

THE ROMANIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE 1990's

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Abstract

The quantity and quality of Romanian historians work improved seriously after the fall of communism. Although the new generation of historians, historians that borrowed the know-how from the West, have to face many obstacles, the battle is not lost already. The battle between those who want to revive the "grand-narrative" from communism and those who are trying to deconstruct some unfounded myths is still on the scene. Ideological constraints and political active involvement in sustaining the "grand-narrative" are serious obstacles for those trying to promote new methodological frameworks and debates. It seems that the state still holds the power to determine the official writers of Romanian history by encouraging a certain number of chosen historians to write a treaty under the aegis of Romanian Academy. Whatsoever, the deconstructivist generation managed to survive and their work to be appreciated by a serious number of intellectuals. Foreign grants are permitting nominal research and each historian can follow its own academic choice.

Key words: grand-narrative, deconstructivism, reluctance to change, historian debate, mentalities

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The general framework

The revolution of 1989 brought important changes in the field of Romanian historical studies⁶. Together with the Communist rule vanished also the political control of the regime over historiography. Although several political forces tried and still try to influence historiography, none of them had the means to exert an encompassing control on the institutions that produce and/or disseminate historical knowledge. Another important change concerned the opening towards the world. The 1980s ideological and economic constraints had made the contacts with Western historiographies increasingly difficult, both in terms of personal contacts between historians and in terms of having access to recent historical literature. After 1989 the policy of isolation ended, and the Romanian historians were free to contact their foreign colleagues, to do research and even to complete their studies abroad. Of course, this freedom was conditioned by the availability of financial means, but the opportunities to benefit from Western grants and other forms of support were significant, especially for young people and for the historians who had been in contact with Western colleagues already before 1989. The attraction of the West and the financial difficulties in most post-communist countries caused a certain slowdown of the scientific contacts with the other East European countries.

Significant change occurred also in the institutional framework of research and higher education. During the 1980s the number and staff of research institutions and history faculties had diminished. In 1989 there were only 3 universities (in Bucharest, Cluj and Iași), which supplied history programs combined with philosophy for a total number of no more than 100 students per year. The number of research institutions was higher, but during the 1980s there were periodic rumors that several of these institutions would be unified under the aegis of the History Institute of the Romanian Communist Party.

After 1989 the History Institute of the Communist Party was disbanded. Most of the other research institutes returned from the universities under the aegis of the Romanian Academy, and their number increased, either through the

⁶ The general overview is based on Bogdan Murgescu, *A fi istoric în anul 2000*, București, 2000, especially pp.37-39, 66-71.

divisions of some of the existing institutes, or through new founded institutions, such as the Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism. Even more dynamic was the university landscape. Demand for higher education was high, and it combined with local pressures to establish new universities in various cities. Therefore, a great number of new universities were founded, both by the state and by private organizations. Not all of them provide history programs, but many do. In 2002 there are 15 state universities and 5 private universities which do offer history programs, and the number of students has increased from less than 100 per year in 1989 to over 2000 per year in 2002. This tremendous increase opened significant career opportunities, both for older historians working in research institutes, museums, or secondary schools, and for young graduates. Nevertheless, while the old universities in the major scientific centers could improve the quality of their staff, the new universities in smaller towns either tried to attract established scholars from other cities, at least in part-time cooperation or resorted to less qualified locals. Most of these new universities had also no adequate libraries and other teaching facilities, and only some of them could compensate this in time through massive investments in teaching infrastructure. The institutional inflation effects were particularly significant with respect to the quality of students, and therefore the overall quality of the teaching process declined. This decline was further accentuated by the structural financial constraints, which emerged since the mid 1990s. Although the total sum included in the state budget for universities has increased, the allocation per student has declined in real terms, as well as the average wages of the teaching staff (the relative decline of the economic and social status of the teaching profession in Romania is more severe than in other East European countries); under these circumstances, in most of the universities, investments in teaching facilities remained also scarce. For the universities, a solution was to increase the number of students, either by obtaining from the Ministry higher numbers of state-financed study places, or by resorting to self-paying students (in Romania higher education is in principle tuition-free, but the state finances only a limited number of places, and the people who do not qualify for these places are allowed to pay for their studies). This did not solve the problem, and the lack of resources persisted, causing an increasing institutional pressure to “rationalize” the teaching process, i.e. to teach to larger groups of students a smaller number of hours per week. In the early 1990s the teaching curricula have been

designed rather autonomously by the academics, according more to “humanistic ideals” than to “financial realism”; since about 1994 this trend has been reversed, the number of teaching hours and the diversity of disciplines have been reduced, and this endangers the overall quality of the teaching process as much as the inflation of less-gifted and less-motivated students.

The dispersion of research and higher education institutions combined with the economic difficulties undermined almost all chances of creating and/or maintaining encompassing professional institutions. The legacy of the communist regime was not particularly helpful in this respect. It existed and still exists a National Committee of the Romanian Historians, but it focuses on Romania’s representation in the International Committee of Historical Sciences, and exerts almost no influence on the internal development of the Romanian historiography. There is also the Society for Historical Studies, which includes numerous secondary school history teachers, but only few researchers and university teachers; in the particular context of the 1990s the tradition that all history teachers in the secondary were automatically members became obsolete, therefore, despite several revitalization efforts, the membership declined significantly. New professional associations also appeared, but only those who have focused on very specific history sub-fields have managed to establish themselves. In this institutional framework, the section for historical and archaeological sciences of the Romanian Academy has tried systematically to assert that it had the role to guide and assess the historical studies in Romania, but this claim was challenged by the major universities, and remained therefore controversial.

General features of the production of historical knowledge

According to the 2 last volumes of the major bibliographical survey, *Bibliografia istorică a României*, the number of people publishing at least 3 articles in 5 years has increased from about 1000 in the early 1990s to about 1500 in the late 1990s⁷. Of course, not all these studies are based on original research. Nevertheless, the numbers indicate that the production of

⁷ Our survey was based on the indexes of *Bibliografia istorică a României*, vol.VIII, 1989-1994, București, 1996, p.421-447, and vol.IX, 1994-1999, Cluj-Napoca, 2000, p.631-686. A larger discussion of the relevance of this criterion in Bogdan Murgescu, *op.cit.*, p.39.

historical works has been a dynamic field in the Romanian society of the 1990s. Besides the “natural” desire of the historians to publish their findings, there were also other causes for this dynamic. There was a significant public demand for historical contributions, which has been articulated by a flourishing landscape of private Publishing Houses. The historians who got jobs in the universities were also exposed to a strong institutional pressure to acquire their doctoral degrees and to publish in order to obtain better positions. In order to become a full professor or a *conferențiar* (i.e. assistant-professor) the Ph.D. is a compelling legal condition, and there are also quantitative requirements with respect to the scientific publications. During the 1980s there had been a radical fall in the number of people who were allowed to register in doctoral programs, so at the beginning of the 1990s a lot of historians around the age of 30 or 40 years did not hold a Ph.D yet. Combined with the cohorts of new graduates, this generated a large and increasing trend of doctoral programs. Of course, the theses begun in the early 1990s started to be presented only in 1994-1995, but in the late 1990s the rhythm increased to more than 100 theses yearly. Of course, the quality of these theses varies a lot, but they included also a lot of original research contributions.

