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The Idea of Nation among the Romanians of Transylvania, 1700-1849

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I

The emergence of the modern idea of nation among the Romanians of Transylvania in the course of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century raises several key questions connected with the general scholarly debate about nation and nationalism in recent decades.¹ They may be simply put: When did the idea of nation, in the modern meaning of the term, appear? What was the importance of the ethnic community (*ethnie*) in its evolution, that is to say, how far back into the past should we search for the origins of the modern nation? And who formulated the idea of nation and propagated it, and, in the process, elaborated a nation ideology?

An investigation of the idea of nation among the Romanians of Transylvania offers an opportunity to test the validity of controversial theories about the emergence and evolution of

¹ Works covering most or all of the period include: Ladislau Gyémánt, *Mișcarea națională a Românilor din Transilvania, 1790-1848* (București, 1986); Keith Hitchins, *A Nation Discovered: Romanian Intellectuals and the Idea of Nation, 1700-1848* (Bucharest, 1999); D. Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum. Din istoria formării națiunii române*, rev. ed. (București, 1984); and Zoltán I. Tóth, *Az erdélyi román nacionalizmus első százada, 1697-1792* (Budapest, 1946) and *Az erdélyi és magyarországi román nemzeti mozgalom (1790-1848)* (Budapest, 1959).

nation. My primary interest here is the extent to which the Romanian case fits the modernist interpretation of nation, which is the predominant contemporary paradigm among students of nation and nationalism.² Modernism can by no means be reduced to a simple formula. There are many varieties. But its leading exponents, among them, Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Eric Hobsbawm, agree that the nation is of comparatively recent origin and is a product of modernization. They date the beginning of nation from the era of the French Revolution, which, they argue, introduced the idea of the modern nation and nationalism into European and world history by establishing the principle of the sovereignty of the people and by combining this principle with efforts to bring about cultural homogeneity. The result, so their argument runs, was the emergence of nations bent on achieving self-fulfillment. Their thought on these matters betrays a strong determinism. For example, Ernest Gellner insists that nations could be products only of industrial and capitalist societies because earlier societies had had no need of nations.³ Benedict Anderson, for his part, argues that nations are essentially products of the era of "print-capitalism", that they were created by intellectual elites or other classes, who, in effect, invented the nation's history and myths and disseminated them through books, newspapers, and works of art. Nations, he concludes, are nothing other than imagined political communities.⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, in a similar vein, argues that nations emerged only in the modern era at a particular stage of the economic and

² For a thorough discussion of modernism, see Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (London, 1998), pp. 1-142.

³ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1983), pp. 39-43.

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (London, 1991), pp. 5-7, 37-46.

technological development of a society, that they exist as functions of a particular type of territorial state or of the effort to establish one, and that they are, accordingly, constructed by nationalists.⁵

II

Let me now describe the principal stages in the evolution of the idea of nation among the Romanians of Transylvania and then return to the more general questions about nation. I count three stages in this evolution: the first dates from 1700 to the 1760s, when the Romanian Greek Catholic intellectual elite was formed, a small, compact group who raised for the first time certain fundamental questions of Romanian nationhood; the second stage covers the period from the 1770s to the 1820s, when a new generation of intellectuals laid the historical and linguistic foundations of nation and opened the way to European currents of ideas; and the third stage, encompassing the 1830s and 1840s, was the era of an enlightened, Romantic, and Liberal generation that strove to transform ideas into deeds and to draw ethnic boundaries.

As this outline suggests, the educated elite played the key role in formulating the idea of nation. Since nation and national ideology belonged to the realm of ideas, intellectuals and others experienced in the uses of theory and abstraction were the natural entrepreneurs of nationhood. It was they, after all, who defined the nation, set its goals, and undertook to make the entire population aware of its own identity. This is not to say that the mass of the people, the peasants, had no part in the shaping of theories about nation. Quite the contrary, they served as an

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 9-11.

inexhaustible reservoir of data, to which historians and linguists and theorists of all kinds turned again and again to buttress their hypotheses. Composing at least ninety percent of the Romanian population of Transylvania in the eighteenth century and almost that much in the first half of the nineteenth century, they were the great repository of customs and beliefs that underlay the Romanians' sense of ethnic community, and thus they provided the foundation stones for the elite's edifice of nation.

