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Is there a future for Medieval Studies in Romania?

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IS THERE A FUTURE FOR MEDIEVAL STUDIES IN ROMANIA?

Carmen Florea

The title of this essay might sound rather pessimistic when it comes to commenting on the status of medieval studies in Romania. It could even be confusing, since there are at least two major positive observations regarding medieval studies. One is inclined to emphasize the privileged position of historical research in Romania because of the different historical traditions (Romanian, Hungarian and German) which co-exist here. As with everything else regarding present-day Romania, the year 1990 also represented a turning point from this point of view. At the beginning of the 1990s Romanian historians tried to propose new avenues to study the past; the Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesülete (*Transylvanian Museum Association*) was re-established after its operation had been forbidden for more than four decades, and collaboration with the *Arbeitskreis für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde* was renewed.¹

The other positive conclusion concerns the institutional context framing the study and research of medieval history. According to official data, medieval history is studied at the undergraduate level in no less than sixteen public universities and five privately funded institutions.² It seems that students in Romania have many opportunities to become acquainted with medieval studies, since courses on medieval European

¹ In late December 1989 a group of historians from Romania led by the distinguished medievalist Șerban Papacostea denounced the uses of history for nationalistic purposes during the communist era and proposed a re-connection with the valuable suggestions formulated in the inter-war historical discourse from Romania and with current research trends in international historiography. Among those issuing this *Declaration of Free Historians* were David Prodan, Dionisie Pippidi, Henri Stahl, Zsigmond Jakó, Teodor Pompiliu, Viorica Moisiuc, Andrei Pippidi, Ștefan Andreescu, Octavian Iliescu, Ștefan Gorovei, Alexandru Zub. The initiative received enthusiastic approval from Saxon historians who had left Romania to pursue their academic careers in Germany; see Konrad G. Gündisch's response in *Revista Istorică* 1, No. 6 (1990). Details about the revival of the Transylvanian Museum Association can be found in its journal *Erdélyi Múzeum* 53(1991): 183-94 (also available online at epa.oszk.hu). From 1962 onwards the Arbeitskreis in Germany continued the activity of the Vereins für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde, a society which had functioned in Transylvania between 1840 and 1947 (www.sibiweb.de/aksl).

² The list is available on the official website of the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research in the section dedicated to higher education, see www.edu.ro. History is offered at the BA level at the universities of Bucharest, Alba Iulia, Gyulafehérvár, Arad, Bacău, Cluj (Kolozsvár), Constanța, Craiova, Galați, Iași (Jászvásár), Oradea (Nagyvárad), Pitești, Sibiu (Nagyszeben), Suceava, Târgoviște, Târgu Mureș (Marosvásárhely), and Timișoara (Temesvár). Privately funded universities offering history are: Christian University "Dimitrie Cantemir", "Spiru Haret" University, Hyperion University, all in Bucharest, West University "Vasile Goldiș" in Arad, and "Mihail Kogălniceanu" University in Iași.

history and Romanian medieval history are compulsory in the national curriculum detailing the domains and areas of specializations in history.³ This introduction to the study of the medieval past can be continued during the MA programs; they aim to offer specializations on specific topics ranging from the case of Transylvania in Central Europe to issues of power and ideologies in the Middle Ages.⁴

At least equally satisfying seems to be the number of research institutes and centers where medieval studies are integrated into the general research policy of these institutions. Again, official data reveal a fairly impressive number of such research units, the great majority of them being affiliated with the Romanian Academy of Sciences. Alongside the research institutes established in the inter-war period and which continued to function during the communist era as well,⁵ new institutional structures, either institutes or research centers, were organized after 1990.⁶ As is the

³ This is a centralized decision taken by the Ministry of Education and implemented by ARACIS (The Agency for Ensuring the Quality in Higher Education), official website www.aracis.ro.

⁴ It is rather a surprise that the number of MA programs accredited by ARACIS and focusing on different aspects of the Middle Ages is extremely low compared to the number of Faculties of History where the history of the Middle Ages is taught. For the academic year 2008/2009 I identified only twelve such programs: two at Alba Iulia University (Museology and Cultural Heritage, Transylvania in the Cultural History of Central Europe); two at the Faculty of History of "Babeş-Bolyai" University in Cluj (Society, Art, and Identities in Central Europe – From the Middle Ages to the Modern Times, and Philosophy in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages), and one each at the University of Galaţi (Romanian Space between East and West); the Faculty of History in Iaşi (an MA program in Power and Society in Antiquity and the Middle Ages), the University of Oradea (an MA program on the History of Western Romania), the University of Sibiu (Central and South; Eastern Europe in the first millennium of the Christian Era); and at the Faculty of Archival Studies of the Police Academy in Bucharest (an MA program in Ancient Languages and Paleography).

