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## RUMANIAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE ANCIENT GREEK COLONIZATION OF THE BLACK SEA REGION\*

The connection between the Greeks and the Rumanians is old and diversified. Soon after their foundation during the 14th century, the two Rumanian Principalities of Valachia and Moldavia pursued and succeeded in achieving direct dependency upon the Church of Constantinople. The Rumanian Princes were inspired by the Byzantine Imperial ideal, keeping alive Byzantine institutions long after the fall of the Greek Empire. The Rumanian aristocracy favoured marriages into distinguished Greek families and absorbed a great number of Greeks. From the 16th century onward the phenomenon of the gradual Hellenisation of the Rumanian upper class is observed, reaching its peak during the 18th and early 19th century. At those times Greeks or Hellenised princes, known as Phanariots (people from Phanari, an area of Constantinople), ruled the Rumanian lands. Even after the anti-Greek movement, an inevitable result of Rumanian nationalism, the Greek element continued to play, until the Second World War, a significant economic role in the united Rumanian state. During the past few decades thousands of Greeks have studied at Rumanian Universities.

Nevertheless, the connection of the Greeks with what is now Rumania dates from long before the creation of the nation of the Rumanian people. Their constant presence on the coastal area of Rumania, known as Dobruja, goes back to ancient times.

In the 7th century B.C. settlers from Miletos founded an important colony named Histria, at the southern estuaries of the River Danube (ancient Greek Istros), which was inhabited until the 7th century A.D. In the 6th century B.C. the Miletians also established Tomis, which during the Roman

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– Byzantine years was called Constantia and later developed into the prosperous harbour of Costanța. Farther to the south, near the present borders between Rumania and Bulgaria, colonists from Heraclea Pontica founded Callatis, where today's town and bathing resort of Mangalia is situated. Between 1918 and 1940, the years of Great Rumania, the Rumanian coastline expanded even more. After-wards Rumania lost to the Soviet Union its northern coast from the Danube to the River Dniester, while the so-called Southern Dobruja became Bulgarian territory. Within this broader geographical region other significant Greek settlements were founded: Tyras at the estuaries of Dniester in today's Ukraine, Bizone and Dionysopolis at the borders of today's Bulgaria.

The colonial activity of the Greeks on the Rumanian coasts has not been overlooked by modern Rumanian historiography. Serious historical work, however, demanded assiduous archaeological research that was possible only after the annexation of Dobruja to the Rumanian state in 1878 (until then the area was under Ottoman administration). By the first decades of the 20th century systematic archaeological excavations were conducted, during which the Rumanian archaeologist Vasile Pârvan distinguished himself<sup>1</sup>.

The intention of Rumanian research was not only the uncovering of the ancient Greek colonies but mainly the presentation of the ancient Thracian character of Dobruja, because the Getae or the Dacians, or the Geto-Dacians (as the Rumanian historians usually refer to them), who were part of the Thracian family, were considered by the Rumanians as their pre-Roman ancestors. According to the Rumanian perspective, life in the areas that were inhabited by the Dacians was continued by their Romanised descendants, the Rumanians. Consequently the extent of the Rumanian region ought to have been the same as that of the Dacians, although until the First World War parts of it such as Transylvania and Bessarabia belonged to the Austrian and Russian Empires<sup>2</sup>. The struggle of the Rumanians for unity was in reality an attempt for the *restitutio Daciae*. As far as Dobruja is concerned, however, there was an impediment. Not only had it not been included in the Roman province of Dacia, but also the presence of the Scythians there had left a

1. See *Enciclopedia istoriografiei românești*, Editura științifică și enciclopedică, Bucharest 1978, pp. 258-259.

2. In 1940 Bessarabia became part of Soviet Union, and between 1940-1944 Hungary took possession of "Northern" Transylvania.



strong mark and, as a result, during Roman times that very area was named Scythia Minor. Therefore what the Rumanian archaeologists and researchers attempted to prove is the Geto-Dacian character of the area, since the Bulgarians doubt its Rumanian origin. Thus Pârvan's most important monograph on the Greek colonies (1926) bears the title: *Getica. A Pre-history of Dacia (Getica. O protoistorie a Daciei)*.

The whole effort of the research concerning the ancient part of Dobruja has been subsequently influenced by the recent dramatic political changes in Rumania, changes that have shaped modern Rumanian historiography as a whole. The pre-war perception of history, considered to be "bourgeois", was replaced by the Marxist doctrine of the historical reality that in turn was influenced by the development of the Rumanian communist regime. Today's Rumanian historiography, a reflection of a long and painful transient period, seeks new models. In attempting to somehow clarify the impression that the Rumanian people have of the Greek colonization of Dobruja, it is essential to deal with these different tendencies.