III

The investigation of how the idea of nation emerged and evolved among the Romanians of Transylvania may conveniently, if somewhat arbitrarily, begin with the union of a portion of the Romanian Orthodox clergy and faithful with the Roman Catholic Church in 1700. The so-called Act of Union, agreed to by the Bishop of the Romanian Orthodox Church, on the one side, and the representatives of the Hungarian Roman Catholic Church and the Habsburg Imperial Court in Vienna, on the other, required the Orthodox to recognize the Pope of Rome as the head of the Christian Church, but left Orthodox doctrine and practice largely undisturbed.⁶ In return, Emperor Leopold I (1657-1705) granted Orthodox priests who accepted the terms of the Church Union all the rights and privileges of Roman Catholic priests.⁷ These advantages, in the end, proved irresistible to the Orthodox clergy because, as Orthodox, they were not recognized by the constitution of Transylvania as legitimate inhabitants of the principality, but were, instead, merely tolerated. Thus, they

⁶ Nicolao Nilles, *Symbolae ad illustrandam historiam Ecclesiae Orientalis in Terris Coronae S. Stephani*, Vol. 1 (Innsbruck, 1885), pp. 247-249.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 224-227, 292-301.

did not enter into the system of the three “recognized” nations (the nobility, essentially Magyar, the Saxons, and the Szeklers) and the four “received” churches (Calvinist, Lutheran, Unitarian, and Roman Catholic), which had gradually come into being since the fifteenth century and dominated Transylvanian political and economic life.⁸

The Church Union was not primarily a religious act. The objectives of the Court of Vienna were clearly secular: it was determined to undermine the dominant, independent-minded Protestant estates and thereby hasten the integration of Transylvania, which Habsburg armies had only recently occupied, into the empire as a loyal province. The Roman Catholic hierarchy, for its part, was eager to strengthen Catholicism at the expense of the Protestants and regarded the Union as merely the first step in converting the Romanians to Catholicism. Everyone involved recognized that the process would be long and slow. The Jesuits, who represented the hierarchy, conducted negotiations for the Union solely with the Romanian clergy because they knew how devoted the peasants were to the beliefs and traditions of their fathers. The Romanian clergy thus entered into the Union in order to achieve equality with the privileged three nations and four churches, but it had no more intention than the peasantry of abandoning its ancestral faith. Accordingly, when Bishop Atanasie of the Orthodox Church severed his canonical ties with the Metropolitanate of Wallachia and was reconsecrated bishop of the new Greek Catholic Church in March 1700, the day-to-day religious life of his faithful continued as before.

⁸ Friedrich Schuler von Libloy, *Siebenbürgische Rechtsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, (Hermannstadt, 1855), pp. 373-385; Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum*, pp. 94-101; Ludwig Binder, *Grundlagen und Formen der Toleranz in Siebenbürgen bis zur Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Köln-Vienna, 1976), pp. 66-92.

The Union propelled Romanian intellectual life in new directions. It led to the creation of an elite, who opened Romanian society to European currents of ideas in ways it had not before experienced. Of immediate importance was entry for Romanians into Roman Catholic educational institutions with their classical curricula on a scale not previously seen. The purpose, of course, was not to promote Romanian education for its own sake, but rather to train a pious and devoted clergy to serve the new Greek Catholic Church. In time this clergy assumed leadership of Romanian political as well as cultural life.

The new elite became the authors and disseminators of a new idea of nation. They often used the term "nation" to describe themselves as a clerical estate, and, in so doing, they were conforming to the practice of the time. The term *natio* stressed quality over quantity, and thus it encompassed only those individuals who, like the Magyar nobility and the Saxon urban patriciate, possessed special rights and immunities. This "nation", then, was not composed of everyone of the same ethnic origin, and Magyar peasants could not be members of the *natio hungarica*. A Romanian *natio* did not even exist because Romanians lacked quality: they were overwhelmingly peasant and Orthodox.

By the 1730s, attitudes and usage were changing. The Greek Catholic elite endowed *natio* with a primarily ethnic meaning. When they spoke of *natio valachica* (Wallachian nation) they usually meant the Romanians as a whole, not a small privileged elite, that is, themselves. For them, the essence of Romanian nationhood in the first half of the eighteenth century lay in Orthodoxy, inasmuch as Orthodoxy in Transylvania was exclusively Romanian. In other words, a Romanian was someone who was Orthodox. But Orthodoxy was not only a body of doctrine. Rather, it was an amalgam of faith and

religious practices intertwined with ancient folk customs and beliefs that had been passed down from generation to generation.⁹ The Romanian sense of community up to the beginning of the eighteenth century had been expressed by that tradition.

Orthodoxy was thus a powerful element of cohesion that bound the Romanian community together, but it was not to be the only one. One essential component of the modern idea of Romanian nation was still missing – a recognition of Roman ancestry. Before 1700, it had had no organic connection with the Orthodox sense of community. The crucial service performed by the Greek Catholic elite was to join together Orthodoxy and Roman ancestry. In so doing, they created the core of a national ideology.

The elite that had emerged by the 1730s and presumed to speak on behalf of the Romanian “nation” was drawn from the well-educated upper ranks of the Greek Catholic clergy – bishops, protopopes, administrators, and teachers from the monastery and secondary schools at Blaj, the diocesan see. They were products mainly of Roman Catholic institutions in Transylvania. The most important of these was the Jesuit College in Cluj, where almost every important figure in the Greek Catholic Church in the eighteenth century studied. Jesuit colleges in Alba Iulia, Braşov, and Sibiu and the Piarist gymnasium in Bistriţa were also hospitable to Romanians.¹⁰

⁹ On this question, see Toader Nicoară, “Le miraculeux et le magique dans la religion des Roumains de Transylvanie au XVIIIe siècle”, in *Church and Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, Maria Crăciun and Ovidiu Ghitta, eds. (Cluj-Napoca, 1998), pp. 413-424.

