

# HISTORY AND MYTH IN THE ROMANIAN CONSCIOUSNESS\*

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Origins

#### FIRST PRINCIPLES FIRST

After having reviewed the developments undergone by Romanian historical ideology, we are now going to analyse successively its fundamental components — the great mythical configurations underpinning the structure and evolution of our national consciousness.

It is only natural we should start at the beginning, not so much for observing the chronological criterion, as for acknowledging the exceptional weight carried by *the myths of foundation*. Each and every community, from tribes to modern nations, justifies itself through the recourse to its origins. At all times and in all cultures, these aforesaid origins are valued above all else, and ceaselessly reiterated and commemorated. There is nothing more urgent, more ideology-prone than a beginning. The myths of foundation bring into focus the very consciousness of a community.

Yet origins are not self-imposed, like an objective fact. We may just as well focus, if we will, on the foundation of Rome or on the Cucuteni civilization, on Herodotus' Gatae or on Trajan, on the first stone implements or on Negru Vodă's settlement, on Burebista or Cuza (Cucuteni: Pre-Historic Culture on the Territory of Present-Day Romania; Negru Voda (Radu Negru): Legendary Founder of Wallachia (Late 13<sup>th</sup> Century); Burebista: the First King of Dacia (1<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.); Alexandru Ioan Cuza: Ruler of the United Principalities (Romania), Built in 1859 by the Union of Wallachia and Moldavia). It is, in all cases, a matter of choice, and the choice is made not in accordance with some objective historical landmark, but rather taking the community's ideological heritage and current projects as a starting point. It is also noteworthy that the myths of foundation display a tendency towards incremental increase by concatenation; their *original* function requires constant renewal and reinforcement which, in their turn, engender further

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\* From Lucian Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească*, (History and Myth in the Romanian Consciousness), Humanitas, Bucharest, 1997.

foundation-related moments, reiterating in actual fact the original foundation and acting as links between this foundation and the present.

Thus, choosing from a wide range of possibilities, we might take the Dacian-Roman synthesis on the territory of Dacia as the founding fact leading to the Romania of today, the initial foundation being updated and reinforced by means of further foundation-oriented developments: the founding of the principalities, the unification of 1600, the unification of 1859, the formation of Greater Romania in 1918, or, more recently, the revolution of December 1989, to the extent we consider it to be a new beginning, bearing testimony to a renewed, as well as eternal, Romania.

Two centuries ago, for Bishop Chesaire of Râmnic, four were the stages making up the foundation: the Roman-Dacian wars, and mostly Trajan's contribution, later consolidated by St. Constantine (Emperor Constantine the Great); the building of the monasteries in Câmpulung and Curtea de Argeș (symbolizing the establishment of Wallachia by Radu Negru); the translation of Slavonic books into Romanian (Matthew Basarab, Șerban Cantacuzino, Constantine Brâncoveanu); and — surprisingly enough, for actuality does impose obligations! — the reign of Alexander Ipsilanti, when Chesarie did his writing... The distance in time and the difference in mentality allow us in the case in point to perceive with greater accuracy the ideological sense of ordering history along the lines of founding moments. The erudite cleric's scheme only regards Wallachia and brings to the forefront the great religious and cultural achievements. It is neither correct, nor incorrect; it reflects, like any other such scheme, a particular view on history from a particular vantage point located in the present.

The Romanian myths of foundation are but a particular case of a quasi-universal mythology, whose purpose, regardless of space and time, is to justify the present through the origins, and to link the two ends of history by means of interposed markers.

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Inclusion in the typology is also verified by the shift from traditional to modern forms. The former generally tend to value *external* interventions, susceptible of promoting into history a formerly void or amorphous space. We are faced with an *ex nihilo* type of creation, resulting in fundamentally new creations. Noticeably enough, the foundation itself is personified — an



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exceptional character is involved in the founding act. All these confer a certain *noblesse* to the new structures, as well as a transcendent dimension. The archetypal essence of the myth of foundation is, to all intents and purposes, intrinsically *sacred*. Even in its later, apparently secular forms, the foundation retains a mystic significance making it perennially viable, above the contingencies of history.

The foundation myths of the Romanian principalities, as recorded in the chronicles: the settlement of Negru Vodă in Wallachia and the double settlement of Dragoș and Bogdan in Moldavia, fit perfectly into the traditional typology. At about the same time, the French and the English would romance their origins by attaching value to invented peregrinations and conjuring up their founding heroes, Francus and Brutus, from the remote city of Troy.

Modern foundation myths, on the contrary, attach value to indigenous origins, in strict accordance with the “scientific”, nationalistic and democratic stage of the historic discourse. The founding act is no longer perceived as a breakthrough performed by an exceptional hero; it is grafted on the organic development of a community or a civilization. *Roots* become more significant than an exalted origin. We shall now follow this shift in focus throughout the Romanian historic consciousness.

## ROMAN TIMES

The modern age is born under the sign of the *Roman myth of foundation*. It is this myth that underpins the foundation. The settlement of the Romanian



Trajan

principalities is recorded as a later stage, reiterating the original creation, Trajan’s “settlement”. Certain researchers do tend to interpret this myth as the proof of an uninterrupted Roman consciousness Romanian society has allegedly treasured.<sup>1</sup> We deem such attempts illusory. Why, then, shouldn’t a Dacian consciousness have endured as well? In actual fact, when it comes to invoking remote origins, it is not a matter of popular consciousness, but rather of intellectual combinations with an obvious ideological and political bias. Regardless of their Latin origin, until 1600, Romanians do evolve in a predominantly Slavonic cultural environment. Their

historic curiosity did not reach deeper than the establishment of the Romanian principalities. It was in the West that the relationship between Romanians and Romans first came to attention, for the simple reason that their knowledge of Latin allowed Westerners to detect the similarities between the Romanian language and Latin, in addition to their access to historic records of the conquest and colonization of Dacia.

As far as Romanian historiography is concerned, Grigore Ureche is the first to lay claim, in the 17th century, to the Roman origin of the Romanians. Several decades later, Miron Costin put together the first "monograph" on the Roman descent of his people, under the title *De neamul moldovenilor* (*On the Moldavian Folk*). Both chroniclers had been schooled in Poland, and were conversant with the Latin language, consequently resorting to sources and documents written in Latin. Beyond any doubt, none of their arguments regarding the Roman origin can be traced back to some earlier autochthonous source. Now, in the 17th century, Romanian historiography emerges from its Slavonic phase, not only due to the fact, essential, of course, that chronicles were compiled in Romanian, but also due to the shift in cultural and historical landmarks. Rome, the conquest and Roman colonization of Dacia become the starting point. The principle of "external intervention" continues to operate, even more forcefully. Their Roman origin strongly marked the individuality of the Romanian principalities, conferred *noblesse* and prestige. Latin was the cultural language in use over most of Europe, while the Roman imperial tradition endured both in the "Holy Empire" as well as in Russia's claim to the little of "The Third Rome".

The purity of the origin was never questioned. With the exception of Stolnic Constantine Cantacuzino, who, in his *History of Wallachia* accepted the Dacian-Roman mixture, later chroniclers and historians, Dimitrie Cantemir as well as the Transylvanian School set, would accept nothing short of a purely Roman descent, having the Dacian's either exterminated or driven away to the benefit of the conquerors. For the Transylvanian School, resorting to the Roman origin, a Roman origin as free of any foreign mixture as possible, was even more essential than for their forerunners in the principalities. In militating for the emancipation of the Transylvanian Romanians, kept in a state of obvious inferiority by the ruling Hungarian elite, they wielded origins as a weapon. Descendants of world rulers, whose language was still the official language in Hungary and Transylvania, the Romanians could not put up indefinitely with the supremacy of a people

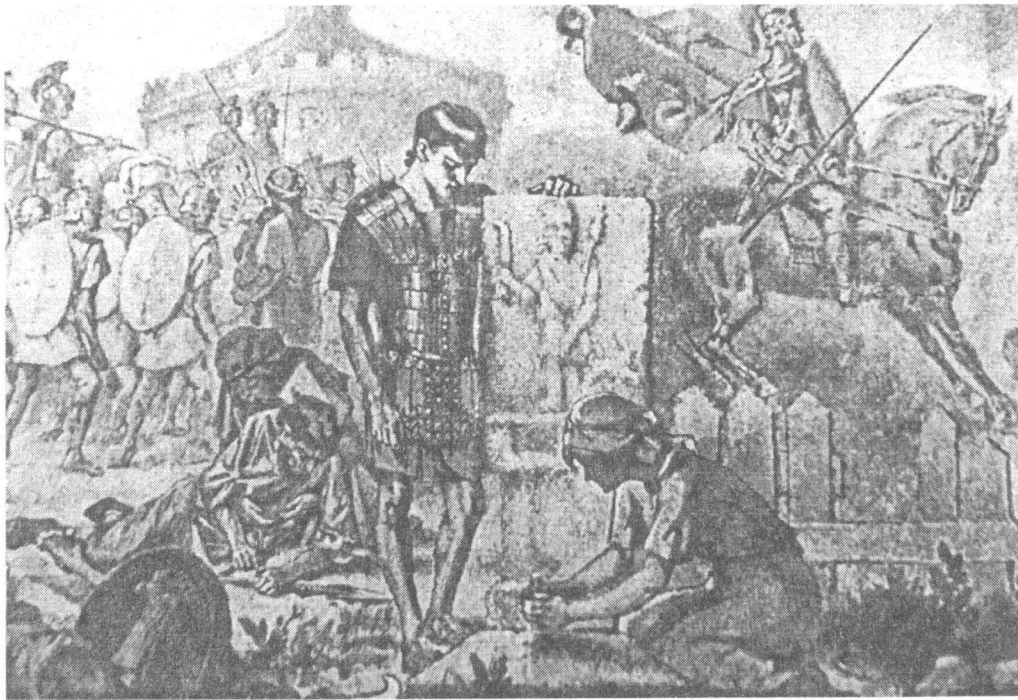
inferior to themselves — in accordance with the norms of the time — as regards “race” and origin.

The difficulty confronting the Transylvanian School consisted in providing an explanation for the extinction of the Dacians, or, at any rate, for their lack of involvement in the formation of the Romanian people. They pleaded extermination, banishment from the territory of Dacia (Budai-Deleanu regards the Dacians compelled to leave their country as the forefathers of the Polish people) or, simply, an incompatibility of civilizations making coalescence impossible. The most sophisticated demonstration belongs to Petru Maior, who, in his *Istoria pentru începutul românilor în Dacia* (1812), sums up all these arguments. Large numbers of Dacians, “unable to flee before the Romans, took their own lives”, while others, “women, children and all, escaped from Dacia and took refuge at their neighboring friends, the Sarmatians”. Maior takes pains to demonstrate that the war was uncommon, in that its end was extermination. He thus answers the question whether the Roman couldn’t have possibly married “Dakian females”. They definitely couldn’t, for, first and foremost, neither men nor women had been left in Dacia. Nevertheless, granted some of the women *had* survived, the historian concedes, in an attempt to disprove his proposition by *reductio ad absurdum*, “the brilliant purity of the Roman blood, if nothing else, was enough to prevent the Romans from marrying such barbarians like unto the Dakian females”. To be sure, “among the Romans it was a matter of great debasement to marry females from other nations”, how much more, then, marrying Dacian “savages”. This custom “not to marry females of other tongues”, Maior insists, has been handed down to the Romanians, which accounts for the survival of the Romanian nation and language. This is in sharp contrast with the Hungarians, who “on their arrival in Pannonia [...] had no females of their own race whatsoever” and consequently “were compelled to marry females of other races: Russian, Slavonian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Greek and what have you”.<sup>2</sup> The Romanians’ nobility and purity is thus additionally valued in opposition with the Hungarian mixture.

Remarkably enough, the historiography in the Romanian principalities, subject, under the Phanariot regime, to the Greek influence, would address, around 1800, the Dacian-Roman fusion as a natural phenomenon. We come across this point of view in the works of Greek historians living in the Romanian provinces: Dimitrie Philippide (in *Istoria României*, 1816) and Dionisie Fotino (in *Istoria vechii Dacii*, 1818–1819), but it is also common with Romanians such as Ienăchiță Văcărescu or Naum Râmniceanu (in the latter’s essay on the origin of the Romanians — *Despre originea Românilor*



*Trajan, victorious over the Dacians*



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*The formation of the Romanian people: a Roman Legionary  
and a Dacian Maiden  
Ateneul Român din București. Marea frescă (The Romanian Athenaeum in  
Bucharest. The Great Mural) Bucharest, 1938*



*The barbarian invasion*



*The foundation of the Romanian lands: voivode and peasants*

— as well as in his introduction to *Hronologia domnilor Țării Românești* — the chronology of Wallachian rulers). The above mentioned “historic tableau” of Moldavia, concocted in 1828, did not shy away from stating boldly the Dacian origin of the Moldavians.

The Romanian historiography of the 19th century developed, nevertheless, along the coordinates laid down by the Transylvanian School. There was no way the slightly cosmopolitan productions of the Phanariot age could compete with the purely Romanian project of the scholars across the mountains. The national Romanian movement gathering momentum after 1821, the growing familiarity with the West and the Western models of civilization, the complexes of small countries aspiring to play a part in Europe by reinstating ancient Dacia (Roman Dacia, to be sure) — everything contributed to the ascension of the Roman model. The excellency of the founding myth guaranteed the excellency of the Romanian future, despite the mediocrity of the present. Through the Romans, the Romanians posed before the West as anybody’s equals, while the act of resorting to the Roman culture was no longer seen as borrowing but rather as a return to the source — a heritage of civilization which the West itself shared.

It is thus explained why, during the interval 1830–1860, interpretations contradicting the Latin purity of the Romanian race are few and far between. Distinctions do exist, but they regard not so much the origins themselves, as the position in relationship to them, the degree of actualization.

The *Latinist school*, represented in particular by Transylvanians but by no means restricted to Transylvania, since Transylvanians already occupied

important positions in the cultural system of the Romanian principalities and, later on, united Romania, undertook to follow to the last limits the latinism founded by the former generations of the Transylvanian School. If the Romanians are pure Romans, their history is of necessity Roman history pure and simple, the extension of Roman history; this is what caused August Treboniu Laurian, the spokesman of the movement, to start as naturally as possible the history of his people with the foundation of Rome (as Samuil Micu had done before him). If Romanians are Romans, then they ought to stay Roman, discarding all foreign influences, even, why not, as far as the institutional organization of



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modern Romania was concerned (Bărnăuțiu's point of view, argued against by Maiorescu), but at all costs in the sphere of the Romanian language, whose "purification" was expected to draw it as near to the original Latin as possible.

The exquisite monument of this tendency was the *Dictionary of the Romanian Language*, published — in two volumes and one glossary — by August Treboniu Laurian in cooperation with I. Massim between 1871 and 1876. The publication of this work was proof of the key positions occupied by the Latinists in the Romanian culture, the Academic Society included (which had been founded in 1867, to become, in 1879, The Romanian Academy), at whose urge the project had been carried out. The result was well above expectations. The language as re-elaborated by Laurian subsequent to its purification from non-Latin elements (grouped in the glossary with a view to their elimination) and the adoption of an etymological orthographic system, had little if any bearing on the authentic Romanian language. The dictionary was both the highest expression of latinism and its swan song. The attempt at creating an artificial language was copiously ridiculed and brought final discredit to the Latinist school. Even fierce opponents as far as the other matters of national history were concerned, like the Junimea set and Hasdeu, joined hands in denouncing the sacrifice of the Romanian language on the altar of imposed latinity.

The opponents of latinism were, ultimately, latinists themselves, since for them, too, the Romanians were descending from the Romans. Well past the half of the century, the Latin filiation of the Romanian people was quasi-unanimously recognized. Kogălniceanu, one of the most severe critics of latinist excesses, unambiguously stated, in *Histoire de la Valachie*, the Roman background of his nation, traced back to the very fabric of Romanian folklore: "Our peasants kept many a Roman superstition, their wedding ceremonies reenact many of the practices common with the citizens of Rome. [...]". The preservation of unadulterated purity appeared to him, starting from the Romans, an essential trait of Romanian history: "Romanians would never marry women of another nation. [...]. Romanians always stayed a nation of their own, keeping the customs and mores of their ancestors, without ever losing anything of the valour and bravery of Roman citizens."<sup>3</sup> In his turn, Bălcescu



Trajan

mentioned — in *Românii supt Mihai Voevod Viteazul* (“The Romanians under Michael the Brave”) — as a fact needing no further commentaries, the colonization of Dacia by the Romans, “subsequent to the extermination of its inhabitants.”<sup>4</sup>

There were, nevertheless, differences between the latinists and those content with the simple acknowledgment of their Roman origin. These differences fall under three main headings.

First, the critics of latinism did not accept the excessive actualization of the origins, transforming the Romanians of their day into Romans, with such consequences as we have already seen, including the ones affecting the Romanian language. Dismissing the *romanomania* (in his 1843 inaugural), Kogălniceanu stressed the necessary distinction between Romanians and Romans, between the origins and the present. The Romanians were expected to prove themselves without relying indefinitely on the “assistance” of their Roman ancestors.