This wave of doctoral theses also strengthened the trend favoring individual research to the detriment of collective projects. During the 1980s the authorities had tried to impose large group research projects, politically nominated as being of national significance. After 1989 there was a reaction against such projects, and most researchers managed to assert their own freedom to decide their own research themes. The attempts of the Romanian Academy and of various grant-awarding bodies to favor group research had only limited effects, because most researchers joined larger projects only apparently, and continued to work on an individual basis; this pattern was strengthened by the fact that output control is superficial, and only very few of the collective research grants have yielded significant contributions to the historical knowledge.

Most of recent research focuses on Romanian history, or on the history of the international relations of the Romanians. In fact, publications on other topics

amount to only about 9% of those listed in *Bibliografia istorică...*⁸. Quantitatively, all historical periods are well represented, but the part of contemporary history (i.e. the period after 1918) prevails and is increasing from about 31% in 1989-1994 to over 35% in 1994-1999⁹. The field of contemporary history attracted also historians who under communism had preferred to save their professional standards by retreating to the study of the periods before 1800; therefore, some of the major Romanian specialists in contemporary history after 1989 had acquired their professional skills and reputation first as specialists in ancient, medieval and early modern history (e.g. Florin Constantiniu, Dinu C. Giurescu etc.). Most of the historical publications of the 1990s are devoted to political history and to a certain extent to cultural history, while economic and social history receive less attention, while theoretical and methodological discussions are almost entirely absent. This pattern was established already in the 1960s, when the Romanian historiography shifted from an aborted Marxist version to nationalism, and has been reinforced after 1989.

Analytically, most of the Romanian recent studies in political history, and in its two neighboring sub-fields - military history and diplomatic history - are archaic, i.e. and methodologically at the level of 19th century historicism. This pattern is due to the fact that most Romanian historians engaged in these fields were completely uninterested in the methodological debates of 20th century historiography or in its interference with other social sciences, and therefore do not feel any need to adjust to the renewal of Western political, diplomatic and military studies since the 1970s. The methodological backwardness combines with a heavily Romanian-centered approach, which takes into consideration only Romania's relations with the "great powers", avoiding any comparison with other small/peripheral countries. This low level of analysis is furthered also by the huge public demand for contemporary political history, and by the fact that the public is better accustomed with traditional historical narratives than with systematic (structural) approaches.

⁸ In *Bibliografia istorică a României*, vol.IX, 1994-1999, only 1665 titles from 18500 are listed under the heading „world history”, which includes also the history of all other parts of the world excepting Romania.

⁹ In fact, this evaluation indicates only orders of magnitude, since many contributions are not limited to a single clear-cut period.

An exhaustive survey of the contributions to historical knowledge during the 1990s is impossible in this framework. As already pointed out, most contributions originate in individual research projects, and are only loosely connected together. In what follows the study will concentrate not necessarily on the analytically best contributions, but on the fields where the renewal of historical knowledge was most consistent and had most public impact.

New directions in contemporary history

Obviously, after 1989 the historians were expected to supply “the real history” of Romania. This demand focused mainly on the history of the 20th century, and especially on the history of communism, which were perceived as having been falsified by the communist regime. The pressure to unveil the misdeeds of communism was supported also by a part of the political forces, especially by the “historical” parties, i.e. the National-Peasant Party, the National-Liberal Party, and the Social-Democratic Party, that had been revived by old survivors of the pre-communist parties. Many of these survivors had been imprisoned by the communists, and wanted a legitimate moral compensation for their sufferings. Besides, they hoped to accumulate political capital through the recollection of their sufferings and on the fact that they had fought against communism; they also hoped to chastise communism and their current political enemies, who were depicted as neo-communists. An Association of the Former Political Convicts, created immediately after the revolution, managed to obtain material benefits for its registered members. These vested interests to document the anti-communist resistance and the communist repression stimulated a lot of research, based on both archival and oral sources. Besides the Association of the Former Political Convicts, specialized institutions were also created to investigate these aspects, e.g. the Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, under the aegis of the Romanian Academy, and the Museum from Sighetul Marmăției, where a great number of non-communist politicians had been imprisoned in the 1950s, many losing their lives.

Many of these investigations focused on the first phase of the communist regime up to 1964, when the repression had been harsher, and a period for

which the archives were easier accessible. In fact, a rather large consensus emerged in this respect. Already in 1968 Ceaușescu had denounced some of the “excesses” of his predecessor, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, and claimed that under his rule such “errors” were no longer possible. Besides putting the blame on Dej, and on his interior minister, Alexandru Drăghici, the national-communist propaganda suggested that the crimes of the 1950s had been caused mainly by the Soviet influence, which had determined an anti-national policy of the regime, and that this phase had ended with the withdrawal of the Soviet occupation army in 1958 and with the Romanian distancing from Moscow in the 1960s. Quite more, while this theme was only cautiously dealt with in the official discourse, the literature of the 1970s and 1980s was free to blame the misdeeds of the so-called “obsessive decade” of the 1950s. Therefore, already before 1989 most of the public opinion agreed silently that the 1950s had been a bleak period in Romanian history, that repression had been wrong, and that the first Romanian communists came to power only with the help of the Soviet Union, serving more Soviet than Romanian interests. Under these circumstances, documenting the evil of communism in the late 1940s and in the 1950s was not really controversial. Even more, the people who had been active in the repression were either dead or too old to count anymore, and the still active members of the communist elite preferred to distance themselves from such compromising political ancestors. The concrete contributions to this first phase of the communist rule are too numerous to be listed here. Besides articles in specialized journals, such as “Arhivele Totalitarismului”, “Analele Sighet”, and “Memoria”, several volumes of documents and monographs were published, focusing especially on the armed resistance in the mountains, on the prison system and on the forced cooperativization of agriculture¹⁰.

Many of these contributions were based on the recollections of the surviving witnesses¹¹. The publication of recollections and/or of interview volumes was not limited to the first phase of communism. It began in fact with the

¹⁰ See the titles listed in *Bibliografia istorică a României*, vol.VIII, 1989-1994, p.220-224, and vol.IX, 1994-1999, p.337-348.

¹¹ Several institutions made significant efforts to establish oral history archives. A special mention in this respect needs the Center for Oral History of the Romanian Radio Society, which collected a large number of interviews and prepares them for public access.

publishing of diaries and/or memories of “bourgeois” politicians of the interwar period (some of them had been already published previously, so were easier available)¹², and extended to the recollections of the surviving communist leaders¹³. Yet, with few exceptions, the phase of national-communism was less thoroughly investigated, most specialists in contemporary history avoiding this controversial period with the argument that the archives are not open for the 1970s and 1980s. Under these circumstances, it is quite revealing that the best analyses of the Ceaușescu regime were made not by the Romanian specialists in contemporary history, but either by foreign scholars¹⁴, or by sociologists¹⁵.

The freedom to deal with topics tabooed under communism extended also to other themes. Some of them, such as the documentation of Romania’s participation in the war against the Soviet Union in 1941-1944, or the description of the way the Soviets had imposed Romania’s shift to communism, enjoyed a large support and generated no polemics. Yet, two other related themes proved to be particularly controversial. One was that of the right-wing movement of the Iron Guard, and the other one was that of Ion Antonescu, who had ruled Romania in 1940-1944 and had fought in alliance with Hitler’s Germany against the United Nations in World War II. In both cases the choice to deal with such a theme was not purely professional, but also personal and/or ideological. Motivations were various. First, there was a desire to “do justice” to a political

¹² Among them memories and/or journals of king Charles II (1930-1940), prime-ministers (e.g. Alexandru Marghiloman, Alexandru Averescu, I. G. Duca, Constantin Argetoianu, Gheorghe Tătărescu, Armand Călinescu, Constantin Sănătescu), ministers (e.g. Grigore Gafencu, Mihail Manoilescu, Victor Slăvescu), and of many other leading politicians and/or intellectuals. For complete bibliographical references, cf. *Bibliografia istorică a României*, vol.VIII, 1989-1994, p.53-55 and vol.IX, 1994-1999, p.53-57.