¹⁰ Vencel Biró, “A kolozsvári jezsuita egyetem szervezete és építkezései a XVIII században”, in *Erdélyi Múzeum*, Vol. 50, No. 1-2 (1945), pp. 1-7; V. Şotropa, “Românii la gimnasiul latino-catolic din Bistriţa, 1729-1779”, in *Transilvania*, Vol. 32 (1901), pp. 3-17; Tóth, *Erdélyi román nacionalizmus*, pp. 168-170.

In all of them, they received a thorough grounding in classical languages and literatures within the humanist tradition and were expected to master Latin composition and conversation. The most promising students, especially those destined to occupy higher positions in the Church, were sent abroad for further study, to the College for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, to the Jesuit University at Nagyszombat, and to the Pazmaneum in Vienna, which had been established in 1623 for the purpose of strengthening Catholicism in Hungary.¹¹

The members of the elite, in addition to performing their ecclesiastical duties, were preoccupied with defining themselves as a community. As Greek Catholics, and therefore as newcomers to Transylvanian religious and public life, they were anxious to find a place for themselves in both the religious and the constitutional structures of the principality. As a group, they were united by strong feelings of solidarity based in the first instance on religion. Religion still meant essentially Orthodoxy, inasmuch as the Church Union had brought little change to either principle or practice. It was an Orthodoxy deeply imbedded in local folk tradition and memory, and thus it transcended the limits of dogma. This sense of community was reinforced by the elite's exclusion from the Transylvanian estates, because of their religion and social status. They were Orthodox, at least in the eyes of the governing nations and were non-noble and, thus, they could not share the privileges that the Transylvanian constitution granted to Protestants and Roman Catholics and Magyar nobles and Saxon urban aristocrats. For this very reason the elite's exclusion was also ethnic because "Orthodox" and "non-noble" were synonymous

¹¹ Tóth, *Erdélyi román nacionalizmus*, pp. 182-187; Francisc Pall, "Știri noi despre primii studenți trimiși de la Blaj la Roma", in *Apulum*, Vol. 17 (1979), pp. 469-476.

with “Romanian”, and thus the elite’s sense of community was inevitably ethnic, too.

The outstanding figure of the elite was Ion Inochentie Klein (or Micu-Klein), the Bishop of the Greek Catholic Church between 1729 and 1751, and the acknowledged leader of the elite during those years.¹² As bishop, Klein considered it his duty to obtain fulfillment of the promises made to the Greek Catholic clergy at the time of the Union. Many of the petitions he submitted to the Habsburg Court in Vienna thus seem at first glance to be expressions of narrow class interests based on legal arguments and precedents compatible with the prevailing system of estates. But it is also evident that Klein was thinking in broader terms about community. In some of his petitions, he spoke of the “Wallachian nation” (*natio valachica*), as in 1735 when he demanded full participation of the Romanians in the government of the principality on the grounds that they were more numerous than any other nation and paid more into the state treasury than any other nation.¹³ In the diet, where he had a seat by virtue of the emperor’s having bestowed on him the rank of baron, he spoke repeatedly in the name of the “entire Romanian nation of Transylvania”, a phrase that caused an uproar among the representatives of the three nations, who denied that there was a *natio valachica* and insisted that there were only *Valachi* or *plebs valachica*.¹⁴

The dispute between Klein and his opponents in the diet over the use of the term *natio* reveals two distinct conceptions of nation, one essentially medieval, the other approaching

¹² The most extensive works on Klein’s life and thought are: Augustin Buna, *Din istoria Românilor: Episcopul Ioan Inocențiu Klein (1728-1751)* (Blaj, 1900); and Francisc Pall, *Inochentie Micu-Klein: Exilul la Roma, 1745-1768*, 3 Vols. (Cluj-Napoca, 1997).

¹³ Buna, *Klein*, pp. 37-39.

¹⁴ Tóth, *Erdélyi román nacionalizmus*, pp. 89-90.

modern usage. The former, as we have noted, referred to the social condition of a group set apart from the general population by certain privileges. It was a legal conception. The members of the Transylvanian diet used it especially when they were discussing their political and constitutional rights or defending them against Vienna and when they wished to make a distinction between their own privileged condition and the common people. But alongside this meaning was the everyday, popular usage of nation as a community resting on a common language, religion, and customs. The estates also used this term frequently when their official status was not in question. Klein also gave two meanings to the term, sometimes in the same petition and sometimes without distinguishing between them. He often signed his petitions as representative of the Romanian *clerus et natio*, a formula with distinct legal connotations. *Clerus* emphasized the fact that his clergy was entitled to special rank because of the rights granted by imperial diplomas at the time of the Church Union, while *natio* usually referred to Romanian nobles, in fact, a kind of gentry, which had survived in southern Transylvania. Nonetheless, the other, popular meaning of *natio* dominated Klein's thought. For him, clergy, nobles, and common people were one, as he demonstrated in a petition to Empress Maria Theresa (1740-1780) in 1744 in which he argued that the "principal rights" enjoyed by Romanian nobles conferred certain "accessory rights" on non-nobles and complained about the efforts of the Transylvanian estates to divide Romanian nobles from non-nobles.¹⁵

