

REPRESENTING ROMANIA:
A MUSEUM AT THE CENTER OF ETHNIC STRUGGLE

By

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To my wife, I acknowledge that this, and much else that is good, would not exist without her.

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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This thesis is a study of the representational battle that has been waged over which group first established itself in Transylvania: speakers of Hungarian or speakers of Romanian. Specifically, this study focuses on how one museum, the National History Museum of Transylvania, in Cluj-Napoca, Romania (hereinafter, the “Museum”), has been used, first by Hungarians and then by Romanians, as a representational bulwark of ethnic defense against the claims of the opposing group.

Because Romanians today control the Museum (as they have for most of the past century), their methods of museological exhibition are the focus of the culminating third of this study. Detailed, critical attention is given to the techniques with which the exhibitions are designed to bolster commonly held Romanian theories about the ethnic settlement of Transylvania in the first millennium. Included in this section is a brief analysis of the way in which Romanian – and Hungarian – archaeologists have tried to prove their varying theories about which group settled there first. This is followed by a

brief review of the positive changes in historiography – if not museography – that have appeared since the political changes 15 years ago.

To appreciate the analysis of the Museum's exhibitions, it is necessary to understand the growth of Romanian nationalism from 17th-century Uniate Church leaders to the writers of the Transylvania School, who removed the religious element from the argument but added a call for the creation of a Romanian nation at a time when nation-building, partly based on theories of ethnogenesis, was a continent-wide trend. These are the subjects of the first third of this paper, which begins with a review of the era of museums that began in 18th-century England.

The middle third of the thesis examines the political growth of Romanian nationalism in the late-19th and 20th centuries and the differing attributes it acquired depending on the needs of the moment. From there, it will be shown how the Romanian Socialist government of the latter half of the 20th century inherited and promoted this nationalistic ideology, and how historians, archaeologists and museum designers who furthered these claims found a place of privilege for their work and themselves.

This study makes no attempt to determine which *ethnie*'s claim on Transylvania (that of Hungarians or Romanians) is correct. Indeed, nothing in this thesis will lend credence to the belief that an ethnic group has a greater claim to a piece of land based on whether it can prove to have first settled there. Still, it cannot be ignored that such contentions, particularly in Central Europe and the Balkans, have potency today. Rather, this study will attempt to show the bases upon which one group, the Romanians, make their claim and one of the ways, argumentative representation in a Museum, they attempt to prove it.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

On July 7, 1994, archaeologists began unloading excavation tools in the main square of Cluj-Napoca, Transylvania's principal city. Instantly, the pealing of church bells was heard across the ancient town, as "several thousand [ethnic] Hungarians"¹ rushed to the square to stop the dig, planned for a spot just in front of the statue of the 15th-century king of Hungary, Mátyás. Scuffles ensued between the demonstrators and police sent to protect the archaeological team, and, eventually, the national government stepped in to postpone, and ultimately limit, the planned excavation. Yet today, a sizeable pit remains exposed in the front of the square, a victory for Cluj-Napoca's nationalist mayor, Gheorghe Funar, who ordered the excavated dirt trucked away in order to leave permanently revealed the ruins of a building dating back almost 2000 years.

What lay exposed was not, and is not, spectacular to the eye: a few crumbled walls, modestly restored by archaeologists, make their way through dirt and rocks. The local archaeological community, Romanians and Hungarians alike, agree that the ruins are from the period of the Roman province Dacia, which lasted in the area from 106 to 271 A.D. What they do not agree upon is what relationship the residents of that province have to the people living today in Cluj-Napoca and the rest of Romania. It is a question that

¹ Michael Shafir, "Ethnic Tension Runs High in Romania," in *RFE/RL Research Report* 3, no. 32 (1994): 24.

underlies this study: which group of people, the Hungarians or the Romanians,² was first established in Transylvania? In this thesis, that question will not be answered. It cannot be, for the written sources and archaeological remnants of the time are sparse and open to interpretation. The opinions of archaeologists, ethnographers, historians and politicians can be quoted *ad infinitum*, and it will become readily apparent that neither side is willing to accept the evidence and arguments of the other. In most cases, they are not debating; they are preaching. Rather, this study will show how a battleground of representation, the National History Museum of Transylvania, was used by the Hungarian population in the 1800s, and the Romanian socialist government through most of the 20th century, to offer a one-sided answer to that question.

An essential plank of the socialist government's rule was its defense of both the Romanian *natio* and nation; thus, part of this study will focus on the way in which that government's nationalist rhetoric was directly reflected in the layout and exhibitions of the museum, particularly in the way it was designed during the early 1960s (and, for the most part, remains today). The thesis will trace the development of Romanian nationalist philosophy to the 18th-century and show how the arguments first written at that time moved through the centuries, were added to and modified, and ultimately became represented in the National History Museum of Transylvania,³ a product of the museum movement of the 19th-century and a tool of the nationalist movement and socialist government of Romania in the 20th-century.

² Throughout this study, the term "Romanians" is used for speakers of the Romanian tongue, even those who spoke it before a nation-state named Romania existed. Similar usage is occasionally employed with the term "Hungarian."

³ Hereinafter referred to as the "Museum."

Armed with their opposing theories, Hungarians and Romanians have argued for centuries over their “ownership“ of Transylvania. Control of the mountainous and richly forested area has changed hands three times in the last century, and deep divisions still linger among the area’s ethnically divided population. Therefore, attention will also be given to the way in which the Museum has served as a hub for ethnic Hungarians in Cluj-Napoca to continue their quest to regain Transylvania, or at least preserve what they see as their unique cultural heritage, through their own museum association and its publishing house.

Although the author does not purport to be an expert on archaeology, limited discussion will be given to the way in which nationalist sentiment, and governmental persuasion, pushed Romanian archaeologists and historians toward certain studies and conclusions, which are reflected in the museum today, representations that try to prove that present-day Romanian citizens can draw a line far backward to find their descendants—right back to that hole in the ground in the center of Cluj-Napoca and beyond, to the purported ancestors of the Romanians.

CHAPTER 2 THE ERA OF MUSEUMS

The National History Museum of Transylvania, from its founding in 1859 to its radical transformation a century later, provides a vivid reflection of several trends:

- The 19th-century boom in museums as centers of display for the achievements and history of dominant cultures
- The growing stature of archaeology in the 20th Century and the ability of found objects to tell tales
- The rising nationalism of the modern era in Europe
- The careful use, particularly by communist and socialist governments, of myths of ethnogenesis, archaeological finds and museum presentation

As well as reflecting trends occurring broadly throughout the West, the story of the Museum stands as a uniquely fascinating tale because of the tumultuous history of modern Transylvania. When the Museum first opened in 1859, it was envisioned as a tool for “defending the national being”¹ of the Hungarian population of Transylvania. A decade earlier, the Hungarians had failed to throw off the rule of Vienna, and the battles in Transylvania had been against not only Austrian forces but also Romanian peasantry who were fighting Hungarian dominance both independently and as part of the Habsburg army.² A decade later, that stifled Romanian population, still mostly members of the peasantry, stared at the Hungarian elite from below, while from above the dicta of Vienna ruled the land. Although the founders of the museum stressed at the time that “theology

¹ András Kiss and Randolph Wolf, “The Archives of the Transylvania Museum, 1842-1950,” *Transylvania Review* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 73.

² Keith Hitchins, *The Romanians, 1744-1866* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 249-266.

and politics are not in the interest of the museum,”³ a century later the Museum Association’s general director determined that the Hungarian intelligentsia and aristocracy in Transylvania had sought

to create – by personal endeavor – its own institutions as superior cultural weapons in keeping their own people alive. This was imposed by the wish to safeguard the national being and this is why these institutions were more than mere scientific institutions.⁴

This was not a unique approach. In England, home to the first modern museums, the elite also sought through object display something akin to the Transylvanians but slightly different, due to the less-beleaguered circumstances of the English. Here, starting with the founding of the British Museum in 1759, the keepers of “cabinets of curiosity” released to institutions their collected wonders in order to celebrate the progress made since the Enlightenment in discovering the true nature of the world. While these new institutions (90 more museums opened in England within the next 100 years) were not designed to safeguard the English people from cultural takeover, they were designed to promote an idea central to that nation’s imperial mood: progress. In them, each object was exhibited

within the legitimating context of the modern, linear narrative, which tacitly promotes the idea of progress. The homogenous form of the museum display represents the past as an undifferentiated path of progress towards the modern, where our discovery of past material legitimates the modern Western position as inheritor of civilization⁵

³ *Pesti Napló*, 22 November 1859: 3.

⁴ András Kiss and Randolph Wolf, “The Archives of the Transylvania Museum, 1842-1950,” *Transylvania Review* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 72-73.

⁵ Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World* (Routledge: London, 1992), 36.

The motif of the museum moved westward across Europe in the 19th-century (the Danish National Museum was opened in 1819; the first German museum in 1830), arriving in Transylvania about the same time as the year of revolution, 1848, when continent-wide revolts sought to overthrow the dominant, aristocratic powers that ruled Europe. While they themselves represented an oppressive aristocracy to the peasants of Transylvania, the Hungarian-speaking Transylvanians viewed the situation differently. They saw a need to cast off a century and a half of Viennese rule and become either autonomous or a part of contiguous Hungary. Thus, the museum was seen as one step toward “defending the national being by the use of science and culture,”⁶ according to András Kiss,⁷ the recently retired general director of the (ethnically Hungarian) Transylvanian Museum Association. The objects displayed each represented slices of the history of the Hungarian-Transylvanian population, which had long held economic and political dominance over the other ethnic groups in the region: the Romanians and the Saxons. Thus, a key part of the new museum’s collection consisted of manuscripts, parchments and edicts written by Hungarian academics or issued by Hungarian rulers since their settlement in the region in the 9th century. Other parts of the collection included Hungarian coins and a wide variety of crops and herbs used by Hungarian farmers, all remnants and markers of Hungarian culture.

As evident above, post-modern critiques of the museum work of the 18th and 19th-century often attack these institutions as “the corpus of construction produced by

⁶ András Kiss and Randolph Wolf, “The Archives of the Transylvania Museum, 1842-1950,” *Transylvania Review* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 73.

⁷ While Hungarians invert their names (e.g., Kiss András), in this study they shall be printed family name last.

dominant social groups in an effort to show that their interests are ‘natural’ and ‘correct.’”⁸ This criticism will become even more relevant when we examine the ways in which the tools of the museum were manipulated by the Romanian government after World War II in order to promote a version of history that supported its claim as the rightful inheritor of Transylvania. When combined with the new archaeological fervor and long-held, nationalistic theories of Romanian ethnogenesis, the museum stood, and stands, as a testament to the way in which representation can serve power.

A walk today through the Museum, as laid out between 1961 and 1963 by Romanian archaeologist Constantine Daicoviciu (1898-1973), leaves no doubt as to its implied message. It is written on none of the walls or display cards, but any visitor familiar with the dominant theories of Romanian ethnogenesis cannot miss that the Museum is, essentially, one extended argument, just as Kevin Walsh would say that the British Museum has implicitly argued for the superiority of the English people.⁹ The point of the Romanian Museum? That the Romanian people are the direct descendants of two civilizations that occupied Transylvania almost two thousand years ago, Dacia and Roman Dacia, and that this line of descent predates any Hungarian settlement in the region and supercedes any Hungarian claim to a right of possession of Transylvania.

To most Hungarian observers interviewed for this study, both lay and academic, the Museum is an elaborate display of a fictitious, or at best unproven, story. Even if that is

⁸ Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (London: Leicester University Press, 1992), 234.

⁹ Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern world* (London: Routledge, 1992), 1-6.

so, it is a story that stands at the center of modern Romanian consciousness, and as such, is an integral part of this study.

CHAPTER 3 THE BIRTH OF ROMANIAN NATIONALISM

The largest section of the present-day Museum, at almost 2,000 square feet,¹ is dedicated to the period of Roman occupation of the area. While that period and those occupiers two millennia ago seem foremost in the minds of modern Romanian museum designers, they achieved conceptual importance only three centuries ago, during a period in European history when many ethnic groups were establishing for themselves grand theories of ethnogenesis, often with the intent of proving primacy on the land they sought and achieving the political status they desired.