⁵ Although their function was severely altered by the adoption of the Soviet model of organizing research institutes in 1948.

⁶ The section dedicated to the institutions, centers and foundations subordinate to the Academy can be found at www.acad.ro/academia2002. These are: Institute of Archaeology and Art History (Cluj); the Institute of History "Nicolae Iorga" (Bucharest), the Institute of History "George Bariţ" (Cluj), the Institute of South Eastern European Studies (Bucharest), the Institute of Archaeology "Vasile Pârvan" (one of the research directions here is devoted to the migration era and the Middle Ages); the Institute of History "A. D. Xenopol" (Iaşi), and the Institute of Archaeology (Iaşi), which was created in 1990 as a result of the transformation of the Department of Archaeology of the Institute of History "A. D. Xenopol." In Sibiu, Târgu Mureş, Craiova, and Timişoara the beginning of the 1990s witnessed the emergence of Institutes of Socio-Human Research, all funded and organized under the auspices of the Romanian Academy. The Center for Transylvanian Studies was established in Cluj in 1991 as a branch of the Bucharest-based Romanian Cultural Foundation; after 2007 it became a department of the Romanian Academy. Its foundation, however, was regarded as a re-establishment of the former Center for Studies and Investigations of Transylvania which operated at Cluj-Sibiu University between 1942 and 1948. One of the first institutional results of the effort of integrating historical research from Romania into the European picture was the creation of

case with the numerous faculties of history, these research structures too, reflect an increased regionalization, being established not only in the traditional academic centers of Bucharest, Cluj (Kolozsvár) and Iași, but also in towns such as Craiova, Timișoara (Temesvár), Sibiu (Nagyszeben), and Târgu Mureș (Marosvásárhely).

This regionalization is not the only feature of this institutional framework, however. One can add that this is a structure massively funded, in some cases exclusively, from the public budget. Furthermore, one notes the centralized character of the governing administrative bodies (the Ministry of Education and Research or the Romanian Academy) to which the universities and the institutes are subordinate. Depending on a single center for issues of financing and daily administration correspondingly increases and determines excessive bureaucracy. Apart from this, most of the historical journals published in Romania are funded from the public budget and issued by universities, institutes of research, museums or archives. Medieval topics are covered in separate sections of the journals of the three main history institutes from the three traditional centers,⁷ but there are also two journals dedicated entirely to the Middle Ages.

The first, *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie*, is issued annually by the “Nicolae Iorga” Institute of History (Bucharest). Significantly, the first issue published after 1989⁸ proposed a new approach to the Romanian Middle Ages which aimed at integrating Romanian research into the international picture, promoting interdisciplinary research, and continuing the work of source editing. The other is *Medievalia Transilvanica*. First published in 1997 by the Museum of Satu-Mare County (Szatmár megyei Múzeum) and bringing together an editorial board of Romanian and Hungarian medievalists,⁹ this journal confirms the tendency

the Institute for Central European Studies of “Babeș-Bolyai” University in Cluj in 1990. Since 1994 the institute has published an English-language journal, *Colloquia. Journal of Central European Studies*. It is worth mentioning that apart from the numerous studies dealing with medieval topics published over the years, the journal also dedicates ample space to influential medievalists such as interviews with Jacques Le Goff, vol. 7-9, no. 1-2 (2001-2002), and Bronisław Geremek, vol. 10-11, no. 1-2 (2003-2004), Gábor Klaniczay (a special “Profile” section), vol. 13, no. 1-2 (2005), the late professor Zsigmond Jakó, vol. 14, no. 1-2 (2006) and Șerban Papacostea, vol. 14 (2007).

⁷ *Revista istorică* of “N. Iorga” Institute of History, *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie* of the Institute of History Cluj, and *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie “A.D. Xenopol”* Iași.

⁸ Vol. 11, 1993. Until 1999, it was published by the Romanian Academy’s publishing house. For unspecified reasons, at least not in the journal’s pages, since 1999 it has been published by a local publishing house, Editura Istros of the Museum of Brăila.