Firstly, let us look at a main representative of the Rumanian "bourgeois" historiography, Professor Nicolae Bănescu, vice-president of the Academy of Rumania between 1938 and 1947<sup>3</sup>. During his formal speech at the University of Athens in 1937, Bănescu referred to the presence of the Greeks of ancient times in Dobruja as the first stage of the beneficial influence of the Greek spirit on Rumania (the two others being the Byzantine and the modern Greek phases). He pointed out that those who benefited from the spirit of the ancient colonists were the ancestors of the Rumanian people, the Geto-Dacians, but he did not ignore the fact that the Scythians—their cohabitants—should have also benefited (it is interesting to note that he uses the term Geto-Scythians). Bănescu did not confine the centres of this influence to Histria, Tomis and Callatis. He also included the cities Tyras and Dionysopolis, which were at that time Rumanian territory, and the neighbouring cities Olbia, Apollonia and Odessos, on the Soviet (Olbia) or Bulgarian coast. Based on the findings that the Rumanian archaeological pickaxe brought to light, he expressed his admiration for the civilisation of the colonies of Dobruja and also for the magnitude of its infiltration through commerce into the Geto-Dacian area. Referring to Pârvan he named a region of the south-eastern area of Rumania near the Danube as "Greco-

3. *Enciclopedia...* pp. 50-51.



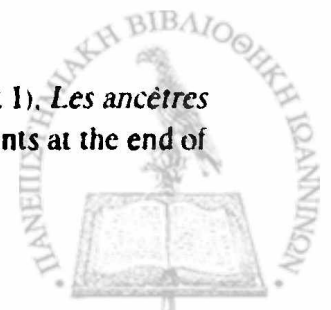
Getan" country. Finally, he praised the privilege of the Rumanian people's ancestors to have come in contact with the brilliant civilization of the Greek world so early in time<sup>4</sup>.

In 1937 in Bucharest, under the auspices of the late King Charles the Second, the first volume of a monumental historical synthesis on the Rumanian people appeared in French. The author was the great Rumanian historian Nicolae Iorga, a charismatic personality who left a great number of works and was for a time Prime Minister of Rumania<sup>5</sup>. In this particular volume, Iorga dedicated a special chapter to the Greek colonization of the Black Sea, like Bănescu, not omitting to make reference to Tyras and Dionysopolis, and to Bizone as well. Although he did not agree with Bănescu's view about the brilliance of the Greek civilization of Dobruja, he believed that the Greek colonists had imposed, through commerce, a significant cultural influence upon the native population, which he did not consider as pure Geto-Dacian either. In fact, he even placed the Greek colonists, along with the Geto-Dacians, the Cimmerians, the Scythians and the Sarmatians, among the pre-Roman ancestors of the Rumanian people. Nevertheless, he did not ignore the diachronic physical and mainly cultural presence of the Greeks. He himself observed in Dobruja the masons of Greek descent from his or older generations, continuing the tradition of fashioning stone that has its origin in the era of Greek colonization. He believed that the naked gypsy dancers of his days (*paparude*) continued a festivity that went back to Callatis. He realized that the word *panair* that is found in Dobruja and the neighbouring areas is the echo of the Greek word *panegyreis* (plural) that means the festivities which took place in the Greek colonies. In addition, he recognized in some water-carrier women in today's Bulgarian South Dobruja the faces of the libation-bearers (*choephoroi*) of Athens. The idea that there was a kind of political agreement between the natives of Dobruja and the Greeks is extremely interesting. This agreement in Iorga's view was necessary for the survival of their colonies. He presented as a historical parallel the settlement of the Crusaders in Syria<sup>6</sup>.

4. *Entre Roumains et Grecs. Ce que nous apprend le passé*, and Greek translation: *Μεταξύ Ρουμάνων και Ἑλλήνων. Τί μᾶς διδάσκει τὸ παρελθόν*, off-print of "Νέα Πολιτική. Μηνιαία Επιθεώρησης", 1937, pp. 1-3 (1049--1051), 9-11 (1057--1059).

5. *Enciclopedia*, ... pp. 183-184.