At the end of the seventeenth century, the Transylvanian Romanians sought to evolve from an underprivileged *ethnie* to a *natio* of equal status with the Hungarians, Saxon-Germans and Szeklers, the groups that wielded most of the economic and political power in the mountain-bounded region. Their efforts would begin a three-centuries-long process, utilizing a massive confessional conversion and the creation of a new history for their people and their language. While these efforts began as a religious movement pursued by religious authorities seeking religious equality, within a century the movement possessed a secular essence. It sought equality and rights for the Romanians as a nation, beginning with the union of the Romanian Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic Church in 1699 and punctuated with the publishing of a prominent political treatise, the *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* (hereafter *SLV*) of 1791, the “most important

¹ Measurements made by the writer in June 2003.

single political act of the Romanians in the 18th century,”² which demanded equal status in the province for all Romanians, clerical and lay, and which used the ethnogenetic arguments that had been primarily formed by religious leaders over the preceding century.³

A Cause for Union

That century of representation had its roots in the Turkish conquest of Hungary (and essential political control over Transylvania) for one and one half centuries starting in the mid-1500s. Following the decisive defeat of the Turks by the Habsburg armies in the 1680s, the Turkish forays into the Carpathian basin and surrounding regions ended. Although the battle had been won, Habsburg Emperor Leopold I valued Transylvania as a defensive line against future northwestwardly incursions by the Turks. The Romanians, he felt, could play a key role in stabilizing the province for the empire. “For the first time, the Orthodox Rumanians [sic] became the special object of the court’s attention. Comprising nearly one-half the total population of Transylvania, they could, if managed properly, so the court thought, become a bulwark of Catholicism,”⁴ according to noted Romanian-history scholar Keith Hitchins. Thus, the court sought to convince the Romanian Orthodox clergy to form a union with the Roman Catholic Church. The Orthodox clergymen had significant motivation to seek such a union. They lived a life

² Keith Hitchins, *A Nation Discovered: Romanian Intellectuals in Transylvania and the Idea of Nation, 1700-1848* (Bucharest: The Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1999), 135.

³ Ketherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 31, credits the 17th-century “Chroniclers (cronicarii)” of Wallachia and Moldovia as the first group *outside* of Transylvania to articulate the Roman descent theory.

⁴ Keith Hitchins, “An East European Elite in the Eighteenth Century: the Rumanian Uniate Hierarchy,” in *The Rich, the Well Born and the Powerful: Elites and Upper Classes in History*, ed. Frederic Cople Jaher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 140.

similar to the common Romanian peasant; the Orthodox Church owned little land and the clergy was prohibited from collecting tithes from the faithful. Most Orthodox clergy owed a percentage of their monthly labor to the (usually Hungarian) landlord. “In education, dress and way of life, there was little to distinguish him (an Orthodox clergyman) from the other inhabitants of the village.”⁵

Within a few years, the Habsburgs and their Catholic allies in Hungary convinced the Romanian Orthodox clergy in Transylvania that a union between the two churches was beneficial; thus was born the Uniate Church of Transylvania, also known as the Greek Catholic church.

While seeking an improvement in their station, they also sought recognition of equality of status. At the time, the Transylvanian Diet had legislatively recognized only three official *natio*s: the Saxons, the Hungarians (Magyars) and the Szeklers; in addition, four religions had the official “received” status from the ruling class: Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism (Reformationism) and Unitarianism. Only these *natio*s and denominations were protected from official interference. The Romanian speakers as a people and as a religious group lacked equality both in fact and in law. Habsburg Emperor Leopold I changed that, at least on paper. In 1699, he issued what is now called the First Leopoldine Diploma. In it, he promised any Romanian Orthodox clergyman who united with the Catholic Church a status equal to Catholic clergy. Two years later, in response to the urging of Metropolitan Anghel Atanasie, the court issued the Second Leopoldine Diploma, delineating more specifically the rights of the new Uniates and

⁵ Hitchins, Keith. “An East European Elite in the Eighteenth Century: the Rumanian Uniate Hierarchy,” in *The Rich, the Well Born and the Powerful: Elites and Upper Classes in History*, ed. Frederic Cople Jaher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 141.

expanding those rights to any lay people who united as well. While the first of the two promises would prove difficult to attain in the coming decades, the second was outright ignored by the local Diet and by Vienna. Disappointment over the failure to implement either promise drove a group of Romanian clergymen, almost a century later, to issue the *Supplex Libellus Valachorum (SLV)*, the Little Book of the Romanians.

The Fathers of the Romanian Nationalist Movement

Visitors to the museum today, who see the facility in essentially the same shape as Daicoviciu laid it out, are offered three guidebooks, “Dacia,” “Roman,” and “Modern.” This is a strong indication, but not the only one, as to which eras of Transylvanian history the Museum operators consider most important. That the 165-year Roman period, the shortest of any of the major eras the museum exhibits, is given such prominence is directly attributable to the efforts of a group of 18th-century writers known as the Transylvanian School, the authors of the *SLV*.

These men were all Greek Catholics and can be seen as the progeny of a long line of politically active Uniate clergy, tracing their roots back to the Orthodox leaders, Metropolitans Teofil and Atanasie, who negotiated the original union with the Catholic Church. To understand how a direct line can be traced through the eighteenth century to the writers of the *SLV* and into today’s Museum, we must first look at the key figures in Uniate church history, who happened to also be the main proponents of Romanian enfranchisement and the creators of the new Romanian historical story.

Whereas Atanasie and Teofil completed the union agreement, the main ecclesiastical figure remains Ion Inochentie Klein (1700-1768).⁶ Bishop Klein ruled the Uniate church from 1729 until 1751, when his political activism in support of Romanian equality cost him his position.

Klein's efforts can be summarized as twofold: promoting the Uniate church amongst the Romanians, and securing the promises of clerical equality found in the first Leopoldine *diploma*. Modern scholars disagree on whether he sought equality for all Romanians—serfs and peasants included. There is, however, no doubt that by 1791, the inheritors of Klein's efforts sought precisely that. To Klein fell the task of paving the road by introducing into the public forum ideas that had circulated only at the village level of folk consciousness: the ancient descent of Romanians from Roman colonists. According to Romanian historian Lucian Boia,

Until the 'age of nations,' the Romanians felt no need to delimit themselves clearly from the Slavs surrounding them. They too were Orthodox, and religion, with its reflections in culture, counted more than ethnic origin. Once they had entered the national phase, however, separation from the Slavic world and closer links with 'Latin sisters' in the West entered the agenda. Rome became a more powerful symbol than Byzantium, not only for the Transylvanian Greek Catholics, but for all Romanians.⁷

In a 1735 petition to the Habsburg emperor, Klein raised in an official forum for the first time the claim that the Romanians were the most ancient group living in Transylvania. The foundation for his theory lay with the Roman conqueror Trajan, the 2nd-century leader who subdued the residents of the land that would become the Roman colony Dacia, which encompassed what is now Transylvania as well as neighboring lands

⁶ Klein was born Ion Inochentie Micu (Romanian for "small") and Germanized his name after the church union, adopting the German surname meaning "small." He is variously referred to as Micu, Klein and Micu-Klein.

⁷ Lucian Boia, *Romania: Borderland of Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 36-7.

to the east and south. The argument, although still in its infancy, would become highly developed and widespread in the coming decades, primarily through the efforts of Uniate clergy and lay intellectuals.

Inside the grandest room of today's museum stands an eight-foot tall reproduction of Trajan's famous column; Klein's 18th-century claims have become widely accepted amongst the Romanian population. Indeed, many Transylvanian Romanians consider Trajan to be one of the fathers of the country, akin to George Washington for Americans. This can be traced back to the early efforts of Klein to emphasize the ancient descent of his impoverished and disenfranchised fellow speakers of Romanian.

Klein's lasting mark is seen in the establishment of Blaj as a center of Uniate education and culture. He promoted the establishment of four Uniate schools, a Uniate seminary and a cathedral. Between 1760 and 1780, the seminaries and other schools established by the Greek Catholic bishopric in Blaj instructed an average of 300 pupils a year.⁸

The schools and monasteries of Blaj brought together clerics who shared a common intellectual heritage and pursued similar goals. Through their labors the idea of nation was further clarified and a new generation of intellectuals formed," Hitchins writes. "They thus provided continuity between the estate-nation conception of Klein and the linguistic and historical nation of the Transylvanian School in the final decades of the eighteenth century,"⁹

It was in these schools that each of the writers of the *SLV* received a strong grounding in the ideas of the unrecognized, ancient history of the Romanians.

⁸ James Niessen, "The Greek Catholic Church and the Romanian Nation in Transylvania," in *Religious Compromise, Political Salvation: the Greek Catholic Church and Nation-Building in Eastern Europe*, ed. James Niessen (Pittsburgh: The Center for Russian and East European Studies, 1993), 49.

⁹ Keith Hitchins, *A Nation Discovered: Romanian Intellectuals in Transylvania and the Idea of Nation, 1700-1848* (Bucharest: The Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1999), 88.

The Authors of the *SLV*

Because it was sent to the emperor signed “the Clergy, the Nobility, the Military and the Urban Estates of the whole Romanian nation of Transylvania,” the authorship of the *SLV* is not known for certain. Various writers offer their own lists of likely candidates, but three names appear foremost on every list: Samuil Micu, Gheorghe Șincai and Petru Maior. Together, the three comprise the heart of what is now called the Transylvanian School. Their writings laid the foundation of Romanian nationalism, and this new ideology received its full expression in the *SLV*. Fifty-seven years afterward, when the 1848 revolution punctuated a century-and-a-half of Romanian agitation, the ideas expressed by the revolutionaries, most of whom taught in Blaj schools, differed little from those expressed in the *SLV*.

Micu-Klein (1745-1806) was the grandson of Bishop Klein and received his education in Blaj, Vienna and Rome. His grandfather’s efforts had secured three spots per year for Romanians at the College for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, and his grandson was the beneficiary of that agreement, according to James Niessen, an historian of Eastern-Europe,

Greek Catholics studying in Vienna and Rome were impressed by the similarity of the Romanian and the Latin languages. Convinced that the church union constituted the return of the Rumanians to their original form of Christianity, they developed existing theories of the Rumanians’ Roman origins and their own historic and linguistic research into a national ideology.¹⁰

Micu-Klein authored the Short Historical Outline of the Daco-Romanian nation in 1778. Two years later, he co-authored *The Roots of the Daco-Romanian or Wallachian*

¹⁰ James Niessen, “The Greek Catholic Church and the Romanian Nation in Transylvania,” in *Religious Compromise, Political Salvation: the Greek Catholic Church and Nation-Building in Eastern Europe*, ed. James Niessen (Pittsburgh: The Center for Russian and East European Studies, 1993), 50.

Language with Șincai (1754-1816), the first Romanian grammar book to appear in print, revealing the tongue's Latin origins, suggesting a Latin-based etymological guide to spelling, and promoting the adoption of Latin words to enrich the vocabulary.¹¹ Both works were published in Latin, emphasizing the idea that Romanian was a language sprung from the Latin tree.

The third member of the group, Maior (1761-1821), was younger than the other two, but his 1812 *History of the Beginnings of the Romanians in Dacia* ultimately proved to be “one of the most influential Romanian books of its time” and a revered part of the ideology of the 1848 revolutionaries.¹²

Analysis of the Arguments of the *SLV*

Here, in brief summation, is the version of history that, in 1700, existed only in Romanian folk consciousness, but which, by 1791, was the near-unanimous version put forth by Transylvania's new, Uniate intellectual class. More than 200 years later, it is the story that underlies much of the Museum's exhibition. The central themes are delivered early in the petition, contained in a tight second paragraph that synthesizes several decades of theorization: “The Romanian nation is the most ancient of all nations of Transylvania. It traces its descent back to Trajan's colonists, who have lived there continuously since their first settlement.”¹³

¹¹ Georges Castellan, *A History of the Romanians*, trans. Nicholas Bradley (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1989), 113-14.

¹² Keith Hitchins, *A Nation Discovered: Romanian Intellectuals in Transylvania and the Idea of Nation, 1700-1848* (Bucharest: The Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1999), 123.

¹³ David Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum, or the Political Struggle of the Romanians in Transylvania During the 18th Century*, trans. Mary Lăzărescu (Bucharest: Publishing House of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, 1971), 10.

Trajan's colonists were the soldiers and inhabitants of the Roman colony of Dacia, the first Roman colony north of the Danube. When Rome retreated south in the third century, the written record of the area becomes scant for half of a millennium. The theory developed by the Transylvanian School and its predecessors is that the farmers and other non-soldiers of Dacia, possessing a mixture of Dacian and Roman blood, remained in Transylvania after the army left and continuously occupied the region thereafter.

The second paragraph continues:

The invasions of the barbarians (the Huns, Visigoths and others) could not replace them (the Dacian remnants). Staving off foreign rule until the coming of the Hungarians, they have lived there under princes elected from their own midst. The name of Vlach, by which they were known when the Hungarians found them there, is merely the term applied to the Romans and the Italic people or Latin peoples by the Slavs.¹⁴

Among these statements, few were, or are, accepted by Hungarian historians, who have comprised the main opposition to the Uniate theories. This is hardly surprising considering the struggle over Transylvania that has ensued over the last 300 years between Hungary and Romania. Austria (and, after 1867, Hungary) controlled the land until the conclusion of World War I, when Allied forces instituted new borders for the defeated Austro-Hungarian Empire. These new borders awarded all of Transylvania to Romania, leaving more than one million Hungarian-language speakers inside Romania. Except for four years during World War II, Romania has controlled the province ever since, and while the two nations have avoided military confrontation, their historians, archaeologists and linguists battle to this day over a dark and distant era, book-ended by the departure of Rome and the coming of the Hungarians seven centuries later.