Secondly, the purity of the Roman blood was addressed, almost a “tabu” for quite a long time. The famous passage from Eutropius, underpinning all considerations on the colonization of Dacia, does state, after all, with extreme clarity, the affluence of colonist from “the entire Roman world” (*ex toto orbe romano*). Şincai<sup>5</sup>, without the benefit of further information, elaborates in his own way on this phrase: “[...] a great number of settlers were brought over to Dakia from the entire Roman world, but particularly from Rome and Italy”, and “not only from amongst the rabble” but also “leading families were taken or moved over to Dakia”. An aristocratic colonization! In order to account for the regional variants of the Romanian language, Maior would concede to the existence of dialectal variety in Dacia, but only as long as its origin was strictly Italian. Alecu Russo, on the other hand, an opponent of latinist purism, would bring up, without a trace of inferiority complexes, the admixture of colonists coming from each and every province of the Empire; according to him, the particular profile of the Romanian language was due to the very “dosage” of this diversity of elements.<sup>6</sup> Even keeping the Dacians out of it all, “purity” was yesterday’s news; there was no way we could be pure Romans.

Thirdly, to conclude, the Dacians were slowly being perceived as more than just an embarrassing barbarian element, whose only contribution was messing up the scheme of Romanian latinity. Their love of liberty, their spirit of sacrifice, which had never been denied, appealed to the revolutionary Romantic generation as virtues worthy to be admired and emulated. What could have been more noble than sacrifice for the motherland and death preferred to slavery, as symbolized by Decebal’s heroism and by the dramatic scene of

collective suicide? “Decebal — Kogălniceanu would exclaim in his famous 1843 lecture —, the most significant barbarian king ever, worthier of sitting on the throne of Rome than Augustus’ unworthy successors.”<sup>7</sup> Alecu Russo, attempting a parallel between *Decebal and Stephen the Great*, would declare: “Both of them had the same aim, the same sublime idea: the independence of their motherland! They are both heroes, though Stephen is a hero more local in character, a Moldovian hero, while Decebal is a world hero.”<sup>8</sup>

Admiration does not necessarily interfere with the latinist interpretation of the origins. “The Dacians, whose land we have inherited”, Kogălniceanu would say in his inaugural; the land, that is to say, not the blood. Russo takes one step further: if in the above mentioned essay only Roman colonists appear, in another text (*Piatra teiului* — travelling notes from the Moldavian Mountains), he sees the race of mountain people, and even their language, as the result of the Dacian-Roman fusion. Considering all the favorable opinions conceded to them, the Dacians appear during the Romantic period — until after 1850 — more like a sort of mythical forefathers, plunged in an age predating history, in a land still able to remember their fierce bravery. Although they had but rarely taken the Dacians as a founding factor, the Romantics did contribute to the consolidation of the Dacian theme, preparing the ground for the approaching reprocessing of the origins.<sup>9</sup>

#### DACIANS AND ROMANS: A DIFFICULT SYNTHESIS

The prospect of a deeper, more accurate synthesis was looming large. The inferiority complex that had promoted the Romans was no longer justified once Romania came into existence, declared its independence and became a kingdom. The Romanians could at last be themselves. The purity and nobility of blood ceased to be decisive arguments (retaining, nevertheless, a certain weight as far as national arguments were concerned). The fact that Dacia had been colonized not exclusively and not even primarily by inhabitants of Rome and Italy started being acknowledged and dedramatized. The Dacians, in their turn, started being recognized, by a few nonconformists at first, then by the whole of Romanian historiography, as a founding element of the Romanian people. That was ultimately a merging together, characteristic of the stage Romanian society had reached in its development, of Western sources (Romans, Latin relatives) and autochthonous ones (the Dacians). Accepting the mixture meant, anyway, a healing, partial at least, from complexes. The very progress of historic research and conception did not allow anymore the autochthonous population to be ignored, neither did it accommodate the illusion of strictly Italian colonization. Around 1870 it was

difficult to state, as nonchalantly as Maior had done, that the ancestors of the Romanians came from Italy, while the Dacians had been exterminated and their women ignored by the conquerors; Maiorescu did hit the nail on the head by calling attention to the fact that a man “in his right mind” could not possibly believe such balderdash. A more adequate interpretation of literary sources, completed by linguistic deductions and archaeological investigations, opened the way for a gradual recognition of the Dacians.

The phenomenon, as seen, pertains to the typology of founding myths development. The French also started, as early as the Renaissance, to lay increasing stress on their Gaelic heritage (so very much so, that the French Revolution could be schematically seen as a clash between the Gaelic people and the Frankish aristocracy, the former getting back at the latter, and rightly so), while in Russia, the traditional version having the state founded by the external intervention of the Varangians began losing ground, in the name of Russian patriotism, to the autochthonous Slavs.

Even before historians, mention should be made, in this matter, of a political character. In 1857, I.C. Brătianu published in *Românul* (“The Romanian”) a series of articles under the title *Historic Studies on the Origins of our Nationality*. If in an earlier text, from 1851, this statesman so concerned with the origins seemed content to invoke the multitude of Latin colonists and their virtues handed down to the Romanians, the picture he later presented was much more complex. The Romanians no longer descended from Romans alone, but from *Tracians, Celts and Romans*. Thus, “we are three times as indomitable and powerful”, a statement of obvious implications.<sup>10</sup> The Tracians, that is to say the Dacians, symbolized the roots going deep into the soil of the country, the Romans — the political principle and the inflow of civilization, while the Celts, as yet never mentioned in the Romanian mythology of the origins, were well worth being invoked as, through them, we became more closely related to the French. The part played by France in the recent unification of the Principalities appeared to be overwhelming, as the French model of civilization was overwhelming. The Celtic viz Gaelic connection justifying the French affiliation contributed a finishing touch to the profile of a country which had to be itself as well as the inheritor of ancient Rome and the Eastern replica of the French model. This remarkable argument clearly illustrates the case in point, i.e. the mechanism reiterating the origins and the political charge of the founding myths.

The Celts failed to get a firm foothold in the Romanian consciousness, but the Dacians were there to stay. In 1860, Hasdeu published in *Foița de istorie și literatură* (“*The Leaflet for History and Literature*”) an important study

with the rather provocative title — considering the predominantly Latinist climate — “Have Dacians truly perished?”. The young historian proved that the Transylvanian School and its minions had built the whole of their argument upon a biased interpretation of ancient sources. The “decrease in the number of men” Eutropius had mentioned was abusively blown out of all proportion and made to appear as the extermination of an entire nation. The Dacians had not perished, Hasdeu concluded, and neither did colonization mean an infusion of purebred Romans; a great diversity of origins was rather the case. Therefore, “our nation evolved from sundry elements, none of which was predominant.” Bang went the myth of purity. The Romanians came across as a “chemical composition” whose various basic elements resulted in a fundamentally new synthesis.<sup>11</sup>

In many subsequent works, *Istoria critică a Românilor* (*A Critical History of the Romanians*) among them, Hasdeu attempted, despite the scarcity of documents, a reconstruction of the old Romanian civilization which, in his view, descended to a considerable extent from the autochthonous civilization of the Dacians, without thus diminishing the importance of the Roman influence. He particularly believed in the historic virtues of linguistics. In his opinion, the origin and evolution of words provided an accurate mirror for history. He was involved in hunting down Dacian words occurring in the Romanian language, and managed to identify 84 of them, to which 15 place names were added. That was a strong argument in favor of the Dacians’ survival and their contribution to the Romanian synthesis. The article *Originile păstoriei la Români* (*The Origins of Animal Husbandry with the Romanians*) — 1874 — is significant in this respect. Hasdeu demonstrated the Dacian origin of such words as *cioban* (shepherd), *baci* (principal of the flock), *stână* (pastureland settlement), *urdă* (sweet cheese) and *brânză* (cheese). Thus, pastoral terminology confirms the Dacian-Roman continuity both ethnically as well as regarding the perpetuation of an ancient occupation. Needless to say, not very many of Hasdeu’s etymologies stood the test of recent research. The fact is, as far as Dacian etymology is concerned, anything can be said, since we completely ignore the case in point, i.e. the Dacian language itself.

In *Strat și substrat. Genealogia popoarelor balcanice* (*Stratum an Substratum. The Genealogy of Balkan Peoples*), the introduction to the third volume of *Etymologicum Magnum Romaniae*, Hasdeu addressed once again, in an overall manner, the issue of the relationship between Dacians, Romans and Romanians. He went on to demonstrate that the peoples of the Balkan Peninsula came into existence through the superimposing of successive

strata: the original “Pelasgians”, then the Tracians, superseded by the Romans and, finally, the Slavs. The ultimate predominance of one of these elements does not justify us to ignore the deep-lying strata. Beyond linguistic differences, the connection between the Balkan peoples is all too discernible (the Bulgarians’ Tracism, the Romanians’ Dacism...). The Dacian substratum of the Romanian people is thus included in a general scheme regarding the historic and linguistic evolution.

While Hasdeu was vigorously tilting at words, an amateur archaeologist was searching high and low all throughout the land for Dacian vestiges. Cezar Bolliac (1813–1881), a journalist, writer and politician, published in 1858, in *Românul (The Romanian)*, a genuine manifesto, titled “On the Dacians”, in which — beating Hasdeu to it by two years — he took the Latinist doctrine to pieces without concealing his enthusiasm for the age and achievements of the Dacian civilization. One sentence is worthy of attention: “Our nobility goes back to the origins of this land.” The Dacians stirred Bolliac’s passion for field-work. “Our archaeological mission as Romanians is, above all, to define what the Dacians were, what their origins were, what their beliefs were, which was their degree of civilization when the Romans invaded and took their country away, and next — how they continued together with the Romans, in what areas the Romans influenced them and in what areas they influenced the Romans.”<sup>12</sup> For two decades, between 1860 and 1880, he travelled extensively, along the Danube, to the hills and to the mountains, in an attempt to answer these questions. At some point he was under the delusion that he had discovered a Dacian alphabet, and on a different occasion he identified certain “prehistoric pipes” which prompted the conclusion that the Dacians were rather partial to the art of smoking. Odobescu twitted him about it in an article entitled *Fumuri arheologice scornite din lulele preistorice de un om care nu fumează (Archaeological pipe-dreams of a puffed-up non-smoker sucking on prehistoric pipes)*. We are not interested here in the genuine value of the research carried out by this enthusiastic *dilettante*. What really matters is that he “dug out” the Dacian substratum previously overshadowed in the Romanian consciousness by the Roman resplendence.

Etymology and archaeology are now joined by poetry. The Dacians are repeatedly invoked by Mihai Eminescu, the great national poet of the Romanians, in texts generally left in manuscript form, in various stages of completion, among them such poems as *Memento mori*, *Sarmis...*, as well as the historic tragedy *Decebal*. Like Hasdeu before him, Eminescu draws with equal pride both on the Dacians and the Romans. Eminescu’s Dacia portrays

a primordial land untouched by history, expressing, like similar excursions into the past made by poet, an ideal of regression, the nostalgia for the origins dawning under the sign of the golden age. Though not sufficiently articulate, this is the starting point of a national mythology, venting the poet's ingrained ideological nationalism and autochthonism, which were to resonate with the nationalism and autochthonism of later generations.<sup>13</sup>

In the same period, Dacia featured as the subject of a doctoral thesis: *Dacia înainte de romani* (*Dacia before the Romans*), delivered by Grigore Tocilescu, in 1876, at the University of Prague, and acknowledged with the prize of the Academic Society. Published in 1880, it is the first synthesis in Romanian historiography on the history and civilization of the Dacians.

Between 1870–1880, the question of origins, as we have seen, undergoes essential reconsideration. From Romans (purebred Romans to begin with, then “adulterated” Romans), the Romanians become *Dacian-Romans*. Here is a formula apparently closer to the truth, but in actual fact more fragile and less accurate than the exclusive acknowledgment of either of the elements making up the combination. Stress was to be inevitably laid either on the former or the latter term of the syntagm. Who was greater? Was it Trajan or Decebal? In which one of the two are we apt to recognize ourselves first? Granted, such questions do appear childish, but nothing is ever childish in mythology, where everything makes sense.

The Latin idea, nonetheless, persists with a vengeance in Romanian society. If pan-Latinism (given the cold shoulder by France) never got anywhere near the accomplishments of pan-Germanism and pan-Slavism respectively, it is not for want of support from the Romanians. In 1869, the “Dacianist” Hasdeu vigorously demanded that “a pan-Latin convention be held in Paris”, while Alecsandri received a prize in 1878, in Montpellier, for *The Anthem of the Latin Gens* (*Cântecul gintei latine*): “The Latin gens does rule supreme/ among the gentes great on Earth [...]”; in the poet's own view, his literary triumph was on a par with the glory earned by the Romanian army at Grivița, which, vanity aside, attests to the intensity of the Latin myth.

The dominant discourse continued to favor, to a greater or lesser extent, the Romans. Among those reluctant to grant the Dacians more than their token due, the author of *Dacia before the Romans* cuts a distinct figure. In his textbook of Romanian history, Tocilescu comes to the conclusion that following the wars against the Romans, Dacia was left *almost* without inhabitants. The phenomenon consequently occurring was not a simple process of romanization, as was the case in France and in Spain, but a massive Roman colonization, enlisting the contribution of a great number of

provinces (not so much Italy). The Romanian people is essentially a *Roman people* (unlike the French, who are Gaelic-Roman, or the Spanish, who are Iberian-Roman). Dacians were indeed present in this synthesis, the historian admits, but only to a limited extent.<sup>14</sup>

Dimitrie Onciul advances a similar point of view. He considers the Romanian people to have descended “most from the Roman colonists who, within the colonized territory, absorbed the remnants of the Dacian population, subsequent to their extensive extermination in battle, as Roman authors claim, or, alternately, to their forced retreat towards the north and the east. The opinion according to which the Dacian-Romans are first and foremost romanized Dacians is not supported by historic evidence. The Dacians did survive in non-colonized areas, as a population different from the Romans and more often than not hostile towards the empire, to the end of the Roman rule, only to disappear later on in the successive waves of invasions.”<sup>15</sup>

Other historians are more generous. In *Istoria românilor din Dacia Traiană* (*The History of the Romanians in Trajan's Dacia*), whose first volume appeared in 1888, A.D. Xenopol supports Dacian continuity with a host of proofs and arguments. His quite balanced presentation brings face to face the autochthonous and the colonizing element. Taking the prejudice favoring the Romans into consideration, he feels the urge to convince his readers that descending from the Dacians is in no way detrimental to dignity: “[...] the root of the Romanian people is anchored in the historic strata by means of two vines which are equally vigorous, enduring and virtuous. Let us, therefore, be not abhored, were Dacian blood be found to tint our nation.” Still, even for Xenopol, the decisive factors were the colonization and romanization, whose extent was seen to have exceeded any like process occurring in other provinces of the Empire. Romans appear to have massively outnumbered the Dacians, “and consequently, the finest specimens of the Romanian race today lean not towards the Dacian character, but rather towards the Roman one.”<sup>16</sup> We are Dacian-Romans, to be sure, but rather more Romans than Dacians...

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Nicolae Iorga, in his numerous synthesis works of mixed magnitude, declares, in his turn, the Dacian-Roman fusion, but within the ampler framework of overall eastern Romanity, and with a heavy stress on a sizable demographic surge issuing from Italy even prior to the respective provinces being engulfed by the Roman state. “A people — he opines — would not switch over to another language unless outnumbered by an inflow of people of like pursuits speaking that language.” The Thracian-Illyrian mass of farmers and shepherds could only by denationalized as consequence of the mass



immigration of Italian peasantry. The process later continued in Roman Dacia, where the number of Dacians left “among the other romanized Tracians was far from large, as their nation had sustained great losses in recent years.”<sup>17</sup> The balance, therefore, is tipped in favor of the Romans and, at least in the initial stage of romanizing the Balkans, in favor of the purely Italian element.