⁹ The members of the Editorial Board were Marius Diaconescu, Ioan Drăgan, the late Pál Engel, Ioan Aurel Pop, Adrian A. Rusu, and Gábor Sipos.

to regionalize research topics that came to the fore after 1989. The journal has three stated goals: to promote research topics pertaining to medieval Transylvania, to ground the study of the history of this region on an “objective basis,” and to encourage collaboration among Romanian, Hungarian, and German historians in order to overcome the identification of medieval Transylvanian history with the history of each one’s own ethnicity.

This situation could make one wonder if the multitude of structures for studying and publishing about the Middle Ages in Romania are matched by a diversity of research strategies. Furthermore, how is this diversity reflected in the works published in the last fifteen years? Has it led to debates that changed the way the medieval past is researched and written about? In order to find answers to these questions it is worth investigating how medieval studies have been present in the historical debates of the last fifteen years.

One of the general features of medieval studies in Romania has been the consistent effort made in the last fifteen years to study various aspects of medieval history comparatively. From this point of view, one can again detect a regionalization of the comparative approach according to the three main centers, București, Iași, and Cluj, where the works published in recent years have increasingly reflected an understanding of the medieval past as connected to neighboring geographical and political areas (Southeastern Europe, the Pontic space, and Central Europe).¹⁰

¹⁰ *Tahsin Gemil, Românii și otomanii în secolele XIV-XVI* [Romanians and Ottomans between the Fourteenth and Sixteenth Centuries] (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1991); Șerban Papacostea, *Românii în secolul al XIII-lea între cruciată și imperiul mongol* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1993), English translation: *Between the Crusade and the Mongol Empire: Romanians in the Thirteenth Century*, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 1998); Mihai Maxim, *L’Empire Ottoman au nord du Danube et l’autonomie des Principautés Roumaines aux XVIe siècle* (Istanbul: Isis, 1999); Victor Spinei, *Marile migrații din estul și sud-estul Europei în secolele IX-XIII*, (Iași: Institutul European, 1999), English translation: *The Great Migrations from Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, 9th-13th c.*, Cluj: Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2003); Ștefan Andreescu, *Din istoria Mării Negre (Genovezi, români și tătari în spațiul pontic în secolele XIV-XVII)* [About Black Sea History. Genoese, Romanians and Tartars in the in the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries] (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2001); Ovidiu Pecican, *Arpadieni, angevini, români. Studii de medievistică central-europeană*, [Arpadians, Angevins, Romanians Black Sea Regia. Studies on Central European Medieval History] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Fundației Desire, 2001); Șerban Turcuș, *Sfântul Scaun și românii în secolul al XIII-lea* [The Holy See and the Romanians during the Thirteenth century] (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2001); Nicolae Șerban Tanașoca, *Bizanțul și românii. Eseuri, studii, articole* [Byzantium and the Romanians. Essays, studies, articles] (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Pro, 2003); Ovidiu Cristea, *Veneția și Marea Neagră în secolele XIII-XIV. Contribuții la studiul politicii orientale venețiene* [Venice and the Black Sea in the Thirteenth-Fourteenth Centuries. Contributions to the Study of the Venetian Oriental Policy] (Brăila: Editura Istros, 2004); Șerban Papacostea, *La Mer Noire carrefour des grandes routes intercontinentales 1204-*

It is worth mentioning in this context the attempt to understand the Romanian medieval past by referring constantly to relations with the Other (migrations, neighboring Christian kingdoms or the Ottoman Empire).¹¹ This tendency for regionally focused research is even better illustrated by the detailed studies dedicated to particular regions of present-day Romania.¹²

After 1989, medieval studies in Romania seem to have been almost exclusively concerned with the close scrutiny of geographical units whose medieval past was studied either in relation with the general evolution of medieval Europe (or more precisely, Central and Southeastern Europe) or with the local history of the respective regions. These were undoubtedly clear points of departure from the way medieval history had been studied during the Communist regime. But did this

1453 (Bucharest: Institutul Cultural Român, 2006); Andrei Pippidi, *Byzantins, Ottomans, Roumains. Le Sud-Est européen entre l'héritage impérial et les influences occidentales* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006).

¹¹ As was the case with Bogdan Murgescu's book, *Istorie românească - istorie universală (600-1800)* [Romanian History-European History, 600-1800] (Bucharest: Editura Teora, 1999).