¹⁴ David Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum, or the Political Struggle of the Romanians in Transylvania During the 18th Century*, trans. Mary Lăzărescu (Bucharest: Publishing House of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, 1971), 10.

Anonymus

Ironically, at the center of the Romanian claims, and much quoted in the Museum today, are the words of a 12th-century, *Hungarian* notary of King Béla III, a figure whose identity is unknown but not his moniker: Anonymus. The argument continues a few pages later:

According to the Anonymus Notary of King Béla, when the Hungarians invaded Transylvania under the duke Tuhutum they found the Romanians there, ruled by a duke of their own, Gelu. But in his struggle against the Hungarians to defend his country, Gelu was unfortunate, for he lost both his duchy and his life. Seeing the sad fate of their prince, the Romanians ceased their resistance to the Hungarians. Surrendering by their own free will, they elected Tuhutum as their prince too and took an oath of allegiance to him.¹⁵

Around a brief description provided by Anonymus, the Transylvanian School built theories that remain today at the foundation of Romanian historiography and museum representation (although the fall of socialism in the last decade has led to a more-varied presentation of views).

Thus, it must be asked: could Anonymus have provided a clear picture of events predating him by two centuries? Hungarian historians have gone to great lengths to argue he could not have.

Hungarian historian György Györffy believes all of Anonymus's historiography is suspect.

He had no written sources about the event as the modern historian does ... He presented numerous Hungarian heroes in his pages and in many cases mentioned

¹⁵ David Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum, or the Political Struggle of the Romanians in Transylvania During the 18th Century*, trans. Mary Lăzărescu (Bucharest: Publishing House of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, 1971), 10-11.

that the descendants of these heroes were still living and working on that land their ancestors had conquered.¹⁶

This, Győrffy believes, was a way of sycophantically reflecting backward in time a glorious history for contemporary aristocrats.

Anonymus recounted these episodes of the conquest in a very colorful and interesting manner. He also presented these episodes throughout his work, pointing out how a certain leader conquered that land which his descendants now owned. It was in this way that his work spoke meaningfully to his contemporaries. We must somehow imagine that Anonymus, as Béla III's notary, was well acquainted with the aristocratic circles and thus was in a position to listen to the stories recounted by the aristocrats about their ancestors; from these he attempted to put together some kind of romantic gesta.¹⁷

Another Hungarian historian, Gábor Vékony, offers his own explanation of why Anonymus mentioned by name certain nationalities as inhabitants of the area when the Hungarians arrived: that these groups were known to Anonymus from contemporary battles. "Russians, Serbs and Poles were not included. In other words, if Anonymus listed the *Blaci* (Rumanians) as 9th century inhabitants of the Carpathian Basin, that could only mean that in the mid-13th century they only knew of Vlachs beyond the Carpathians"¹⁸ Other Hungarian historians reflect similar skepticism, while many Romanian historians (and archaeologists) have accepted Anonymus's descriptions as fact.

If Anonymus's history is accurate, that would bolster a further claim of the *SLV* (and many modern Romanian historians): "As regards religion, the Romanians were

¹⁶ Győrffy, György. "Who Were the People Living in the Carpathian Basin Before the Hungarian Conquest?" Edited by Thomas Szendrey. In *Transylvania and the Theory of Daco-Roman-Rumanian Continuity*. New York: Committee of Transylvania, 1980. 51.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

already Christians at the time of Roman rule.”¹⁹ Thus, the line of reasoning goes from continual Romanian occupation of the territory to continual Romanian Christianity. There is no proof offered in the *SLV* of the latter claim, but predicated on the words of Anonymus, it could be deduced that the Daco-Romans left in the province adopted Eastern Christianity long before the conversion of the Hungarians to Catholicism in 1,000 A.D. The writers of the *SLV* relied on this reasoning to argue to the new emperor in 1791 that Orthodoxy preceded the “received” religions in the province and deserved at least equal status. It will be seen later how Romanian archaeologists and museum designers have tried to prove this continual Christian presence in the Museum.

Hitchins, for one, is unimpressed by the Transylvanian School’s ethnogenetic arguments. While addressing a similar line of reasoning in Micu’s monograph of 1812, Hitchins opined that

his (Micu’s) works display many of the qualities of modern historiography, but the critical attitude he tried to maintain toward his sources faltered whenever the nobility of the Romanians’ lineage and their historical rights came into question. His insistence upon the purity of Romanian descent from the Romans is a case in point. Shortcomings in Micu’s work may be attributed in part to the prevailing state of historical scholarship, but his general attitude was greatly influenced by the political and social milieu in which he was writing.²⁰

¹⁹ David Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum, or the Political Struggle of the Romanians in Transylvania During the 18th Century*, trans. Mary Lăzărescu (Bucharest: Publishing House of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, 1971), 11.

²⁰ Keith Hitchins, *A Nation Discovered: Romanian Intellectuals in Transylvania and the Idea of Nation, 1700-1848* (Bucharest: The Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1999), 121.

CHAPTER 4 FROM GOD TO COUNTRY

The mode of Eastern European state formation occurred as it did “because the Eastern Europeans lacked for most of modern history a national state. National consciousness drew on a variety of sources of inspiration, including religion, language, history and race. It appears, in fact, that religion was the key factor,”¹ writes Dennis Dunn.

The irony of the direction taken by the members of the Transylvanian School is that they almost completely abandoned the dedication of their forefathers to the Uniate church. Indeed, the *SLV* never pleads for rights of Uniates solely but rather for recognition of the equality of the “nation,” a concept that, decades earlier, had not included each peasant, serf and speaker of the Romanian tongue, but rather a limited group of clergy. In the eighteenth century, the term took on a new meaning.

The authors of the *Supplex Libellus Valachorum*“ claimed rights for all Romanians without regard to religion, and they presented their demands on behalf of the entire Romanian nation, Uniate and Orthodox together. They recognized as members of the nation every person of high status or low, who professed the same ethnic origin and spoke the same language.²

The political ideology of the Transylvanian School began in earnest with the union between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. From there, a group of determined Uniates strove to drag their Romanian brethren westward in religious orientation, inculcating them with the

¹ Dennis Dunn, “Nationalism and Religion in Eastern Europe,” in *Religion and Nationalism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1987), 11.

² Keith Hitchins, *A Nation Discovered: Romanian Intellectuals in Transylvania and the Idea of Nation, 1700-1848*, (Bucharest: The Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1999), 138.

ideas that their roots were west, in Rome, and not east, in lost Byzantium. Schools in which these ideologies were paramount, along with the study of Latin and Romanian's Latin roots, were seen as a way to further solidify this history in the minds of the people, pulling them up to a sense of historical entitlement.

The documentation of historical origins and the development of the Romanian nation by scholars of the Transylvanian School constructed an identity and commemorated it, establishing written sites of an official memory (as opposed to a living memory) of the Romanian people,³

writes American historian Tanya Dunlap. The "sites," in the form of historical texts, preserved Romanian intellectuals' efforts to shape their past and provide an official social memory for future scholars.

A culmination of the efforts to emphasize the Latin roots of the Romanian people came in 1859, the same year that the Transylvanian History Museum opened, when the Latin alphabet officially replaced the Cyrillic one for writing the Romanian language. Simultaneously, "a massive campaign was begun to 'restore' lapsed Latinisms into Romanian."⁴ Thus, less than a half century after their deaths, the Latinizing efforts of two members of the Transylvanian School, Micu-Klein and Șincai, were reified. "The works of the Transylvanian School laid the conceptual foundation of a modern Romanian nation. Their officially documented social memories, inscribed in print, established the building blocks of a modern Romanian national identity."⁵

³ Tanya Dunlap, "A Discourse of memory: A History of the Romanians of Transylvania," (paper presented at a conference on "State and Nation Building in East Central Europe," Institute on East Central Europe, Columbia University, March 1996), 8-9.

⁴ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 35.

⁵ Tanya Dunlap, "A Discourse of memory: A History of the Romanians of Transylvania" (paper presented at a conference on "State and Nation Building in East Central Europe," Institute on East Central Europe, Columbia University, March 1996), 8-9.

By 1849, Romanian leaders seeking sovereignty for the Romanian population of Transylvania had adopted this concept, urging equality for the Romanian “nation,” a term that entailed an ethnic, rather than a political, grouping.

Subsequently, Romanian authors throughout the mid- and late-1800s sought Europe-wide recognition of “Romanians’ western nature,” and first published some of their major works in French and German, according to Katherine Verdery, a specialist on Romanian history. To escape the heavy dominance of the major powers surrounding them would require the eventual support of outsiders, and such support would more likely come for a disadvantaged ethnic group unjustly denied their proper homeland. By 1920, the help had come.

CHAPTER 5 NATION BUILDING

In the basement of the Transylvanian History Museum is a large lapidary filled with Roman sarcophagi and stone detritus of buildings built during the era of Roman occupation. In the inner courtyard, rows of sarcophagi lend emphasis to the idea of direct descent from the Romans.

The creation stories begun by the Transylvanian School and their religious forebears were part of a larger European pattern, coinciding with efforts made across the continent during the late 18th- and early 19th-centuries.

This myth creation was notably analyzed by Anthony Smith, who writes that from the late 18th-century onward, most ethnic communities in Europe developed “myths of descent.” A common feature of this trend was a discovery of ethnic roots in the grandest and most powerful figures of historical lore. For a while, British writers claimed Brutus as an ancestor, while French historians drew a line back to both the Romans and the Trojans. Drawing on such ancestors gave these ethnic groups “claims to special identities, dignity and autonomy,”¹ Smith wrote, adding that

since the late eighteenth century, spokesmen for every ethnic community have made frequent appeals to their alleged ancestry and histories, in the struggle for recognition, rights and independence. In the course of these struggles, ethnic spokesmen have drawn on, or in some cases invented, a “myth of origins and descent” which then inspired writers and artists to recreate for their publics the events, atmosphere and heroic examples of remote, archaic eras ... By 1800, most

¹ Anthony Smith, “National Identity and Myths of Ethnic Descent,” *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change* 7 (1984): 111.

of Western Europe was caught in the romantic quest for origins; by 1850 it had spread to Eastern Europe.²

Yet, only three decades later, when subjugation still came from the West in the form of the Habsburg Empire, those seeking to promote the Romanian spirit began to search for more homegrown roots.

² Anthony Smith, "National Identity and Myths of Ethnic Descent," *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change* 7 (1984): 98.

CHAPTER 6 DECEBAL AND THE DACIANS

At the center of the Museum courtyard, one bust stands. It is that of Decebal, the last king of the Dacians, whose armies were defeated by Emperor Trajan's forces over a five-year battle. Decebal's prominent position is contrasted with the rows of Roman artifacts surrounding him, providing an apt representation of a split that occurred in the last quarter of the 19th-century in the theories of Romanian ethnogenesis. Author Katherine Verdery credits writer and scholar Bogdan Hașdeu with popularizing the emphasis on (indigenous) Dacian descent that now holds equal place with Roman Dacian-ness in the ideology of Romanian descent. According to this idea, the essence of the Dacian people, part blood, part spirit, survived the defeat and occupation of the Romans. "Coupled with Romantic theories that a people's inner nature is determined by the soil on which it is formed, the Dacian emphasis chartered a 'manifest destiny' for restoring to Romanians all the soil of Daco-Roman cohabitation."¹

Inside of this essence, presumably, is the spirit of a strong people, whose ruler, Decebal, committed suicide rather than being taken prisoner by Trajan. The two spirits, the conqueror and the proud conquered, today embody the two sides of Romanian national consciousness: indigenous Dacian and Western Roman.

That a new theory of Dacian descent might take its place beside Roman-ness in Romanian national ideology in the late 19th century is likely a reflection of the particulars

¹ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 37.

of the time. After 1881, when two Romanian provinces, Wallachia and Moldavia, united to form the kingdom of Romania, all that was left for Romanian nationalists to gain was Transylvania. Thus, claiming that the Romanian “essence” included a large portion of leftover Dacian-ness was akin to pushing back the primacy of Romanians several centuries. It also played well to a polity trying to rid itself of outside dominance.

Through its emphases, Dacianism stood at the heart of what became a quest to define the “national essence,” integral to defining Romania’s future trajectory. By associating itself with what was unique and original in the Romanian character, rather than with ‘imports,’ Dacianism became central to a posited pristine ethnic ego.²

That different theories would be the products of different eras supports a view of history suggested by Edward Hallett Carr, who wrote, “There is no more significant pointer to the character of a society than the kind of history it writes or fails to write ...The historian, before he begins to write history, is the product of history.”³

Inside the museum, as will be demonstrated later in this study, the two divergent roots of Romanian national consciousness, Roman and Dacian, are both given places of honor.

² Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 38.

³ Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 48, 53.

CHAPTER 7 THE INTERBELLUM

Patience was replaced by lawless impatience, the regular work by corruption, peace by humiliation and insult. The old staff slowly disappeared and the pay for the self-sacrificing work was that one of the elderly clerks was physically assaulted and the writer of this paper put into prison after a mean and base intrigue.¹

Nineteen forty-one must have been a time of mixed anger and joy for Hungarian archaeologist Marton Roska as he wrote the above description of the post-World War I-era in the introduction for the newly restarted journal of the Coin and Antiques Collection of the Transylvania Museum Association. After 22 years (1918-1940) of Romanian control of Transylvania, the Museum, and its collections, German Chancellor Adolf Hitler returned the northern part of Transylvania, including Cluj-Napoca, to Hungarian control on Aug. 30, 1940. Twelve days later, the Romanian museum staff fled (along with a portion of the museum's collections) to Sibiu, a southern Transylvanian town still under Romanian control. There they would stay until 1944, when Romania regained control of the entire province. Meanwhile, Hungarian academics reacquainted themselves with collections over which they had lost control after World War I. The coin and antiques collections, for example, were stored in the library of the University of Cluj, which had been controlled by Hungarians before the Romanian government took it over in May 1919 and changed its name from the University of Kolozsvár.

¹ Márton Roska, "Előljáróba," (Introduction) *Közlemények az Erdélyi Múzeum Érem És Régiséggyűjtéséből* (*Journal of the Coin and Antique Collection of the Transylvanian National Museum*) 1 (1941): 3.

The interbellum years were characterized by far more collegial cooperation between Romanian and Hungarian academics than the period following World War II. The coin and antique collection, for example, was managed from 1919 to 1929 by Professor Dimitrie Teodorescu (1881-1947), “a good expert, an empathetic and high-minded colleague who had respect for the pain of his (Hungarian) colleagues,”² Roska later wrote. The actions of Teodorescu’s successors inspired the complaints of which Roska wrote in the above introduction to the restarted journal.

This collegiality extended to other elements of the collections.³ While the archives of the Transylvanian Museum Association (a vast collection of manuscripts, family histories, minutes of the legislative Diet and correspondence amongst nobility) transferred to Romanian control in 1919, a Hungarian curator, Lajos Kelemen (1877-1963), was retained to manage it. Even when a Romanian took control of the archives in 1936 after Kelemen’s retirement, the collegial mood continued. According to Kiss, the new curator, Romanian historian David Prodan,

was a specialist, a man of culture driven by European ideas. He tried to deal in good faith and to the best of his ability with the requirements of his work, so when the Romanian authorities were evacuated in 1940, the Archive suffered no loss, owing to his good will and honour.⁴

² Márton Roska, “Előljáróba” (Introduction) *Közlemények az Erdélyi Múzeum Érem És Régiséggyűjtéséből* (*Journal of the Coin and Antique Collection of the Transylvanian National Museum*) 1 (1941): 3.

³ The collections of the Transylvania Museum Association were not kept in one location prior to the 1930s. Indeed, the Association did not even acquire the building that serves today as the Museum until 1912. Prior to that, most of the collections were stored at the library of the University of Kolosvar (later: Cluj).

⁴ András Kiss and Randolph Wolf, “The Archives of the Transylvania Museum, 1842-1950,” *Transylvania Review* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 79.

Still, the inter-war years so greatly affected the finances of the Association that it had to discontinue publication of its scientific journals from the end of World War I until 1930.⁵

Meanwhile, the Romanian authorities were solidifying their control of the Museum and its collections, creating the Institute of Classical Studies in 1929 to redesign and control the museum. In 1935, the government added a third side to the building,⁶ and, two years later, the new exhibits were opened. The organization was a stark contrast to the way Hungarian academics had presented the history of the region. Under its original layout, the Museum's collections had focused on the following areas:⁷

- Books and manuscripts
- Coins and antiques
- Herbs and crop history
- Art

In essence, the entire Museum had been dedicated to preserving and commemorating the actions of the Hungarian-speaking population of Transylvania during the previous millennium. When the Romanians took over, the focus shifted completely, moving almost two millennia into the past for the bulk of its presentation. The Institute organized the building not by subject matter but by time period, categorizing in the following manner those items deemed exhibition-worthy:

- First Floor—Rome and the Middle Ages
- Second Floor—Prehistoric times and the Daco-Roman era (including Dacia and Roman Dacia)

⁵ Samu Benkő, “Köszöntjük az Olvasót” (Greetings to the reader), *Erdelyi Múzeum* 1-4 (1991): frontispiece.

⁶ Radu Belcean, “Istoria Muzeului National de Istorie a Transilvaniei,” (The History of the National History Museum of Transylvania), *Gazeta de Cluj*, March 2003: 16.

⁷ *Pesti Napló*, 22 November 1859: 3.

- Third Floor—Continuation of the Daco-Roman era, Greek and Egyptian collections, the Middle Ages and Modern Art (i.e., Romanian art of the 20th century)

The new system removed almost all traces of the second millennium and the Hungarians who controlled most of Transylvania during it, supplanting it with the proclaimed forefathers of Romania and a modicum of items that offered no contradiction to the theory of Daco-Roman descent. It is a system, as will be examined later, that continues essentially unchanged in the same building today.

The bulk of the Museum's exhibits since the 1930s (excepting 1940-44) has been objects uncovered at archaeological sites throughout Transylvania. More than a dozen ethnic groups, tribes and civilizations have called the area home since prehistoric times, and each has left material remnants of their occupation. It is those remnants that have been the centerpieces of the Museum for most of the last 70 years and have comprised the physical representation of Romania's answer to the centuries-old argument about which culture first occupied Transylvania: Hungary's or Romania's. While the objects cannot declare a verdict, others contend to have heard their judgment clearly.

CHAPTER 8 ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE NATION

In the early 1900s, the growing field of medieval archaeology combined with the modern nationalist movement to create a governmental-academic bond that lingers today—despite its questionable use by some of the most repressive governments of the modern era. One of the more prominent archaeologists of the early 20th century was German Gustav Kossina, who proposed that “ideas and influences were passed from more advanced peoples to less advanced peoples with whom they came into contact.”¹ This theory folded neatly into the Nazis’ effort to expand Germany through both military and academic imperialism. Kossina’s theory of “settlement archaeology” held that if similar shards of pottery were found at archaeological sites in Germany and Poland then that was vindication of Germany’s future territorial aspirations.

Maps showing the distribution of Germanic artifacts were also believed to show the prehistoric settlement or territory of the Germans. Such maps were then used by the Nazis to bolster their expansionist policies: wherever a find was determined to be Germanic, the land was marked as ancient German territory. In this way, Kossina arranged the chronologies so that everything started in Germany and Scandinavia far back in prehistory and spread from there to Germany’s inferiors.²

Joseph Stalin encouraged similar conclusions by his archaeologists in support of the Slavic nature of most Soviet territory, and to judge by the charges of their critics, both

¹ Barbara G. Scott, “Archaeology and National Identity: the Norwegian Example” (an expanded version of a paper presented at an annual meeting of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies in Austin, Texas, April 1993), 12.

² *Ibid.*, 12.

Hungarian and Romanian archaeologists also eventually adopted some of the methods of Kossina.

In order to validate Romanian claims to primacy in Transylvania, Romanian archaeologists had the job of verifying a history that posited continual Romanian (i.e., Daco-Roman) occupation of Transylvania from the time of the Roman withdrawal until the 9th-Century arrival of the Hungarians; in essence, to prove that the people who were the ancestors of today's Romanians were always in, and never left, Transylvania. To do this, they would have to complement the sparse written records with material finds. Thus, Romanian archaeologists were in the same position as the historians: arguing from scant evidence a strong theory of the past, one that bolstered Romanian claims to Transylvania.

Romanian historians and archaeologists showed a willingness to produce such works during the 1930s and 1940s, but their progress was postponed in 1947, when the Romanian Communist Party called for a rewriting of the nation's history. To accomplish this, the Party abolished the Romanian Academy, replacing it with one with a Party-selected membership. At the same time, multiple research institutes for history were coalesced into a single entity controlled by the state and 80 percent of professors lost their posts because of "bourgeois" leanings.³ For five years, those who could produce materialist interpretations of history consistent with Marxist dogma were moved into university posts and given publishing freedom. However, the momentum of more than two centuries of seeking the "national essence" was overwhelming, and by the mid-1950s, particularly after Nikita Khrushchev's anti-Stalinist proclamation, the call for

³ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 110.

Marxist histories was fading, replaced by an even greater emphasis on history and archaeology that celebrated the ancient grandeur of Romania and Romanians.

Given the state control of the universities, the publishing houses and the institutes of history, Verdery writes, the pressures were understood well by academics:

first, many intellectuals made their living as state employees and expanded their disciplines at state expense. State bureaucrats were the people through whom one might gain ground by showing that one's image of Romanian identity, values for it, and manner of attending to it were better—more representative than those of others ... making the state bureaucracy virtually the sole employer and sustainer of culture.⁴

For the next four decades, academics who could reflect the state ideology found sufficient funding for all of their work. The pace of Romanian archaeological work quickened from the mid-1950s onward, particularly as the Romanian Communist Party and eventual leader Nicolae Ceaușescu rewarded academics for excavations that provided more proof of the Romanians' ancient heritage. Archaeological digs around the country produced items that were almost instantaneously identified as “Dacian”: cups, coins, belt buckles, etc., results that garnered derision from Budapest-based academics.

“A single pot of ceramics cannot be specifically dated, as if this is a Hungarian vessel. This is a false way of thinking,” charges Hungarian archaeologist Miklós Takács. Regarding the Daco-Roman thesis, he said, “Solely archaeological proof cannot be found.”⁵

Archaeologists on both sides of the border have complained about the secrecy surrounding some of the excavations, particularly that surrounding Dăbâca, said by many

⁴ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 73.

⁵ Interview by author, Budapest, Hungary, July 2003.

Romanians to be the 9th-century fortress of Gelou (also spelled: Gelu), the Daco-Roman prince who fought against the newly-arriving Hungarians, if Anonymus's historiography is to be believed. Despite more than a decade of digging at the site near Cluj-Napoca, only one, brief report has been published on the findings, and it is more than 30 years old.⁶

Romanian archaeologist and historian Florin Curta charges that the digs at Dăbâca have been widely publicized but poorly understood.

Romanian archaeologists made every effort possible to turn Dăbâca into a Transylvanian Troy and to prove that [Anonymus] was a reliable source for the medieval history of (Romanian) Transylvania ... Even if we were to admit that Dăbâca existed as a fort before the Hungarian conquest, it remains to be explained what was the role of the fortification within the local network of settlements, why was it erected in the first place, or what its function was. Merely assigning Dăbâca to Gelou does not explain anything.⁷

However, even today, the artifacts pulled from the ground at Dăbâca receive prominent placement in the museum, contributing to the overall argument of millennia-long Romanian occupation of the land. Indeed, in July 2003,⁸ the archaeologist in charge of the museum's post-Roman section, Dr. Ioana Hica, defended the interpretation of Dăbâca as Gelou's Daco-Roman fortress. Based on ancient texts, Hica said, "Gelou was killed on the left side of the Szamos (Romanian: Someș) River, and only Dăbâca has been found on that side." No further excavation of that site has occurred since the late 1980s, she added.

⁶ Florin Curta, "Transylvania Around A.D. 1000," in *Europe Around the Year 1000*, ed. Przemyslaw Urbanczyk (Warsaw: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, 2001), 147-48.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 148, 152.

⁸ Interview by author, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, July 2003.

Timothy Champion charges that archaeology driven by the engine of ancient documents suffers from the “tyranny of the historical record, in the sense that the programme for the archaeology of the historic period in Europe is set by history and the historic vision of the past ... regularly subordinated to those of the literary record.”⁹

This type of text-driven archaeology, Curta contends, is symptomatic of much of the work produced by the Party’s favored academics during the Communist era. In 1982, one of these prominent figures, historian Ștefan Pascu, director of the Institute of History and Archaeology at Cluj-Napoca, gave the following interpretation of some of the results of the digs.