In the final analysis, Klein's conception of nation was ethnic rather than religious. Underlying it was a strong historical consciousness. In a petition he submitted to the emperor in

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122; Eudoxiu Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, Vol. 6 (București, 1878), pp. 575-576.

1735 concerning Romanian rights in the Fundus regius, the region in southern Transylvania controlled by the Saxons, he argued that the Saxons could not claim the region as exclusively theirs because they were, in fact, late-comers. Rather, it was the Romanians who were entitled to a place of privilege because they were the oldest inhabitants of the land, having resided there continuously since the time of the Roman emperor Trajan in the second century.¹⁶ Expressed here for the first time among Romanian intellectuals in Transylvania in outline form was the notion of Daco-Roman continuity (the direct descent of the Romanians from the Roman colonists of Dacia and their uninterrupted presence there down to the present), which was to become the cornerstone of a national ideology.

Although Klein's idea of nation in some respects approached modern usage, his thought was, nonetheless, limited by the legal structures and mental climate of the time. For example, he drew no theoretical conclusions from the notion of Roman ancestry, but used the idea of Daco-Roman continuity simply as a tactical political weapon. Nor did he speculate on the obvious ethnic relationship between the Romanians of Transylvania and their brethren across the Carpathians. His attitude toward the common people also reveals the limited nature of his idea of nation. His sympathy for their hard life was genuine, but he sought rights, in the first instance, for his clergy, not peasants.

Klein did not stand alone. His views on community and his efforts to gain recognition for his clergy were embraced by a younger generation of protopopes, administrators, and teachers. Gathered in Blaj to pursue their respective vocations and sharing a common cultural heritage, they cultivated a new idea of

¹⁶ Országos Levéltar (Budapest), Erdélyi Kancellária, 1735/93, f. 2; Nilles, *Symbolae*, Vol. 2 (Innsbruck, 1885), p. 528.

community. They focused in particular on the connection with Rome, which they came to view from a perspective that transcended religion. Their thought about the Church Union displayed a broad conception of historical development, which in turn reflected changing intellectual and cultural values in Transylvania in the middle of the eighteenth century. They were, after all, men of their own time. Although they by no means rejected the tenets of their religion, they nonetheless revealed an indomitable faith in reason and learning as the keys to social and spiritual fulfillment in this world. Belief in progress and in their ability to control their own destiny identify them as men of the new age of Enlightenment.

The Church Union provided a theoretical justification of their faith in progress and gave substance to the idea, "Romanian nation". It explained the history of the Romanians since the Roman conquest of Dacia – their rise and fall – and presaged a new age of glory. The weaving of these ideas into a coherent doctrine signified a reconciliation between the Byzantine East and the Latin West, which provides the key to an understanding of modern theories of Romanian nationalism. In trying to harmonize the patriarchal Orthodox tradition of an essentially rural world with the dynamic spirit of urban Europe, Greek Catholic intellectuals made an indispensable contribution to the creation of a new, distinctive entity – "Romanian".

Their ideas were given clear form for the first time in a small book, *Despre schismaticia grecilor* (On the Schism of the Greeks) written in 1746 by Gherontie Cotore, later vicar-general of the Greek Catholic Church. Cotore forcefully asserted the direct descent of the Romanians from the Roman conquerors of Dacia. The idea was common coin among Romanian intellectuals of the period. The novelty of Cotore's argument lay in his identification of the ancient Romans with the Church

of Rome and his linking of the decline of the Romanian nation in the Middle Ages to their abandonment of the Western Church in favor of Eastern Orthodoxy. He discerned a striking analogy between the “decadence” of the Romanians during the Middle Ages and the widely accepted explanation of the fall of Constantinople to the Turks. The cause of both tragedies, he argued, had been the separation of the Romanians and the Greeks from Rome. It was too late for a revival of Byzantium, but Cotore was certain that the Romanians stood on the threshold of a renaissance, if only they would return to the Mother Church.¹⁷ He thus saw the union as a reaffirmation of the inherent Latinity of the Romanians. But he had no intention of abandoning the spiritual culture of Eastern Orthodoxy, for he (and his colleagues) recognized it as a determinant of their identity at least equal to Romanness. The task Cotore had set for himself, then, was to connect the Rome of Trajan with the Rome of Peter and Paul and to reawaken in his fellow Romanians a consciousness of their Western origins without at the same time requiring them to sacrifice their Eastern heritage.