Roman symbols are dominant over a long period, the figure of Trajan himself having pride of place among them. On occasions, he does share his position with Decebal, but on the whole, he is given preference, since he pre-eminently defines the founding moment, which is the conquest of Dacia by the Romans. On the inauguration of the Romanian Athenaeum, in February 1888, Alexandru Odobescu delivered an erudite lecture meant to stress the relationship between the Bucharest edifice and the circular domed Roman buildings. The Athenaeum was thus seen to symbolize the Roman origin of those who erected it. So that the relationships Romanians-Romans would be made even more obvious, the distinguished archaeologist suggested the representation in base-relief, on the pediment, of the “Transfiguration occurring here, in Romania, when, the dark, ruthless oppression of the Dacian Decebal gave way, in our country, through its fortunate conquest by Trajan, to the quick, effortless beginning of the brilliant and blessed rule of the Latin nation”. The mural in the ample circular hall was supposed to depict at first the barbaric state of prehistoric times, followed by the Dacian-Roman wars and the final triumph of Rome. Not a word was mentioned about the image of Decebal, yet “the great, gentle figure of Emperor Trajan will dominate, with his grey crown and his prophetic gesture, the whole of his army. [...] He, who gave all of us here birth and a name to go with it, life and a faith to justify it. He will shine in his place like the sun at noon.”<sup>18</sup>

The mural which Odobescu sketched as an ideal project was to be carried out half a century later, between 1933 and 1937, by the painter Costin Petrescu. At the time, the major part played by the Dacians in the Romanian synthesis was indeed recognized (and, as we are going to see, even exaggerated at times). Yet, in keeping with an enduring tradition, the foundation scene depicted by Costin Petrescu totally ignores Decebal. We can only see Trajan as victor, contemplating the Dacian disaster. The mural also features Apollodorus of Damascus, a symbolic character considered to be more representative than Decebal, to the extent that the bridge he had built connected Dacia to the rest of the Empire. The mixed origin of the Romanian people is not ignored, after all, finding its illustration in the courtship of a Dacian woman by a Roman legionary. The man is obviously a Roman; he provides his descendants with a name and with legitimacy.<sup>19</sup>

In D. Onciul's synthesis *Din-istoria României* (*From the History of Romania*, editions in 1906, 1908 and 1913) we come across the most concentrated expression of the Romanian Pantheon. The book contains two illustrations only. The former represents Trajan, "the founder of the Romanian people", the latter — King Carol, "the founder of the Romanian Kingdom". The connection between the two founding moments — ethnic and political — occurs extensively at the height of Carol I's rule, marked by the 1906 jubilee. The Romanian king and the Roman emperor are pictured together on several plates and medals, with inscriptions such as "To the fathers of the Romanian nation 106–1906–1866".<sup>20</sup> Apart from his noble blood, Trajan also symbolized a political project: the imperial glory of Rome reactualized by the rule of Carol I.

Accepted, more or less, as a population subjected to romanization, the Dacians did not offer the Kingdom of Romania a sufficiently appealing political symbol. Between their barbaric monarchy and the Roman imperial insignia the choice was obvious. The 1848 revolutionaries were definitely more open to admiring Decebal than the political decision-makers of 1900.

In spite of all that, the ground gained by the Dacians grew consistently firmer. The autochthonist wave raised after 1900, and amplified between the two world wars, favored the Dacian roots either directly or indirectly. We have seen how Vasile Pârvan sketched an image of Dacian civilization which was amazingly similar to the image, as it was perceived at the time, of traditional Romanian civilization. Pârvan's endeavour, historically respected for the thoroughness of its information (both literary and archaeological) and considered methodologically water-tight, placed the Dacian factor in a practically impregnable position. Starting from the conclusions of the great archaeologist, further steps could be taken, and were indeed taken, while none of the ground gained on behalf of the Dacians was retroceded. They appeared as a numerous, strong people, creator of a remarkable civilization, singular among all Thracian nations in founding a state. Here is how Pârvan himself sums up the essential traits of the Dacian identity at the moment of the Roman conquest: "First of all, Dacia was a great kingdom with a perfectly homogeneous ethnic basis, with century-old historic traditions, with a well-defined social and economic structure, with an advanced culture whose forms had been initially influenced by Celtic civilization, then, for two centuries before Trajan, by the Roman one. We are not talking here, as in Dalmatia, in Thracia, in Pannonia or in Moesia, simply about a number of barbarian tribes, with a population varying in numbers inhabiting a rather large territory, yet lacking in political and national solidarity with one another, but about a nation conscious of its own identity."<sup>21</sup>

The formula “nation conscious of its own identity” foreshadows the Romanian national consciousness and in 1926 it actually equates ancient Dacia to Greater Romania. The part played by the Romans, nonetheless, does not decrease as the Dacians gain in importance. Pârvan reveals a long process of westernization, “pre-romanization” we might call it, starting well before the conquest of Dacia. He believes that in the Roman province of Dacia, amidst a thinned out autochthonous population subject to massive colonization the Roman element was dominant. The romanization process could be also felt in the rest of Decebal’s Dacia, which had escaped Roman annexation and continued to be populated by Dacians. “Not only the Banat and Oltenia, but also Wallachia and Moldavia gradually received, through nation and interest promoted connections with Roman Dacia, on the one hand, and with Gettic Moesia on the other, the Roman form of life. [...] The interest-promoted solidarity of pre-Roman Dacia came back into existence: the Dacians in Greater Dacia contributed with their race to preserve what the Romans in Roman Dacia had created through their culture.”<sup>22</sup> Pârvan managed, through his genius, to fix the Dacian-Roman synthesis in a perfect balance. The Romanians are, to the highest degree, both Roman and Dacians, while pre-Roman Dacia, the Dacia of the Roman age, included into the Empire or not, and contemporary Rumania appear as perfectly overlapping historic entities resonating to each other across the millennia.

One decade later, in C.C. Giurescu’s *Istoria românilor (The History of the Romanians)*, the first volume, published in 1935, the Dacians were reaching new heights of “biological” input into the formation of the Romanian people, attaining, at long last, a majority even in Roman Dacia: “In spite of all the severe losses they had sustained in battle, in spite of the emigration of tribes which, in order to avoid being subjects to the Empire, fled into the northern mountains, we do believe that the population staying behind was numerous enough, making up the *majority* of the new province inhabitants. [...] *Romanity triumphed in Dacia* because it won the natives over.”<sup>23</sup>

The Romanians were thus defining themselves as *romanized Dacians*, after having been pure Romans to begin with, then Romans mixed to a greater and lesser extent, then Dacian-Romans...

#### THE DACIANS STRIKE BACK

Yet things did not stop there. The next move, and a predictable move, too, given the logic of nationalism, was to have the Romans expelled from the Romanian anatomy. Autochthonist nationalism came full circle back to the purity of the race advocated by the first nationalists, with the only difference

that this time the said purity was to be Dacian rather than Latin. The Roman infusion had grafted the Dacian space upon an incontestable center of the world: Rome. This time the center simply swung back to Dacia, a timeless, eternal Dacia, with the rest of the world obediently orbiting it. This reshuffling duly reinforced the concept of *centre*. We should notice that shifting center-wise a peripheral space, located in all ages on the edge of great civilizations, was and still is the major concern of Romanian nationalism.

In 1894, Teohari Antonescu (1866–1910), an archaeologist, a disciple of Odobescu, later to become a professor with the University of Iassy, published an essay entitled *Dacia, patria primitivă a popoarelor ariene* (*Dacia, the primeval homeland of Aryan peoples*). The author was a member of the “Junimea Literary Society” and the text was printed in *Convorbiri literare*, a magazine given to criticizing nationalist phantasm, yet sufficiently open and tolerant to accept any original contribution. Following a series of deductions whose starting point was the linguistic material, a method not unlike Hasdeu’s, Antonescu only succeeded in coming up with a new homeland for the Aryans, who had anyway been bundled all over Europe and Asia by their admirers and by researchers. Dacia thus became the starting point of glamorous history.

Still, the great discoverer of a world having its center located in Dacia was Nicolae Densușianu (1846–1911), a Transylvanian who settled down in Bucharest in 1878, an erudite historian and passionate nationalist. His claim to fame was a paper, much appreciated at the time, *Revoluția lui Horea* (1884, *Horea’s Revolution*) which he credited with the aim of establishing a “Romanian political system”. For Densușianu, nonetheless, “the Romanian political system” and Romanian history in general went a long way back, a very long way back, to be sure. Excited by the question of origins, he went a great deal further than Hasdeu, reaching out in all earnestness for the genuinely true beginnings. His method, Hasdeian, albeit lacking in the professionalism which, at least from time to time, checked the fantastic bents of Hasdeu’s *Critical History*, gave free rein to elements of archaeology and folklore, linguistics and mythology, all of them entering random combinations. The result was *Dacia preistorică* (*Prehistoric Dacia*), a monumental work totaling 1,200 pages, posthumously published in 1913 through the care of an admirer, C.I. Istrati (himself a most fascinating character: a doctor and a chemist, a professor with the University of Bucharest, a conservative politician and, on top of all that, a spiritualist...). Vasile Pârvan saw it as a “fantastic novel”; it is, all things aside, the expression of the highest dose of the imaginary ever to occur in Romanian

historiography and, apart from that, a genuinely influential book, if not on its publication, when the well established principles of the critical school would allow but little room for alternative theories, then certainly in later manifestations of Dacist autochthonism.

Densușianu reconstructed the history of an assumed “Pelasgian empire” which, originating in Dacia, some 6,000 years B.C., was supposed, under two great sovereigns: Uran and Saturn, to have extended over Europe and the Mediterranean into Egypt and North Africa as well as a sizeable part of Asia. The prehistoric replica of Romania had surrounded itself with a universal empire, definitely the grandest to have ever existed. It was from here, from the Danube and the Carpathians, that civilization spread to the other parts of the world. From here that the ancestors of the Romans set out for Italy. The Dacian and the Latin languages are nothing but dialects of one and the same language, which thus accounts for the lack of “Dacian” inscriptions in Roman Dacia, since the two peoples spoke anyway the same language. Among the arguments advanced by Densușianu are the scenes carved on Trajan’s column, in which the Dacians and Romans converse without the assistance of an interpreter, which proves they can perfectly understand each other by speaking each their own language. Therefore, unlike the other Romanic peoples, resulting indeed from a mixture, the Romanians are a pure race, descendants of the ancient inhabitants of this earth, and their language owes nothing to Latin, since it has been handed down from immemorial times (which accounts for its different character in comparison to Western Romanic languages).

C.I. Istrati, who prefaced *Prehistoric Dacia* with a lengthy text on the life and work of its author, concluded his enthusiastic evocation by a remarkable parallel. “The times of unknown glory”, “conceived and carried out in the Carpathians and more particularly in the Bucegi”, are brought back to him during a visit to the Peleş Castle. Dacia as the center of the world, the Bucegi as the center of Dacia, and the Peleş, at the heart of the Bucegi — here is a symbol both cosmic and political. King Carol I appears to Istrati “as a new Uran and Saturn”<sup>24</sup> rolled into one... Trajan couldn’t hold a candle to these emperors of the origins, who had poured history into its very first moulds.

During the period between the two world wars, Densușianu’s thesis was picked up and developed by amateur historians inebriated by nationalism. The increasingly frequent clash of ideologies and the bold emergence of the autochthonist spirit allowed them areas of operation which the professionalization of history seemed to have closed at a certain point. The non-specialist’s intuition even becomes, to some, a virtue. Transcending

rationalism was advocated by the nationalist right as a fundamental requirement. Mircea Eliade urged “a new dilettantism”, since, it had been noticed that “dilettantes always sympathized with history and had understanding for it;” deeper meanings and an overall synthesis were allegedly more accessible to them than to the professional.<sup>25</sup>

It didn't take the dilettantes long to arrive. Their favorite battlefield became the question of origins; until today, they were to make a glory out of giving an original and “patriotic” answer to this question. One of them was General Nicolae Portocală who, in 1932, published the book *Din preistoria Daciei și a vechilor civilizațiuni* (*From the prehistory of Dacia and the ancient civilizations*). The military enthusiast does follow Densușianu, on the whole and scathingly criticizes Pârvan — the great advocate of Dacian civilization! — whom he charges with an abusive insistence on foreign influences. The most remarkable part of his demonstration regards the impossibility of romanizing the Dacians. Who was to romanize them: “foreign, illiterate legionaries whose Latin was perhaps reduced to military commands”? And how could the half-territory not occupied by the Romans be romanized then? The conclusion can only be that the Dacians had always spoken a “rustic Latin language”. It was not from the West towards the East that romanization occurred, but rather from the East towards the West. It is not the scholar who is right, but rather the Romanian peasant saying that “The Italian speaks broken Romanian”. It is not the Romanian language that is broken Latin, but the Latin language and its descendants that are “broken Romanian”.<sup>26</sup> All the Roman conquest achieved was to destroy a flourishing civilization and shove the Romanians out of history for one thousand years.

Portocală is followed by a certain Marin Bărbulescu, his name suggestively round to Bărbulescu-Dacu (The Dacian), author of a book published in 1936, *Originea daco-tracă a limbii române* (*The Daco-Thracian origin of the Romanian language*). The belief that the Romanian language is nothing but the ancient Dacian language also makes a convert out of the writer 5 Brătescu-Voinești, who, on the eve of and during the World War II, became a great admirer of the solutions and mythologies of the extreme right. “We are not neo-Latins, but proto-Latins”, he writes in *Originea neamului românesc și a limbii române* (*The Origin of the Romanian Nation and the Romanian Language*, 1942, republished in 1943). “The others” speak a language similar to ours simply because *they* are the ones descending from our ancestors. The Romans, as the Romanians, descend from the Thracian-Gettae-Dacians. “Latin was the literary form of the language spoken

by the Gettae-Dacians. The very same language of the Gettae-Dacians, having reached France, became the language of the Gauls to begin with, and, with time, the French language.”<sup>27</sup> According to Brătescu-Voinești these are axioms and require no further demonstration; let them who think otherwise demonstrate!

And thus, it is not we who “issue from Rome”, but the Romans, the French and all the others that hail from the Bucegi...

The amateurs’ Dacism rejected (and still does) the obvious: the Romanity of the Romanian language, for the sake of a fictitious Dacian Language similar to Latin. Naturally, this is not the approach of professionals, even of those professionals lured by the same Dacian horizon. They do not reject linguistic Latinity but deem essential what lies beyond the Roman glaze. Both biologically and spiritually, the Romanians are Dacians not Romans, and not even Dacian-Romans.

The cult of Zalmoxis is invoked to the effect, by which Geto-Dacians are supposed to have foreshadowed the Christian religion, thus being more prepared than others to receive it. And, as the Romanian nation is first and foremost Christian-Orthodox, the connection is inevitably made with the supreme Dacian deity rather than to the Pagan Roman pantheon. Zalmoxis provide a remarkable model of mythological logic. The starting point, the only concrete starting point, actually, is a brief and rather obscure passage from Herodotus (who also supplies the information, obviously wasted on the partisans of nationalist exegesis, according to which Zalmoxis was allegedly one of Pythagoras’ slaves). It is hard to say what in those lines pertains to the authentic religion of the Getal and what to a projection of the Pythagorean doctrine into the Getic space. Not that Zalmoxis is anywhere represented in any way, be it in the pre-Roman period (since the Dacian’s “oral” civilization was neither characterized by writing, nor by figurative representations) or in Roman Dacia, abounding in deities of all kinds. Along this fragile axis, the ancients themselves developed the myth of Zalmoxis, later to be adopted and amplified by Romanian culture, mostly between the two world wars, mostly in right-wing circles. Gradually, the few lines written by Herodotus grew into a whole set of bookshelves.<sup>28</sup>

Lucian Blaga discerned “the revolt of the autochthonous background”; he also published, in 1921, the play *Zamolxe*, where the Dacian space features as “a means to enact the ethical and metaphysical values of existence”, to quote Mircea Eliade. Eliade was himself a great supporter of the Dacian background. This is definitely what attracted him to B.P. Hasdeu, whose *Scieri literare, morale și politice* (*Literary, moral and politic writings*) he

edited in 1937. In the "Introduction" to this selection, he insisted on stressing the general tendency — anticipated by Hasdeu — towards turning to account autochthonous roots by playing down the significance of alien borrowings. He went on to invoke Camille Jullian, who demonstrated, in the case of Gaul, "that the much praised Roman civilization was nothing but brutal militarism wreaking havoc with the beginnings of a promising culture"; Spanish thought parting company with Latinity through Unamuno follows a similar direction. "Today — Eliade concluded — the fascination held by the Dacians goes beyond scientific interest; everything points to the belief that the craving for the original and the local will run deeper and deeper throughout Romanian spirituality."<sup>29</sup>

In 1943, Eliade published, in Spanish, in Madrid, a synthesis of Romanian history: *Los Rumanos. Breviario historico*. The first chapter of the book is suggestively titled "Under the Sign of Zalmoxis". As far as origins are concerned, the author makes the distinction between Romanization and... Romanization. In Dacia, the phenomenon occurred differently from either Spain or Gaul. "Unlike in the other regions, Romanization here did not trigger off a radical change in the aboriginal ethnic substance. The Dacians did learn Latin but also held on to their customs, way of life, ancestral virtues. In the new cities, the gods of the Empire were worshipped; but in the villages and in the mountains the cult of Zalmoxis endured, and this even later, under a changed name. Thus, when the first Christian missionaries came to spread the new faith, the Dacians immediately embraced the Christian faith, long before other peoples: Zalmoxis had been preparing them for centuries."<sup>30</sup> Needless to say, all these affirmations lack even the least documentary support.

Zalmoxis was particularly popular among the Legionaries. Their myth of foundation was the Dacian one. P.P. Panaitescu, ascending in the autumn of 1940 to a key position of the Legionary movement, said it loud and clear in a text opening with the words "We are Dacians!", the arguments brought in support of this statement being "race" and "blood".<sup>31</sup>

78 Ethnic purity — the Roman or the Dacian version of it — belongs to a traditional tendency in Romanian culture, but the stress so thickly laid on *race* and *blood* cannot be dissociated from the moment 1940. When the Nazis exalted the superiority of the German race, the exponents of the nationalist right boldly invoked a similar model. All the more so, since when the Germanic tribes and the Dacian civilization were considered in relation to primordial times, the Romanians could be seen to advantage.