¹² Ioan Aurel Pop, *Instituții medievale românești: adunările cneziale și nobiliare (boierești) din Transilvania (secolele XIV-XVI)* [Romanian Medieval Institutions from Transylvania, Fourteenth to Sixteenth Century] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1991); Konrad G. Gündisch, *Das Patriziat siebenbürgischer Städte im Mittelalter* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1993); Wolfgang Schuller, ed., *Siebenbürgen zur Zeit der Römer und der Völkerwanderung* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1994); Adrian Bejan, *Banatul în sec. IV-XII* [The Region of Banat between the Fourth and the Twelfth Centuries] (Timișoara: Editura de Vest, 1995); Géza Entz, *Erdély építészet a 14-16. században* [Architecture in Transylvanian, Fourteenth to Sixteenth Century] (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum, 1996); Harald Roth, *Kleine Geschichte Siebenbürgens* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1996); Ștefan S. Gorovei, *Întemeierea Moldovei. Probleme controversate* [The Foundation of Moldavia. Controversial Issues] (Iași: Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza," 1997); Adrian A. Rusu, *Cetiri și biserici din Țara Hațegului până la 1700* [Founders and Churches in the Hațeg region until 1700] (Satu-Mare: Editura Muzeului Sătmărean, 1997); Hermann Fabini, *Atlas der siebenbürgisch-sächsischen Kirchenburgen und Dorfkirchen*, vol. 1-2 (Hermannstadt-Heidelberg: Monumenta Verlag-Arbeitskreis für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde, 1998-1999); Ioan Drăgan, *Nobilimea românească din Transilvania între anii 1440-1514* [Transylvanian Romanian Nobility between 1440 and 1514] (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2000); Dan Nicolae Busuioc-von Hasselbach, *Țara Făgărașului în secolul al XIII-lea. Mănăstirea cisterciană de la Cârța* [The Făgăraș Region during the Thirteenth Century. The Cistercian Monastery of Cârța] vol. 1 (Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2000); Harald Zimmermann, *Der Deutsche Orden und das Burzenland. Eine diplomatische Untersuchung* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2000); Mihaela Sanda Salontai, *Mănăstiri dominicanice din Transilvania* [Dominican Monasteries in Transylvania] (Cluj-Napoca: Nereamia Napocae, 2002); Enikő Rüz-Fogarasi, *Privilegiile și îndatoririle orașelor din Transilvania voievodală* [Privileges and Duties of the Towns from the Voievodate of Transylvania] (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2003); Lidia Gross, *Confresiile medievale în Transilvania (sec. XIV-XVI)* [Transylvanian Medieval Confraternities, Fourteenth to Sixteenth Century] (Cluj-Napoca, Editura Grinta, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2004); Laurențiu Rădvan, *Orașele din Țara Românească până la sfârșitul secolului al XVI-lea* [The Towns of Wallachia until the End of the Sixteenth Century] (Iași: Editura Universității "A.I. Cuza", 2004).

renewal of topics and approaches lead to more substantial debates about how we analyze the Middle Ages? Did this determine reflection on the methods used and the way the medieval past is understood?

The major historical journals devoted ample space to book reviews and various viewpoints could be expressed in separate sections.¹³ Unsurprisingly, thus, one of the most interesting debates, that between Șerban Papacostea and Daniel Barbu, can be found in the journal devoted to medieval studies.¹⁴ This was one of the few debates which could have changed both the fate and the “face” of medieval studies in Romania. Papacostea insisted on the historian’s obligation to use the documents extensively, to remain faithful to the information they provide, and to always search for historical facts.¹⁵ On the other hand, Barbu argued, in the spirit of Karl Popper’s “The Poverty of Historicism”¹⁶ that what the sources reveal are only facts as they were understood and interpreted by those producing them. These two opposite views on how the sources can or cannot be used in order to gain a more nuanced comprehension of the past deserved a more detailed debate. Unfortunately, this did not happen; at least, none of the historical journals of the Romanian Academy, including the one where the debate started, echoed this polemic. It seems that medievalists in Romania lost an excellent opportunity to discuss how Ranke’s idea of *wie es eigentlich gewesen* could be, and even deserves to be, further applied to medieval studies.

A profound silence seems to have surrounded the community of medievalists in Romania in the years 2002-2003. This silence concerned not only a case of serious plagiarism, which was denounced particularly in cultural magazines, but also the debates taking place at Leeds in July 2003.¹⁷ Romanian medievalists seemed to

¹³ Such as the Addenda et corrigenda section of the journal *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie*, that of Viewpoints in *Medievalia Transilvanica* or the Workshop section of the Erdélyi Múzeum.

¹⁴ The debate focused on Barbu’s book *Byzance, Rome et les Roumains. Essai sur la production politique de la foi au Moyen Age* (Bucharest: Éditions Babel, 1998).