Cotore and his colleagues thus conceived of their church as an entity quite different from Bishop Klein’s. Whereas he had treated it as something imposed from the outside and as a device to achieve social and political goals, they revered it as a peculiarly Romanian institution, or, put in modern terms, as the embodiment of the national spirit. Such an interpretation is suggested by their use of “Romano-Valachus” beginning in the 1740s to describe Romanians who had united. They clearly accepted an identification with Eastern Orthodoxy, which is inherent in the word “Valachus”, for it differentiated Romanians

¹⁷ Zoltán I. Tóth, “Cotorea Gerontius és az erdélyi román nemzeti öntudat ébredése”, in *Hitel*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1944), pp. 89-91; Gherontie Cotore, *Despre articușurile ceale de price*, Laura Stanciu, ed. (Alba Iulia, 2000), pp. 16-18.

from the other inhabitants of Transylvania – the Lutheran Saxons and the Calvinist and Roman Catholic Magyars. But, in their minds, the link to Rome (“Roman”), established by the Church Union, further differentiated the Romanians from the surrounding Slav Orthodox – the Serbs, in particular. Thus, by removing the Romanians of Transylvania from the Orthodox Commonwealth, Cotore and company placed ethnic interests, represented by the Greek Catholic Church, ahead of religion.

The thought of the Greek Catholic elite about community was still in many ways beholden to religion, as they showed little hesitation in condemning the Orthodox as schismatics. Yet, as Gherontie Cotore’s writings make plain, they treated the Church Union as much more than a contest between Greek Catholics and Orthodox. It was, as we have seen, an affirmation of Roman ethnic origins. In this context they made no distinction between Greek Catholics and Orthodox, and, thus, their efforts to bring all Romanians into the Union was a recognition of the existence of a single Romanian ethnic community. But these ideas were not yet modern national consciousness. Their sense of ethnic unity was still based mainly on legal precedents and privileged castes rather than on adherence to an organic view of nation that blurred all distinctions among its members except the ethnic. Nonetheless, by elaborating an idea of community that fused Roman ethnic origins and the Eastern Orthodox spiritual tradition, they prepared the way for the reconciliation of all Romanians. They put forward as the basis of community a common heritage that encompassed religion and at the same time transcended it.

IV

The members of a new intellectual elite, who were active between the 1770s and the 1820s, were polymaths who

produced an amazing variety of works – histories, grammars, theological and philosophical tracts, church sermons, and schoolbooks – all intended, as they themselves put it, to promote the “general welfare”. Their wide-ranging preoccupations were illustrative of a new trend in Romanian society – the secularization of the elite, a process well underway in spite of the fact that the majority of the elite were priests. They also had greater commerce with European currents of ideas than previous generations, a circumstance reflected in their elaboration of an idea of community approaching modern nationhood.

This generation was mainly responsible for laying the historical and linguistic foundations of the concept of the modern Romanian nation. In so doing, they also sharpened the contours of an emerging national ideology. At the forefront of these endeavors stood three men, Samuil Micu (1745-1806), Gheorghe Șincai (1754-1816), and Petru Maior (1756-1821), members of the so-called “Transylvanian School”, who in masterly histories and pioneering grammars defined the uniqueness of the Romanian ethnic community and thereby justified its demands for a place in the estates system.¹⁸

At the heart of the matter was the theory, or, many would say, the myth of Daco-Roman continuity. Samuil Micu gave full expression to it in a long series of historical works, beginning with *De ortu progressu conversione Valachorum episcopis item archiepiscopis et mitropolitis eorum* in 1774 and ending with his four-volume *Istoria și lucrurile și întâmplările*

¹⁸ General works on the Transylvania School include: Dumitru Ghișe and Pompiliu Teodor, *Fragmentarium illuminist* (Cluj, 1972); Ion Lungu, *Școala ardeleană* (București, 1978); and Dumitru Popovici, *La Littérature roumaine à l'époque des lumières* (Sibiu, 1945).

Românilor, which he completed toward the end of his life.¹⁹ He was at pains to prove the direct descent of the Romanians of the eighteenth century from the Romans who had settled in Dacia in the second century. In his four-volume history he went even further, dating the beginnings of Romanian history from the founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus and claiming that the Romanians were the pure descendants of the Romans, since, in his view, Trajan's struggle with the Dacians had been one of attrition, in which the latter had been exterminated.²⁰ He also argued that with the Roman colonization of the now "deserted" realm of the Dacians came Christianity.²¹ When, after a century and a half of Romanization and Christianization, the Emperor Aurelian withdrew the army and administration from the province Micu insisted that "all farmers and others who had taken up agriculture and work at home... stayed behind".²²

In the following centuries, so Micu's argument ran, when Dacia was overrun by one barbarian people after another, its Roman inhabitants survived by taking refuge in the mountains. It was their descendants whom the Magyars found when they entered Transylvania in the tenth century. These Romanians, as Micu now calls them, who were organized in a flourishing duchy under "Duke" Gelu, made a treaty of alliance with the Magyars and chose the latter's chieftain, Tuhutum, as their

¹⁹ For a thorough examination of Micu's historical writings from the perspective of nation and religion, see Pompiliu Teodor, *Sub semnul luminilor: Samuil Micu* (Cluj-Napoca, 2000), pp. 121-152, 179-236.