¹³ These were published either in the form of memories written by these communist veterans themselves (e.g. Silviu Brucan, *Generația irosită. Memorii*, București, 1992; Gheorghe Apostol, *Eu și Gheorghiu-Dej*, București, 1998), or in the form of interview books (e.g. Lavinia Betea, *Maurer și lumea de ieri. Mărturii despre stalinizarea României*, Arad, 1995; eadem, *Alexandru Bârlădeanu despre Dej, Ceaușescu și Iliescu. Convorbiri*, București, 1997).

¹⁴ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism. Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu’s Romania*, Berkeley, 1991 (Romanian edition in 1994).

¹⁵ Vladimir Pasti, *România în tranziție. Căderea în viitor*, București, 1995; Pavel Câmpeanu, *Ceaușescu, anii numărătorii inverse*, Iași, 2002.

movement/actor condemned by the communists, and therefore perceived basically under their anti-communist dimension. This combined with the nostalgia of former members of the Iron Guard and/or of people who identified themselves either with the nationalist movement, or with the authoritarian option symbolized by Antonescu. The strategy of the people who tried to recuperate the Iron Guard and/or Ion Antonescu was to stress their "law and order" statements, and to capitalize the economic frustrations of the 1990s, and also the Xenophobic, anti-Semitic and anti-Gypsy sensibilities of parts of the population. This "recuperation" had thus a clear authoritarian, right-wing nationalist and anti-democratic dimension, and was often undertaken by historians who also committed themselves politically¹⁶.

In the particular case of Ion Antonescu¹⁷, this historiographic reevaluation had also some special political connotations. In the early 1990s a large part of the opposition against the president Ion Iliescu, losing the elections, tried to argue publicly that Iliescu was neo-communist and pro-Russian, and that the solution for Romania was to return to its pre-communist political system, i.e. to the constitutional monarchy under King Michael I (1927-1930, 1940-1947), who had been forced to abdicate by the communists and lived in exile in Switzerland. Some of the followers of Ion Iliescu counter-acted by boosting up the figure of Ion Antonescu, who could be presented as the best symbol of the anti-communist and anti-Russian struggle; quite more, insisting on Antonescu's virtues allowed to blame King Michael for having overthrown the former one in August 1944, for having delivered him to the Soviets, and having agreed to his conviction and execution as a war criminal. Yet, in spite of these basic lines, the political and historiographic divides did not overlap entirely. Some members of the "historical" parties tried to value simultaneously Antonescu and King Michael as anti-communist symbols, while Ion Iliescu personally, and also a part of his followers, stuck to a "left

¹⁶ The most obvious example is the historian Gheorghe Buzatu, who published extensively on Ion Antonescu – e.g. Gheorghe Buzatu (coord.), *Mareșalul Antonescu în fața istoriei*, 2 vols., Iași, 1990; Ion Antonescu, *Un A.B.C. al anticomunismului românesc* (ed. Gheorghe Buzatu), 2 vols., Iași, 1992, 1999 – and then became leading member of the extremist Greater Romania Party, and vice-president of the Senate on behalf of this party.

¹⁷ See the documentation gathered by William Totok in <http://home.t-online.de/home/totok/ion.htm>

anti-fascist sensibility” and kept their distance from any positive reevaluation of Antonescu.

Besides this distance, Antonescu’s “recuperation” encountered some political and scientific difficulties. Most important was the fact that Antonescu had been Hitler’s ally not only against the Soviets, but also against the United States and against Great Britain, and this did not fit with Romania’s efforts to be accepted in Western organizations, such as the NATO, and the European Union. Even more serious was the fact that Antonescu had persecuted the Jews. The Federation of the Jewish Communities in Romania began a large scientific endeavor to document the suffering of the Romanian Jews during World War II, and this documented also Antonescu’s personal responsibility in this respect. Antonescu’s defenders tried to argue that he had not agreed to deliver the Romanian Jews for the German *Endlösung*, and that the survival rate of the Romanian Jews was higher than in many other countries; yet, the documents published in the 1990s showed clearly that Antonescu also considered that Romania should try to get rid of its Jews, that he continued discriminations, issued criminal orders with respect to the Jewish population in Basarabia, northern Bucovina, and Transnistria, and was thus personally responsible for the deportation and death of more than 100000 Jews¹⁸.

During the 1990s, protests against the apologetics of Antonescu have met with little success. Yet, after Iliescu’s reelection in December 2000, his public conciliation with King Michael in spring 2001 and the American warnings that Romania’s chances to be accepted in NATO would be endangered if it did not share the Western values lead to a sharper policy against the cult of Antonescu. First of all, the military, who had previously participated intensely at the reevaluation of Antonescu, were efficiently warned to refrain

¹⁸ See especially the volumes: *Martiriul evreilor din România 1940-1944. Documente și mărturii*, București, 1991; *Evreii din România între anii 1940-1944*, 4 vols., București, 1993-1998. The findings of these documents were analysed in synthetical overviews (e.g. Victor Neumann, *Istoria evreilor din România*, Timișoara, 1996), and in special monographs (e.g. Lya Benjamin, *Prigoană și rezistență în istoria evreilor din România 1940-1944. Studii*, București, 2001). The number of Jewish victims is highly controversial, and might exceed significantly the figure of 100000.

from such manifestations¹⁹, and began to be schooled about Antonescu's misdeeds. Then, the government issued a decree banning all statues and public manifestations in favor of people convicted for war crimes²⁰, i.e. for Antonescu, and several organizations began to organize scientific discussions on the fate of the Jews during Antonescu's regime. This very politicized reassessment of Antonescu combined with a more general discussion about the significance of anti-democratic and anti-Semitic ideas in interwar Romania. Several contributions illuminated these subjects²¹, and thus provided arguments that before the Soviet impact, at least a large part of the Romanian society had undermined the democratic constitutional system. These discussions focused often on the right-wing ideas and connections of several outstanding Romanian intellectuals, such as Mircea Eliade, Constantin Noica and Emil Cioran, and thus caused passionate polemics; yet, it is interesting that there were mostly political scientists, philosophers, writers and literary historians who carried the debates, while the traditional specialists of political contemporary history generally avoided this subject.

The deconstruction of historical myths

In fact, the reassessment of several aspects of contemporary history did not change much to the grand-narrative of Romanian history. Contemporary history had been perceived also before 1989 as particularly vulnerable to political influences, and thus as less reliable. Therefore, it played only a marginal role in the grand-narrative of Romanian history, which continued to be based on the ideas that the Romanians were of noble Dacian and Roman descent, enjoyed chronological priority in Romania (especially in the

¹⁹ Striking was the fact that in 2001 general Chelaru, former chief of the General Staff, was forced to resign from the army because he participated at a ceremony at a statue of Antonescu. Afterwards, gen. Chelaru became president of a small nationalist party.

²⁰ "Monitorul Oficial", nr.214, 28 martie 2002. For a general presentation of this re-assessment see Randolph Braham's introduction to the volume *Exterminarea evreilor români și ucrainieni în perioada antonesciană*, București, 2002.