The years of World War II, bearing the trauma of territorial amputation as well as the hope of revival within restored or even enlarged borders, meant



an instinctive appeal to Dacian perenniality. Here are a few lines printed in the first issue of a literary magazine with a symbolic name, *Dacia rediviva*: “From afar, the eternal archetype of Dacia shines through. In its profile, so accurately fitting us, we regain our dimensions entire. [...]”<sup>32</sup> In 1945, a certain G. Ionescu-Nica attempted to solve the problem of national frontiers by resorting to the same mythical space of ancient Dacia as a decisive argument in the perennial contour shaping the Romanian territory.<sup>33</sup>

#### CLASS STRUGGLE IN DACIA

The first stage of Communism took both the Dacians and the Romans a peg or two down. The Dacian-Roman origins were not exactly contested, but the problem of origins as such no longer kept its former importance. The founding myths of Communism lay in different direction altogether. The uprisings and revolutions, the coming into existence of the Communist party, the Grivița strike and the turning point of 23rd August 1944 appeared as more significant moments than the distant Dacian-Roman synthesis. Moreover, class considerations superseded ethnic considerations. The demarcation line separated not so much the Dacians from the Romans, or the Dacian-Romans from the others, as it cut through their respective societies. A certain ethnic element could no longer be dealt with wholesale. Under Burebista and particularly under Decebal, the Dacian state had come to use slave labor. Once the Roman conquest is completed, “the wealthy strata of Dacian society go over to the Roman invaders”, Roller’s textbook insists on driving the point home. On the other side were left with “the free but poor people and particularly the slaves”.<sup>34</sup> Class struggle intertwined with the struggle of liberation from the Roman oppression. The Dacians made up the mass of the oppressed and, likewise the class of the oppressors consisted of — primarily — Romans (or those who had been Romanized).

Dacia had to conform to the model of the struggle for independence going on in colonies or in the “Third World” with the support of The Soviet Union and the “brotherhood of Socialist countries”, while the Romans had come to look quite similar to Western imperialist. Through persevering squeezing of the sources, class struggle raised to unexpected proportions, taking such forms as uprisings concerted with attacks of the free Dacians.<sup>35</sup> The latrons’ file is as meaningful as it is entertaining. *Latrones*, in Latin, simply means *robbers*. Some funeral inscriptions in Dacia refer to killings among the population of the province by the so-called *latrones*. The funeral monuments were erected in the memory of persons of substance, and hence the idea that they had been killed not in order to be robbed — the vulgarity of it all! — but

as an expression of class struggle. The *latrones* are given noble outlaw status, seen as avengers of the oppressed masses. A historian takes one step further, identifying a genuine “institution” of the Dacians, *latrocinia* by name, which in translation would mean something like *guerrilla fighting!*<sup>36</sup>

In the 50’s, therefore, the considerations on the *ethnic*, Dacian-Roman substratum of the Romanian synthesis were few and far between. Between the two elements, nevertheless, the Romans appear to be at a distinct disadvantage. They are consistently termed *invaders*, their withdrawal from Dacia — equated to a *liberation*. Though the notion is not explicitly phrased, the Romanians are rather seen as Romanized descendants of the Dacians, for the most part identified with the oppressed masses in the Roman province. Things could be taken no further than that. Denouncing the Romans was in keeping with the anti-imperialist, anti-Western project, but excessive concern for the autochthonous roots would have imparted a nationalist note to the historic discourse, and, obviously, that was not the expedient thing to do. Nationalism was targeted as unambiguously as Western imperialism was. To this effect, a third element joined the ranks of the Dacians and Romans; further, we shall dwell upon the developments undergone by the question of origins in the “internationalist” atmosphere of the times.

#### THE DACIAN MOMENT OF COMMUNISM

The gradual shift from the historic mythology of class struggle towards nationalist mythology was to reinstate the traditional myth of foundation. As early as 1960, the first volume of the treatise *Istoria României (The History of Romania)* deals more peaceably with the Romans. The inflow of Roman colonists and the Romanization process are no longer rebuked on impulse by harping on the unjust character of the conquest. The Romans are indeed routinely criticized — no communist worthy of his name could connive at the annexation of foreign territories —, but with certain moderation, doubled by the compensatory recital of the elements of progress they ushered. The *Programme* of the Communist Party of 1975, compiled in terms of such vagueness as to keep everyone happy, does hint at the “negative aspects” of Roman rule, but also acknowledges “the new socio-economic revival” of the epoch, and duly underscores the fact that the Romanians resulted “from the coalescence of the Dacians with the Romans”.<sup>37</sup>

The rehabilitation of the Romans, nevertheless, is not exactly taken beyond a certain point and, what’s more, it cannot keep abreast of the constant consolidation undergone by the autochthonous roots. Whether good or bad, or — rather — bad to begin with, and good afterwards, the Romans

are nothing but an episode of an ancient history running into millennia. Nationalist ideology could rely to this effect on the richness of archaeological finds. In themselves, these finds represent perhaps — leaving aside all ideological manipulation — the most productive area of Romanian historical research under the Communists. Archaeology was encouraged, nevertheless, exactly because it was aimed at providing ideologically expedient solutions to historical problems. The Romanian past thus came to run considerably deep, the Dacians having themselves inherited a history that preceded them copiously, all the way from the Stone Age to the Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures. No matter how imposing the “seal of Rome” might have been, all it could do was contribute its particular shade of color, all but limited in time, to an independent history, having its own specific traits and encompassing a specific area.

Although professional historians continued to support — with inevitable nuances, of course — the Dacian-Roman synthesis, a train of politically influential non-specialists of no mean consequence took over, in the mid-seventies, Densușianu’s Dacianist thesis. The historical obsessions of the “extreme right” on the eve of World War II were thus transferred to the “extreme left”, which is highly revealing as far as the shared inducements of the totalitarian phenomenon are concerned, particularly when it comes to the nationalist strain of communism. The offensive was launched by the Institute for Communist Party History which — having forged the recent history of the country — went on, in similar vein, to boldly process a history going back thousands of years by applying to it the expertise of its specialists on the workers’ movement.

*Anale de Istorie (Historical Annals)*, the aforesaid institute’s journal, published, in its fourth issue of 1976, an article (unsigned) on which much attention was lavished, focusing on the *beginnings of the Romanian people history* (compiled with a view to supporting those who were to teach and to take the course on “fundamental problems concerning the history of the country and of the party”).<sup>38</sup> The text claimed, not as a hypothesis but as a fact, the pre-Romanic or Latin character of the Thracians’ language. The demonstration, for we do benefit from a “demonstration”, is exemplary with regard to the meaning of elementary lack of professionalism doubled by a boundless disregard of truth. It follows the drift of Densușianu’s paper, promoted from “prehistorical fairy-tale” to authorized source. Yet, as the bibliography had to be updated, “the French academician Louis Armand” is invoked, who had allegedly *shown* that “the Thraco-Dacians spoke a pre-Romanic language”. Now, if an academician says it, and a French one at

that, it's got to be true! The lay reader may well believe a great historical and philological authority is being quoted (to say nothing of the fact that the appeal to authority simply cannot be accepted among the methods of historical argumentation). In reality, Louis Armand was an *engineer* and occupied top positions with the French railways as well as in the atomic industry. But coming back to Densușianu, what the party researchers retain from his convoluted ratiocination is the highly humorous story about the absence of interpreters: "In support of this conclusion (i.e. of the Latinity of the Dacian language), a few bas-reliefs on Trajan's Column bring undeniable testimony. Thus, one of them represents a delegation of Dacian peasants talking directly to Trajan, without interpreters, and he answers them likewise, without interpreters." We are here at the lowest point of the profession (the authors enjoying the official status of "professionals"), the inferior limit reached by history under the communist dictatorship: a sign of the brazen conviction that, at the end of the day, we can twist history any old way we want to.

The elimination of Romans from national history thus become, once again, the order of the day (with or without the negation of Romanization). The Institute for Communist Party History and The Center for Military History marched in the front rows of this trend. If Nicolae Ceaușescu continued to plead, in his various historical invocations, for the Dacian-Roman synthesis, his brother Ilie Ceaușescu never missed the opportunity to denounce the Roman invaders, going so far as to hint at the formation of the Romanian people prior to the Roman conquest. Roman rule is scathingly judged in the first volume of *Istoria militară a poporului român* (*The Military History of the Romanian People*, 1984). The negative consequences of the conquest are noted while positive ones are altogether done away with. Granted "the interweaving of the Dacian and Roman civilizations" is accepted, but care is taken to make it clear, without fear of contradiction, that "the Dacian people managed to preserve its ethnic being".<sup>39</sup> No biological union with the Romans is allowed for, but only an adoption of their language; well, at least the Latinity of the language was accepted...

The identification of the Romanians with the Dacians resulted in the insistence upon the originality and value of the latter's civilization. That was quite natural (mythologically): the Romans needed no such aggrandizement, while the Dacians could only benefit from a bit of airbrushing and some extras. Once again, the historians pertaining to the previously mentioned category put up a good show. Some genuine professionals were quick to follow suit, among them Ion Horațiu Crișan, who authored a monograph of certain repute: *Burebista și epoca sa* (*Burebista and his age*, 1975, second

edition 1977). Crişan's approach is interesting enough: he embarks upon apparently correct analysis of the sources, then moves on to advancing conclusions that have no bearing whatsoever on the sources. The use of writing by the Dacians thus appears, at Crişan as well as other authors, as a sign of the high degree of civilization attained by the Dacians. It had become almost a political faux pas to claim that the Dacians might not have practiced the art of writing, although, in reality, the sources are not exactly convincing in that respect. Writing was not enough, though. The Dacians were expected to have given expression — in writing or otherwise — to the highest possible thought. The idea was advanced that the history of Romanian philosophy ought to start with Dacian philosophy. The essential references to the “philosophical preoccupations” of the Dacians are to be found in Jordanes, a historian of the 6th century, who wrote on the Goths. Attempting to endow his subject with extra-value, he assimilated the Goths with the Getae and, furthermore, ascribed to them all sorts of abilities and intellectual peculiarities. The ravings of Jordanes, as well as those of his model, Cassiodorus, both of them unable to tell the Getae and the Goths apart, at the very least, cannot by any means be taken as a source for a history they had a vague and distorted knowledge of, unless we decide to accept all sources on an indiscriminate basis. Crişan, as a professional, promptly remarks on the exaggerations of the text, and yet moves on to an unexpected conclusion: the necessity “to include in the history of Romanian philosophy a chapter on the philosophy of the Dacian-Getae, which will have to be researched and reappropriated in monograph form”.<sup>40</sup> This is mind-boggling stuff! A few considerations, if we do accept to play at the game of Jordanes, might be something to get away with, but a *monograph* on the history of Dacian philosophy, when we don't even have as much as three words written in the Dacian Language is taking it a bit too far...

A certain amount of agitation also occurred in the insoluble question of the Dacian Language. Be it “Latin” or other than Latin, this language demanded to be reconstructed and eventually given its place in the University curriculum as an object of study. It was suggested, at some point, that the University of Bucharest set up a Dacian Language Department. Whether Dacian philosophy was meant to be taught in the Dacian language over there we do not know, but what we do know for sure is that all these worthy initiatives were shattered by an obstinate obstacle: the utter inexistence of the object of study. The enthusiasts, nevertheless, are soldiering on. For a few decades, a host of trend-setting amateurs have invaded the field of linguistics, imagining fantastic etymologies liable to restore the language of our

ancestors. This type of “para-linguistics” with ultranationalist overtones appears to have become, in Romania, a genuine social phenomenon.

Along more prudent lines, though also aimed at consolidating the Dacian heritage, some academic research chose to follow the direction taken by Hasdeu. The recognized specialist of this trend is I.I. Russu, author of the study *Limba traco-dacilor (The Language of the Thraco-Dacians, 1959 and 1967)*. He came to identify — though many a linguist deemed it debatable — some hundred and sixty words belonging to the Dacian substratum, liable, together with their derivatives, to represent about 10 per cent of the main lexical stock of the Romanian language. The language we speak, therefore, is sensibly marked by a Dacian streak.

We should also mention in this framework the influence far from negligible exercised by the scientific lucubrations of the much debated businessman domiciled in Italy, Iosif Constantin Drăgan. A Legionary in his young days, Drăgan later courted the Ceaușescu regime, thus performing the shift also characterizing Dacian mythology. As author of the study *Noi, tracii (We, the Thracians, 1976)* and editor of the magazine bearing the same title, launched in 1974, he stirred up a whole movement aimed at enhancing the part played by the Thracians in the history of Europe, and joined by sundry amateurs (a jurists’ literary circle among them!), as well as by professionals for whom scruples were of little, if any, account (such as the archaeologists Dumitru Berciu and Ion Horațiu Crișan). In the magazine *Noi, tracii*, such affirmations were made as, for instance, that the ancestors of the Romanians go back some 100,000 years<sup>41</sup>, which is ample proof that the Romanian people is the oldest on continent if not in the world. As for the area they covered, Drăgan generously grants the Thracians half of Europe, obviously, with the center within the current borders of Rumania. Interestingly enough, the volume *Noi, tracii* contains arguments and passages (like, for instance, those regarding the “Latinity” of the Dacian language) identical with the ones published almost simultaneously in *Anale de istorie*. Who supplied the information to whom is of little import; the significant fact is the identification of the Institute for Communist Party History, upon which scientific and ideological authority had been conferred in Communist Romania, with the kind of practice Drăgan indulged in.

Nevertheless, all these irresponsible ravings and exaggerations aside, the Dacians did end up holding sway over Romanian consciousness. Apparently they won, at long last, the war against the Romans. Revealing to this effect is the series of busts strung in front of the National Military Museum of

Bucharest; we are confronted by a three to one ratio between the Dacians and the Romans, the former represented by Dromichete, Burebista and Decebal, the latter — grudgingly — by Trajan. How far we are from the Atheneum mural!

The identification of the Romanians with the Dacians tended to acquire European notoriety. According to the press, the Italian president, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, on a visit to Bucharest, insisted on extending to the Romanian people apologies — somehow belated — for the conquest of Dacia by the Romans. The anecdote — whether authentic or not — is significant for the logic of historical mythology. In actual fact, the connection between the Italian president and Trajan are just as mythological as any special bonds allegedly connecting president Iliescu to Dromichete or Decebal.

### THE SLAVS, A VACILLATING PRESENCE

The ongoing contest between the Dacians and the Romans was somehow complicated by the additional involvement of the Slavic factor (the other ethnic elements, less substantial and quicker to be assimilated by the Romanians, being in no position to claim actual participation in the Romanian foundation). The Slavs, as known, exercised a notable influence upon the Romanian language, as well as upon the old Romanian institutions and culture. In actual fact, the assessment of their role was also subject to extreme swings, according to the ideological and political circumstances.

The Latinist stage, and generally the historiography of the 19th century well towards its end, were focused on the elimination or at least drastic reduction of the Slavic factor. The attempt was justified by the modernization process of Romanian society, desperately striving (and partially and temporarily succeeding) to break free from the Slavic zone of the continent. The remarkable fact is that, until B.P. Hasdeu, modern Romanian historians had no knowledge whatsoever of old Slavonic or the various Slavic languages, which was paradoxical enough, given the Slavonic gilt of medieval Romanian culture. Hasdeu himself, educated in a Slavic environment and apt to be considered the first Slavonic scholar of Rumania, does not come across as a supporter of the Slavic influence. He undertook to temper Latinism by the recourse to Thracian substratum, but as far as the Slavs were concerned, he did his best to curb their impact upon the Romanian synthesis. According to Hasdeu, the Romanian people was fully formed at the time it entered a relationship with the Slavs. Slavic words had supposedly penetrated

the Romanian language not by means of ethnic contact, but rather via political, religious and cultural channels, over some seven centuries, to the reigns of Matei Basarab and Vasile Lupu.<sup>42</sup>

The reaction tending to rehabilitate the Slavs and the Slavonic culture came from the *Junimea* set during the last decades of the 19th century, in relation to Latinism, and, in a way, as an exercise in overcoming national complexes. [...] The absolute sensation along these lines was *Dicționarul etimologic* (*Etymologic Dictionary*, 1870–1879) of Alexandru Cihac, an intimate of *Junimea*. The etymologies he established led to the unexpected conclusion that the lexical stock of the Romanian language was rather Slavic (and of other origins) than Latin: two fifths Slavic elements, one fifth — Turkish, and also one fifth — Latin! Romanian thus became a mixed language, in which Turkish and Latin origin words amounted roughly to the same number. The almost simultaneous publication of the dictionaries of Laurian and Cihac marked the extremes between which the interpretation of the Romanian language ranged, origins and influences being generally included in this interpretation. (We deem it necessary to remark that specialists appreciate Cihac's work as greatly superior to Laurian's linguistic fantasy).