²⁰ Samuil Micu, *Istoria și lucrurile și întâmplările Românilor*, Manuscript, Library of the Romanian Academy, Cluj, Ordea Collection, Vol. 1, p.49.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, pp. 18-19.

²² *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 64-64; Samuil Micu, *Scurtă cunoștință a istorii românilor*, Cornel Cîmpeanu, ed. (București, 1963), p. 26.

prince. Micu here was at pains to point out that this treaty did not subordinate the Romanians to the Magyars, but, instead, created a condominium of equals.²³ But, Micu sadly admitted, the Middle Ages was a dark period for the Romanians when, through circumstances not of their making, their legal and social status inexorably declined.

Gheorghe Șincai in *Cronica Românilor* (1808) and Petru Maior in *Istoria pentru începutul Românilor în Dacia* (1812), one of the most influential Romanian books of the time and for a number of decades to come, offered their own versions of the Roman descent of the Romanians and their uninterrupted presence in Dacia.²⁴

Micu and his colleagues eagerly turned to language to support their theory of Romanian nationhood. They were motivated in part by a desire to refine the language and thereby render it capable of expressing new ideas and introducing new generations to advances in learning. But mainly they sought evidence to reinforce their historical arguments about the noble ancestry and the ethnic distinctiveness of the Romanians. Most of what they wrote was intended primarily to demonstrate the Latinity of the Romanian language and, by extension, prove the Roman origins of the Romanian people. These works ranged from Micu's and Șincai's *Elementa linguae Daco-Romanae sive Valachicae*, published in Vienna in 1780, in which they replaced the traditional Cyrillic alphabet with the Latin and introduced an orthography that was etymological rather than

²³ Micu, *Scurtă cunoștință*, pp. 35-36.

²⁴ Gheorghe Șincai, *Hronica Românilor*, Florea Fugaru, ed., Vol. 1 (București, 1967), pp. 13-14, 48-50, 65-67, 136-137, 263-266, 337-338, 341-345, 598-602; Vol. 2 (București, 1969), pp. 123-125, 213-216; Vol. 3 (București, 1969), pp. 177-181; Petru Maior, *Istoria pentru începutul Românilor în Dacia*, 2nd ed. (Buda, 1834), pp. 6-17, 29-31, 189-195.

phonetic, to Petru Maior's preface to the so-called *Lexicon de Buda*, published in Buda in 1825, in which he argued that Romanian was derived from Vulgar Latin and appealed to all patriots for help in restoring their language to its original form by replacing Turkish, Slavic, and other "foreign" words by words of Latin origin.²⁵

All these writings of history and language together offered a definition of nation that was widely accepted by the educated of the day. As they used the term it meant a people who were united in a community on the basis of common origins, a common historical experience, and a common language. Samuil Micu gave eloquent expression to their sense of ethnic solidarity when he wrote that the Romanians inhabited a territory encompassing Wallachia, Moldavia, Transylvania, Maramureș, the Banat, and parts of Hungary as far as the Tisza River. He had not the least doubt that they were one people, even though they were separated by political boundaries.²⁶

The idea of nation espoused by Micu, Șincai, and their generation differed significantly in certain respects from that represented in the activities and writings of Bishop Klein and Gherontie Cotore. The divergences are perhaps most evident in their respective treatments of history and language. Klein concerned himself with the origins of the Romanians only in passing, although he was fully aware of their unique ethnic character and their distinctive historical evolution in Transylvania. Cotore possessed the same fund of information, but he conceived of Romanian historical development mainly

²⁵ Petru Maior, "Dialogu pentru începutul limbii române între nepot și unchiu", in *Lexicon Valachico-Latino-Hungarico-Germanicum* (Buda, 1825), pp. 64-68, 72-73.

²⁶ Pompiliu Teodor, "Despre 'Istoria Românilor cu întrebări și răspunsuri' a lui Samuil Clain", in *Studii. Revistă de Istorie*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1960), p. 203.

in terms of religion. As for language, neither Klein nor Cotore paid special attention to Romanian. They did not speculate on its origins and they composed no grammars, and for serious writing they preferred Latin. Micu and his colleagues, on the other hand, had, as we have seen, made history and language the marks that distinguished one people from another and established their pedigrees.