²¹ E.g. Leon Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s*, Oxford, 1991 (Romanian edition 1995); Zigu Ornea, *Anii treizeci. Extrema dreaptă românească*, București, 1995; George Voicu, *Mitul Nae Ionescu*, București, 2000; idem, *Teme antisemite în discursul public*, București, 2000; Andrei Oișteanu, *Imaginea evreului în cultura română*, București, 2001.

symbolic competition with the Hungarians for Transylvania), had fought valiantly against all foreign intruders, defending thus both Europe (especially against the Turks) and the Fatherland. This grand-narrative focused mainly on figures and events from the Middle Ages, but the allegedly eternal struggle for independence and national unity was crowned by the process of building up the “national unitary state”, a process that began in the 19th century and was triumphally fulfilled in 1918. Therefore, in this grand-narrative the period after 1918 is rather an epilogue, dominated by defensive attitudes and by the sufferings inflicted by the malicious “great powers” (especially the Soviet Union, but sometimes also the United States) and “revisionist states” (especially Hungary), which strived to tear apart the “Romanian national unitary state” and/or to favor some particular groups, especially belonging to the minorities.

A significant number of Romanian historians have challenged aspects of this grand-narrative, both before and after 1989. At first, this questioning was not programmatic, but came from the normal scientific proceeding, which made many historians who worked especially on ancient and medieval history to reveal facts and to draw conclusions which did not fit into the ideological pattern of the national grand-narrative. Of course, during the rule of Ceaușescu caution was imperative, so the conclusions were more often implicit than explicit, and generalizations were avoided. After 1989 the contributions that contradicted particular aspects of the historical vulgate grew in numbers, and there was an increasing pressure to question the whole nationalist grand-narrative

Yet, the systematic challenge of the nationalist historical narrative came from the field of cultural studies. This particular direction had benefited already during the 1970s and 1980s from contacts with the Western historiography, especially with the French studies in the history of mentalities. After 1990 this direction, which had been marginal before, acquired an increased importance and audience, and began to challenge the hegemony of traditional political history²². The field of modern and contemporary political ideologies, tabooed before 1989, proved to be particularly attractive for the specialists in cultural history, who felt compelled to use their

²² For the rising trend in the history of mentalities and in imagology studies, see *Bibliografia istorică a României*, vol.VIII, 1989-1994, p.80-81 and vol.IX, 1994-1999, p.105-111.

methodological expertise in order to deconstruct these ideologies and to expose their often mythological character.

Generally, the historiographic direction of deconstructing the national myths is associated in Romania with the name of Lucian Boia, and this is justified to a large extent. Boia, professor at the University of Bucharest and director of a Center for the History of the Imaginary, has catalyzed the energies of several historians working in this direction²³ and has provided the most explicit and systematic contribution to this field of scholarship²⁴. Boia's main argument was that the Romanian ideology of the 19th-20th centuries adapted itself to the challenge of national competition in the modern world, and the historiography tried, partly consciously, partly instinctively, to provide an adequate historical basis for a positive self-definition of the Romanians. Or, as Boia puts it, insisting on history was also a compensation for a less satisfying present: the aim has been "to prove through history a noble origin and a glorious past, able to ensure to the Romanian nation, more than its not so glamorous present, a respectable place in the concert of European nations"²⁵. Boia describes the way the Romanian historians and intellectuals have conceived various constituents of the Romanian historical identity, showing especially the fact that the opinions have varied a lot over time, and that they have only little to do with any "objective truth". Although Boia is cautious to assert that these patterns are not particularly Romanian, but are common to most modern European cultures²⁶, and although he insists that his aim is not to destroy all historical myths, but just to present their evolution and to help the Romanian society to decide consciously what myths it would prefer in its way into the 21st century, his approach was perceived as an outright personal attack on the Romanian national historical narrative.

²³ For example he organized colloquia on the historical myths at the University of Bucharest in 1993-1995, and published the papers in the volumes: Lucian Boia (ed.), *Mituri istorice românești*, București, 1995; Lucian Boia (ed.), *Miturile comunismului românesc*, 2 vols., București, 1995, 1997.

²⁴ Lucian Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească*, București, 1997; idem, *Jocul cu trecutul. Istoria între adevăr și ficțiune*, București, 1998.

²⁵ Idem, *Istorie și mit...*, p.32.

²⁶ Idem, *Două secole de mitologie națională*, București, 1999.

It is worth mentioning that the deconstructionist direction was broader than the circle of Boia's disciples, and its members owed at least equally to the intellectual influence of Pompiliu Teodor in Cluj, of Alexandru Zub in Iași, and especially of Alexandru Duțu in Bucharest²⁷. The contributions of Andrei Pippidi to the analysis of the Romanian national consciousness and of the significance of historical figures and monuments date already from the 1980s, and some of them even from the 1970s²⁸. In Transilvania, Sorin Mitu deconstructed the genesis of modern Romanian nationalism independently from Boia's impulses²⁹. Last but not least, the investigations of Mirela-Luminița Murgescu on the ideology of primary school education during the mid 19th century allowed dating precisely the moment when the nationalist discourse entered into the mass culture (the 1860s and 1870s) and to identify the continuities in the general patterns of the historical grand-narrative from the 19th century to the end of the 20th century³⁰.

All these contributions broadened the field of discussion, and provided consistent arguments for the deconstructionist approach. Nevertheless, in the public it was Boia who represented this direction. Boia's particular style, essayistic and avoiding "thick descriptions" based on extensive punctual research, proved to be highly effective in addressing cultivated non-

²⁷ Alexandru Duțu insisted already in the 1970s of the importance of mentalities and of images, and also carried out personal studies on such topics for the early modern period (e.g. Alexandru Duțu, *Eseu în istoria modelelor umane*, București, 1972; idem, *Modele, imagini, privești*, Cluj-Napoca, 1979; idem, *Călătorii, imagini, constante*, București, 1985). After 1990 the studies on the formation of identities/alterities expanded to the 19th-20th centuries, and became one of the booming fields in Romanian scholarship. They proved to be also one of the few interdisciplinary meeting points between historians, philosophers, social scientists, anthropologists, writers and literary critics. Good examples for this direction are the collective volumes: Alexandru Zub (ed.), *Identitate/alteritate: despre experiența românească a străinului*, Iași, 1995; Alexandru Zub (ed.), *Identitate și alteritate în spațiul cultural românesc*, Iași, 1996; the series *Identitate și alteritate. Studii de imagologie*, edited by Nicolae Bocșan and several other historians from Cluj (3 volumes, 1996, 1998, 2000); Mirela-Luminița Murgescu (ed.), *Identități colective și identitate națională. Percepții asupra identității în lumea medievală și modernă. In memoriam Alexandru Duțu*, București, 2000.

²⁸ See especially the older essays collected in Andrei Pippidi, *Despre statui și morminte. Pentru o teorie a istoriei simbolice*, Iași, 2000.

²⁹ Sorin Mitu, *Geneza identității naționale la românii ardeleni*, București, 1997.

³⁰ Mirela-Luminița Murgescu, *Între "bunul creștin" și "bravul român". Rolul școlii primare în construirea identității naționale românești (1831-1878)*, Iași, 1999.

historians, but less adapted to the dialogue with the majority of traditional historians. These historians rejected Boia's relativistic approach, feeling that it belittled not only the contributions of previous historians, but also their own professional accomplishments. Therefore, these historians preferred to value empirical research, and refused any legitimacy to any theoretical approach. This option was consistent with a long anti-theoretical tradition in the Romanian historiography, a tradition that had been strengthened by the more recent refutation of Marxism.