The Gordian knot of this etymological conundrum was cut by Hasdeu through his seductive theory concerning *the circulation of words*. The structure of a language, Hasdeu showed, is not given by the overall number of words, but by their circulation. There are words almost forgotten in storage in dictionaries, while others are used numberless times. Their value, therefore, is quite different. "Without a doubt, Slavic and even Turkish words are far from exiguous with the Romanians; yet when it comes to actual circulation, that is to the vital activity of the Romanian language, to the organic movement, they recede to near nothingness before Latin words." Whole sentences can be formulated using words of Latin origin exclusively, but not one sentence restricted to words of other origins. Once again, Hasdeu's demonstration upset the balance to the disadvantage of the Slavic influence.<sup>43</sup>

Still, the Slavic influence was brought forth with a vengeance by Ioan Bogdan. For him, the Slavs become a *constitutive element* of the Romanian synthesis: "The influence of the Slavic element on the formation of our nation is so obvious, that we can say, without a hint of exaggeration, that there is no such thing as the Romanian people before the absorption of Slavic elements by the aboriginal Roman population, between the 6th and 9th centuries."<sup>44</sup> There are, in the Romanian language, "an enormous sum of Slavic elements"



adopted both directly, through cohabitation, and via political-literary channels, the Slavic language was used by the church and the government, and even in “the daily affairs of the Romanians”, well into the 16th–17th centuries, and as far as the state is concerned, “almost all of our old institutions are either of Slavic origin, or have, beside the few elements inherited from the Romans, a quorum of Slavic elements.”<sup>45</sup> The Romanian-Bulgarian relationships are given particular consideration by Ioan Bogdan, in such a manner that could only be abhorrent to Romanian nationalism. While we, the Romanians, “were growing increasingly estranged from the Roman culture and reverting to barbarism”, the Bulgarians, “who had surged upon us as barbarians, were appropriating, under the protective wings of an organized and powerful state, from their Byzantine neighbors, a civilization advanced for those times, the Byzantine civilization, which was nothing but the continuation, under a Greek form and with Oriental influences, of the ancient Roman civilization.”<sup>46</sup> For three centuries, the Bulgarian czarate ruled north of the Danube as well; this is the time when many elements pertaining to the Slavic culture and political organization made their way into Romanian society. To a great extent, the Slavic influence was, therefore, a Bulgarian influence.

Ioan Bogdan represented, before the advance of communist historiography, the furthest point in affirming the Slavic influence. His contemporaries, as well as the historians of later generations had different viewpoints regarding this matter; anyway, no return was ever made to the stage of denying or ignoring the Slavic factor. The former *Junimea* member A.D. Xenopol, even though he doesn't go as far as Bogdan, credits the Slavic influence with a sizeable impact and, like Bogdan, believes the Bulgarian state to have ruled over the Romanian territories (a point of view expressed in *Teoria lui Roesler — Roesler's Theory*, and then in *Istoria Românilor din Dacia Traiană — The History of the Romanians in Trajan's Dacia*). Iorga, so close to Bogdan in certain respects, is much more of a Latinist when it comes to sorting out the Romanian origins. He does not accept the Bulgarian rule north of the Danube, and tends to limit the influence resulting from the Romanian-Slav cohabitation: “From the entire life of the Slavs living in these parts, all that is left are a great many words which entered our language, but mostly for secondary ideas and for articles of trade picked from the fairs on the right bank of the Danube, since, as far as major ideas are concerned, we can fully express ourselves with words coming from the ancient Roman heritage. There are then left from them certain elements of popular mythology, certain institutions, and that's about all.”<sup>47</sup>

The “new school”, who saw a model in Ioan Bogdan, held Iorga responsible, among other things, for the underestimation of the Slavic influence, even though they were more moderate in their conclusions than Bogdan was. C.C. Giurescu and P.P. Panaitescu insisted on the multiple Slavic elements penetrating the Romanian language, culture and political organization, nevertheless considering them as secondary, added to the Dacian-Roman foundation. Still, as regards the language, Giurescu insisted, “the influence of the Slavs is superior to the influence exercised by Germanic peoples upon the language of the Gaulo-Romans or the Italians.” He accepts but also refines Bogdan’s affirmation according to which there is no such thing as a Romanian people prior to the arrival of the Slavs: “This affirmation should be understood to the effect that the Romanian people reached its complete structure, its complete ethnic characteristics, only after the *essential* Dacian-Roman element, making up the *foundation*, had the Slavic element added unto it. In other words, we are not talking here about *equal* parts, neither as quantity, nor as quality, and it is the first two elements, whatever way you look at it, that have to be stressed.”<sup>48</sup> A conflictual note is further associated with the Slavic ingress, hinting at the Romanian-Russian and Romanian-Bulgarian relationships in the inter-war period. “The Slavs — Giurescu drives the point home — came to Dacia as conquerors”, and turned out to be more brutal than either the Germans or the Huns. The conquest also explains the *Slavic origin of the Romanian aristocracy*, a thesis advanced by several authors, but presented systematically by P.P. Panaitescu (in the article “Problema originii clasei boierești” — “The Question of the Origin of Romanian Aristocracy”).<sup>49</sup>

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The moment impossible to overcome by the integration of the Romanians in a Slavic environment was, obviously, the pro-Soviet stage of Romanian communism. The Dacians and the Romans were left, as we have seen, in their founding place, yet unenthusiastically evoked. The Slavic influence, on the other hand, was vigorously highlighted. In Roller’s textbook, no word of Latin origin is mentioned, while tens of Slavonic words are listed, proving a strong influence“ in all areas of our economic, social, political, military, cultural life”. If the accent formerly fell on the Southern Slaves (the Bulgarians), now the Kiev-state came to the foreground, as having allegedly played an essential part in the formation of the Romanian states, “as a basis for the Romanian-Russian relationships which evolved over the centuries.”<sup>50</sup>

The directions imposed by Mihai Roller, in 1952, on historical research clearly express what was being prepared: a fusion between the history of the

Romanians and the history of the Slavs — the Eastern Slavs, first and foremost: “Without, for a moment, losing from sight the existence of the Romanized native population (Dacian-Roman), research should be focused on the question whether the formation of the Eastern Slavs partially occurred, if at all, also in parts of our country’s territory [...] The existence in the vicinity of our country of the powerful feudal state of Kiev, with an advanced civilization reflecting over the entire Eastern part of Europe, the struggle of Kiev against the reactionary citadel represented at the time by Byzantium, and later on the incorporation of part of our country’s territory into the feudal state of Kiev contributed to the development of feudal relationships and sped up the process of feudal organization in our country. The expansion of the Bulgarian feudal state, in the 9th and 10th centuries, into our country’s territory is a fact above dispute and it did have an impact upon the development of our country. This influence of the Southern Slavs complements the one of the Eastern Slavs, which both preceded and followed it, in the 11th and 12th centuries, when a part of our country’s territory was included into the Halici-Volhynia khanate.”<sup>51</sup>

If ethnically and linguistically the Romanians kept mainly Dacian-Roman (with noteworthy Slavic influences, nonetheless), the *political foundation* tended to become simply Slavic. The dosage is remarkable: Russia, first of all, Bulgaria in the background, while Byzantium features as “reactionary” (Greece, which Stalin had craved for a moment, ended up on the Western orbit!).

The alignment of communism with national values caused Slavic influences to ebb away. Without going into details regarding this matter — to which different authors lent different accents —, suffice it to remark that, generally, parting company with the Slavs meant their exclusion from the ethnic composition of the Romanians. The strategy was simple enough; it consisted in shifting back in time the “moment” of the Romanian people formation. The 10th century, suggested by Ioan Bogdan, adhered to by the inter-war generation, adopted, with a slight drop towards the end of the 9th century, by the 1960 *Istoria României*, then by Constantin Daicoviciu in the compendium of the same title published in 1969, meant accepting the Slavs as founding element, albeit second to the Dacian-Romans, since without their assimilation there could be no “Romanian people” to speak of. What nationalist communism was after was not so much obscuring the Slavic influence, as placing it beyond the point marking the formation of the Romanian people. The Slavic elements had to be picked up by an *already formed* Romanian people, crystallized, as it were, into its essential structures.

Steps were taken for the identification of the *proto-Romanians* and a *proto-Romanian language* around the 6th century, according to political calculations passed for the result of objective research. Once again, *The Military History of the Romanian People* breaks all records; in its view, the Romanians are already Romanians by the year 271, if not much earlier, while the Slavs' role (to say nothing of other contributions) was deemed insignificant. Amusing, from an arithmetical point of view, is the claim that the Romanian people, allegedly, "goes back over 2000 years, to the moment when the Dacian people appropriated the Latin language and spirituality"<sup>52</sup> (though one wonders, in passing, how ever can a spirituality be appropriated). By deducting 2000, let alone "over", from 1984, the year when the volume was published, we find ourselves in 16 B.C., some 120 years before the Roman conquest of Dacia. The explanation of this mathematical feat is not some new theory of Romanization, but simply, one of Ceaușescu's casual references to the Romanians being over 2000 year old, Ilie Ceaușescu and the authors of the "Military History" enthusiastically snapping at the idea.

Now, what does "proto-Romanians" mean, and what exactly is a people "formed" or "approximately formed"? And what arguments can support the claim that around the year 600 *proto-Romanian* was spoken, when, for the period in question, as well as for many centuries following it, we have no language samples — be they Romanian or "proto-Romanian"? And, furthermore, can we generally come up with a date for the formation of a people, which is an even more complex, more difficult to define phenomenon than the formation of its language (since it entails a certain sense of cultural belonging and self-awareness)? When did the French, the Italians, the Germans, the English come to be formed? The peculiar insistence of Romanian historiography on this question — also referred to be the scholarly name "ethnogenesis" — is a national characteristic. Any such brand of chronology panders to ideological demands, and the demands of Communism were the formation of the Romanian people alongside the Slavs, for a start, then its removal from the sphere of Slavic influences.

#### THE NATION: BIOLOGICAL ORGANISM OR SOCIAL COMMUNITY?

I might be queried as to what my's-opinion is on the amount of the various elements making up the Romanian people. The answer is that I have no answer whatsoever, for the simple reason that, from this perspective, the

problem is purely mythological. By offering an answer I would do nothing but join either one or the other of the founding myths in circulation. The Romanians are Romanians, they are neither Dacians nor Romans, and neither are they Slavs. The insistence on autochthonous roots enhances, first of all the biological background of the origins. But how is this background manifested: through blood, or, could it be, through genes? Is there such a thing as Romanian blood, or a gene that is specifically Romanian, or Dacian-Roman, for that matter? The only unambiguous relationship to the origins is, after all, through the language. The Romanic essence of the Romanian language, supported by the name "Romanian", does tend to tip the scales in favor of the Romans; perhaps at the end of the day, albeit not in the way they imagined it, the historians of the Transylvanian School were closer to a certain truth (the only truth that could be demonstrated at least) than the supporters of Dacianism.

Yet, claiming on this assumption that we are primarily Roman would be grossly inaccurate. What, if anything, did the Romanians in the Middle Ages have in common with the Dacians or with the Romans? Slavonic culture and the orthodox religion had already brought them close to the Byzantine-Slavic civilization. What is, for instance, more important in defining a Romanian: the Dacian origin or the Orthodox religion? (This difficulty was solved by those seeing in Zalmoxis a forerunner of Christ!) What about today? Whom are the Romanians more akin to: the Dacians, the Romans, the Slavs, or the peoples of contemporary Europe? An Arabic proverb quoted by Marc Bloch says that "men are more similar to their times than to their fathers".<sup>53</sup> This applies equally to individuals and nations. No matter how different Romanians are from, say, the Germans, *today* they are much closer to them than to any Dacian or Roman ancestor. The latter belonged to "traditional" civilizations governed by an entirely different set of values and reactions by comparison to the ones we have in a world that is predominantly technological and urban. We are, of course, drawn to the Dacians and the Romans by what generally draws us to all our fellow-humans, regardless of time or of space. Otherwise, any attempt at a more accurate detail will only end up in such platitudes as: we have inherited the courage of the Dacians and the rational spirit of the Romans... A nation is not a *biological* organism, but rather a *social* one. It does not come across as a sum of individuals (each with his or her retinue of ancestors), but rather as a cultural synthesis. No matter how far behind they lag, the Romanians do display the cultural profile of a people belonging to the 20th century.

It is not tilting at foundation myths here. Each nation has its own and carefully cultivates them. Romanians are going to evoke their history from days bygone, and it is only natural that they should. What we have to understand, nonetheless, not in order to blow up the whole contraption, but rather to look through the logic of its functioning, is the process of mythological actualization of either the original foundation or the successive foundations. We do live in the present, yet we relate to our origins, we do have an undeniable identity, yet we enhance it through our ancestors' identity. All that belongs to the historical and political imaginary, which does not mean it lacks in significance. Quite the contrary. In the reality as such we are separated from our distant past; nevertheless, through its imaginary actualization, the past becomes a sizeable force of the present.

<sup>1</sup> The thesis is developed by Adolf Armbruster: *Romanitatea românilor. Istoria unei idei (The Romanity of Romanians. History of an Idea)*, Editura Academiei, București, 1972 (new edition, Editura Enciclopedică, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Petru Maior, *Istoria pentru începuturile românilor în Dacia (The early History of the Romanians in Dacia)*, Buda 1812, pp. 8–22 (also see the edition revised by Flora Fugariu, Editura Albatros, București, 1970, vol. I, pp. 98–109).

<sup>3</sup> Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Opere*, vol. II, pp. 57 and 67.

<sup>4</sup> Nicolae Bălcescu, *Opere*, vol. III, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Gheorghe Șincai, *Hronica românilor și a mai multor neamuri (The Chronicle of the Romanian, and of Other Nations)*, Editura pentru literatură, București, 1967, pp. 13–14.

<sup>6</sup> Alecu Russo, *Scrieri (Writings)*, published by Petre V. Haneș, Editura Minerva, București, 1908, p. 88.

<sup>7</sup> Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Opere*, vol. II, p. 390.

<sup>8</sup> Alecu Russo, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>9</sup> On the reception of the Dacians in Romanian culture, see also Ovidia Babu-Buznea, *Dacii în conștiința romanticilor noștri. Schiță la o istorie a dacismului (The Dacians as perceived by our Romantics. An Outline for a History of Dacism)*, Editura Minerva, București, 1979.

<sup>10</sup> Ion C. Brătianu, *Acte și Cuvântări (Documents and Speeches)*, vol. 1, part 1, Editura Cartea Românească, București, 1938, pp. 163–176.

<sup>11</sup> B.P. Hasdeu, “Pierit-au dacii?”, in *Scrieri istorice (Historic writings)* vol. 1, Editura Albatros, București, 1973, pp. 78–106.

<sup>12</sup> Cezar Bolliac, “Despre daci”, in *Românul*, 14/26 July and 24 July/5 August 1958; “Excursiune arheologică din anul 1869” (*Archaeological*

excursion in the year 1869) in *Scrieri (Writings)*, vol. 2, Editura Minerva, București, 1983, p. 307. See also Ovidia Babu-Buznea, *op. cit.*, pp. 76–81.

<sup>13</sup> Several sources can be consulted on Eminescu's "Dacianism": G. Călinescu, *Opera lui Mihai Eminescu (The Work of Mihai Eminescu)*, vol. 2, Fundația pentru Literatură și Artă „Regele Carol II”, București, 1935; Dumitru Murărașu, *Naționalismul lui Eminescu (Eminescu's Nationalism)* Editura Pacifica, București, 1994 (first published 1932), p. 79; also Sorin Antohi's considerations in *Civitas imaginalis*, Editura Litera, București, 1994, pp. 111–115.

<sup>14</sup> Grigore Tocilescu, *Manual de istoria românilor*, București, 1899, pp. 22 and 34.

<sup>15</sup> Dimitie Onciul, "Dacia", in *Enciclopedia română (The Romanian Encyclopaedia)*, vol. 2, Sibiu, 1900, p. 87.

<sup>16</sup> Alexandru D. Xenopol, *Istoria românilor în Dacia Traiană*, vol. 2, H. Goldner, Iași, 1888, pp. 163 and 307.

<sup>17</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria românilor pentru poporul românesc (The History of the Romanians for the Romanian People)*, Editura Minerva, București, 1993 (first published 1908), vol. 1, pp. 16 and 26.

<sup>18</sup> Alexandru Odobescu, *Ateneul român și clădirile antice cu dom circular*, in *Opere complete*, vol. III, Editura Minerva, București, 1908, pp. 330 and 332.

<sup>19</sup> On details regarding the conception of this work see *Ateneul român din București. Marea frescă (The Romanian Atheneum in Bucharest. The Great Mural [Bucharest, 1938]*, text and illustrations.

<sup>20</sup> For a review of the images joining Trajan and Carol I, see Carmen Tănăsioiu, *Carol I and his Official Iconography*, in *Romanian Historic Myths*, pp. 151–152.