¹⁵ *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie*, 20 (2002): 350-351.

¹⁶ First published in 1957, Romanian translation published in 1996 (Bucharest: Editura All). Barbu’s response was published in the same periodical, vol. 21 (2003): 383-389.

¹⁷ Several medievalists, among them Șerban Papacostea, Ștefan Andreescu, Leon Șimanschi, and Ovidiu Pecican protested in cultural magazines such as *Revista 22*, (11 March 2002 and 15 July 2002) and *Observatorul cultural* (no. 107, March, 2002) against volume 4 of the History of the Romanians, published by the Romanian Academy publishing house. The volume, coordinated by the Academy’s Section of Historical Studies, contained chapters which were largely plagiarized from previously published material. See also the review by Daniel Ursprung, “Historiographie im Zeichen der Beharrung. Kritische Anmerkungen zur umfangreichsten Gesamtdarstellung der rumänischen Geschichte,” *Südostforschungen* 63-64 (2004-2005):

be indifferent to discussing the fate of their craft both at home and abroad. As was the case with the Barbu-Papacostea debate, which could have occasioned a reflective discussion on the medievalist's craft today but in fact did not, we lost a great opportunity. It seems that the culture of debates, discussions, critical reviews is not strongly present on our agenda.

This seems to be confirmed also by the bitter conclusions reached by those evaluating the status of Romanian historiography after 1989.¹⁸ Perhaps the most disappointing remarks concern the Middle Ages itself. According to Ovidiu Cristea, one of the respondents, medieval studies in Romania after 1990 did not evolve satisfactorily. This was determined by the absence of a critical assessment of medieval studies in the 1990s, by a significant lack of communication among medievalists from different parts of the country, and equally important, the lack of a coherent research strategy. His conclusion is pessimistic and reveals a paradox: medieval studies in Romania pretend "to go western," but, this journey is made with a patriotic historiography.

Rather hesitantly, this situation is tending to get better in cyberspace virtual space. The existence of two websites, one claiming to be that of the medievalists from Romania¹⁹ and the other wishing to promote an alternative history,²⁰ where divergent opinions are constantly being presented and debated, might bring some improvement to the "non-combatant" status of medieval studies. Still, one can dare hope that individual initiatives, the existence of dedicated, well trained and eager-to-change-something medievalists would dramatically transform the current

408-421. At the International Medieval Congress in Leeds in 2003 a panel was organized on: "Is There a Place for Medieval Studies in Present-Day Society?"

¹⁸ *Revista istorică* 15 (2004): 51-60. *The Outlook in Historiography* also comprised the points of view of two alumni of the CEU Medieval Studies Department, Mária Pakucs Willcocks and Marian Coman. The need for clarification and evaluating the status of medieval studies was clearly felt fifteen years after the fall of the Communist regime as this is also seen in Zsigmond Jakó's *Az erdélyi magyar történetkutatás mai kérdései* [Present Issues concerning Hungarian Historical Research in Transylvanian], opening remarks at a conference organized in Cluj, 20 and 21 October 2004, *Erdély a magyar középorkutatásban* [Transylvania in Hungarian Medieval Research], *Erdélyi Múzeum* 67 (2005): 1-5.

¹⁹ www.medievistica.ro is available only in Romanian. There are several medieval topics which are dealt with such as history, archaeology, art, monuments, a substantial section dedicated to book reviews and a forum for debates. Among the contributors are also two Medieval Studies alumni, Cosmin Popa-Gorjanu, "Feudalismul românesc" [Romanian feudalism] and Cristian Daniel, "Istorie bisericească" și "istorie a bisericii" [Ecclesiastical History and Church History].

²⁰ www.patzinakia.ro, a site developed by medievalists and early modern researchers. It also hosts the online journal *Studia Patzinaka*, volume 7 (2008). Among the most active members of this group is Ana Maria Gruia, an alumna of the Medieval Studies Department.

status. For this to happen, however, they will have to renounce turning a deaf ear to each other; they will have to learn to communicate with each other at least to the same extent as they are with their colleagues from other parts of the continent. Furthermore, serious debates on concepts such as “Romanian medieval space/territory,” “Romanian medieval civilization,” and the chronology of the Middle Ages are still needed. One of the unexpected results of the regionalization and fragmentation of medieval studies after 1989 was the dominant ethnic view from which various topics were approached. If there is a future for medieval studies in Romania, concepts, chronology, and methodological approaches should be clarified. Otherwise, this future will be marked not by regionalization, but by parochialism.