), „Apărarea Națională” („The National Defense”), „Facla”

(„The Torch”), „Universul” („The Universe”) or „Țara Noastră” („Our Country”).

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- [23] A.C.N.S.A.S., Criminal fund, file no. 013495, vol. 2, ff. 78-79, f. 151.
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