As archaeological research continues, new proofs of the nature of the Daco-Roman civilization come to light. Roman coins of the fourth and fifth centuries, the great majority of bronze and a few of silver, have been discovered throughout the area. Bronze money reflects the humble socioeconomic status of its Daco-Roman users.¹⁰

The degree to which Pascu’s conclusions rankled Hungarian historians can be judged by the content of *Transylvania and the Rumanians*, a 1997 collaboration between three Hungarian historians. In the book, the authors spend 163 pages directly responding, page by page, to Pascu’s book. In response to Pascu’s commentary on coins, they write

It is an old assumption of Rumanian archeologists that bronze coins, i.e. coins of a lower value, must have been Daco-Roman since they are assumed to have been a poor population. Pascu reiterates this view, disregarding some important facts: bronze coins were most abundant along the Roman *limes*, where small-scale commerce flourished. Most of them are, in South-East Europe, found in Oltenia and in the Banat along the Danube. Many bronze coins from the 4th century were found between the Timis and the Mures rivers, where Sarmatian Iazyges were living in that period. In Transylvania, such coins are numerous beyond the territory

⁹ Timothy Champion, “Medieval Archaeology and the Tyranny of the Historical Record,” in *From the Baltic to the Black Sea: Studies in Medieval Archaeology*, ed. David Austin and Leslie Alcock (London, 1990): 91.

¹⁰ Ștefan Pascu, *A History of Transylvania*, trans. D. Robert Ladd (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), 32.

which once belonged to the Roman Empire ... Thus, finds of bronze coins cannot be used to determine the ethnic character of their users.¹¹

Hungarian archeologists are also accused of subjectively interpreting archeological evidence in a way that bolsters the oft-heard Hungarian theory about their arrival in Transylvania. To wit: when Hungarians entered Transylvania in 895, after a decades-long, westward migration, they found a land that “stood empty,”¹² there for the taking. While the mass of the “seven tribes” of Hungarian lore continued westward to the flat plains of former Roman Pannonia (present-day Hungary), a large contingent stayed behind and settled in Transylvania, particularly in the western section. Szeklers, linguistic relatives of theirs, subsequently established settlements in the southeastern corner of Transylvania, and their unbroken predominance in that area is indicated by their majority status there today.

Intent on proving this interpretation, Hungarian historian István Bóna wrote a large section of the controversial, 700-page *History of Transylvania*, a 1986 publication whose editor was the Hungarian Minister of Culture at the time, giving the book the government’s stamp of approval. Bóna’s section deals with the time period 271-1172, which includes the departure of the Roman troops and the arrival of the Hungarians.

After the Roman departure, Bóna wrote, “Southern Transylvania turned into a desolate and empty land.”¹³ Conversely, the western and central portions of Transylvania were alive from the early 10th Century onward with dense Hungarian occupation, Bóna

¹¹ Alain Du Nay, André Du Nay and Árpád Kosztin, *Transylvania and the Rumanians*. Hamilton and Buffalo: Matthias Corvinus Publishing, 1997: 28.

¹² Peter Sugar, *A History of Hungary* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 7.

¹³ István Bóna, “From Dacia to Transylvania: The Period of the Great Migrations (271-895),” in *History of Transylvania*, ed. Béla Köpeczi, trans. A. Chambers-Makkai *et al.* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1994), 79.

wrote, citing archeological finds, primarily from cemeteries. Intricate maps in the book show hundreds of Hungarian or Szekler settlements dotting the Transylvanian landscape by the middle of the 10th century, a time when Romanian historians say that Romanian principalities and *voivodates* (small Romanian kingdoms) were controlling the same lands. Maps to this effect, appearing today in the Museum, will be discussed in a later section. The response to Bóna's contentions from the Romanian government was stern. Ceaușescu called the book a "forgery" of history¹⁴ and a large advertisement was placed in the *London Times* objecting to the book's contents.

In his essay, Bóna rarely even used the word "Romanian," which begins to appear regularly only in the section describing the 13th Century, which is the period during which most Hungarian historians say the Romanians began moving into Transylvania from the south and east. Romanian critics contend that Bóna's analysis of cemetery finds wrongly leans toward the Hungarian theory to the same degree that Pascu leans in the opposite direction. One example is his identification of swords with curved hilts, found buried with males, as "Hungarian."

"István Bóna believes that the long sabre with a curved hilt was a typically Hungarian weapon, but admits that the 'conquering Hungarians' already had 'Western' weapons, such as Viking, double-edged or Byzantine swords,"¹⁵ Curta notes, calling Bóna "Kossinist" for interpretations such as the identification of "grooved-rim vessels and clay cauldrons" found in Transylvanian digs as Hungarian. "Only recently have

¹⁴ László Péter, *Historians and the History of Transylvania* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1992), 50.

¹⁵ Florin Curta, "Transylvania Around A.D. 1000." in *Europe Around the Year 1000*, ed. Przemyslaw Urbanczyk (Warsaw: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, 2001), 147.

Hungarian and Romanian archaeologists become aware of the wide-spread use of clay cauldrons in areas with no connection to the Carpathian basin and Transylvania,”¹⁶ Curta notes.

As a testament to the status still attributed today to archaeology in Romanian academia, prominent archaeologists, employees of the national Ministry of Culture, occupy offices with a courtyard view at the Museum today. Their numbers and specialties indicate which historical period the Museum’s management, and the Ministry, consider most important. In the summer of 2003, the museum employed 10 archaeologists specializing in the century and a half of Roman rule in the area. Conversely, for 400-1,400 A.D. only two archaeologists were employed, according to one of the Museum’s Roman-era archaeologists, Carmen Ciongradi.

The relative détente between Romanian authorities and Hungarian academics during the interbellum ended quickly following the return of Transylvania to Romanian control in 1944. The Transylvanian Museum Association’s many publications were definitively ceased. “In 1947, an unspeakable harm was done when the printed LII (the 1947 edition) issues were sent to the paper mill by the influential members of despotism,”¹⁷ according to the introduction to the restarted Museum Association journal. Former Museum Association Director Kiss said the collected books and manuscripts of the organization were seized by the Romanian authorities and placed out of reach for decades. Even today, he said in an interview with this author, material from the original

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁷ Samu Benkő, “Koszontjuk as Olvasot” (Greetings to the Reader) *Erdelyi Múzeum* 1-4 (1991): frontispiece.

collections is either stored in the back of the Museum library or exhibited in the University library without explanation of where it came from or who collected it.

The association itself ceased operating under pressure from Romanian authorities in 1950 and it would be 38 years before it was reborn. As a testament of the degree to which the Party wanted exclusive control over academia, the Romanian museum association, ASTRA, was also shut down, Kiss said.

In 1948, the newly formed, Party-selected Romanian Academy assumed control of the museum, and in 1963, the State Committee for Art and Culture¹⁸ put all of the nation's museums under its supervision. In that same year, the newly-redesigned Museum opened under the aegis of Daicoviciu,¹⁹ a prominent philologist, historian, archaeologist and proponent of the theory of Daco-Roman descent, who went on to lead the excavations at Sarmizegetusa, the grandest city of old Dacia. The museum's address today is located at 2 Constantin Daicoviciu St.

In 1941, Daicoviciu vented some of his frustrations about Hungarian scholarship in the annual journal of the Romanian Institute of Classical Studies, which was housed temporarily in Sibiu after having fled the Hungarian re-occupation of Northern Transylvania. In the article, he questioned some of the

tendentious works of Hungarian archaeologists . . . [W]e feel justified to be reserved concerning their objectivity for treating these (Daco-Roman continuity) issues. There appears so often in their works, from all sorts of people, statements that reveal a certain attitude, dictated by Hungarian political and national resentments.²⁰

¹⁸ Later called the Ministry of Culture.

¹⁹ Radu Belcean, "Istoria Muzeului National de Istorie a Transilvaniei" (The History of the National History Museum of Transylvania), *Gazeta de Cluj*, March 2003: 16.

²⁰ Constantin Daicoviciu, "The Continuity Problem in Dacia: Historical-Archaeological Observations and Explanatory Notes," trans. Sorin Frățilă, *The Annual of the Institute of Classical Studies* 3 (1941): 206.

Having gained approval in 1961 to head the redesign of the Museum, Daicoviciu set out to explain the history of Transylvania and the Romanian people “slowly, but reliably, based on verified information.”²¹

²¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

CHAPTER 9 THE MUSEUM TODAY

The purpose of the following section is not to determine whether the Romanian (or Hungarian) version of Transylvanian history is correct. As with most history based on ancient documents and archaeological discoveries, correct interpretations will always be a subject of debate, particularly when combined with competing national interests. Rather, this survey of key sections of the Museum will highlight the way in which the Museum designers, led by Daicoviciu and followed by four decades of Museum archaeologists and curators, have attempted to build a persuasive case through:

- the use of prominently displayed written sources
- the placement of objects below sources to act as material proof of the written words
- the labeling of the objects so as to verify (or at least not contradict) the written sources

Seen together, this examination will show that the Museum is an elaborate, academic extension of the Romanian *ethnie's* claim to Transylvania, a coordinated argument with a focused thesis.

Before one enters the museum, the message sent by the objects in the courtyard and foyer is clear: here is a place of memorialization of the ancient roots of the Romanians. In the leafy courtyard, Roman sarcophagi squat along the walls, while columns from Roman ruins line a sidewalk. In the foyer near the entrance, giant stone tablets with Latin inscriptions greet visitors.



Figure 1. Roman sarcophagi line the wall of the Museum's courtyard.

As mentioned earlier, a bust of Decebal, the defeated Dacian ruler, stands amid the Roman ruins, giving physical representation to the fused ethnogenesis in Romanian national ideology.

As one ascends the spiraling staircase leading up to the Museum's exhibition floors, photographs of archaeological digs are prominently displayed on the walls. The photographs are not labeled, and one is left to guess which Roman or Dacian site they represent. Still, the statement is clear: here is a place where science, specifically archaeology, will be prominent and where, one can presume, Romanian national ideology will be proven with the authoritative stamp of science.

As mentioned earlier, Daicoviciu's re-design was a drastic departure from the way in which the Hungarian academics told history. Instead of the disciplinary approach (i.e., sections devoted to coins, agricultural history, mineralogy, family documents and the like), the Museum was/is arranged chronologically, starting with the Paleolithic period. This room features a large, fabric recreation of an elephantine ancestor, marking one of the few spots in the museum in which a recreation is used. One has to wonder if the elephant was designed to provide a friendly greeting to the schoolchildren who visit the museum, youngsters who will soon face room after room of glass cases filled with potshards and iron tools. The subsequent rooms, dedicated to the Neolithic era and the Bronze Age, also feature recreations, with an early loom constructed in the former and a clothed and ornamented pair of female mannequins in the latter, the only room to feature mannequin.

From this point, time slows down, and each period receives greater attention and space, as well as greater certainty of detail. The next room features a large map of "Dacian fortresses and villages," next to cases filled with pottery, fibulae,¹ jewelry and loom weights. The labels in the cases do not say where the material was found, beginning a trend that will run throughout the museum. Here, the visitor is left to presume that the material was found in "fortresses and villages" that were distinctly "Dacian" and that all of the objects found here could be ascribed to that culture, even though the Dacian culture is shrouded by more than two millennia of sparsely-recorded history.

¹ A fibula was a type of clasp, similar to today's safety pin or brooch, that was used in ancient times to fasten clothing together. Because of the sturdiness of their composition and their frequent use in clothing corpses, burial-site finds of fibulae are useful markers of culture in this region; see Florin Curta, *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, c. 500-700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

British museum specialist Susan Pearce notes that this type of “deterministic” interpretation imbues the objects in a museum with a certainty that may be more reflective of curators than of reality.

This generalizing tendency creates a certain determinism in which societies take inevitable forms and work out predetermined destinies ... the exhibition based on this reasoning would consequently group the objects into corresponding patterns and relationships, backing these up by map, by labels and by scenic photographs.²

Thus, if a Romanian archaeologist has set out to excavate a “Dacian” site, then each of the objects he finds will likely be Dacian. This is the point at which the deterministic museum of the late 19th- or early 20th-century runs head-on into the uncertainty of a post-modern era, in which scientists studying the nature of light (and social scientists studying the nature of man) have acknowledged that their expectations often determine the findings of their investigations. If this is true in a laboratory setting, where scientists have attempted to determine whether light is composed of waves or particles, then can archaeologists, sweating in the dirt of a land that has been traversed by dozens of cultural and ethnic groups over the last three millennia, determine with certainty whether an object is surely Dacian, particularly if their careers and their excavations’ funding depend on their conclusions? Pearce argues that

[t]he museum history of an object chronicles the construction of knowledge in which it has played a part, and the old labels, display boards, plinths and graphics are the fossils of the history of meanings. Meaning and understanding become a conglomeration of assorted life histories – of the collector, of the curator, and of the object specimen itself.³

² Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (London: Leicester University Press, 1992), 158.

³ Susan M. Pearce, “Presenting Archaeology.” in *Making Early Histories in Museums*, ed. Nick Merriman (London: Leicester University Press, 1999), 20.

