
P R O F I L E

The Transylvanian Scholar Ștefan Manciulea

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ȘTEFAN MANCIULEA (1894–1985)

Introduction

BORN IN the Romanian city of Blaj and imbued with the spirit, the traditions and the values of the Transylvanian School, Ștefan Manciulea (1894–1985) attended school in his native town and then the Faculty of Greek-Catholic Theology and the Faculty of History-Geography of Bucharest, along with the Pedagogical Seminar, which allowed him to teach as a professor in the educational system—a dream come true when he taught at Moise Nicoară High School during 1921–1928 and at Sfântul Vasile cel Mare High School after 1929. The scientific coordinator of his Ph.D. in geography was Professor S. Mehedinti, and in 1941 the Minister of Education appointed him as associate professor with the Geography Department of the Faculty of Sciences, teaching regional geography and the geography of states and continents.

In addition to his teaching career, Ștefan Manciulea followed his inner calling and passion for history, geography, geology, historical demogra-

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phy, Transylvanian culture and philology, being strongly influenced by Timotei Cipariu. Ștefan Manciulea's achievements were widely acknowledged, given the originality and the practical importance of his scientific work, not only by the numerous fellow professors, students, graduates, lecture participants, but also by esteemed former professors of his, such as N. Iorga, S. Mehedinți, D. Onciul, T. Simionescu, V. Pârvan and many other Romanian personalities.

Ștefan Manciulea became a well-known figure in Straja, his native parish situated in the vicinity of the Romanian city of Alba Iulia; he also became famous in the city of Blaj—where he received his theological education—and in the academic circles of Cluj and Timișoara. He was perceived as a person of outstanding intellectual qualities, an encyclopedic scholar, a person who shared his wisdom and theoretical knowledge, and was also a true and noble Christian devoted to the Biblical precept “Love thy neighbor.” Ștefan Manciulea's main traits of character (modesty, simplicity, tenacity, scientific originality and innovation in teaching) were also widely praised. Nowadays' society appreciates Ștefan Manciulea as an important geographer and historian, the founder of geo-history as a new science, a true academic scholar who tried to answer the socio-political, demographic-economic and geo-historical questions of his time.

After facing many difficulties and hardships, mainly in the first part of his adult life, Manciulea's activities became more complex and varied, highly appreciated by both his superiors and his friends, bringing him academic prestige. The situation changed in 1947 after the totalitarian political system asserted its authority and force, and when a whole generation of hard-working, honest, nation-oriented intellectuals and scholars were no longer allowed to exercise their profession because they refused to join the Communist Party or they refused the orders of the new political system. Professor Ștefan Manciulea was one of them, prosecuted for “affiliation to the Romanian Greek-Catholic religion and the publication of scientific studies that instigate to racial hatred between the cohabiting nationalities of the country” and sentenced to seven years of harsh imprisonment.¹ Thus began his personal Golgotha, a long stretch of pure injustice. He was forced to leave the university, being no longer allowed to hold any public office. As a consequence, his only alternative was to apply for positions that involved physical labor. In 1962 a second conviction was pronounced on the same political basis. After the Romanian government decided to release all the political prisoners in 1964, he had to work as simple manual laborer, at the farm of the Normal School in Blaj, at the Romanian Rail Company Greenhouses, as a gardener at the Romanian Rail Company Asylum, as a carpenter, locksmith and laboratory technician—all jobs meant to humiliate and demean any person proven to have been “a bandit, a thief and a robber”—words used

by the prison guards during the hard years of his incarceration. He accepted this long stretch of pure injustice in a stoic manner, with Christian faith and hope.

Thinking rationally, he was fully aware that much was to be done for the Romanian nation, especially when it came to promoting young people so that the following generations would not be ashamed of being Romanian. This idea required thoughtful actions, commitment to specific ideals, as well as hard work. His advice for the young was: “Every little thing you do, do it so that it truly serves you and others. Unfortunately, most of us Romanians are only willing to work if somebody makes us. Maybe it is because of the atavistic instinct we acquired while forced to work for the benefit of others. We have not yet reached that point where we cherish work itself, the way the Saxons are cherishing it.”²²

Personality Profile

DURING THE last year of his life, picturing his final judgment before the Almighty, Manciualea defined himself as “a simple archive moth or bookworm.”²³ He always used sharp artistic images to talk about himself, resorting to the neutral third person: “He was as much as possible a very modest person. He never liked people to talk about him, or about his work and studies. He did not interfere with other people’s life, things or rules. He lived most of his life among books, searching libraries and archives for as much information as possible about the life and history of the Romanian people in Transylvania, the history of Blaj city, about the most important religious figures, the local bishops and scholars, trying to identify their achievements in the service of the religious, cultural and national progress of all Romanians.”