<sup>21</sup> Vasile Pârvan, *Dacia*, 5th edition, Editura Științifică, București, 1972, pp. 150–151.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 155.

<sup>23</sup> C.C. Giurescu, *Istoria românilor*, vol. 1, 5th edition, 1946, pp. 123 and 173.

<sup>24</sup> C.I. Istrati, „Nic. Densușianu. Viața și opera sa“ in N. Densușianu, *Dacia preistorică*, București, 1913, p. CXIII.

<sup>25</sup> Mircea Eliade, "Către un nou diletantism" (*For a new dilettantism*), in *Romanian Profecy (Prophetism românesc)*, edited by V. Diță, with a foreword by Dan Zamfirescu, vol. 1, Editura „Roza Vânturilor“, București, 1990, p. 29 (the article was published in *Cuvântul (The Word)* on the 11th of September 1927.

<sup>26</sup> N. Portocală, *Din preistoria Daciei și a vechilor civilizațiuni*, Institutul de Arte Grafice „Bucovina“, București, 1932, pp. 213 and 245.

<sup>27</sup> Ioan Al. Brătescu-Voinești, *Originea neamului românesc și a limbii române*, Editura Cartea Românească, 1942, p. 39.

<sup>28</sup> On the avatars of Zalmoxis — this mysterious character — see Zoe Petre, “Le Mythe de Zalmoxis”, in *Analele Universității București*, history, 1993–1994, pp. 23–36.

<sup>29</sup> Mircea Eliade, introduction to B.P. Hasdeu, *Scrieri literare, morale și politice*, Fundația pentru Literatură și Artă „Regele Carol II”, vol. 1, București, 1937, p. LXXVII.

<sup>30</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Les Roumains. Précis historique*, Editura „Roza Vânturilor”, București, 1922, p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> Milviuță Ciaușu, „Panteonul mișcării legionare” (*The Pantheon of the Legionary Movement*) in *Mituri istorice românești (Romanian Historic Myths)*, edited by Lucian Boia, Editura Universității București, 1995, pp. 204–207.

<sup>32</sup> Horia Nițulescu, „Prolegomena la o anumită durată românească” (*Prolegomena to a certain Romanian duration*), in *Dacia rediviva*, No. 1, april 1941, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> G. Ionescu-Nica, *Dacia sanscrită. Originea preistorică a Bucureștilor (Sanskrit Dacia. The prehistoric origin of Bucharest)*, Tipografia Carpați, București, 1945. The lectures included in this brochure are vehemently anti-Hungarian (at a time when the Transylvanian question was raised, the author’s claim to the province being supported by Dacian arguments). For the rest, the Dacians are declared founders of Rome, and the Orthodox Metropolitan Seat of Bucharest is deemed the oldest in Europe, naturally “if we take into consideration the continuity of the Geto-Dacian Romanians’ spiritual religious monotheism”.

<sup>34</sup> *Istoria R.P.R. (The History of the People’s Republic of Romania*, Mihail Roller, ed.), Bucharest, 1952, p. 43.

<sup>35</sup> For a further illustration of this point also see the studies of Dumitru Tudor: *Istoria sclavajului în Dacia romană (The History of Slavery in Roman Dacia)*, Editura Academiei, București, 1957, and *Răscoale și atacuri „barbare” în Dacia romană (Barbarian’ Uprisings and Attacks in Roman Dacia)*, Editura Științifică, București, 1957.

<sup>36</sup> Dumitru Berciu, „Lupta băștinașilor din Dacia împotriva cotropitorilor romani” (*The struggle of Native Dacians against the Roman invaders*), in *Studii și cercetări de istorie veche*, nr. 2, July-December 1951, pp. 73–95.

<sup>37</sup> *Programul Partidului Comunist Român de făurire a societății socialiste multilateral dezvoltate și înaintare a României spre comunism (The Romanian Communist Party Programme for the Achievement of the Multilaterally Developed Socialist Society and the Furtherance of Romania towards Communism)*, Editura Politică, București, 1975, p. 27.

<sup>38</sup> „Începuturile istoriei poporului român”, in *Anale de istorie*, nr. 4/1976, pp. 142–152. Since the article was not signed, we ought to display here the elementary courtesy of giving the credit for it to — at least — Ion



Popescu-Puțuri and Gheorghe Zaharia, the Institute's director and deputy director, respectively, and the main artificers of its historical fantasies.

<sup>39</sup> *Istoria militară a poporului român*, vol. I, Editura Militară, București, 1984, p. 182.

<sup>40</sup> Ion Horațiu Crișan, *Burebista și epoca sa*, second edition, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1977, p. 446.

<sup>41</sup> Dr. Corneliu Belcin, jurist, „Elemente introductive la problema: Originea, vechimea și importanța poporului român în lume“ (*Introductory elements to the problem: The Origin, the age and the importance of the Romanian people in the world*), in *Noi, tracii*, nr. 12, August 1975, pp. 8–11. (“Even no more than 100,000 years of existence on Earth is more than enough to lead us to the conclusion that we are the oldest people of Europe”.)

<sup>42</sup> B.P. Hasdeu, *Istoria critică a românilor*, vol. 1, București, 1873, pp. 278–281.

<sup>43</sup> On the theory concerning the circulation of words see B.P. Hasdeu, „În loc de introducere“ (*In Place of an Introduction*, chapter III: „În ce constă fizionomia unei limbi?“ — “What makes up the physiognomy of a language?”) in *Etymologicum Magnum Romaniae*, vol. I, Editura Academiei Române, București, 1886 (new edition, Editura Minerva, București, 1972).

<sup>44</sup> Ioan Bogdan, *Istoriografia română și problemele ei actuale (Romanian historiography and its current problems)*, București, 1905, p. 21.

<sup>45</sup> Ioan Bogdan, *Însemnătatea studiilor slave pentru Români (The Importance of Slavic Studies for the Romanians)*, București, 1894, pp. 17–19 and 25.

<sup>46</sup> Ioan Bogdan, *Românii și bulgarii (The Romanians and the Bulgarians)*, București, 1895, p. 15.

<sup>47</sup> N. Iorga, *Istoria românilor pentru poporul românesc (The History of the Romanians for the Romanian People)*, vol. I, p. 33.

<sup>48</sup> C.C. Giurescu, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 247 and 260.

<sup>49</sup> C.C. Giurescu, “Slavii au venit în Dacia în calitate de cuceritori” (“The Slavs come to Dacia as Conquerors”), in *op. cit.* vol. I, pp. 268–278; P.P. Panaitescu, “Problema originii clasei boierești”, in *Interpretări Românești* (“Romanian Interpretations”), published 1994, pp. 31–64.

<sup>50</sup> *Istoria R.P.R.*, pp. 54–56.

<sup>51</sup> Mihai Roller, „Cu privire la unele probleme din domeniul cercetărilor istorice“ (“On certain questions regarding the field of historical research”) in *Studii. Revistă de istorie și filosofie* (“Studies. Journal for History and Philosophy”), July–September 1952, pp. 152–153.

<sup>52</sup> *Istoria militară a poporului Român*, vol. 1, p. 208.

<sup>53</sup> Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire ou Métier d'historien*, Paris, 1964, p. 15 (“Les hommes ressemblent plus à leur temps qu'à leurs pères.”)

Continuity

A HISTORIOGRAPHIC PARADOX:  
THE FORMATION AREA OF THE ROMANIAN PEOPLE

The particular insistence on the “formation of the people” is typical of Romanian historiography and amplified by the question regarding the area defining the formation of the Romanian people and language. It is here that we encounter the famous issue of continuity, which, next to “ethnogenesis” did its bit for the creation of a genuine “national obsession”, kept going by the ideological and political machinations. The issue of continuity is nothing but the extreme form taken by the general vagueness associated with the geographic location of the Romanian people’s beginnings. Once again, we are confronted with a peculiar situation in European historiography. According to the multitude of divergent theses, Romanian and foreign, the Romanians are thought to have formed themselves into a people within the territory corresponding to modern Romania, or in some limited area of this territory, even very limited indeed, according to some versions, or, conversely, in an area exceeding by far the current spread of the Romanian people and reaching well into Central and South-Eastern Europe, or, finally, somewhere South of the Danube, completely outside the borders of the country they are inhabiting today!

Three main factors are responsible for this quite paradoxical situation.

16 First of all, there is a certain lack of concordance between the effective process of Roman expansion and Romanization and the existing ethnic configuration of South-Eastern Europe. The Northern half of the Balkan Peninsula belonged to the Empire for some eight centuries, a period allowing for a flourishing Roman life to develop and take hold. North of the Danube, roughly within the borders of today’s Romania, the Roman rule was only effective in half of Dacia. The province Dacia was part of the Empire for no longer than 165 years, which can obviously raise questions regarding the thoroughness of the Romanization process. On the other hand, it follows that the half of Dacia escaping annexation couldn’t possibly be Romanized. Nevertheless, the conclusion turns out to be at variance with the premise: Romania, Rome’s descendant in this part of Europe, lies North of the Danube, not South...

Secondly, a great diversity of hypotheses are given free rein by the scarcity of sources regarding the North-Danubian area during the thousand years separating the withdrawal of the Roman rule, in the year 271, from the foundation of the first Romanian states in the 14th century, complicated by the complete lack of internal written sources. As far as certain historical aspects are concerned, archaeology was able to fill in the gaps. We do know today that the territory of Dacia continued to be densely populated; we can reconstruct the way of life of those who lived there. Unfortunately, archaeological material *does not speak*; it cannot tell us what was the language spoken by the makers of the objects in question, in a certain century, in a certain corner of today's Romania.

And, last but not least, a third factor, the ideological and political one, came on the scene, with a plethora of complications in its train. Denying Romanian continuity and bringing in the Romanians from the area South of the Danube obviously fitted the Austro-Hungarians objectives during the 18th and 19th centuries, and it is still dogmatized today in Hungarian historiography for the purpose of ensuring for the Hungarians the chronological ascendancy in Transylvania. Paradoxically enough, both the immigrationists and the Romanian nationalist bring up overlapping arguments. The same historical premises can justify a theory as well as its opposite. Invoked by the Latinists by virtue of their obsession with the nobility and purity of Romanian blood, the extermination of the Dacians gave equal service to the immigrationist thesis: what argument could be better than having Dacia emptied of its native population? And, conversely, the claim that the Dacians were never Romanized, advanced by the nationalist extreme supporting unadulterated Dacianism, only plays into the hands of those defending the hypothesis according to which the expansion of Romanians and the Romanian language occurred outside the borders of today's Romania, while for all serious linguists, Romanian is a Romanic language.

#### NORTH AND SOUTH OF THE DANUBE. A COMPROMISE, PERCHANCE?

In the view of the Transylvanian School, adhered to by the whole of Romanian historiography towards the middle of the 19th century, the initial Romanian space is represented both by Dacia and by the territory South of the Danube. The Romanians appear as the descendants of the Romans in this part of Europe. Since information on the territory North of the Danube is scarce, the history of the centuries following the Roman withdrawal from Dacia during the reign of Emperor Aurelian can sooner be said to take place in what

is today Bulgaria, rather than on the territory of contemporary Romania. "The Romanians were united with the Bulgarians as soon as the latter arrived — Şincai says —; therefore it was not only the Bulgarians that defeated the Greeks, but even more so, and even more frequently, the Romanians defeated them under the names of the Bulgarians, the Cumans or the Pechenegs". And in the year 963, with Samuil, who was *Romanian*, "the Romanians took over the rule from the Bulgarians".<sup>1</sup> The first Bulgarian czarate, it follows, was Bulgarian-Romanian, while the second one was Romanian-Bulgarian; the *Romanian-Bulgarian Empire*, founded by the South-Danubian Vlachs Peter and Asan, and reaching apogee under Ioniță, was to represent, up to the phase of Communist historiography, an important chapter of Romanian history. Kogălniceanu has the kingdom of the transdanubian Vlachs extended until the year 1394, when it was destroyed by the Turks (what he actually means, of course, are the Bulgarian czarates); he also makes the affirmation that the Balkan Romanians contributed several emperors to Rome and Byzantium. Laurian also mentions the *Bulgarian-Romanian kingdom* (the first czarate), then the *empire of the Romanians and the Bulgarians* (the second czarate, lasting to the end of the 14th century).

The shift of the main stage of Romanian history from the North to the South of the Danube, and for several centuries, too, might suggest a scenario close to the one advanced by the immigrationists, even if Romanian historians tend to defend the idea of continuity. South-Danubian Romanity was simply more active, more "tangible" than the Romanity of former Dacia.

By comparison with this generous expansion of the initial Romanian territory, Hasdeu, in *A Critical History of the Romanians*, operates a drastic reduction. The lack of Germanic elements in the Romanian language determines him to have the Dacian-Romans removed from the areas North and South of the Danube, where the presence of Germanic migratory peoples had been attested. The area in which the Romanian language and people were formed is confined to an even smaller space than the borders of Roman Dacia. The "ethnographic map" of Romania, between the 3rd and 6th centuries, covers, according to Hasdeu, the area "from Severin to Hațeg, from the Temeșiana Mountains to the Olt, far from the Goths and Gepids". It follows that "the Romanian nationality was born and developed in Oltenia, extending to the Hațeg Valley". From Oltenia, the Romanians would lately spread towards Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia, the process being rather lengthy, from its onset, in the 6th century, all the way to the 14th century. Hasdeu insists on "the expansion force of the Oltenians".<sup>2</sup> For him, Oltenia was, and still is, the core of the Romanian nationality. To be sure, Hasdeu-the

nationalist was impressed with the “ethnic purity” of Oltenia, the province with the least amount of foreign elements among all Romanian areas.

Xenopol confronts us with a different kind of territorial limitation. His purpose is to bring to nothing, item by item, Roesler’s theory, published in “Romanian Studies” in 1871. In support of the South-Danubian origin of the Romanians, Roesler appealed to the similarities between Dacian-Romanian and Macedonian-Romanian, two dialects of the same language, separated today by a wide gap, as well as the South-Slavic influence in the Romanian language. Xenopol’s reply was published in 1884, under the title *Roesler’s Theory. Studies on the Endurance of the Romanians in Trajan’s Dacia* (and also in French, in 1885: *Une énigme historique. Les Roumains au Moyen Age*). His strategy serves two purposes: firstly, the unambiguous separation, from the very beginning, of the North-Danubian Romanians from the Macedonian Romanians, and, secondly, the explanation of the South-Slavic influence by any other means than a possible sojourn of the Romanians South of the Danube. According to Xenopol, Moesia had been but scantily Romanized in ancient times; there was, therefore, no way Romanians could have formed themselves into a people over there. The Romanic element was to be looked for not in Moesia, but lower South, in the Balkans. Consequently, there was no direct connection between the two Romanic stems of the East: “The Dacian-Romanians and the Macedonian Romanians are two distinct peoples through their origins, owing their amazing similarity to the fact that the same elements were involved in their making.”<sup>3</sup> In order to remove the Romanians even more distinctly from the Balkan sphere, Xenopol also removes them from the Danube, pushing them towards the mountains. During the migratory invasions, the Romanians had allegedly withdrawn into the Carpathian “fortification”, in the area of Transylvania; this accounts for the remarkable unity of the Romanian language, as well as for the existence of Hungarian words in the language of all Romanians, as well as Negru Vodă’s settlement in Wallachia and Dragoş-Bogdan’s in Moldavia. After the last migratory wave, the Tartars, the Romanians (having, no doubt, realized that the migratory invasions were over!) descended towards the foothills and the plain to found the two principalities. The formation of the Romanian people and the Romanian continuity are thus restricted to Transylvania, having occurred in the Shelter of the Carpathians.

As regards sorting out the South-Slavic influence — the other essential item of Xenopol’s demonstration — once again we witness a complete reversal of Roesler’s arguments. Once the evolution of the Romanians South of the Danube is found unacceptable, we are left with the opposite solution:

the expansion of the Southern Slavs North of the river. In Xenopol's opinion, the first Bulgarian czarate covered the whole area of today's Romania. For several centuries, "Romania" had actually been part of Bulgaria... Here is the explanation for the Slavic rite in the Romanian church and, generally, for the political and cultural influence of slavonism.

Now what would a Romanian nationalist of today make of the restriction of Romanian continuity to Transylvania and the subjection of the first Romanians to the Bulgarian czarate? Still, it was pure nationalism that prompted Xenopol into that course of action, out of the intention to demolish completely Roesler's argument. The ways of nationalism are diverse and often unexpected.

Hasdeu had restricted the "cradle" of the Romanian people to Oltenia. Xenopol had expressed a preference for yet another Romanian province: Transylvania. Onciul goes beyond these restrictions. In a text meant as a review of Xenopol's book, but ending up as a study in its own right, one of the fundamental monographs on the subject ("Roesler's Theory. Studies on the Endurance of the Romanians in Trajan's Dacia by A.D. Xenopol. Critical Considerations", in *Convorbiri literare*, 1885), he expressed his option for the entire area of Roman Dacia: Oltenia, the Banat, Western Transylvania. But, according to Onciul, the area of the Romanian people formation also extended beyond the Danube. Moesia, superficially Romanized in Xenopol's thesis, became, with Onciul, a hub of Romanity. The Danube vanished as a border. The original "Romania" comprised about half of today's Romania, but, in compensation, a sizeable part of what today is Bulgaria and Serbia.