Upon entering the next room, the visitor walks under a sign that reads, “Dedicated to Sarmizegetusa.” This site has been described as the religious and royal center of the Dacian civilization, and Daicoviciu himself began the diggings there after World War II. The room features prominent quotations from the *Geografia* of the Greek writer Strabon, including one that notes the Roman fear of a Dacian ruler, Burebista. Twentieth-century Romanian historiography posits an identical death for Burebista and Julius Caesar, both in 44 A.D. and both at the hands of conspirators, establishing another strong link between the Dacians and Romans. This historical fact, however, also seems to be based on some supposition. In *Burebista and his Time*, Romanian historian I.H. Crişan demonstrates that a sparse written record, such as that of Burebista’s life and death, need not preclude speculation. While admitting that Strabo’s text makes no mention of regicide, he contends that “a king of Burebista’s stature could not be removed from the throne unless he got killed. The question at issue is whether we can get to know the names of the conspirators and their purpose in bringing about the king’s end.”⁴

Thus is established a theme that runs through the rest of the museum. To wit: the Dacians were a powerful and proud empire, feared by the Romans, who stopped their northward progress at the edge of Dacia while trying unsuccessfully time and again to conquer the Dacians. Ultimately, the superior Roman army prevailed and, in taking over the province, commingled the bloodlines and spirits of two great people. Out of this mixture came Roman Dacia, the cauldron of power and excellence that produced today’s Romanians, who have had a continual presence in Transylvania since that time. Taking

⁴ Ion Horatiu Crişan, trans. Sanda Mihailescu, *Burebista and His Time* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania, 1978), 241.

this as gospel, the Museum displays its objects and texts as certain evidence of what Anthony Smith would call a “creation myth.”

The Room of Dacia

Of all the rooms in the museum, the grandest is reserved for Dacia at its point of defeat, for at that time the most contentious spirits of the Dacians and Romans met. Notably, the room is more than 1,000 square-feet in size, more than double most of the other rooms. Obviously, when it acquired the museum, a former home, the staff did not have the luxury of designing the sizes of the rooms dedicated to particular periods, but it was able to choose which era would be represented in this room, which is surely the handsomest of the building, with wood-lined walls and a drop-ceiling with recessed lighting. It is also one of the few places in the Museum where a visitor can find a bench to sit on.

A large sign proclaiming “DACIA” appears high on one wall above a map detailing the extent of the kingdoms of Burebista and Decebal (ruled 87-106 A.D.), the next powerful Dacian king after Burebista.

Quotes affixed high on the walls, from Roman writers, praise the courage of the Dacians and the “Geti,” a Greek term for a subgroup of the Thracians that, according to a large quote by Roman Cassius Dio, was another term for Dacians. With that established, the quote by Iordanes, praising the Geti as superior to all “Barbarians,” makes more sense.

Cassius Dio’s words also appear prominently in a display that depicts the dual nature of modern Romanian national consciousness: large artist renditions, facing each other, of the heads of Decebal and the Roman emperor Trajan, the leaders of armies that waged a multi-year battle for the area.

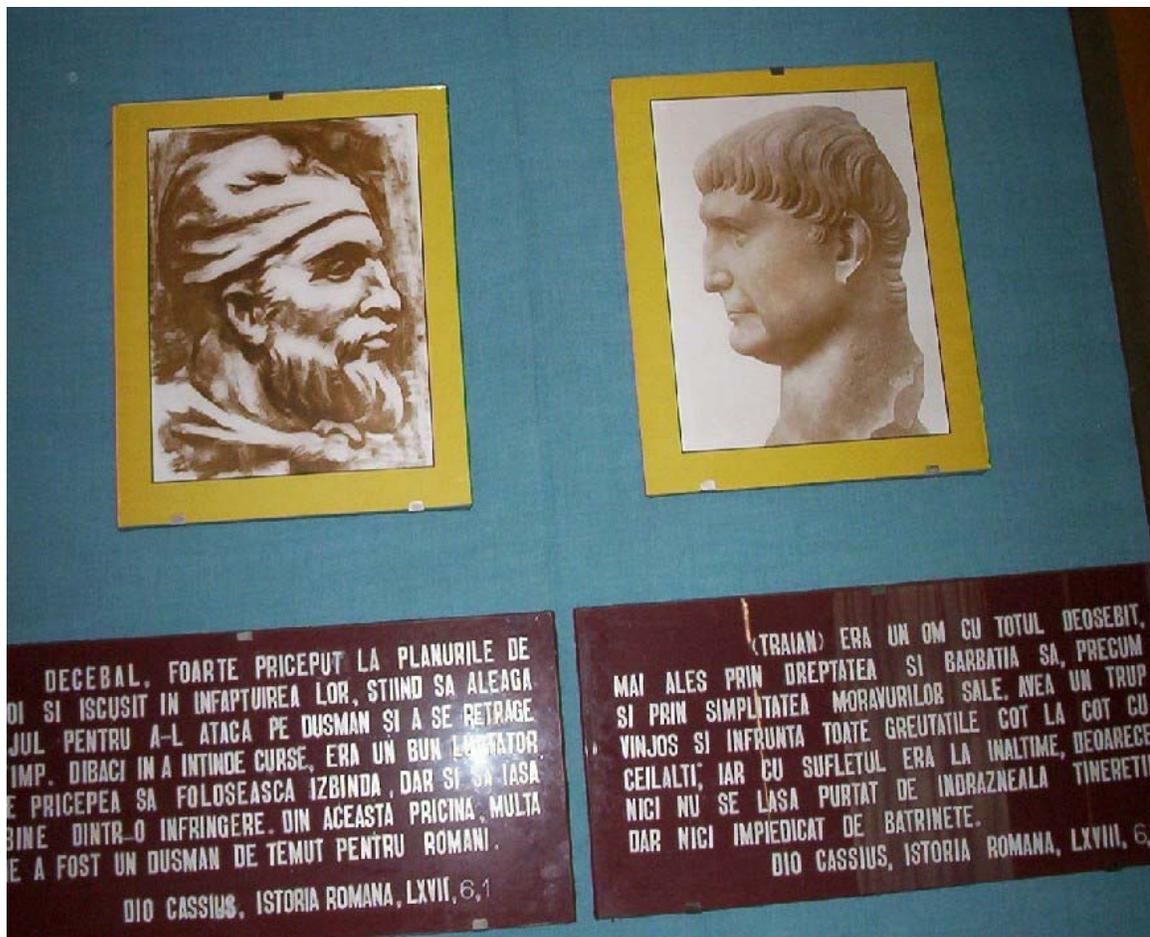


Figure 2. Decebal and Trajan, right, face each other in the Museum.

When the superior Roman army had defeated the outmatched Dacians, Decebal committed suicide rather than be taken into the custody of the Romans. A few yards from their portraits stands an eight-foot-tall reproduction of Trajan's Column in Rome, built to commemorate victory in the Dacian wars. From the 2,500 figures on the columns, the depiction of Decebal killing himself is enlarged and specially exhibited next to the reproduction of the column. Romanian ideology has connected the Column so strongly to the nation's own ethnic roots that the following story is oft-repeated. A Romanian peasant decided to walk to Rome to see his ancestors. When he arrived after the long journey, he found the Column and sat at its feet. When the locals saw him sitting there, in

typical Romanian-peasant garb, they are said to have exclaimed, “Look! A Dacian has climbed down off the column.” This tale is used to further the link between modern Romanians and the ancient people who lived in this area.

The column itself is considered such a strong piece of evidence for this viewpoint that the local mayor, Funar, has proposed building a full-sized recreation of Trajan’s Column in downtown Cluj-Napoca, in front of the previously-mentioned Roman-era excavations and the statue of Hungary’s King Mátyás. One can imagine how galling this idea is to Hungarians who believe they settled in an unpopulated land in the 9th Century, one to which proto-Romanians began migrating only 300 years later from the southern side of the Danube. The two versions of history are so far apart, and so rigidly certain, that there is no room for debate. To admit that the other side has valid points to make or critiques to offer is to admit that one’s claim to the land may not be justified.

Indeed, on a comparison tour through the National Museum in Budapest, this writer noted the complete absence of the word “Romanian” from exhibits detailing the period of time studied here. Hungary’s Takács admits that the Budapest Museum’s approach is similarly didactic. “The exhibitions were made to be understood by a 4th-grader . . . You will find nothing about these (continuity) debates. Everything is clear and everything is simple.”⁵

In Cluj-Napoca, the “Dacia” room presents a clear and simple picture of the first link in the Museum’s chain of argumentation. Its strength comes from the combined elements of quotations, drawings and a smattering of ancient objects (one hardly needs to

⁵ Interview with the author, Budapest, Hungary, July 2003.

read their labels to know they are Dacian). In subsequent rooms, another link is added to the argument for continual Romanian occupation: the 165-year period of Roman colonization.

Roman Dacia

As discussed earlier, Romanian national ideology as it relates to ethnic origins has differed century to century. In the late-17th and early-18th centuries, Romanian theorists posited a direct line from Roman Dacia to latter-day speakers of Romanian, a line that carried with it such strong Latin ties that the Romanians saw their ethnics as an offshoot of the Roman Empire. As a backlash against that movement and against the Transylvanian School/Uniate Church hierarchy, Dacianism gained ground in the mid-18th century. A strong emphasis on Latin roots again proved popular during the heady nationalistic years of the 1840s and 1850s, while a return to indigenous Dacianism marked the end of that century.⁶ Only in the 20th century, it would seem, has a balance been struck in the historiography (and, hence, the museum representation) of the ethnic-origins question.

The space allotted for this period is about 50 percent greater (approximately 1,500 square-feet in total) than that allotted to Dacia alone, although the Dacian era was many times longer. Among the items presented here are Roman-style busts, ornate marble carvings, a model of the coliseum built in the area, and a variety of personal effects. One thing notably missing is a textual explanation. In other parts of the Museum (particularly in the Medieval section), lengthy Museum-written text is used to elucidate the exhibits; in other places, extensive quotations give the visitor the necessary information. Here,

⁶ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 30-38

however, the original designers and subsequent curators may have wisely refrained from framing the objects and explaining what they prove. Given the spectrum of opinion concerning which ethnic strain emerged dominant from this period, the safest path likely was to let the objects speak—and the visitors interpret—for themselves.

An interesting choice was made in reference to the ethnic mixing in the area. One exhibit case is devoted to showing the various points of the Empire from which Trajan moved colonists and soldiers to Dacia. Among these were England, Spain, Syria and Egypt. If intermingling and intermarriage between the Dacians and the Romans occurred as Pascu contends, then the newly created Romanian people would seem to be a conglomeration of several different ethnic strains. Indeed, unlike other European ethnic claims, purity of blood rarely appears in arguments about who is a Romanian; rather, shared language, religion, history and customs are more common cultural markers, bringing Romanian theorization close to the “ethnos” theory of Soviet anthropologist Yulian Bromley, who also added shared psychological traits and consciousness of an ethnicity distinguishable from other groups as markers of a cohesive ethnos.⁷ Bromley did not stop there, however, contending that one stable ethnos had always controlled the lands held by the Soviet Union after World War II. This “primordialist” position, while not predominant, was repeated in some of the state-favored Romanian historiography, particularly that of Ceaușescu’s brother, Ilie Ceaușescu, who wrote that “the Romanian people remained always the same, consolidated, unitary and homogenous in the hearth it had always occupied.”⁸

⁷ Marcus Banks, *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions* (London: Routledge, 1996), 17-19.

⁸ As quoted in Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 249.

With so many cultural groups traversing Transylvania for centuries, this idea of an ethnicity frozen in time (presumably at the moment of Roman withdrawal) is found only on the fringes of Romanian academia, while purity of blood is a claim rarely heard. Perhaps blood is used as a defining characteristic only for ethnic groups who are trying to keep outsiders from joining, rather than for one trying to gain for itself a permanent place at the table of nations. Though four decades of Soviet leaders urged the varied ethnic groups of the Union to de-emphasize their differences in the name of proletarian brotherhood, it will be interesting to see if the Romanian *ethnie* ever forms for itself a strong bloodline identity, particularly as it (along with most European countries) faces increased pressures of immigration from the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

After Rome

At the end of a long walk that began in the Paleolithic era, that extended through thousands of square feet of Dacian and Roman artifacts and representations, the visitor arrives at the end of the hall, where two smaller-than-average rooms are devoted to the next half-millennium, introduced under the banner, “Dacia After the Retreat of Aurelius.”

As discussed earlier, many Hungarian historians have insisted that after Emperor Aurelius pulled his empire back across the Danube, starting in 271 A.D., Roman Dacia emptied. Stripped of the vibrant economy a Roman province provided, as well as the protection of the Roman army, all the residents would have chosen to retreat with the army, according to this argument. If any remnants remained, they would have been killed off, or subsumed, by the coming waves of migrating peoples that began traversing the area a few decades after the Roman departure.

Obviously, centuries of Romanian historiography have held the exact opposite to be true.