The rejection of the deconstructionist approach was not limited to private criticism and/or to the individual option for empirical research. Boia's book on the Romanian historical myths was severely criticized in "Revista istorică"³¹, while a historian from Cluj wrote an entire book in order to refute almost all Boia's arguments³². Most of these critics focused on concrete aspects of Boia's arguments, for instance on the fact that his presentation does not reflect the accomplishments of Stephen the Great as we know them from the medieval sources, or on the fact that he mixes historiographical and literary sources, blaming the historians for having mythified the Romanian history while the main responsibility should have been assigned to the poets and other writers.

Besides this concrete criticism, the deconstructionist approach has been criticized also in a theoretically-reflected manner by Sorin Antohi. Antohi accepted the intellectual need to deconstruct the historical myths, in fact he also participated in this endeavor, but he questioned both the extension of a sound historiographic iconoclasm to absolute relativism, and the efficiency of Boia's approach in the particular context of the Romanian post-communist society. He put the clash between traditionalist nationalist historians and the deconstructionist school into the broader framework of the cultural controversy between „Autochtonists” and „Westerners”, and argued: „I think that the stigmatized Romanian of our days would appreciate a less radical message about his individual and collective identity; a message that, ending to turn him into a devil or to victimize him, would teach him that he is human like all humans... Ending to be the unique great

³¹ Radu Păun, *Miturile demitificării sau radiografia unei șanse ratate. Lucian Boia, Istorie și mit în conștiința românească*, „Revista istorică”, X, 1999, nr.1-2, p.175-184.

³² Ioan-Aurel Pop, *Istoria, adevărul și miturile (Note de lectură)*, București, 2002, 391 p.

cripple of History or its last chronic patient, the poor Romanian would be more attentive to the calling of democracy"³³. Antohi suggests thus a "third discourse", which would avoid both the Romanian-centrism of the nationalists, and the uncritical imitation patterns of the Westerners³⁴. Nevertheless, in spite of the epistemic differentiation, which determines him to reject both "the idolatry of facts" and "the idolatry of theory", Antohi is closer to the deconstructionist approach than he would openly admit. He states: "We should think now how to make an equally radical critique, but which should be more just to the canon of the Romanian historical studies, and, on the other hand, more cunning in using the solid critique elements already produced by the Romanian historiography, placed in a global theoretical-methodological context"³⁵. Antohi's "third discourse" might prove to be an efficient intellectual option, but it had up to now only a limited impact on the historical craft; this (temporary?) failure was determined to a certain extent by the large-scale counter-offensive of the defenders of the nationalist grand-narrative of Romanian history.

The counter-offensive of the old-style nationalist historiography

The defenders of the nationalist grand-narrative reacted violently against Boia's deconstructionist approach. In 1995, when the volume of the colloquium on the Romanian historical myths was published, military historians accused Boia and his co-authors in prime-time at the national TV that they betrayed the country in favor of obscure forces, i.e. the West, the franc-masons, the Hungarians etc. This reaction was certainly excessive, but undermined Boia's credibility among a less cultivated audience. Nevertheless, it was inefficient in the intellectual circles, and therefore in 1997 the reaction to Boia's main book was less violent; this was due to a certain extent also to the fact that after the 1996 elections the defenders of the nationalist historiography felt they had no longer the political support of the state authorities. Besides, Boia's book on history and myth published in 1997

³³ Sorin Antohi, *Exercițiul distanței. Discursuri, societăți, metode*, București, 1997, p.310.

³⁴ This concept has been developed in Antohi's dialogues with Adrian Marino and Alexandru Zub: Sorin Antohi, *Al treilea discurs. Cultură, ideologie și politică în România*, dialog cu Adrian Marino, Iași, 2001; Alexandru Zub în dialog cu Sorin Antohi, *Oglinzi retrovizoare. Istorie, memorie și morală în România*, Iași, 2002.

³⁵ Sorin Antohi, in *Oglinzi retrovizoare...*, p.97.

enjoyed a strong media support from the Humanitas Publishing House, and was celebrated by a lot of intellectuals - writers, political analysts, journalists, but few historians - as a major scientific achievement. Boia's opponents avoided concrete scientific debates on Boia's arguments, and often shifted the discussion to issues like patriotism, the fact that other European nations (and also the United States) promote their national values, and that the Romanians should not be ashamed of their past etc. Thus they managed to create and maintain the impression that Boia tried to belittle the Romanians and to disarm them symbolically in the European competition. Nevertheless, this pattern caused a certain downturn of the polemical accents strident in 1995.

Yet, this was more an armed respite than a lasting cease-fire. The open conflict broke out in the so-called "alternative schoolbook scandal" in autumn 1999³⁶. In fact, the defenders of the nationalist grand-narrative of Romanian history took advantage of an innovative schoolbook of Romanian history for the 12th grade written by a group of young historians from Cluj and published by the Sigma Publishing House, which incorporated deconstructionist elements, in order to arise public anger against any attempt to change the old historical canon. In this attempt the nationalist historians combined with the political opposition and with a part of the press in the attempt to discredit the government, and especially the minister of Education, Andrei Marga. Although the opponents of the schoolbook failed in their attempt to determine the Parliament to ban it from schools, the whole debate was a sign that the Romanian society was reluctant to accept the questioning of its historical grand-narrative. It indicated also to all those feeling uneasy about the change in historical knowledge that they could try to reverse the trend.

³⁶ For more detailed analyses of this episode, see Mirela-Luminița Murgescu, *Between Nationalism and Europeanism or How to Adjust Two Concepts for One Shoe? Remarks about the debate on national history and textbooks in Romania*, paper presented at the conference *The image of Europe between globalization and national consciousness: traditional concepts and recent developments in the teaching of history, geography and civic education in the countries of the European Union, Eastern Europe and the Balkans*, Torino, May 2000 (in print), and Armin Heinen, *Auf den Schwingen Draculas nach Europa? Die öffentliche Debatte um neue Schulbücher als Indikator der Transformationskrise der rumänischen Geschichtskultur*, "Jahrbücher für Geschichte und Kultur Südosteuropas", 2, 2000, p.91-104.

The Romanian Academy, some of the new universities and after the elections of November-December 2000 the new minister of Education provided institutional backing for the traditionalist nationalist historians. The leading figure of this ideological and institutional offensive is the historian Ioan Scurtu. Scurtu developed the so-called "Roller-argument", claiming that the deconstructionist approach influenced by the "Annales" school was similar to the anti-national attempts of the Soviet-inspired Mihail Roller³⁷ to destroy the Romanian historical consciousness: "Some people, who try to impose some ideas, come and tell that these are Western, modern, tied to the new spirit. I honestly say that these ideas evoke to me a part of the 1950s, when, exactly the same, ideology prevailed, i.e. Marxist-Leninist teaching, comrade Stalin, dialectic and historical materialism. The historical fact, scientific in itself, did not prevail, but ideology.... This is what is happening now, it is a bad-taste mimetism of some currents which are present in the West and which are not even majoritary"³⁸. The underlying idea was that the Romanian historians and the Romanian society, who have resisted also Roller's malicious attempts, would resist also the temptation of 'demythisation' and return to the traditional nationalist image of the past. In November 1999 Scurtu managed to be elected president of the Society for Historical Sciences, in spite of the clear opposition of the representative of the Education Ministry and of his colleagues from the History Department of the Bucharest University, who controlled the Bucharest branch of the society, and in 2001 he became education counselor of the re-elected president Ion Iliescu. This political position allowed to him to present his ideas as being the official line of the president and of the government. In an interview given after his nomination as counselor, he reiterated the "Roller-argument": "After 1989 we witnessed the comeback of the practice of the 1950s, when our history and culture were

³⁷ Mihail Roller (1908-1958) was the leading figure of the Romanian historiography in the first decade of the communist rule. After having studied in the Soviet Union, he was in charge of the Romanian historiography on behalf of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, became full member of the Romanian Academy (without holding a doctoral degree), and even vice-president of the Academy. The schoolbook of Romanian history coordinated by him was compulsory in the secondary, and became a symbol of the Soviet-inspired reinterpretation of Romanian history. After 1955 Roller's influence decreased, and in 1958 he killed himself.