Divinity and the Lord were the supreme values that guided his life, ambitions and actions. As a youth he took an oath to faithfully and loyally serve God, a true pledge which, besides the fear of sinning, influenced all his decisions and actions. He admitted to sin and wrongdoing, including the worst of all: “The temptation, the ardor and hunger for writing and reading quickly brought me to forget my oath. All these temptations began to strongly sway my soul, so that I slowly began to forget the holiness of my oath.”²⁴ From adolescence to old age, throughout his life, Manciualea’s personality was uniquely shaped by his qualities and daily activities as a professor, scientist, vicar, social tutor, day laborer, livestock farmer, plowman, gardener, engine driver, carpenter, miner, bench-screw worker, laboratory technician, meteorologist, archivist, librarian, museum curator, school vice-principal, and associate professor at the Faculty of Sciences. The administrative and political professions did not appeal to him; he

sometimes turned down job offers in spite of promises of important financial income. Nicolae Iorga offered him the position of county prefect, but Ștefan Manciualea turned down the offer because he had always refused to join any political party. In the spring of 1947, he declared to his investigators: “I have never done politics in my entire life, nor was I part of any political organization. On the contrary, I hated and I was the declared enemy of any activities of this nature. My God-gifted knowledge and intelligence were used for scientific research and studies, thus serving the interests of the Romanian country and nation. This is path that I will follow and I will firmly say no to any political party.”⁵

Ștefan Manciualea was deeply absorbed by his studies and research, investigating the historical sources, or the archive documents written in Romanian, Latin, Hungarian, German or Slavic, or having simple conversations with local people in the Romanian villages, town, schools, churches or administrative institutions to find out about the local customs, traditions, “the common law” with long-established rules and regulations, “the judgment seat” (local law forum), the folklore, the traditional folk costumes, the local toponyms or information about religion, the economy etc. Often he lost track of himself, paying no attention to hunger, thirst or clothes: “Because he only covered his body so he would not feel too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter, showing a modesty suitable only for the humblest monks in the world.”⁶

As a professor, Manciualea acquired a solid pedagogical culture, assimilating the knowledge, courses and teaching methods of his brilliant professors. His pedagogical instruction consisted of attending the courses of the Pedagogical Seminar and applying his knowledge during practical training done in middle schools. Ștefan Manciualea’s understanding of Romanian and world pedagogical history motivated him to expand his knowledge, focusing in particular on the successes and failures of Transylvanian educators in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He even wrote a book, *The Teachers of Blaj City Guiding the Pupils’ Decency and Good Behavior*, clearly emphasizing the scientific and methodological role of geography and history in school. He also underlined the important educative and formative role of moral, social, civic and health education.

Ștefan Manciualea’s teaching career followed a winding path. He made his teaching debut as a confessional substitute teacher in his native village of Hăpria, near the city of Alba Iulia; then he taught as a secondary teacher at Moise Nicoară High School in Arad (1921–1927) and at Sfântul Vasile cel Mare High School. In 1938 he was appointed secondary school inspector for Mureș County. Beginning with the 1940–1941 academic year, he was appointed by the Ministry of Education as associate professor with the Geography Department of the Faculty of Sciences, teaching regional geography and the geography of states and continents. Ironically, during the totalitarian regime, fate made it so that he worked

in another high school, unfortunately not as a geography teacher, but as a farm hand at the Blaj–Chereteu Normal School farm, and then as a laboratory technician in the Physics and Chemistry Department of Iacob Mureșianu High School in Blaj. Although he was forced to do such demeaning jobs in spite of his scientific degrees and pedagogical training, he did not give up and used after-work hours to complete his scientific research, reading through the whole library of the high school.

The Blaj schools' philosophy and values were guided by the following educational motto: "Book knowledge, faith and piety."⁷ Implementing this principle, the teachers of Blaj morally advised and guided their pupils so that, upon reaching maturity, they would be honorable men, ready to devote their life and activity to the nation's interests and showing nothing but respect for the Romanian nation. Manciualea underlined the importance of educating young people in a spiritual way and of school and family relations, since education begins at home, the educational system continuing this instruction, strengthening the moral virtues seeded by parents and seeking to change and eliminate the base urges that might spring up in the child's mind.