6. N. IORGA, *Histoire des Roumains et de la romanité orientale*. I (part I), *Les ancêtres avant les Romains*, Bucharest 1937, pp. 183-216, see also the table of contents at the end of



A change in the historical perspective manifests itself in 1960, when an edition of the Academy of the People's Republic of Rumania was published under the title: *History of Rumania*. Its aim was to lend the national history its Marxist substance, according to the resolution of the 2nd Congress of the Rumanian Workers' Party that had accepted the directions of Orthodox Soviet Socialism. The non-reference to the Greek colonies in the Rumanian territories that were lost to the neighbouring socialist countries is typical. The Greek colonization of Dobruja was considered an independent socio-economical phenomenon not related to the later presence of the Greeks in Rumania. It was nothing but a natural and predictable result within a particular chronological period, due to the development of the relations of production of an ancient people living not far from Dacians. So it happened, and that particular process expanded to the area that was to become a region of Rumania. Nevertheless the further development of the relation of production in the colonies brought about the decay of their civilization, as well as the gradual eradication of their Greek character. This long historical process was complete by the end of the 7th century, with the definite destruction of the local, pre-existing, disintegrating slave-owner society, by the wave of Slav and Bulgarian invaders. The isolation of the new Rumanian regime seemed to influence the portrayal of the relationship between the Greeks and Geto-Dacians, the latter of whom are presented as the only native people of Dobruja. The Geto-Dacians do not appear to benefit from their contact with the Greek civilization since they seem just to be dependent cultivators who, with their labour, increase the wealth of their exploiting colonists. Those of the Geto-Dacians who do not have immediate contact with the Greeks also seem to suffer from the distressing consequences that the vicinity to a developed economy causes to their traditional society. Finally, the art of the colonies is considered to be poorer than that of the Greek Metropolis, with the only exception being when it receives the influences of the native element, which is considered to be powerful enough to affect even the religion of the Greek colonists<sup>7</sup>.

the book: cf. idem. *Istoria românilor*. I (part I), *Strămoșii înainte de romani*<sup>2</sup>, Editura științifică și enciclopedică. Bucharest 1988, pp. 7-10 (contents in Rumanian and French), 203-219 (notes and commentaries of V. MIHĂILESCU-BÎRLIBA: pp. 219-221).

7. *Istoria României*. I. *Comuna primitivă. Sclavagismul. Perioada de trecere la feudalism*, Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române. [Bucharest] 1960, pp. V-XII, XXIX-XXXVII (the ideological context), 162-212, 212-215 (bibliography), 580-613, 613-614 (bibliography).



The ambitious effort to create a great Soviet-style national history was not to be completed, since political events changed once more. In 1965 a new Congress of the Rumanian Workers' Party decided to change its name into the Communist Party, declared the country a Socialist Republic and appointed as the most powerful man of the country Nicolae Ceaușescu. A new era started that was characterized by the doubting of the Soviet guardianship, the pursuit of self-sufficiency and rising nationalism. The new spirit was reflected in the conception of the relationship between Greeks and the Geto-Dacians and it is even found in the work of Professor Dionisie Pippidi, who was one of the authors of the edition just discussed<sup>8</sup>. This internationally-known and respected professor was of Greek origin and a relative by marriage to Iorga. In 1967, revising some of his earlier work, he projected a perspective on the relations between the Geto-Dacians and Greeks according to which the Geto-Dacian element imposed on Dobouja's Greek people an especially significant influence, which is not confined within the areas of art and religion, but it is mainly present in economics and politics. This influence appears to be the result of the transformation, from the 4th century B.C. onwards, of the colonies into rural centres rather than the commercial ones that they had been. Thus, a necessary factor for their survival was the unimpeded cultivation of the hinterland that was achieved with the labour of the neighbouring Geto-Dacians and with the military protection that the Geto-Dacian rulers offered. In his effort to give evidence for this perspective, Pippidi mentioned some inscriptions that could prove, in addition to their alliance, the political subordination of the Greeks to the Geto-Dacian chiefs according to their so called "Pontic" policy. He blamed at the same time the "bourgeois" historiography because it not did succeed in making proper use of the inscriptions<sup>9</sup>. The idea of the dependency of the Greeks became extremely popular in the Rumanian historiography, especially in 1980, when the anniversary of the 2050 years since the

8. *Enciclopedia* ... pp. 263-264.