The two generations also held divergent views on the relationship between religion and nation. To be sure, Micu, Şincai, and Maior remained Christians and served their church with devotion in various ways, but they were at the same time men of the Enlightenment. They made a clear distinction between the otherworldly pursuits of the church and the immediate, practical goals of human beings. Most important among these goals for them was the affirmation of the ethnic nation, and they viewed the reception of new ideas, the spread of useful knowledge, and the application of reason to social problems as indispensable for its progress. From their standpoint, then, the church as an institution could no longer provide the leadership, and religion could no longer serve as the ideology of progress in a modern, enlightened world. All their writings make clear that the idea of nation had outgrown the bounds of religious dogma and theocratic privilege, which had predominated in the first half of the century.

The Church Union continued to be a source of concern for the Greek Catholic elite because in the interest of the ethnic nation they sought harmony with the Orthodox. But they also fostered the Union by the written and spoken word, and they showed no inclination to abandon it. For them, the Union had taken on a life of its own. At the level of community, it signified a renewal of the links with ancestral Rome, the Rome of Trajan; at the level of faith, it represented a return to the original sources of Christianity among the Romanians' ancestors in ancient

Dacia, a return, that is, to the Rome of Peter and Paul. But the Greek Catholic elite showed no inclination to renounce their Eastern heritage and acquiesce in the Latinization of their church.

The attitude of the elite toward the mass of the common people also sheds light on their idea of nation. They showed deep compassion for the peasantry and worked in their own ways to improve their lot. Samuil Micu, for example, knew the hardships of the rural world from first-hand observation,²⁷ and he urged landlords to treat their peasants in the spirit of Christian charity. He also turned to the peasants to buttress his idea of nation, finding in their customs proof of the Roman origins of the Romanians.²⁸ Şincai's contributions to village education and Maior's sermons also suggest an abiding concern for the general welfare.

Yet, despite their compassion, their attitude toward the mass of the population remained ambivalent. On the one hand, they used the term "nation" in an ethnic sense and meant the Romanian people as a whole. For them, the rigid division between separate orders had lost all meaning. But, on the other hand, they could not imagine the peasants as part of the political nation. Like their predecessors, they considered them ignorant and superstitious and in need of a long period of tutelage before they could participate fully and rationally in public affairs.

The primacy of the ethnic nation in the thought of the elite about community was strikingly evident in their brief foray into politics between 1790 and 1792. They had been moved to action in order to gain a hearing for the Romanians (and themselves) during the constitutional upheaval in Transylvania

²⁷ Micu, *Istoria*, Vol. 1, p. 493.

²⁸ Micu, *Scurtă cunoştinţă*, pp. 84-88.

following the death of Emperor Joseph II in 1790. In an imposing document known as the *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* Samuil Micu, Gheorghe Șincai, Petru Maior, and many of their colleagues drew up a persuasive statement of ethnic distinctiveness and a forthright demand that the Romanians be received among the privileged nations. The first part consisted of a lengthy exposition of the theory of Daco-Roman continuity, which provided the historical and legal justification for the restoration of the Romanians' ancient rights in Transylvania.²⁹ Of particular interest here are the demands that Romanian nobles, peasants, and clergy, both Orthodox and Greek Catholic, enjoy the same rights and privileges as the nobles, peasants, and clergy, respectively, of the other nations; that the Romanians be accorded proportional representation in county, district, and communal government and in the diet; and that the Romanians be permitted to hold a national congress of nobles and clergy under the chairmanship of the Greek Catholic and Orthodox bishops, where ways of satisfying the demands of the Romanian nation could be determined.³⁰

All the Romanian elite's hopes of securing official recognition of their nation were dashed by the rejection of the *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* by the Imperial Court in Vienna and the reaction that followed the accession of the conservative Francis II to the Habsburg throne in 1792. Significant Romanian political activity ceased for nearly four decades. During this time Romanian intellectuals concerned themselves mainly with the writing of scholarly works on history and language and the instruction of the common people through the composition of religious and moral works and schoolbooks.

²⁹ I have used the text published in Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum*, pp. 455-465.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 465-467.

The conception of nation inherent in the *Supplex Livellus Valachorum* was markedly different from what it had been in the first half of the eighteenth century. To be sure, Bishop Klein had made similar demands and had adduced similar arguments in support of them. He had even placed the welfare of the nation as a whole ahead of confessional interests, but he could conceive of success only in terms of the union of all Romanians in a single church. One religion, one nation had been his goal. In a somewhat different form, it had also been the goal of Gherontie Cotore and other members of his generation. But the authors of the *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* claimed rights for all Romanians without regard to religion, and they presented their demands in the name of the entire Romanian nation, Greek Catholics and Orthodox together. They recognized as members of the nation every person of high status or low, who professed the same ethnic origin, spoke the same language, and observed the same spiritual culture.

These ideas survived the conservative reaction in the Habsburg Monarchy between the 1790s and the 1840s and inspired a new generation to seek their fulfillment in political action.