The withdrawal of the Roman army and administration from the province of Dacia did not mean that the Daco-Romans abandoned their lands. That Daco-Roman civilization north of the Danube survived the so-called Age of Migration . . . is indisputable. In the first place, a people would not so readily abandon lands in which they had lived for millennia; there is no historical evidence that an entire people has ever left its home in the face of invasion.⁹

The challenge for the designers of the Museum was how to make this argument convincing with the paucity of material finds supporting it. The result was a perfunctory exhibition of quotations and objects designed to bolster this syllogism: the Daco-Romans had accepted Christianity before Roman Dacia was abandoned; there have been discoveries, dated to the period after Roman withdrawal, of objects that include Christian markings; therefore, the Dacians, already Christian, were still in the area, living and practicing the new faith.

It was apparently assumed by the designers that this argument, as a central plank of the Romanian continuity thesis, would already be known by visitors to these rooms, since no explanatory text makes this point. A few mounted quotations from ancient sources make the point that Roman Dacia had become Christian before Aurelius' withdrawal, while a couple of other quotations refer, inexplicably, to the Christianization of the Celts, Gauls and others who moved through Transylvania in the centuries after the Empire left. None of the quotations address the issue of a Christianized, Romanized population left behind after Roman retreat.

The minimal amount of objects in the first of these two rooms fall into two categories: objects with arguably-Christian symbols on them, such as a Constantine cross

⁹ Ștefan Pascu, *A History of Transylvania*, trans. D. Robert Ladd (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), 28.

or a fish, and general archaeological finds such as fibulae and jewelry. Both artifact-types are notable for their lack of labeling, leaving their significance unexplained.

The second room contains a more-abundant exhibition of artifacts left by the Goths, Celts and other groups that moved through the area in the era of migration. Observing the displays in these two rooms, Ioan Stanciu, a migration-period archaeologist with the Institute of Archaeology and Art History in Cluj-Napoca, noted the “disproportionate representation” given to presentation of the Roman and Daco-Roman periods when compared to the subsequent six centuries. A Museum spokeswoman told the author that one significant addition had been made to these two rooms since Ceaușescu’s fall. A large map, installed in 1993, now notes the many tribes and cultural groups that moved through the area in this era, a fact that was formerly missing from the room. The brightly-colored map is filled with arrows indicating the century and direction of migrations by the Goths, Visigoths, Celts, and, yes, the Hungarians.

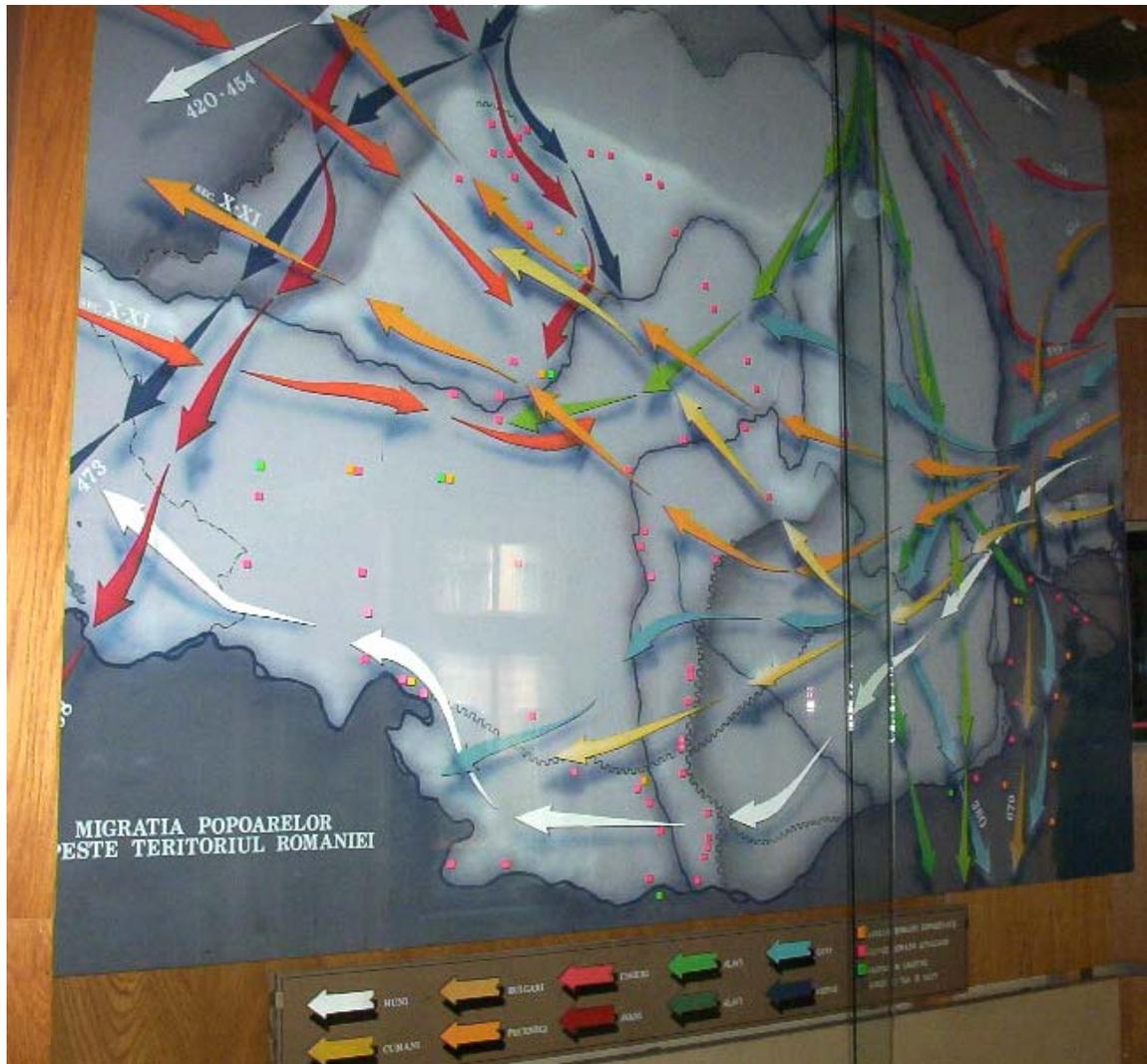


Figure 3. The map of the era of migration, with colorful arrows indicating the directions from which different groups entered Transylvania.

In sum, these two rooms leave a gap in the Romanian argument and provide fuel for Hungarian historians, such as Bóna, who take the absolutist position that “not one single late Roman or early medieval source mentions or knows of a ‘surviving’ Roman population in Transylvanian Dacia: the onetime Roman towns, settlements and forts perished without exception.”¹⁰ Whether this is true or not cannot be determined by the

¹⁰ István Bóna, “From Dacia to Transylvania: the Period of the Great Migrations (271-895),” in *History of Transylvania*, ed. Béla Köpeczi, trans. A. Chambers-Makkai *et al.* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1994), 63-64.

thin case made in these two rooms. The paucity of displayed objects, the questions left by the lack of labeling and explanatory text and the quotations of questionable relevance all give the impression that the continuity argument is yet to be made convincingly in this Museum.

The 9th Century

While the era of migration (271 to 895 A.D.) in Transylvania is key to determining whether the Daco-Romans continued to exist in Transylvania after the Roman withdrawal, the end of the 9th century is the decisive point for Hungarian and Romanian historians, archaeologists and museum designers. Both sides agree that the Hungarians migrated from east of the Carpathian Mountains in the latter part of the 9th century, settling in both the Hungarian plain (former site of the Roman province Pannonia) and present day Transylvania. The central point of dispute is whether the Hungarians entering Transylvania found an empty, and fertile, land or one occupied by a thriving Daco-Romanian culture. For hundreds of years, proponents of each argument have not only offered diametrically-opposed viewpoints on this question, but have contended that their conclusion establishes modern-day ownership of the land for their *ethnie*.

The medieval section, which begins the exhibitions on the next floor of the Museum, utilizes another text-dominated layout. Found objects seem of secondary importance here to a story that is best told through words. The visitor is greeted with a five-foot-high placard that establishes the theme of the exhibition:

In the three Romanian counties, Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania, the feudal period ... begins with the crystallization of the feudal relationship and begins in the 10th century A.D. and took place until the middle of the 14th century. The feudal relationship was born in principal from the destruction of the common social village order and the seizure of the peasantry's land.

Without actually saying it directly, this paragraph implies that a “village order” of Transylvanian Romanians already existed in the 10th century and that it met destruction.

The sign continues:

There also appeared the first Romanian political formation (of Menumorut, Glad and Gelu), especially in Transylvania, but also in the lower Danube area, proving the new relation between the lord and vassal on the territory of our country.

This section takes three figures who appear in Anonymus’ *Getsa Hungarorum* and gives them the 10th-century position of “lords” that would later be occupied by “the Hungarian conquest in the 11th and 12th centuries.” Furthermore, this section effectively pushes the Hungarian occupation of Transylvania forward more than a century from the widely-accepted date of arrival in Transylvania in the last decade of the 9th century. The general impression of this sign is that Romanians had a structured, feudal society functioning in Transylvania for more than a century prior to the Hungarian arrival, clearly indicating which group is the true latecomer and invader.

Below this introduction are placed three vases. Although none are marked with a date, they are each labeled as coming from a county in Transylvania. Without making the claim, the designers have left the visitors to reach the conclusion that these vases are from the era discussed above, and that they are definitively “Romanian.”

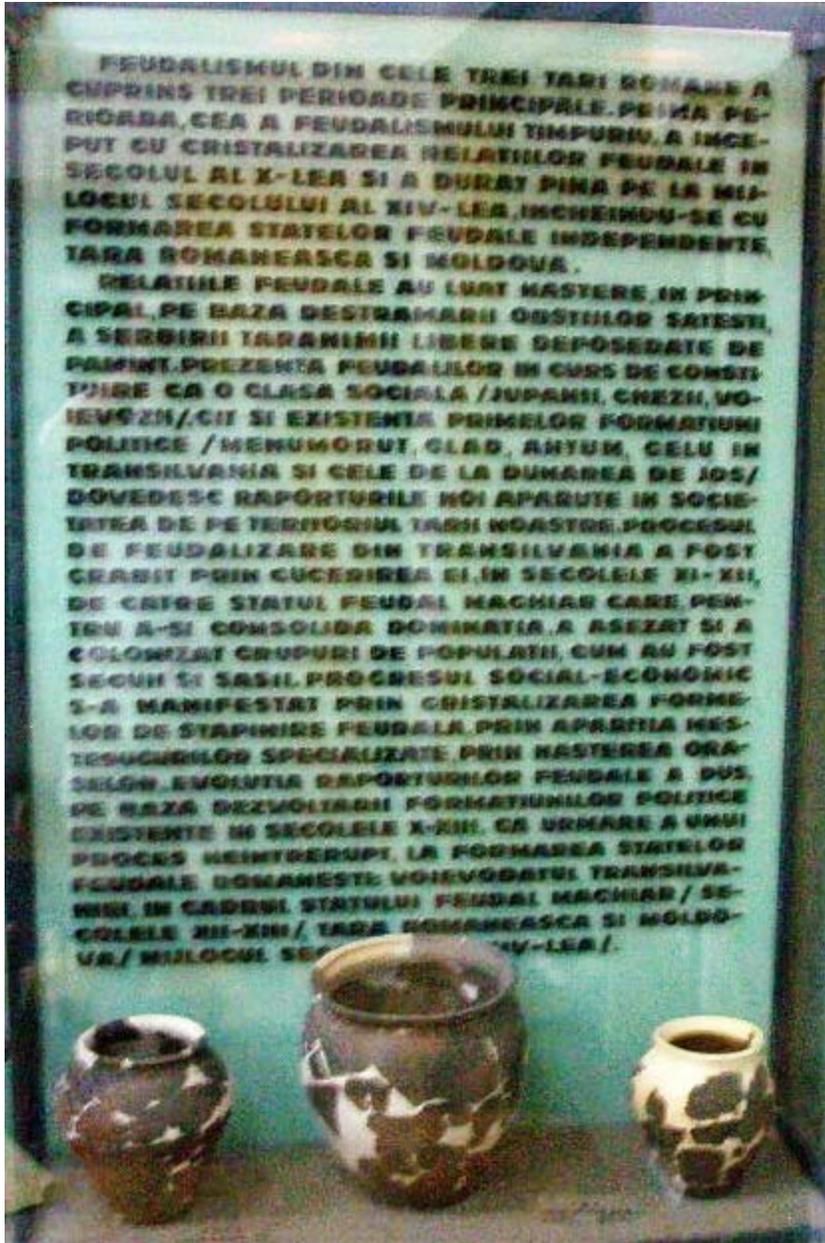


Figure 4. The introductory text, and accompanying objects, of a medieval case.

Throughout the medieval room, in case after case, objects are minimally labeled. Rather, quotes or titles at the top of the cases declare the subject of the case, and the visitor is left to assume that the objects verify the words. In one case, two rows of vases are marked with a sign that says simply, “Vase (9th – 10th century).”