9. D.M. PIPPIDI. *Contribuții la istoria veche a României. Ediția a două revăzută și mult sporită*. Editura științifică, Bucharest 1967, pp. 32-67, 120-221: the Pontic policy (*politica pontică*) of the Geto-Dacian leaders: p. 214. The author concentrated his critique on the different perspective of Scarlat Lambrino, the successor of Pârvan as the director of the archaeological campaign in Histria, who lived in exile as opponent to communist regime: *Enciclopedia* ... p. 196. also *infra* n. 10.



foundation of the first united Geto-Dacian kingdom, as a fact that predicted the unity of the Rumanian state, was celebrated. In a commemorative publication of the University of Bucharest (Faculty of History-Philosophy), the archaeologist Alexandru Suceveanu, exalting Burebista, a contemporary of Caesar who united the Geto-Dacians, presented him not only as ruling the Greek cities but also conquering and punishing them according to a highly inspired, anti-Roman plan<sup>10</sup>. The same year another Rumanian expert, Radu Florescu, praised the Geto-Dacian unity, being the author of two impressive volumes of archaeological interest, but he avoided mentioning anything about the ceded Southern Dobruja<sup>11</sup>. In 1981 the same scientist presented, although with doubts, a previously known Geto-Dacian personality, Dromichaïtes, the opponent of the Diadoch Lysimachus, as an already powerful Geto-Dacian king who extended his rule over the neighbouring Greek cities<sup>12</sup>. Dinu Giurescu, the last of a family of eminent Rumanian historians, took the same perspective in an illustrated book for the English-speaking public. He went even further by objecting to the ancient name Scythia Minor, given to Dobruja, suggesting that the term Pontic Dacia would be better and presenting the colonies on the Rumanian coast and the lost Rumanian land as one entity<sup>13</sup>.

Concerning the trends that have been formed in the years after the Ceaușescu's period, one should mention a lecture, the text of which, is apparently still unpublished, delivered by the historian Nicolae Stoicescu, Ambassador of Rumania in Athens during the first Iliescu's presidency. In it he included the Greek colonization of Dobruja, having in mind a diachronic perspective of the Greco-Rumanian relations that seems to be the same as Bănescu's. After being freed from "historical materialism", spirit becomes now the centre of interest. Remembering archaeological data, Stoicescu is

10. Al. SUCEVEANU, *Burebista și Dobrogea în 2050 de ani de la făurirea de către Burebista a primului stat independent și centralizat al geto-dacilor*. Bucharest 1980, pp. 59-79. About the author who actively participated in the excavations of Histria: *Enciclopedia...*, p. 306; Al. SUCEVEANU. *Histria*. VI. Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România. Bucharest 1982. pp. 7-8. 13-15 (in which he mentions Lambrino).

11. *Strămoșii românilor. Vestigii milenare de cultură și artă. Daco-romanii...* I-II, Editura meridiane. s.l. 1980.

12. R. FLORESCU. *Țara lui Dromihaïtes, "Pontica" XIV*, 1981. pp. 153-157.

13. D.C. GIURESCU. *Illustrated History of the Romanian People*. Editura sport-turism, Bucharest 1981. pp. 30-34. About this family of historians: *Enciclopedia...* pp. 155-157.



convinced about the “wealth of the intellectual life” in the Greek colonies and, calling upon the resolutions of the Rumanian “bourgeois” historiography, assumes, like Bănescu, the existence of a native population deeply influenced by the Greek civilization, considering his individuals half-Greeks (*Mixhellenes*). He does not overlook the economic dimension of the contact of Greeks with the Geto-Dacians, although he limits it to commercial activity only. He ignores the relationship of dependence-exploitation in the agricultural sector, which was so favoured in previous Marxist historiography. An even greater impression is caused by the absence of any mention of the political subordination of the Greek colonists to Geto-Dacians. Nevertheless, not every sense of national feeling has been excluded from Stoicescu’s text: there is not the slightest reference to the Scythian element but, on the contrary, immediately after Callatis, Dionysopolis of Southern Dobruja is mentioned<sup>14</sup>.

In conclusion, Bănescu’s lecture is inspired by an idealism which was common to the representatives of the conservative European scholars at this time. But, in the case of Iorga, who is also conservative, this very idealism is shaped and re-determined by the authenticity of his genius. Concerning the representatives of the Rumanian Marxist historiography, their conception, in contrast to their dialectic principles, deviates towards isolation and nationalism, reflecting the ideological contradictions that characterized and undermined communist countries. Although Stoicescu does not keep himself completely at a distance from his era, he expresses a general tendency of the Rumanian intelligentsia to re-accept the institutions of the intellectual establishment that had been displaced by the communist regime.

14. After a typewritten copy, 30 pp. About N. Stoicescu: *Enciclopedia...*, pp. 304-305.