³⁸ Interview in "Curierul Național", X, nr.2620, October 16/17, 1999, p.3.

presented in the darkest colors. In 1953 Mihail Roller cautioned the historians to see how great Stephen the Great and how brave Michael the Brave could be, because they have been feudal princes, who exploited the working peasantry... What difference is between this conception and the way some historical figures are presented in a certain history schoolbook, printed in 1999? ... Such an approach is not by chance, it is not the outcome of the thoughts of some isolated persons, but it is a planned action that – under the pretext of ‘demythisation’ – aims the minimization and even the destruction of the national values. I mention that in the 12th grade curriculum for Romanian history, issued by the Education Ministry in 1999, are absent the four “pillars” of our existence: **ancientness, continuity, independence and unity**³⁹. The four “pillars”, which are bolded in Scurtu’s text, clearly indicate the traditional historical grand-narrative in the way it had been sketched in the 19th century and developed by Ceaușescu before 1989.

Scurtu used his political influence in order to consolidate his historiographic power. In April 2001 he became also director of the “Nicolae Iorga” Institute in Bucharest, the main history research institute in the network of the Romanian Academy. Scurtu’s allies control several other research institutes, most of the history departments in the new state universities (but not the departments in the old universities of Bucharest, Cluj and Iași), some of the new private universities, and also the committees which allocate research grants. Quite in this logic, but in spite of all previous legal regulations, the Education minister Ecaterina Andronescu decided in summer 2001 to limit the number of schoolbooks, and in September 2001 banned the history schoolbook that had caused the scandal in 1999.

The defenders of the nationalist grand-narrative felt they needed a new authoritative version of the Romanian history. The president of the Romanian Academy, the literary historian Eugen Simion, had championed this idea already since the early 1990s, and in 1994 the historical section of the Academy had started a large-scale project to publish an 11 volumes history of the Romanians. In 2001 the slumberous project became instantly urgent, and the authors were summoned to deliver immediately their contributions. In December 2001 the first 4 volumes (up to 1601) of the

³⁹ Ioan Scurtu, interview in “Adevărul literar și artistic”, April 3, 2001, p.3.

Academy treatise *The history of the Romanians* were printed⁴⁰, and the next 4 volumes (up to 1947) are announced to be prepared for publication in 2002. Dan Berindei, the chief of the historical section of the Academy and general coordinator of the project, expressed bluntly the main goal of the history treatise: "Through this work will be cleared out the confusions, which have 'flourished' in recent years; at the same time, it will end the denigration of historical personalities, the exaggerations of 'demythisation', the 'throwing of the child together with the water in the lavatory'. The handling of history returns thus in the grip of specialized historians, because after 1989 in this field have mingled those called and those un-called"⁴¹. The attempt to present the treatise of the Academy as **the** unique authorized history of the Romanians is obvious, and it was supported by a huge launch ceremony, in the presence of state president Iliescu and of prime-minister Năstase, with huge media coverage.

At a first glance, the history treatise is impressive. The four volumes published in 2001 amount to more than 3000 pages, signed by 59 specialists, mostly historians, but also geographers, biologists, and linguists. Yet, if we go into details, several shortcomings become obvious. The "little mistakes" are more numerous than usual, and testify for the hurry of the publishing process. The structure is rather rigid, and takes only seldom in consideration the new directions in historical studies; for example, in the second volume to the process of Christianisation are dedicated only two sub-chapters, one for Dobrudja and one for the territories north of the Danube, although this issue has been studied extensively in recent years and would have needed a general refreshing discussion⁴². And old Romanian-centric visions, stressing

⁴⁰ *Istoria românilor*, vol.I-IV, București, 2001. Quite interesting, although Eugen Simion expresses his hope that the treatise will be finished as planned, i.e. will present all the Romanian history up to the most recent times (vol.I, p.XIII), the coordinator of the project, the historian Dan Berindei, explains that the 9th volume (about the communist period) will be written "in the years to come", while later will be written a 10th volume about the post-communist period, and an 11th volume discussing the evolution of the Romanian historiography (vol.I, p.XVII). It is obvious that the preparation of the last 3 volumes has not started yet, and that there is no serious plan to do it in the near future.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, vol.I, p.XIX.

⁴² *Ibidem*, vol.II, p.370-373, 587-600; of course, information about early Christianity are scattered also in other chapters, for example in that dedicated to "Culture" in Dobrudja during the 4th-6th century (p.529-547). An example of the innovative critical contributions on

the “heroic” nature of the Romanian past, abound, while critical assessments of the received ideas are quite rare.

The reluctance to include the more recent trends and contributions of historical knowledge is quite general, and is consistent with the general framework of the treatise. Most of the co-authors of the treatise are quite old, almost half of them at their 70s or 80s, and 9 of them are already deceased, some of them for several years now; in fact, if we inspect the list of the 59 co-authors, we find out that only 4 historians are younger than 55 years (born after 1946). Besides the unwillingness to give credit to the younger generation of historians, especially in the case of the third and fourth volume we are struck by the absence of some of the best specialists of the “mature” generation, who either were not invited to contribute, or refused (e.g. Șerban Papacostea, Ștefan S. Gorovei, Andrei Pippidi, and the list is much longer). The overall coordination seems to have been scanty, so that the chapters differ a lot in conception, level of analysis, and information. Some chapters present decently the state of the art on their particular topics, while many other chapters simply include older materials, written in the 1980s and even in the 1970s or 1960s. The lack of scientific control caused even several scandals of proven plagiarism⁴³, as well as a scandal of including texts

this theme published during the 1990s is Nelu Zugravu, *Geneza creștinismului popular al românilor*, București, 1997, 570 p.

⁴³ First, Șerban Papacostea, corresponding member of the Academy and former director of the “Nicolae Iorga” History Institute in Bucharest, revealed that the chapter about Stephen the Great signed by Ion Toderășcu in the fourth volume of the treatise is almost entirely (80-90%) identical with a study published by him in 1982 (Șerban Papacostea, *O nouă sinteză de istorie a românilor; metodă și probitate*, “22”, XIII, nr.10, March 5-11, 2002, p.7). Several other cases of plagiarism were disclosed also by other historians, so that Papacostea could summarize that at least “twelve historians, deceased or living, have been dispossessed of their texts” (Șerban Papacostea, *O carte de istorie și istoria ei*, “22”, XIII, nr.28, July 9-15, p.9). Faced with these accusations, the editors of the treatise tried to limit the damage, acknowledged that they had used texts prepared for an earlier version in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but continued to argue that the treatise is a scientific achievement, and that all historians, including Papacostea, should have cooperated instead of criticizing the whole project (see the interventions and the communiqué of the history section of the Academy in “Academica”, nr.1, April 2002 (XII, 138), p.38-40).

written by deceased historians without any permission, modifying the authors will⁴⁴.