In their turn, his pupils, students and colleagues praised professor Manciualea as one of the greatest teachers of Blaj. One of his former students, who completed his theological studies in Rome and was the initiator of the Romanian language segment broadcast by Vatican Radio, the priest Pamfil Cârnațiu, described the personality of professor Manciualea with great sincerity and admiration. He remarked that "everybody considered him strange," he was "always deeply lost in his thoughts," "he taught with extreme tenacity" and, besides the geography classes, he also taught "moral education," as he was trying to help his students improve the very act of learning, to value time, to take care of their health and to aim for higher moral values. He had a comprehensive vocabulary and when he told a story, everybody was all eyes and ears. He advised his pupils to prepare for life as best they could, for "there are many things to be done for the poor people of this country."⁸ He frequently reminded his pupils of the rules of good behavior, of what the French call "le bon-ton," meaning good manners in school, on the street, when having lunch, dinner or supper, during vacations, when using a means of transport, at the theatre and telling them how to properly dress for various occasions.

As a scientific researcher, Ștefan Manciualea was always guided by truth and justice, by the Christian love for his fellow men—regardless of their ethnic origin—and by the objectivity resulted from the application of specific methods, processes and techniques used in history, geography, geology and historical demography. Under arrest, during his second interrogation, Manciualea sincerely declared that "through my scientific work and studies, I tried to show and prove

with the help of foreign, historical and ethnic data, our native right over this land. You will not find a single word showing disrespect for our nationality. I used the historical, geographical, anthropo-geographical, ethnic and statistical data found in archives and libraries, beginning with the eighteenth century and till 1850, which proved the Romanian presence in this region and in other parts of our country, describing our old administrative structures and forms of organization and the Romanian principalities and voivodeships.”⁹

Moreover, in his most important study—*The Western Border*, which brought him a Romanian Academy award—Manciulea reassures his readers that

*in an objective manner, taking into account the general historical truth and mainly using Hungarian information, diplomas, documents and statistical data, the following arguments will seek to prove that we have every right over the region known nowadays as the Tisza Plain, the land delimited by the western border of the Romanian state; we were the first settlers, before the Hungarians, and we have lived as a nation with a distinct political and economic life in an area that far exceeded today’s borders. We mean here the historical time of the seventeenth and sixteenth centuries and the land beyond the Tisza, all along the Northern Carpathians, up to the regions at the foot of the Tatra Mountains, the western and northwestern region as far as Moravia and Silesia, and north up to nowadays Poland.*¹⁰

In order to obtain real scientific results, to find the truth, to make fair and equidistant political decisions, Ștefan Manciulea paid special attention to writing methodology and style. With an encyclopedic culture and a polyglot, he studied various topics reading important studies by Hungarian, Romanian, Serbian historians, geographers, chroniclers and scholars, etc. gathering their ideas, descriptions and information about the nations’ continuity, the state of the civilization, the social position and mobility of the various nations in the Transylvanian region, the Tisza Plain etc. He used the evaluation method, analyzing historical documents, archives and statistics from different centuries and data on population censuses, language, clothing, folklore, toponyms; he also studied the functioning of administrative institutions, the traditional rights in various regions, the courts of justice, the economy and way of life. In order to complete his studies, he traveled to various regions, visiting almost all villages in the western part of Romania. His research focused on unpopulated areas as well as on villages, parishes and towns. Every time Ștefan Manciulea arrived in a small town, he would study the archives and libraries in order to find archeological, historical and statistical documents, as well as the relevant ethnic, demographic and toponymic data.¹¹

The manner in which he presented his scientific research and results and his writing style denote the author's desire to make his studies well understood, in order to better convince the readers of his beliefs. In his writings, Manciulea uses a scientific approach, a concise and accessible phrasing, precise enunciation and sufficient arguments and proofs. That is why his studies are defined by simplicity, conciseness, precision and logical coherence. The studied maps, tables and statistical data contribute to the consolidation of the information. For example, his study *The Romanian Settlements in Hungary and Transylvania during the 14th–15th Centuries*, awarded by the Romanian Academy in 1941, begins with a very useful and appropriate introduction regarding the content of his work, continuing with a short presentation of each chapter: ideas on the Hungarian settlements in the Tisza Plain and Pannonian Plain, and the colonization of Transylvania; the presence of the Romanian element in these regions; the religious and political organization of the Romanians living in Transylvania and Hungary until the sixteenth century; the taxes levied from the Romanians of Transylvania and Hungary during the Middle Ages; the Romanian people and their settlements in the Hungarian counties until 1500; the Romanian settlements in Maramureș; the Romanian people and their settlements in Crișana and Sătmăr until 1500; the Romanian settlements in Banat; the Romanians from Hașeg (Hunedoara County) until 1500; the Romanian settlements on the estates of the Roman-Catholic Diocese of Alba Iulia until 1500; the Romanian settlements in the Arieș Valley and Turda County; the Romanian villages in the county of Cluj; the Romanian settlers from Sălaj and Crasna regions, the Rodna Valley, the Bistrița region, the Târnava Valleys, the Szekler Land, the Bârsa and Olt regions until the year 1500; the Romanian settlements on royal territories. The volume ends with clear, logical and well-structured conclusions. Manciulea used the same scientific method in his later studies, including the ones referring to some of the essential moments of Transylvanian culture.