Another case is titled “Fortress Dăbâca ... one of Voivode Gelou’s fortresses.” Anonymus’ Gelou is now credited with more than one fortress, while a collection of unmarked or oddly-marked items in the case are left to make the argument. A row of earrings, necklaces and bracelets are marked with a sign that says “11th – 12th centuries,” a late date for objects designed to prove occupation as early as the 9th century.

Archaeologist Takács said this is because the proof does not exist. “In Dăbâca, there are no artifacts I have heard of that can be dated to the 9th century,” he contended in an interview. Curta, on the other hand, writes that “the evidence published so far, albeit poorly, does contain evidence of a 9th-century occupation of the site,” but it has not been sufficiently studied to bolster a particular historical argument. He writes,

[f]ar from cunningly distorting or destroying the evidence, the (Romanian) excavators were overwhelmed by the complexity of the site and embarrassed that no substantial evidence was found to prove the *Gesta* right. This may also explain the rather confusing description of both the site and its history.¹¹

The following case contains many representative elements under the title, “The Formation of the Romanian Polis in Transylvania: 9th-11th Centuries.” Suggesting that a complex Romanian “city-state” was formed in Transylvania by the time of the Hungarians’ arrival, the argument is bolstered by the first appearance in the Museum of reproductions of Anonymus’ aged parchment. Four separate pages (from chapters 19, 20, 25-6 and 44) tell of four leaders (Tuhutum, Gelou, Glad and Menumarut) who represent the “proof” that the Daco-Roman community survived for more than six centuries, hiding among the densely forested mountaintops, while Tribes and armies traversed and occupied the land. The pages build on each other, explaining interactions between the

¹¹ Florin Curta, “Transylvania Around A.D. 1000.” in *Europe Around the Year 1000*, ed. Przemyslaw Urbanczyk (Warsaw: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, 2001), 148.

four up to the point where Menumorut, as Anonymus tells it, refused to accede to the demands for land or riches from the invading Hungarians. For his obstinance, he was killed. As if to accentuate his bold spirit, a rusted sword is perched above the quotations, although the given date – “11th century” – would place it at least a century after the conflict suggested below.



Figure 5. A sword and pots displayed under Anonymus’s words.

In summary, the persuasiveness of the Museum’s medieval and era of migration sections rests on two judgments: was Anonymus’ text accurate, two centuries after the events about which he was writing; and, secondly, do Romanian archaeologists make a convincing argument, either inside the Museum or out of it, that the objects they have found in their pursuit of Anonymus’ heroes are genuine relics of Daco-Roman survivors.

If an observer doubts either of these premises, the conclusions assumed by these exhibits cannot be drawn. It is a tenuous position for the validity of a Museum to be in.

CHAPTER 10 THE CHANGE

In 1989 and 1990, as Communist governments throughout Eastern and Central Europe collapsed, textbooks were rewritten, statues were pulled down and museums were shut for re-designing. In East Germany, for example, museumologist Susan Crane writes that little credence was given to the scholarship that had been promoted by the Party.

The former East German museum's [the Museum of Germany History in Berlin] exhibits had featured narrative texts which changed according to the party's needs over the years and was ideologically offensive to the West, but its artifacts effectively represented an emphasis on social history. Exchanging titles with the new DHM [German Historical Museum, opened in Berlin in 1987], the old museum's exhibits were dismantled, although some effort was made to document the old exhibits and preserve their contents.¹

Such wholesale change did not occur in Cluj-Napoca. While the Museum's top floor had included tributes to the Soviet army in the 1960s, Kiss said, afterward Ceaușescu flexed his independence *vis a vis* the Soviet Union and removed most of the Soviet material, replacing it with exhibits dedicated to Michael the Brave ("Mihai Viteazul"), a Wallachian leader who conquered and briefly held Transylvania and Moldavia in 1599-1601.² Thus, the Museum as it existed in 1989 told a mostly national, rather than a social-materialist, story, and the bulk of the exhibits remained as they had

¹ Susan A. Crane, "Memory, Distortion and History in the Museum." *History and Theory* 36, no. 4 (Dec. 1997): 55.

² Because his military victories brought all three of the provinces that today comprise Romanian territory under a single ruler for the first time, Michael is considered to be the first great unifier in Romanian history. His iconic image, therefore, has been promoted throughout the last century, particularly through the placement of public statues, as a celebration of Romanian control in the three provinces. Such a statue has been erected also in Cluj-Napoca.

been before the change. It must be recognized that financial constraints on the State have limited the changes that could have been made in the last decade, but even the improvements set to begin in 2004 are cosmetic rather than thematic. Hica, the lead archaeologist for the post-Roman rooms, said no improvements beyond better labeling of some objects were planned for the rooms on the migration era. Afterward, the basic story will apparently remain the same.

CHAPTER 11 NATIONAL IDENTITY

The story from either side of the debate will be unlikely to change until both recognize the effect that national identity and territorial aspirations have had on scholarship.

The national identity of Transylvanian Romanians was formed in an environment of disenfranchisement. Fifty years after the writing of the *SLV*, 90 percent of the Romanian population of Transylvania was still peasantry, one-fourth of them serfs. “On all counts—political, religious and economic—the Romanians were at the bottom of the social scale, despite the fact that they formed a majority of the population.”¹

Thus, in a period when national consciousness and the formation of myths of ethnogenesis were sweeping the continent, the Romanians were forming theirs from a subjugated position. “Those who spoke for the nation did so largely in opposition to the holders of power. That is, the Nation as a socio-symbolic construct was produced in counter discourse to the exercise of rule.”² This fact cannot be ignored when judging the intensity of the result. Several Romanian historians agree, among them Sorin Mitu.

The issue of national identity and that of ‘discovering’ the features that constitute it are raised here (in Transylvania) with an intensity unheard of in other areas of the Romanian space, due to the inferior political status of the Romanians in Transylvania, to inter-ethnic tensions, and to the fierce disputes with other competing nations. The self-image the Transylvanian Romanian comes up with is

¹ Keith Hitchins, *The Idea of Nation: the Rumanians of Transylvania, 1691-1849*. (Bucharest: Editura Stiintifica si Enciclopedia, 1995), 146-8.

² Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 41.

shaped under the pressure of the constant threat they feel coming from ‘the other.’ The collective defence mechanism set off by this permanent fear and defiance favours the shaping of an original self-image that feverishly tends to make up compensating myths, imaginary spaces of mental security meant to provide symbolic protection to a threatened identity and injured national pride.³

The loss of Transylvania was also a great wound for the Hungarian people. It separated them from the one land where they had never experienced foreign subjugation. It was the home of many of their tales and heroes and the subject of poems and songs — as well as approximately two million Hungarian speakers who were suddenly trapped in a foreign country after 1920. To admit that the Romanians might have an equally-justified claim to the land (if historical claims can provide such justification) has been difficult for private citizens and historians alike. The Romanians feel similarly protective of the land they have controlled for 80 of the last 84 years. Since Romania was only founded in the 19th century, and greater Romania (including Transylvania) is less than a century old, the people feel insecure about potentially losing their land. They sense that the Hungarians would like to revise the borders eastward, and their historiography and museum representations reflect that fear.

However, since the fall of communism in Europe, some historians on both sides have shown a willingness to analyze their own historiography with the same rigor they have applied to their foils. To wit:

This book is written for the non-Hungarian reader who wishes to discover what happened in the Carpathian basin during the Middle Ages. It is to be hoped that nobody living in that region who has strong national feelings will find comfort in it. Each of the nations of the region has its own vision of the past, incompatible with

³ Sorin Mitu, *National Identity of Romanians in Transylvania* (Budapest: Central European Press, 2001), 4.

that of the others, and it was my firm intention that none of these visions should be represented in this volume.⁴

Such a preface is a good beginning. Whether Hungarian Pál Engel succeeded in that 1992 effort is the subject of another study, but the recognition that pleasing one's countrymen has been a guiding force for previous historiography in the region was the first step to a truer, more objective rendering of history.

Romanian History professor Lucian Boia echoes that idea.

We are dealing here, of course, with the particular logic of *foundation myths* (italics in original). All communities, whether traditional or modern, construct a mythology of their origins. The 'foundation' is for a community what the birth certificate is for an individual. Without it, you do not exist, or you exist in a diminished and marginalized manner, not recognized for what you are. This is why communities hold so strongly to their foundation myths.⁵

If elite opinion eventually transforms common belief, then the two historians just quoted may be among those on the crest of a wave of self-analysis that will one day crash over Romanian historiography – and, ultimately, society.

Unfortunately, Mitu does not yet see the same coming out of Budapest. "It is obvious that the denial of Romanian continuity ... continues to be the sole interpretation espoused by contemporary Hungarian historians, for whom it serves to insure chronological priority for the Magyars in Transylvania,"⁶ he charged.

⁴ Pál Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary, 895-1526*, trans. Tamás Palosfalvi (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), xi.

⁵ Lucian Boia, *Romania: Borderland of Europe*, trans. James Christian Brown (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 33.

⁶ Sorin Mitu, *National Identity of Romanians in Transylvania* (Budapest: Central European Press, 2001), 48.

Curta also noted “a much larger debunking process currently taking place in the Romanian historiography. To my knowledge, there is nothing comparable in Hungarian historiography, at least not in Medieval Studies.”⁷

However, in addition to the Engel book quoted above, a review of recently-published works by Hungarians shows a similar vein of self-criticism, which should lead to more balanced historiography.

In 1992, László Péter edited a collection of essays entitled, *Historians and the History of Transylvania*. In it, he wrote, “Interest in national history was just as strong in the Hungarian Enlightenment as in the Romanian. In each case the past was put in the service of the present.”⁸ Later in the book, he wrote,

National conflicts appear insoluble because the irreconcilable accounts of the past have themselves created the rival nations as permanently fixed entities and because the conflicting pasts create mutually destructive visions about a society’s future ... The Hungarian view of the past did not obliterate Transylvania’s internal diversity, but ... not much was said about the Romanians. The Hungarian nationalist account of Transylvania’s history was indeed, to borrow a phrase from Robert Pynsent, ‘economical with the past’ of the Romanians and Saxons.⁹

Still, Péter is unlikely to please too many Romanian historiographers when he later calls the earlier-mentioned *History of Transylvania* “an outstanding achievement,”¹⁰ albeit one that he admits has errors. It is unlikely that, even with an introspective attitude, Romanian and Hungarian historians are suddenly going to see history identically.

⁷ Florin Curta, “Transylvania Around A.D. 1000.” in *Europe Around the Year 1000*, ed. Przemyslaw Urbanczyk (Warsaw: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, 2001), 147 (footnote 35).

⁸ László Péter, *Historians and the History of Transylvania* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1992), 24.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 41-3.

¹⁰ László Péter, *Historians and the History of Transylvania* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1992), 49.

A final Hungarian historian to examine is László Kürti, a professor at the University of Miskólc. In a 2001 study, after a lengthy analysis of the “remote border” thesis and how it affects historiography from the center (i.e., Budapest and Bucharest) in reference to Transylvania, Kürti wrote

The hallmark of most scholarly negotiated nationalism, and in this case the Hungarian and Romanian contestation is no exception, is historical determinism and essentialism. During state socialism, notions of the Daco-Roman continuity on the Romanian side and Hungarian ethnogenesis on the Hungarian side were ‘supported’ by incessantly fabricating new sets of ‘scientific’ data. No wonder that these were supported by Marxist-Leninist interpretations of historical, linguistic and archeological ‘facts,’ all amounting to Romanian and Hungarian claims of ‘rights’ and ‘cultural heritage.’¹¹

Perhaps one caveat can be made to this note of optimism: of the five authors mentioned above – Engel, Mitu, Boia, Péter and Kürti – four of them published their books only in English, outside of their home countries. Only Mitu’s was first published domestically. Perhaps only for an audience away from the center can historians begin to step back from the historiographic and representational struggle that has been the norm for centuries. Meanwhile, in their domestic representational spaces, the historians, archaeologists and museum curators explaining Transylvanian history will have to continue struggling with indictments such as Susan Pearce’s:

The past is essentially unknowable, forever lost to us, and in museum displays, its material traces are reconstructed into images of time past which have meaning only for the present, in which genuinely intrinsic relationships to the past are used to authenticate a present purpose.¹²

¹¹ László Kürti, *The Remote Borderland: Transylvania in the Hungarian Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 41.

¹² Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: a Cultural Study* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 209.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The author, John J. Schweig, returned to university training at 35 years of age, after 13 years away from academia. He had formerly received a bachelor's degree in government-journalism from California State University, Sacramento. With this thesis and the accompanying coursework, he will have earned his Master of Arts degree in history with a concentration in European history. His area of focus has been Hungary and Transylvania.

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