In spite of all scientific and ethical problems, the prestige of the Academy and the media persuaded a large part of the public, including a significant number of professional historians and history teachers, that the history treatise of the Academy is a major scientific achievement. Yet, an increasing number of historians and also other intellectuals consider it a failure, and undermine its public acceptance. Therefore, it is still an open question whether the treatise of the Academy will really become the standard version of the historical grand-narrative, or will remain a text with only historiographic value.

Perspectives at the beginning of the 21st century

In spite of the traditionalist attempts to impose the monopoly of the old nationalist historical grand-narrative, the cultural, historiographic and ideological pluralism gained after 1989 is irreversible. There are no institutions able to stop the historians from researching a particular topic, or from publishing a particular contribution. Of course, institutional and financial constraints are not absent, but the multitude of universities, research institutes, publishing houses, and research grants awarding institutions provides a quite large range of options to the historians.

This freedom allows to most historians to choose the themes they are working on, and the methodological approaches they use. Several of these historians, particularly in the fields of ancient, medieval and early modern history, where the stock of expertise and methodological knowledge has been traditionally higher and where the tradition of scientific autonomy has

⁴⁴ The most outrageous case is that of the distinguished archeologue and medieval historian Radu Popa (1933-1993), whose older texts were melted in several chapters of volume III together with conflicting texts written by Ștefan Pascu and Ștefan Olteanu, although in his last study, practically a scientific testament, he had criticized precisely the opinions of Pascu and Olteanu (Radu Popa, *Observații și îndreptări la istoria României din jurul anului o mie*, "Studii și cercetări de istorie veche și arheologie", 42, 1991, nr.3-4, p.154-188; Petre Alexandrescu, *Volumul III din Istoria Românilor, o istorie în trei acte și un deznodământ*, "22", XIII, nr.18, April 30 – May 6, 2002, p.12).

been higher, produce historical knowledge at according to the best standards of scholarship. Combined with the basically democratic political system, this variety of research and approaches provides a solid basis for the plurality of interpretations in Romanian historical science.

A clear sign of this pluralism is the multitude of different and sometimes even diverging general overviews of Romanian history, which were published during the last years.

As an alternative to the official project of the Academy, a group of 5 distinguished historians, whose leading figure appears to be Șerban Papacostea, published already in 1998 a general history of Romania in just one volume⁴⁵. It expresses in fact the historical production of specialists who have matured under communism and who have “fled in time” in order to avoid the ideological constraints of the Ceaușescu regime and to preserve their scientific integrity; thus, it is not surprising that for the history of the 19th and 20th century Șerban Papacostea and Pompiliu Teodor avoided their Romanian colleagues and preferred to turn to two Western historians, Keith Hitchins and Dennis Deletant. Significant is also the choice of the title *The History of Romania*, which indicates more openness to the problems of the minorities than the alternative option, *The History of the Romanians*⁴⁶. This general overview provides an example of moderate scholars tradition, not too open to innovations or to the questioning of constituents of the Romanian historical grand-narrative, but obviously more solid scientifically than the treatise of the Academy.

Florin Constantiniu has published another alternative synthesis of Romanian history, which is more critical when it comes to the self-image of the Romanians. Constantiniu argues as follows: “I would dare to say that,

⁴⁵ Mihai Bărbulescu, Dennis Deletant, Keith Hitchins, Șerban Papacostea, Pompiliu Teodor, *Istoria României*, București, 1998 (and also a second edition in 2002).

⁴⁶ After 1989 there has been a debate whether the national history should be entitled *istoria României* (*the history of Romania*) or *istoria românilor* (*the history of the Romanians*). The first name had been imposed under communism, while the second had prevailed in the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century. In the general context of nationalist revival and of ideological anti-communism, most of the historians and the political class (in the Education Law from 1995) chose *istoria românilor* (*the history of the Romanians*).

usually, one learns more from failure than from success. If we want to avoid the evil, we have to know its causes. We don't serve a sick man by hiding his disease, but telling to him the truth, so that he knows how to cure himself. This is the reason for showing the sins of our past. Not in order to darken or to diminish it, but in order to improve and to prevent repeating mistakes, which, unrecognized, continue to burden, to disturb and even to block the progress of the Romanian society"⁴⁷. Written in a very personal narrative style, and well informed about most problems it discusses, Constantiniu's approach focuses more on the ethical and political aspects, and often neglects other aspects of the Romanian history.

A group of 13 historians belonging to different generations, most of them teaching at the Bucharest University, has provided an alternative history of Romania in the form of an anthology of texts⁴⁸. The basic idea was to provide the public, and also the professional historians and the history teachers, with relevant sources, and to encourage independent thinking on various historical problems. Therefore, the selection included controversial texts, many of them contradicting the prevailing grand-narrative, and several times for the same problem were selected several conflicting sources; when needed, the editors provided also short comments or explanatory notes to these texts. Although the editors of this post-modern version of Romanian history tried to cover as many aspects as possible, and although they include texts on material culture, on mentalities and on minorities, it is obvious that such an approach cannot claim to be an exhaustive historical narrative.

Other general overviews of the Romanian history have been published after 1989 by Catherine Durandin⁴⁹, Ion Bulei⁵⁰, Lucian Boia⁵¹, and others. The public benefits also from new editions of syntheses published originally before 1989, among which the most popular seems to be that of Vlad

⁴⁷ Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român*, București, 1997, p.14. New revised editions in 1999 and 2002.

⁴⁸ Bogdan Murgescu (coord.), *Istoria României în texte*, București, 2001.

⁴⁹ Catherine Durandin, *Istoria românilor*, Iași, 1998 (Romanian translation of the French version published in 1995).

⁵⁰ Ion Bulei, *Scurtă istorie a românilor*, București, 1996.

⁵¹ Lucian Boia, *România, țară de frontieră a Europei*, București, 2002.

Georgescu⁵². As can be noticed, the range of alternative versions available is quite large.

Besides the variety of general overviews, we have to notice that the Romanian historians have enlarged the field of their investigations. The impact of the “Annales” school is not limited to the history of mentalities, but includes also Braudel-inspired attempts to reconstruct the structure of early modern economies and to measure the general development level of societies⁵³. Obviously, the collection and analysis of economic data is easier for the 19th and 20th century, and the impressive volumes published during the 1990s will help to reassess the whole modern development of Romania⁵⁴. Attempts have been also made to analyze aspects of the Romanian social history in a broad European context⁵⁵. The new ideological and cultural context after 1989 has stimulated the interest for genealogical research, with the double aim to reconstruct the evolution of particular families and to illuminate the history of elites⁵⁶. Religious history also has benefited largely from the liberalization after 1989, and brand new studies have illuminated both institutional church history and the history of

⁵² Vlad Georgescu, *Istoria românilor. De la origini pînă în zilele noastre*, București, 1992 (first published in an English version in 1984).

⁵³ E.g. Bogdan Murgescu, *Circulația monetară în Țările Române în secolul al XVI-lea*, București, 1996; idem, *Istorie românească - istorie universală (600-1800)*, București, 1994 (second augmented edition in 1999).