He was a dedicated and devout man of the Church and Greek-Catholic vicar. He did not confine himself to rhetoric and simple words, nor did he simply perform the religious rituals, but he dedicated himself to helping those in need, the Christians who were sick or poor. Every time he had to leave the church, especially when he was a high school teacher in Blaj, the Christians from the parish acutely felt the loss of a truly devout spiritual father. His activity as a priest was praised by Bishop Alexandru Todea in the eulogy delivered at Ștefan Manciulea's funeral on 14 July 1985. The bishop emphasized the fact that even after the Blaj church took another path of the Divine Providence, Ștefan Manciulea still continued to perform the Holy Liturgy and he was constantly present in sacerdotal life until the last days of his life.¹²

Therefore, as a teacher, scientist, scholar and priest, Ștefan Manciulea was enlightened and guided by the Christian love for his peers, by passion and perseverance in his teaching and research career. Above all, the faith in the Holy Father and consequently in the people's power to discover the truth and do good had been the fundamental principles of his life, work, writings and scientific conferences. He believed that his main duty was to serve the country and its people. He often declared that he only searched for truth and justice and all he wanted to witness was the eradication of evil from the life of the Romanian people and the victory of the good through truly worthy life values.¹³

The Existential Motivation

DURING HIS education and in his research, Manciulea valued the importance of modern and contemporary European culture; he was deeply touched by the effects of the Enlightenment movement and especially by the concepts and ideas of the representatives of the Transylvanian School, the so-called "forty-eighters." From this point of view, he understood well the relations between "form and substance," discovering that in the Austro-Hungarian Empire there was a huge difference between the Romanians and the other oppressed nationalities, in economic, social, and cultural terms. However, he was particularly influenced by the work of his mentor, Timotei Cipariu, whom he regarded as the founder of Transylvanian philosophy and philology.

Certainly Manciulea was profoundly impressed by the ideas and the bitter answers emerging from his master's writings: "When I contemplate the sad fate of this country," T. Cipariu wrote, "it breaks my heart seeing how far behind it is compared to other nations," which not very long ago were uncivilized and today, to our shame, are far ahead of us.¹⁴

After the Great Union of December 1918, he often said: "So many things are to be done in this country!" In his opinion, the advancement of the country could be obtained through disciplined work and tenacious involvement in achieving the established goals. "Still, despite the favorable conditions of this country, there is no other people in his world living in poorer conditions than us. Almost everything that we produce is in the hands of foreigners."¹⁵ Such ideas characterize his critical attitude (in a Kantian sense) and the fundamental motivation behind his assumed purpose in life: to serve his people and his country. By the end of his life, Manciulea still believed with all his heart in the motto of his adolescence, written on his graduation picture: "We will be our nation's sacrificial shrine and the soul of our people!"

The other component of his motivation, his permanent desire for knowledge, self-education, research, discovery, is connected to that egocentric type of personality that relies, in any circumstance, on true belief. Compared to belief and to divinity, all the other things are evanescent. In his *Testament* he said: “I wain, ask and demand from those still alive that no one, for no reason, should preach a sermon. No speeches, no discourses, no forgiveness, etc., for I consider them all empty notions and the ‘vanity of vanities.’”¹⁶ In conclusion, “the sense of human life on this earth is subordinated to the final goal of the individual—that of receiving the final judgment and entering the kingdom of heaven and achieving eternal happiness.” Here we also have the philosophical exhortation of Timotei Cipariu, as a secular existential principle: “Dear brothers, be mindful of the short time of your lives and properly use it, for the time of death is long.”

Most of Manciualea’s works, if not all of them, were written as a response to the imperatives of the time, whether political, religious or cultural. In some of his introductory or closing notes Manciualea reveals the reason motivating him to write the book. For instance, in *The Western Border*, Manciualea intends to reply to Hungarian revisionism and to its territorial claims, which started right after the end of the First World War, by dismantling its discourse and presenting the historical truth supported by evidence.¹⁷ By the end of his life, in the context of the re-emergence of the Hungarian revisionist propaganda claiming that the Transylvanian territory should be returned to Hungary, Ștefan Manciualea reopened old files containing statistical data, maps, and information in order to give new arguments supporting the continuity of the Romanian people inside the borders set by the Trianon Peace Treaty. Manciualea actively sought to send his works to international specialists and organizations, in an attempt to spread the historical truth regarding the origins of the Romanian people.