We have seen that having South-Danubian Romanity integrated in Romanian history had already become a tradition in national historiography. But what Onciul refers to is not only a common territory of the Romanians and the Balkan Vlachs; in a way vaguely resembling the immigrationists' approach, he hints at the North-Danubian Romanity being reinforced by Southern Romanic waves. His theory, termed *admigration*, offers a synthesis or a compromise solution between the rigid thesis of continuity and the just as rigid thesis of immigration. According to Onciul's point of view, the Romanian people was formed both through the continuity of the Dacian-Roman element in the province of Dacia and through the considerable inflow of Romanized population from the South of the Danube. During the first centuries of the Middle Ages, the Romanic element in the Balkan Peninsula was even stronger "than Trajan's Dacia could have possibly been during the migratory invasions. This Romanic element of the Balkan countries — Onciul states — is without a doubt identical to the

Romanian one, and thus, our history initially takes place mostly in the Balkan Peninsula, where it actually originates through the Roman conquest of the Thracian-Illirian countries and their subsequent Romanization. It would be terribly wrong to renounce this history and restrict our past to Trajan's Dacia exclusively, where apparently we are going to search for it in vain at those times, in order to be able to know it and understand it."<sup>4</sup>

From the 7th century onwards, for several hundred years, following the Slavic invasion South of the Danube, the Romanic "reservoir" of the Balkans contributed a substantial supply of Romanity to the North-Danubian areas whose Romanity had endured in a rarefied condition, due to the multiple inroads made by the barbarians. Like Xenopol, Onciul brings arguments supporting the inclusion of the territories left of the Danube to the Bulgarian czarate, which would have favored the process of "admigration". Unlike Xenopol, he went as far as to consider that even the second czarate — the Romanian-Bulgarian Empire — bordered on the Carpathians, which would more convincingly account for the extensive presence of the Romanian element in this political structure. Furthermore, the origins of Wallachia would be also accounted for, the country having, at a certain point, separated itself from the state of the Asans. The Romanian population was seen to have expanded East of the river Olt and the Carpathians — into Wallachia and Moldavia — only as late as the second half of the 11th century (after the Pechenegs had left these territories). The Romanians thus featured simultaneously as autochthonous (in Roman Dacia), immigrants (from South of the Danube) and conquerors (in the Principalities).

We are not concerned here with the validity of Onciul's solution. Neither are we going to discourse the general validity of any other solution. Nonetheless, we do have to admit that the thesis of admigrationism, achieved an astute combination of continuity and immigrationism advancing plausible answers to all embarrassing questions immigrationists might have asked. Once the Romanian element had also come into existence South of the Danube, all immigrationist reasoning could no longer challenge North-Danubian continuity.

In subsequent interpretations, Onciul was to lay heavier stress on the area of Roman Dacia and underscore the endurance of the Roman element residing there, which only allowed the South-Danubian inflow to play a secondary part.

The synthesis between continuity and immigration was also advocated by the most reputable of the Romanian linguists. On the whole, linguists appear to be more open than historians when it comes to considering South-Danubian Romanity as a founding element. Alexandru Philippide

(1859–1933) took the issue a great deal further. In his work *The Origin of the Romanians* (1923–1927), he argued for the complete (or almost complete) extinction of North-Danubian Romanity following the abandonment of the province by Emperor Aurelian and the recolonization of the territory — today's Romania — with a Romanic population coming from South of the Danube from the 7th century onwards (until the 13th century).<sup>5</sup>

Unlike Roesler and Philippide, though only partially so, Ovid Densusianu (1873–1938), in *Histoire de la langue roumaine* (1902), a work of certain acclaim in Romance linguistics, considered the survival of a certain Roman element North of the Danube, mostly in the South-West of today's Romania; still, even according to his point of view, the Balkan element was more important than the autochthonous one, its origin being, nevertheless not in Moesia, as generally accepted, but farther West, in Illyria.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Sextil Pușcariu (1877–1948) suggested a linguistic synthesis involving equally the territory of Trajan's Dacia and the Thraco-Illyrian provinces of the Balkan Peninsula.

G.I. Brătianu follow the course set by Onciul and Pușcariu, in *Une énigme et un miracle historique: le peuple roumain* (1937, Romanian edition 1940), where he writes polemically against the immigrationists, though accepting the partly South-Danubian origin of the Romanian language and people, also conceding to the immigrationist theory the fact that “the region East of the Carpathians, Moldavia and Bessarabia, was, of course, the last stage of Romanian expansion during the Middle Ages.”<sup>7</sup> The relatively late romanization of the Moldavian area (during the centuries preceding the formation of the Principalities) did not mean, according to Brătianu, an argument in favor of Slavic priority, since the Slavs, mentioned by Jordanes and Procopius, had been replaced with time by various peoples from the steppe, such as the Pechenegs and the Cumans. If Moldavia was not originally Romanian, then neither was it Slavic!

12 The double-origin idea — North and South of the Danube — is also clearly expressed by P.P. Panaitescu in his textbook on the history of the Romanians: “[...] from the occurrence of the Albanian element in the Romanian language, and from the similarity between the Dacian-Romanian and Macedonian-Romanian dialects, it follows that the area of formation of the Romanian nation is the lower reach of the Danube, on both banks of this river, all of Trajan's Dacia, as well as the two Moesias (Bulgaria and Serbia).<sup>8</sup>

One has to conclude, rather unexpectedly, perhaps, for the Romanian reader of today, subject for decades, during the age of nationalist communism, to a rabid anti-Roeslerian campaign, by acknowledging the fact



that many Romanian specialists — both historians and linguists — chose a compromise solution between continuity and immigrationism (with a variety of nuances as regards the percentage or surface area of the North or South-Danubian territories involved in the making of Romania.

#### ROMANIAN CONSOLIDATION NORTH OF THE DANUBE

There are, nonetheless, historians who, without in the least ignoring Balkan Romanity, make a primary purpose out of completing and consolidating the sphere of North-Danubian Romanity and Romanian-ness. In *The Beginnings of Roman Life at the Mouths of the Danube* (1923), Pârvan has the province of Dacia doubled by a second center of Romanity which he calls Scythian Dacia. Under the same name he gathers Dobrogea, which had been under the Roman rule for centuries, Wallachia, the South of Moldavia and Bessarabia. Here is, therefore, as far as Dacian-Roman origins can be said to justify Romanian rights, the inclusion within the sphere of the ideal original Romania of most of the territory left outside Trajan's Dacia. Though not officially annexed to the Empire, the plain North of the Danube, surrounded by the Romanity of Transylvania, Oltenia and Dobrogea, is in its turn subjected to sensible Romanization. "Dobrogea is full of Roman cities. Wallachia and Moldavia are full of Dacian villages throbbing with Roman life. Between Trajan's Dacia, which only starts its new life from the year 107 onwards, and Dobrogea which had started it one hundred years before, a host of roads are opened, well guarded and well trodden, both from Transylvania towards the Sea and from the Sea towards Transylvania. Along the valleys of the Siret, the Buzău, the Ialomîța, the Argeș, there is a constant upstream and downstream traffic of Roman troupes, Roman merchants, Dacian-Roman peasants, while the Dacian way of life, deep down to its core, became, without much ado or pomp, Roman life."<sup>9</sup> The whole territory of Romania, all the Romanian provinces did their bit for the formation of the Romanian people — this is Pârvan's conclusion (which he also expresses in clear-cut terms in *Dacia*).

Likewise, Iorga insists on integrating in an early *Romanian Country* the complete territory of Romania, even if the intensity of Romanity or of Romanian-ness does not appear to him identical from one province to the other: "Still, the whole country, and Transylvania, where larger numbers of Romanians dwelt, and Oltenia where there were significant numbers of them, and Wallachia, where their villages were sparser, and Moldavia, where, in the North-East, our people still continued, slowly but surely, the Romanization

of the Western Slavs, or the lesser Russians, all of these together were known as The Romanian Country [...].”<sup>10</sup>

For Iorga and Pârvan, the Romanians are the inheritors and continuator of the whole Eastern Romanity, by dint of their very survival, which sets them apart from the greatest part of the Latin element in the Balkans. South-Danubian Romanity played an important part in the spreading of the Roman element throughout Dacia, but once planted North of the Danube, the said element mainly endured on account of its own vitality. The *Romanian* phase of history takes place, first and foremost, on the territory of today’s Romania. Talking about the empire generally known in Romanian historiography as “Romanian-Bulgarian”, Iorga underlines its fundamentally Bulgarian character; the Romanian founders were quick to lose “the awareness of belonging to a nation other than the Bulgarian one”. “It was, therefore, through these isolated Romanians from among our shepherds that great and glorious things were accomplished, yet for *another nation*.”<sup>11</sup>

Neither does C.C. Giurescu invoke any Romanian population inflow from beyond the Danube during the first centuries of the Middle Ages, although he does stress the presence and vitality of the Balkan Vlachs. He insists on integrating in the process leading to the formation of the Romanian people the whole of the North-Danubian territory. To the “retreat to the mountains” which, according to Xenopol, drastically limited the original Romanian area, he opposes *the retreat to the woods* before various invaders (“the shelter of our ancestors during the Middle Ages was the forest”). But since the forest practically covered the whole area of Romania, we can hardly speak of a retreat anymore, of giving way. “[...] The Wallachian plain and the Moldavian plateau, as well as the Transylvanian one, were covered by extensive forests. From the foot of the mountains to the Danube and the Dniester, and, in places, to the sea, one could travel all the way through the forest.”<sup>12</sup> In the Vlăşia forest — which translates as the “forest of the Romanians” — that is, in the Wallachian plain, the “Dacian-Romans” were at home when the Slavs came.

4

In spite of the gradual concentration on the whole of the Romanian territory of today, it can be said that all historians prior to the communist period *also* considered *the Balkans* when debating the formation and evolution of the Romanian people. The differences in interpretation regard the inflow of population: the participation, either massive or limited, or the lack of participation, or the insignificant participation of Balkan Romanity to the North-Danubian Romanian build-up. The historical demonstration did carry contemporary overtones: Romania was intent on playing the arbiter in

the Balkans, and thus openly champion the cause of the Aromanians scattered throughout the peninsula.

#### THE TIMES OF COMMUNISM: IDEOLOGICAL IMPERATIVES AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS

The communist phase of the historical discourse excelled in the opposite direction, at obscuring Balkan Romanian-ism. During the “internationalist” stage, the Slavic expansion into the original Romanian area — Russian in the North and Bulgarian in the South — allowed no more room for Romanian assertions beyond the current borders, themselves blotted out by the immersion into the Slavic sea. Yet neither did the next stage, the nationalist one, turn out to be more beneficial to the Romanians from across the borders. The principle of “non-interference” in the affairs of other states — necessary to the Ceaușescu regime for claiming the “others” non-interference in its own policy — was also applied to the past. The borders of modern Romania were impressed as an immovable framework upon the whole of her historical evolution: an eternal Romania with the contours of the Greater Romania of 1918 (time was when school-use maps displayed, regardless of the age at issue, the shape of Greater Romania shaded in the same color. Romania stood out at the only European entity of invariable contour, even as far back as the Middle Ages, centuries before her foundation...). From this perspective, there could be no such thing as the historical “annexation” of the South — Danubian area, or the “renouncing” (also in the historical sense) of the provinces (Transylvania, Dobrogea, Bessarabia), which had been included for centuries within other borders. History was being rewritten to accommodate an ever-existing Romania, claiming nothing from others, and unyielding as far as her patrimony was concerned.

In the first volume, published in 1960, of *The History of Romania*, the renunciation of the Balkan area is theoretically justified by marking the distinction between two stages, the former “*preceding* the formation of the people, when only a Roman or Romanic population is discernible, and the extensive stage of the formation of the Romanian people proper as a people of its own.” That is to say, even if both banks of the Danube could be taken into consideration for the period of the Roman rule in Dacia, or for the period immediately following it, the matter had no bearing on the actual formation of the Romanian people, being only related to the extension of the Romanic element to South-East Europe. The Romanian people was only formed after the separation of Balkan Romanity from North-Danubian Romanity, subsequent to the invasion of the Slavs, more precisely “during the last

centuries of the first millennium A.D., in the area North of the lower Danube, having as a nucleus the territories in the Dacian foothills and mountains.”<sup>13</sup>

The North-Danubian constriction was compounded by an even stricter one, expressed, for reasons of prudence, in the bombast of the age. The sentence “[...] with the mountain and foot-hill areas of Dacia for a nucleus territory” actually meant that the Romanian people did not even come into existence on the whole territory of Romania, but only in those areas subjected to Roman colonization, in the mountains and foot-hills of Transylvania and Oltenia. That was Constantin Daicoviciu’s opinion, which he later expounded openly and thoroughly, during the years of relative “liberalization”. In the chapters he contributed to the *History of Romania*, published in 1969, Daicoviciu underpinned the fact that the principle of continuity was only restricted to Roman Dacia, and could not be applied to the whole of today’s Romania territory since “the Dacian population of Wallachia and Moldavia was colonized at a much later date”. He did express his reservations concerning the tendency to hijack archaeological material for ethnic purposes, a method lavishly used and abused in order to decree the Romanian character of all vestigial finds. He even went so far as to consider the Dridu culture (identified in Wallachia, occurring sporadically in Transylvania, but quite developed in Bulgaria), generally interpreted by Romania archaeologists as a proof of continuity, to be “a *Slavic culture* (or more exactly Slavic-Bulgarian)”.<sup>14</sup> The Romanian territory was thus divided between a Romanized Transylvania and an area extending beyond the Carpathians and markedly Slavic in character.

The Dridu culture has actually been the subject of heated debate for decades, most of the Romanian researchers claiming its Romanian character, while foreign ones pronounce it essentially Slavic. The stakes are all the higher as the period under discussion, centuries 8 to 11, covers the crystallization of the Romanian linguistic and ethnic phenomenon. In *The History of the Romanian People* (1970), Ion Nestor, an archaeologist of no mean repute earned him by the value and originality of his research work, displays, unlike Daicoviciu, a remarkable conformism. He regards the elements making up the Dridu culture as “for the most part Romanian in origin”, identifying “proto-Romanians” as early as the 6th century, and extending the formation area of the Romanian people, without further discussion, to the entire territory of the country, with due harping on the strong bonds between the provinces.<sup>15</sup>

This version of the Romanian people formation *exactly* on the territory it inhabits today, without the slightest fluctuation of the frontiers, became

established in the 70's and 80's, both in the official discourse concerning national history, and in the more or less conforming contributions of many a specialist.

Ligia Bârză's study *The Continuity of Material and Spiritual Vestiges of the Romanian People on the Territory of Former Dacia* (1979), rewritten in the 80's, but published in 1991 (*The Origin and Continuity of the Romanians. Archaeology and Historical Tradition*), offers both an overall view of the problem and a stimulating starting point for discussing the archaeology-continuity connection. The premises put forth, professional beyond dispute, and the all too familiar conclusions are kept apart by the ideological partition of "unity and continuity". Thus, we come across the parallelism between the Romanization process within and without Roman Dacia, a well-established fact, after all: "Considering all possible element, it is highly probable to accept a very early date for Latin starting to be generally used in the area of the East Dacians, in Wallachia and in South Moldavia."<sup>16</sup> It follows from the context that this moment precedes the retreat of the Roman armies from Dacia during the reign of Emperor Aurelian or, in any case, it does not occur long after it. A "non-archaeologist" is confronted by the following difficulty: the organized, massive character of Roman colonization in the province of Dacia was generally pleaded in support of rapid, thorough Romanization; even so, archaeology proves the existence of important elements and "islands" of Dacian civilization surviving well after the Aurelian retreat; how, then, could a similar Romanization phenomenon occur parallelly to impose the Latin language there, where the Romans had not settled?

Further, we find out that after centuries of uninterrupted material continuity, a complete upheaval occurs during the second half of the 6th century and the first half of the 7th, once the Slavs settle down on Romanian territory. Everything changes: the aspect of houses, their contents, and even the funeral rites. Only incinerated graves are to be found, "in sharp contrast to previous centuries". „It is the moment when ancient traditions vanish away, when culture regresses to prehistoric forms of manifestation such as preponderantly hand-wrought ceramics and the decline of manufacturing techniques and traditions."<sup>17</sup>

The conclusion is far from surprising: it can only be, regardless of the premises, the material and spiritual continuity on the territory of former Dacia!