⁵⁴ Victor Axenciuc, *Evoluția economică a României. Cercetări istorico-statistice. 1859-1947. Vol.I. Industria. Vol.II. Agricultura. Vol.III. Monedă-credit-comerț-finanțe publice*, București, 1992, 1996, 2000; Gheorghe Dobre (coord.), *Economia României în context european - 1938*, București, 1996; idem, *Economia României în context european - 1947*, București, 1997; Constantin Grigorescu (coord.), *Nivelul dezvoltării economico-sociale a României în context european, 1989*, București, 1993.

⁵⁵ Gheorghe Platon, Alexandru-Florin Platon, *Boierimea din Moldova în secolul al XIX-lea. Context european, evoluție socială și politică (Date statistice și observații istorice)*, București, 1995; Alexandru-Florin Platon, *Geneza burgheziei în Principatele Române (a doua jumătate a secolului al XVIII-lea - prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea. Preliminariile unei istorii, Iași, 1997.*

⁵⁶ For example, Ștefan S. Gorovei organizes in Iași yearly international genealogical conferences and edits a specialized journal, “Arhiva Genealogică”. For the way genealogical studies serve the history of political elites, see Mihai S. Rădulescu, *Elita liberală românească (1866-1900)*, București, 1998. For a general overview of the dynamic of genealogical studies, cf. *Bibliografia istorică a României*, vol.VIII, 1989-1994, p.70-71, and vol.IX, 1994-1999, p.83-88.

religious practices⁵⁷. The history of minorities is another booming field, and has included also the history of the Roma (Gypsy) population, which had been neglected previously⁵⁸. Gender history is still underdeveloped, but several Romanian history graduates work abroad at doctoral theses in this field and at least in Bucharest and Cluj there are already interested groups of scholars, so that the number of publications on these topics will certainly increase⁵⁹. The extension of historical research to previously neglected topics has been furthered also by the history research competition for young people ISTORIA MEA - EUSTORY, which has been organized in Romania since 2000; the first two editions had as general themes *Childhood and Youth Through History* (2000) and *Techniques and Technologies in Communities from Yesterday and Nowadays* (2001-2002), and the large participation attests that the young people interested in history are open to such topics⁶⁰. Therefore, it is highly probable that the enlargement of the field of historical studies will continue with the next generation of historians.

This enlargement and development of historical studies will cause inevitably a change in the general perception of history among the Romanian historians. Such a change does not necessarily imply open clashes in the historical profession. Nevertheless, some sociological features of the Romanian historical profession suggest that serious historiographic conflicts are to be expected in the near future. With some exceptions, the Romanian

⁵⁷ Besides the old journals edited by the religious institutions, there have been founded new centers for the research of church history and of the history of religions at the Bucharest University, and at Cluj Pompiliu Teodor has animated a whole direction of studying the religious history of Transylvania during the early modern period; this direction is continued now by his disciples, and extended to the 19th century by Nicolae Bocşan and his disciples. The list of contributions is too large to be listed here (cf. *Bibliografia istorică a României*, vol.VIII, 1989-1994, pp.93-95, 132-135,156-157, 171-172, 199-200, and vol.IX, 1994-1999, pp.124-127, 170-173, 184-190, 223, 258-260, 298-260).

⁵⁸ Viorel Achim, *Țiganii în istoria României*, Bucureşti, 1998; Lucian Nastasă, Andrei Varga (eds.), *Minorități etnoculturale. Mărturii documentare. Țiganii din România (1919-1944)*, Cluj, 2001. For a general overview of this dynamic of this field of scholarship, compare the titles listed in *Bibliografia istorică a României*, vol.VIII, 1989-1994, p.235-236, and vol.IX, 1994-1999, p.382-392.

⁵⁹ Ștefania Mihăilescu, *Emanciparea femeii române. Antologie de texte*, vol.I 1815-1918, Bucureşti, 2001; Ghizela Cosma, Enikő Magyari-Vincze, Ovidiu Pecican (eds.), *Prezențe feminine. Studii despre femei în România*, Cluj-Napoca, 2002.

⁶⁰ www.geocities.com/noua_istorie. Two volumes including an analysis and excerpts of the best entries are in preparation and will be published in 2003.

historiography is now dominated institutionally by a generation of historians educated in the 1950s and in the early 1960s, and who have matured in the context of the re-nationalization of history after the Roller-period; therefore, many of them are psychologically linked to the nationalist grand-narrative of Romanian history, and quite reluctant to theory, to the influence of the social sciences and to the methodological evolutions of recent historiography. Yet, most of the leading historians of this generation will come soon to the age of retirement, and will have to yield their positions to younger colleagues. This will prove to be a complicated problem, because in universities exists a certain generational gap, partly due to the diminished number of births during World War II, and partly due to the vicissitudes of the historical profession under Ceaușescu. After 2005 in most universities the majority of the teaching staff will consist of historians having studied in the 1980s or 1990s, and having been exposed to massive Western influence after 1990; quite more, a significant number of the members of this new generation will have obtained their Ph.D. and will have earned the ranks of *conferențiar* and professor, which allow to hold leading positions in faculties and universities.

It is an open issue whether the struggle for institutional and symbolic power will include open debates on the sensible points of the Romanian historical grand-narrative. Such an evolution will put a strain on the Romanian historical profession, because open scientific debates are still rare and scare most Romanian historians, who prefer to avoid any disputes. Another problem will be the lack of institutional arenas for such debates, because the professional history journals appear rarely and with huge delays, and are not adapted to polemics; therefore, the debates will either use the cultural weeklies and/or the electronic media, as they already do (e.g. the debate on the history treatise of the Romanian Academy), or will generate the need for new professional media. A special journal for history debates and book reviews would certainly help to organize the historiographic field for such debates, but such an undertaking would need financial and institutional support in order to turn into a general reference for the Romanian historians.

This issue leads to the complicated social embeddedness of Romanian historiography. Whether the historians will challenge the existing historical grand-narrative, and especially whether their challenge will become socially

significant, depends on the attitude of the various leading groups in the Romanian society. At this moment, the majority of the political class prefers to avoid any disturbing discussions, while significant groups of leading intellectuals and journalists favor such debates. Yet, the prevailing ethno-centric image of the past is a medium- and long-term risk for the democratic evolution of the Romanian society, and the high score of the Greater Romania Party in the 2000 general elections are a serious warning in this respect. Up to this moment, the Western pressure and help for a democratization of civic culture has not included history as a major target; yet, this is likely to change, and the example of the recent Antonescu and Holocaust debate proves that external influences can be both stimulating and effective.

Romania is not the only country facing the need to readjust its image of the past in order to build a stable democratic society. The German experience is one of the most radical, because after almost two decades of avoiding to face the difficult aspects of the national past, during the 60s began a series of scientific/public debates which allowed both to the German historical science to progress and to the German society to become one of the most committed to democratic values in European comparison. If the German experience is relevant, the optimal timing for such debates would be the period 2005-2010, when the new generation raised after the collapse of communism might begin to question their parents, and when the perspective of joining the European Union and the economic growth might diminish the social resistance to innovations troubling collective self-definitions⁶¹. Yet, Europe offers also different experiences, for example the French one, where historiographic innovation avoided for a very long time complicated issues, such as collaborationism or the Vichy regime, and where the public debates on historical sensitive problems had a more limited impact. Whether the Romanian experience will be similar to the German one, to the French one, or will be different to both, is an open question to be answered only in the future.

⁶¹ This argument has been developed in Bogdan Murgescu, *A fi istoric...*, p.108-115.