In what regards Manciualea’s personality, such extrinsic reasons are less relevant than the intrinsic motivation, especially the one correlated with his existential belief. The latter, as his daughter says, helped him overcome the suffering, the physical ordeals, humiliations and sorrow caused by the political imprisonment and by the communist authorities.¹⁸

Conclusions

AS A humanist thinker with philological skills, a scientific researcher in the fields of history, geography, demography, geology and Romanian cultural history, Ștefan Manciualea had an original contribution to all these domains, appreciated even during his life by Nicolae Iorga, Virgil Madgearu,

and the Romanian Academy, which gave him two awards for *The Western Border* (1937) and *The Romanian Settlements in Hungary and Transylvania during the 14th–15th Centuries* (1941). His scholarly and cultural work owes its depth and accuracy to his encyclopedic, multilingual and interdisciplinary education, put to good use in his research. The methodology he used was specific to the field of historical studies and he employed it with objectivity, in pursuit of both historical truth and justice.

Manciulea never abandoned his goal in life, his values and principles of science and humanism. His only policy was to serve his people and country. But his destiny was tragic and unjust. He was removed from the university and from scholarly studies for no good reason, at the peak of his career, by the repressive totalitarian authorities. During the communist regime, Manciulea remained the same dignified man, of a generous, forgiving and loving character. He had great difficulties in understanding that a significant part of his works were used by historians, geographers, and other intellectuals without properly quoting and without acknowledging his contributions, even plagiarizing some of them. The Romanian writer Ion Brad was so impressed by Manciulea's life that he wrote a novel about him, entitled *Appeal* (1988).

The high quality of his research work has been underlined in recent decades, especially after 1989, by many historians, geographers, and other intellectuals, who, emphasizing their accuracy and their present importance, have initiated the necessary steps for republishing them, thus acknowledging their real scholarly and cultural value.

His remains rest in Blaj, in a small church cemetery near the hill by Liberty Field. Just like he used to evoke the great names of Transylvanian teachers and scholars such as Timotei Cipariu and other intellectuals of the Transylvanian School, the time has come for contemporary scholars to praise his work, his scholarly activity, his altruistic nature and to republish his major scientific works. □

Notes

1. Ștefan Manciulea, *Povestea unei vieți* (Cluj-Napoca: Clusium, 1995), 100.
2. Ștefan Manciulea, *Profesori blăjeni îndrumând purtarea de bună-cuviință a școlarilor*, foreword by Ion Buzași (Târgu-Lăpuș: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2011), 43–44.
3. *Ibid.*, 141.
4. *Ibid.*, 142.
5. Ștefan Manciulea, *Povestea unei vieți*, rev. edition by Ștefania Manciulea and Ion Buzași (Cluj-Napoca: Clusium, 1995), 90–91.

6. Alexandru Todea, “Panegiricul rostit la înmormântarea profesorului Ștefan Manciulea, 14 iulie 1985,” in Manciulea, *Povestea unei vieți*, 153.
7. Ibid., 32.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 113–114.
10. Ștefan Manciulea, *Granița de vest*, 2nd edition, ed. Prof. Valeriu Achim (Baia Mare: Gutâiul, 1994), 18.
11. Ibid., 66.
12. Todea, 152–153.
13. Manciulea, *Povestea unei vieți*, 151.
14. Ștefan Manciulea, *Timotei Cipariu: Început de autobiografie* (Blaj: Tipografia Seminarului, 1940), 4.
15. Manciulea, *Profesori blăjeni*, 44.
16. Ibid., 148.
17. Manciulea, *Granița de vest*, 17–21.
18. Ibid., 144.

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Abstract

The Transylvanian Scholar Ștefan Manciulea

The present study presents the Transylvanian scholar Ștefan Manciulea (1894–1985) and his contribution to the development of geography, history, geology, historical demography and culture, focusing on the analysis of the motivational factors and values that conditioned his decisions and guided his life, scientific work and teaching career. Even though he had an endless trust in truth, justice and the political rights of the Romanian people, his destiny proved to be tragic. During the totalitarian regime, Ștefan Manciulea was a true model of human dignity for the future generations and a devoted patriot.

Keywords

Ștefan Manciulea, geo-history, Blaj schools, Transylvanian culture