In actual fact, a mixture is concocted out of the "life" continuity and the Romanian continuity, two drastically different matters. Life continuity is obvious, and we would barely need archaeological evidence in its favor. Whoever could presume today that the Dacians could have become extinct,

following extermination by Romans, or that in 271, or at any time after, the North-Danubian population could have emigrated south of the river? Gone are the times when Roesler swept the Dacian-Romans to the Balkans, while Xenopol packed them off to the Transylvanian mountains. The problem of Romanian continuity is not whether people continued to live here, but whether they continued to speak Latin and then Romanian. Whether Latinity was not somehow wiped out, as in Britain, Pannonia, the Balkans and North Africa. The archaeological discontinuity around the year 600, reflecting structural changes later developing towards the Dridu culture, does allow for such an interpretation. Archaeology is very much like a two-edged weapon: it cuts both ways. It is, therefore, more prudent and also more correct not to get things mixed up: there is no way material arguments can contribute decisive information on the spoken language or languages, to say nothing of the linguistic hotchpotch, either for or against the Romanians.

After 1989, the political grounds of the historical limitations to the existing borders are no longer of any consequence. Now, the Dridu culture can serve not only to keep the whole of the Romanian territory “under control”, but also to expand its original area. As there is no better expression of widely circulated historical ideas than a school text book, it is enough to have a look at the map inserted in the 11th form *History of the Romanians*, published in 1992, to get a glimpse of the “new” formation area of the Romanian people. “The area of the first Romanian archaeological find” (the Dridu culture, to be sure) includes Greater Romania in its entirety, with almost the whole of Hungary and Bulgaria up to the Balkans thrown in.<sup>18</sup> This is a remarkable expansion for a culture denied by Daicoviciu even the right to represent Transylvania. Wouldn't it have been more appropriate to explain the pupils that we actually don't know whether Dridu is a Romanian, Slavonic or Slavonic-Romanian culture? That researching material finds does not enable us to draw any conclusions (not irrefutable ones, by all accounts) regarding the language spoken by the people in question? Can Bulgaria be considered, at the exact time when the first Bulgarian czarate was in full expansion, as predominantly Romanian? Naturally, the Romanians did feature in this vast area, and so did the Slavs; they cannot be excluded at each other's expense.<sup>19</sup>

#### THE ROMANIAN STATE DURING THE “DARK MILLENIUM”

Besides ethnic continuity, *political continuity* represents an equally mythologized aspect. The mere perpetuation of an amorphous Romanian element, subject to a variety of foreign dominions, appears to fall short of providing a satisfactory solution. Though they may — or may not — own up

to it, Romanians are sore complexed by the absence — for one thousand years — of a Romanian state, the absence of a political tradition deeply rooted in time, comparable to the one of neighboring nations.

Huru's *Chronicle* attempted, in its time, to make up for this gap, inventing, out of nothing, a Romanian republic in the year 271. The common state of the Romanians and Bulgarians could play, even more convincingly, a similar part. With Xenopol and Onciul, it metamorphosed, nonetheless, into a kind of Bulgarian dominion upon the North-Danubian territory.

Wandering, as he was wont, off the beaten track Hasdeu reconstructed a magnificent history centered round the great Basarab dynasty. The essay he wrote on the subject in *Etymologicum Magnum Romaniae*, later to be published separately under the title *The Basarabs. Who? Whence? Whereof?* ("Basarabii. Cine? De unde? De când?" 1896), makes, perhaps, for the most fascinating historical reading in the whole of Romanian literature. Piece by piece, he puts together a scholarly demonstration of apparently impeccable logic resulting in a splendid imaginary edifice. The conclusion is that the Basarabs, an originally Dacian caste, supplying Dacia with kings and Rome with quite a few emperors, subsequently watched over the destiny of the Romanian people, from their position as rulers of Oltenia, for one thousand years, until they also founded Wallachia ("The Romanian country"). We have here perfect political continuity, and a remarkable one at that, since, at times, it contributed achievements recorded by the great history of the world.

After so many attempts, unfortunately imaginary, the slate was still clean. By way of inscribing it, Iorga suggested the organization of the natives, subsequent to the Aurelian retreat, into what he called *Romanii populare* ("popular romanies"), a solution not exactly explicit, but appealing to many as the face-saving version, which various authors invoke until today.

The Transylvanian *voievozi*, Gelu, Glad and Menumorut, mentioned in Anonymus' Hungarian Chronicle (*Gesta Hungarorum*), play an important part in Romanian history, exactly because they illustrate, besides ethnic continuity, the existence of Romanian state structures at the time of the Hungarian expansion. This privileged position somehow prevented the critical historiographic function from being exercised naturally. Like Negru-Vodă, the three appear to be symbolic characters rather than real personalities. They individualize a certain political idea or historical situation (in the case under discussion, the existence of Romanian political formations), which does not essentially change the problem, after all.

During the last half of the century it was attempted, particularly by resorting to archaeological material, to locate such political structures even further away into the past. It is hard to imagine an area as large as Romania as devoid of all forms, no matter how sketchy, of territorial organization. But this kind of fragmentation into independent little states could not fully satisfy the national-communist ideology, inclining towards full unity of the country and equally full continuity between Dacia and Romania. The state, and the whole state, at that, had to continue by all means. That is why the *Programme* of the Romanian Communist Party (1975), a text with deep historical implications, records the existence of an “unorganized state” lingering on within the territory of Dacia after the withdrawal of Roman rule.<sup>20</sup> According to all definitions and interpretations currently in operation, the state rather appears to be an organized something. The “unorganized state” concept represented at the time a genuine contribution not only regarding the history of the Romanians, but the theory of the state in general. The uninterrupted existence of the state from Burebista to Ceaușescu was imposed as a dogma of local national-communism, the Romanian state thus becoming one of the oldest in Europe.

#### CONCLUSIONS: ARCHAEOLOGY, LINGUISTICS AND POLITICS

Here are, therefore, in a rapid and fatally incomplete succession, the avatars of the original Romanian area: from Hasdeu's Oltenia to the Romania-Hungary-Bulgaria complex of the latest school books, or from Roesler's exclusively South-Danubian Romania to the equally exclusive formation of the Romanian people on the exact territory of yesterday's Dacia and today's Romania. I refrain from taking the liberty to suggest a solution which might favor either one or the other of the hypotheses. I venture nevertheless to assume that two remarks are absolutely necessary — a methodological and an ideological one.

0 Addressing the question of the Romanian people formation and continuity, the Romanian historians of the last half of the century displayed a tendency towards overrating their own methods, generally paying scant attention to the linguists' research and conclusions. As literary sources are practically exhausted, Romanian historiography turned to archaeology. Continuity thus became an exclusively archaeological matter. Language receded into the background when weighed against “concrete” testimonies — a rather peculiar procedure, given the fact that, after all, what is generally



called “the Romanian people formation” by a loose enough formula is actually, much more accurately and appropriately, “the Romanian language formation”. Romanian is the one speaking Romanian; even if this is not the only “condition”, it is the foremost condition, and compulsory, at that. One does not say that archaeology should be altogether excluded from the matter, but its role is ultimately limited. In actual facts, archaeologists have been assuming for decades the mission of fully clarifying the problem of the centuries in question, vestiges confirming life continuity. The only thing is, a confusion occurred here — whether intentionally or not is of no consequence. It is not the continuity of the population in general that is questioned, but rather Roman and Romanian continuity. A “Dacian” who does not speak Romanian is of no interest to us in this respect: he is not a Romanian.

Neither can linguists advance a watertight solution. All we can say is that, to a greater extent than historians, they do feel compelled to take into consideration a South-Danubian area *as well*. Even during the communist period, Iorgu Iordan, a student of Alexandru Philippide, took the liberty of supporting this point of view. Further worthy of notice is the publication — uncensored, albeit heavily annotated — of Carlo Tagliavini’s synthesis, *The Origins of Neolatin Languages* (1977). The reputable Italian linguist ascribes the formation of the Romanian language to a limited area located on both banks of the Danube in agreement with a host of other linguists: “Without denying the existence of Roman population remnants North of the Danube, most foreign philologists admit that the area of Romanian language formation ought to be established, approximately, in the South-West areas bordering North and South on the Danube.”<sup>21</sup> In actual fact, nevertheless, we have to reiterate that neither can linguists’ conclusion be taken for granted as certain and unambiguous.

The version of the Romanian language formation within a limited area (significantly more restricted than today’s Romania) North and South of the Danube displays fewer weak spots and provides more explanations than the other versions. It can be considered a hypothesis of greater ability and logic, yet not necessarily of greater verity. It is hard to assume that truth, the complete, perfect truth could ever be restored. History, even history and linguistics together, cannot provide complete restorations, particularly when the phenomena under discussion loom through the distant mists of the beginnings. The correct thing to do is to conclude and declare without

complexes that everything in this field is hypothesis, being, of course, free to consider one hypothesis more “true” than the other.

A further remark regards the ideological background and the political spin offs of the matter. The actualization of foundation myths is a process we can do little to discourage. Appealing to their origins, the Romanians, like any other community, have the feeling they affirm their individuality and defend their rights. Attacks against Romanians make similar use of historical schemes. As regards continuity, and to the extent Hungarian historiography features extensible as the main adversary of Romanian continuity North of the Danube, it is obvious that Transylvania is the crux of the matter. The formation of the Romanian people North of the Danube, on the territory of Transylvania inclusively, and even predominantly there, legitimizes the Romanian claim to the province. The arrival of the Romanians from somewhere else supports, on the contrary, the Hungarian historical claim. Things are no different as regards Bessarabia and even Moldavia. What would happen if we discovered that the Romanians came there after the Slavs?

Absolutely nothing, to be sure. Far from contesting to historical imagination its right to make use of its resources, it is obvious that territorial readjustments are not triggered off by the earnest appeal to a distant past. When it comes to readjusting borders by force, a historical alibi is always at hand: history would provide anything. Mussolini wanted to reestablish the Roman Empire. He was, so to say, fully justified: for almost one thousand years the Mediterranean Sea had been an Italian lake, while Latin was spoken from Spain to Bulgaria and from Libya to England. Appealing to history — and, more precisely, to the immigrations theory — the Hungarians can be sent packing back to the Urals, and the Americans returned to Europe, leaving the Indians free in their own country. Let no one say we have put forth a silly game; it is the very same game we encounter in our own history. Moreover, history is not a unique, absolute datum; it puts forth a multitude of sequences, out of which anyone can choose whatever suits him or her. If we take a stand at the year 800, we can send the Hungarians to the Urals, yet, if we do advance towards the year 1 000 or 1 200, things take a different turn, this time favoring historical claims of the kind that could be invoked by those entertaining a nostalgia for Greater Hungary. By the same token, the Romanian claim to Dobrogea frequently hails back to the rule of Mircea the Old; but Dobrogea was not under the rule of Mircea alone: it was under the rule of the Greeks, also, and of the Bulgarians, and of the Turks, for even a longer time.

Inasmuch as decision rests with right rather than might — always apt to come up with justifications, historical ones included — the past should fade away before the *realities of the present* and the *free expression of options*. Romanian claims to Transylvania are only apparently validated by the Dacians or the Dacian-Romans. What does validate them effectively, nevertheless, is the fact that the substantial majority of the population is Romanian, and — should it ever come to that — most of the province inhabitants would resolutely manifest their allegiance to Romania. Had an inversion of the ethnic ratio occurred in Transylvania — a phenomena recorded in various parts of the world —, things would have been different. Who could demand that we return to the borders and ethnic proportions of several hundred years ago? The Kosovo case is instructive: here, the affirmation of Serbian duration and continuity clashes today with the much more convincing argument of a crushing Albanian majority. In this one respect, the Transylvanian question is as good as solved. Mythological exercises — be they Hungarian or Romanian — are of no consequence: Transylvania is unquestionably Romanian, and just as unquestionably, it is inhabited by a Hungarian minority whose specific rights ought to be recognized. Neither continuity, nor immigrations can alter one jot of the problem's data.

While keeping at bay Hungarian immigrationism, Romanian historians walked into a trap, particularly in the age of Ceaușescu, insistence upon the duration and continuity of the nation became the order of the day. Historical law was brought into the foreground, and — as nothing is certain and unambiguous in historical law, so much the less in the exquisitely intricate question of the Romanians' origin —, an unstable and controversial argument came to obscure the unquestionable reality: the predominantly Romanian character of Transylvania, regardless of what happened one or two thousand years ago. A flimsy argument ousted watertight argumentation. The recourse to history can have the boomerang effect. We have just admired the Romanian map of the Dridu culture, but it runs the risk of being replicated by the Bulgarian one. What are we to do, then: include Romania into Bulgaria or Bulgaria into Romania?

We do not consider renouncing the myths of foundation altogether, but having them de-dramatized and de-politicized is worthy of consideration. The question applies not to the Romanians exclusively, and not even to the Romanians in particular, but to all and sundry, at least in Central Europe, since the West, having allowed recent history to teach it a lesson, has

considerably curtailed its conflictual discourse regarding the origins. Europe is being established with current realities as a starting point, its current political and ethnographic map included. Involving the past into the present (actually, projecting the present upon the past) can lead to inextricable conflicts. It is only natural that each nation should love and respect its history, but it is an illusion (which might turn dangerous) that history has already marked the road we have to cover further. The responsibility for today rests with us, not with our ancestors; the future is not built facing the past.

Translated by Florin BICAN

<sup>1</sup> Gheorghe Șincai, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 282–283 and 289.

<sup>2</sup> B.P. Hasdeu, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 306–308.

<sup>3</sup> A.D. Xenopol, *Teoria lui Roesler. Studii asupra stăruinței Românilor în Dacia Traiană*, Tipografia Națională, Iași, 1884, p. 224.

<sup>4</sup> Dimitrie Onciul, „Teoria lui Roesler. Studii asupra stăruinței Românilor în Dacia Traiană de A.D. Xenopol. Dare de seamă critică”, in *Scrieri istorice (Historical Writings)*, Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu, ed., vol. 1, Editura Științifică, București, 1968, p. 224.

<sup>5</sup> Alexandru Philippide, *Originea românilor*, vol. 1, Iași, 1923, p. 854, and vol. 2, Iași, 1927, p. 569.

<sup>6</sup> Ovid Densusianu, *Histoire de la langue Roumaine*, vol. 1, Paris, 1902 (reprinted in Bucharest, 1929), pp. 288–289: „Un point où nous tombons d'accord avec Rösler c'est que le centre de la formation du roumain doit être placé au sud du Danube.”

<sup>7</sup> G.I. Brătianu, *O enigmă și un miracol istoric: poporul român*, Fundația pentru Literatură și Artă „Regele Carol II”, București, 1940, p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> P.P. Panaitescu, *Istoria Românilor*, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, București, 1990 (reprinting of the 1943 edition), p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> Vasile Pârvan, *Începuturile vieții romane la gurile Dunării*, second edition, Editura Științifică, București, 1974, p. 130.

<sup>10</sup> N. Iorga, *Istoria românilor pentru poporul românesc*, vol. I, p. 269.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> C.C. Giurescu, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 269.

<sup>13</sup> *Istoria României*, vol. I, Editura Academiei, București, 1960, pp. 776 and 808.

<sup>14</sup> *Istoria României* (Miron Constantinescu, Constantin Daicoviciu and Ștefan Pascu, editors), Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, București, 1969, pp. 103–106.

<sup>15</sup> *Istoria poporului român* (Andrei Oțetea, editor), Editura Științifică, București, 1970, p. 108.

<sup>16</sup> Ligiă Bârzu, *Continuitatea creației materiale și spirituale a poporului român pe teritoriul fostei Dacii*, Editura Academiei, București, 1979, p. 82.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 86, and Ligiă Bârzu and Stelian Brezeanu, *Originea și continuitatea românilor. Arheologie și tradiție isotrică*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1991, p. 213.

<sup>18</sup> Mihai Manea, Andrian Pascu, Bogdan Teodorescu, *Istoria Românilor. Din cele mai vechi timpuri până la revoluția din 1821 (The History of the Romanians. From the earliest times until the 1821 revolution)*, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, București, 1992, p. 173.

<sup>19</sup> The limits the discussion can range within are significantly revealed by Kurt Horedt (German archaeologist of Romanian origin, professor at Cluj University, later established in Germany) in his study *Siebenbürgen im Frühmittelalter*, Bonn, 1986. Horedt, whose familiarity with Romanian mediaeval archaeology is beyond dispute, considers that in the 7th century Transylvania was completely taken over by the Slavic influence, the Slavic age lasting till the 10th century. The Romanian element ostensibly occurs here only as late as the 9th century. This does not necessarily mean that the Romanian-German archaeologist is right; it only means that the problem is sufficiently complicated not to be addressed sententiously. The most recent contribution to the subject is the entry “Dridu”, written by Eugenia Zaharia for *The Encyclopaedia of the Ancient Archaeology and History of Romania* (scientific coordinator: Constantin Preda), vol. II, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1996, pp. 81–83. The interpretation reiterated here is that the culture in question is strictly Romanian and perfectly unitary in an area much larger than today’s Romania. Ion Nestor is mentioned, yet neither Constantin Daicoviciu nor Kurt Horedt receive any mention. Apparently, they do not deserve a reply, once they don’t think as they *ought* to...

<sup>20</sup> Programul Partidului Comunist Român..., p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> Carlo Tagliavini, *Originile limbilor neolatine*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1977, p. 300.