V

The Romanian elite of the 1830s and 1840s, often called the generation of 1848 and the chief bearer and promoter of the idea of nation, was still composed of intellectuals and was still mainly Greek Catholic. Like the generation that had preceded them, they were drawn to European currents of thought and they brought Romanians into ever-closer communion with Western Europe. But they were not "Westernized". Their particular world of ideas owed much to an indigenous tradition, which was itself a distinctive blend of

sometimes contradictory traditions: the Western European – the Enlightenment in its Austro-German form, Romanticism, and Liberalism; the Orthodox, which had combined the folk traditions of the Southeast European rural world with the religious forms and spirituality of Byzantium; and, finally, the Transylvanian, that complex of political, social, and cultural forms to which all the peoples of the principality had contributed since the Middle Ages.

The view of the world that moved these intellectuals was in many ways cosmopolitan, despite their preoccupation with nation. They were the heirs of the Enlightenment, as their respect for reason and practical knowledge attests, but at the same time, the spirit of Romanticism infused their movement with a special enthusiasm and drive, and Liberalism reinforced their commitment to both individual and collective freedom. Imbued with these values in the decade preceding the Revolution of 1848 and during the Springtime of Peoples itself, they hesitated not at all to proclaim themselves a part of Europe. They thought of their own strivings for national fulfillment as simply one aspect of a grand European movement to achieve political and social justice. Their overflowing optimism in 1848 had its origins in the conviction that ethnic self-determination was the key to the general progress of humanity.

The generation of 1848 was thus different in fundamental ways from preceding generations.³¹ The majority of its members were secular in outlook, and it is a sign of the times that they were not attracted to the priesthood. Although they had all been exposed in some degree to theology and other religious

³¹ A comprehensive portrait of this generation is provided in George Em. Marica, et al., *Ideologia generației române de la 1848 din Transilvania* (București, 1968). See also Gyémánt, *Mișcarea națională*, pp. 336-362.

studies, few chose the church as a career, and thus they offer a striking contrast to their intellectual forebears of the eighteenth century. Instead of holy orders, they embraced teaching, journalism, and the law, choices that suggest how the opportunities for employment for Romanians had expanded as the economy and society of Transylvania evolved toward modern forms. The attitude of this elite toward the Greek Catholic and Orthodox churches as institutions and toward the bishops and other leading ecclesiastics reflected the pervasiveness of rationalist and liberal ideas and the predominance of nation in their thought. They condemned the “sterile” rivalries between Greek Catholics and Orthodox as disruptive of the nation’s unity, and they treated religious doctrine itself as largely irrelevant to the achievement of their goals. But none of them advocated the dissolution of the churches or the abolition of religion. Rather, they sought to enlist the churches and their clergies for service in the national cause as mobilizers of the peasantry and preservers of the traditional moral code.³²

Some members of the 1848 generation concerned themselves with the economic development of the Romanians, a matter largely ignored by their predecessors. They were by and large economic liberals who advocated the least possible restraints on the production and distribution of goods. They were certain that any changes in the existing economic structures of Transylvania could only benefit the Romanians and assist them in achieving national emancipation. Thus, they

³² *Foaie pentru minte, inimă și literatură* (Brașov) (henceforth, FM), Oct. 1, 8, 15, 1839, July 30 and Aug. 6, 1845. See also the wide-ranging discussion of these matters in Sorin Mitu, *Geneza identității naționale la românii ardeleni* (București, 1997), pp. 362-394; Simion Bărnuțiu, “Săborul cel mare al episcopiei Făgărașului”, FM, Jan. 25 and Feb. 1, 1843.

urged the dissolution of the craft guilds, which generally excluded Romanians; the removal of internal tariffs, which discouraged Romanian peasants and small traders from selling goods outside their home districts; and the abolition of serfdom, which, they complained, stifled initiative and kept the majority of Romanian peasants poor. For similar reasons and betraying their admiration for the Western European economic model, they favored the development of modern, capitalist forms of production, especially industry. They were also eager to create a prosperous middle class, which, they claimed, was the “most creative and modern” social class, whose absence among the Romanians had deprived them of the dynamic leadership the advanced nations of Western Europe enjoyed.³³

The outbreak of revolution in the spring of 1848 in the Habsburg Monarchy seemed to promise the Romanian elite the speedy fulfillment of their aspirations. Their firm sense of ethnic solidarity made them confident of success. The criteria they used to define nation were common origins, language, and history, and thus, for them, nation was a community that embraced all Romanians, regardless of class or religion. So certain were they of their own identity as Romanians that they spent little time arguing the merits of the theory of Daco-Roman continuity or writing histories of the Romanians and grammars of their language. They were at heart idealists who believed passionately in the ability of men to improve their condition through the reform of their institutions. Like their counterparts elsewhere in Europe, they professed faith in the swift and glorious transformation of society. But their experience of revolution in the coming year showed that they had grievously misjudged the rhythm of change in history and had foreseen the collapse of the old regime before its time had come.

³³ Marica, *Ideologia*, p. 89, note 203; p. 240, note 663.

The fundamental goal of the elite in 1848 was to secure political autonomy for the Romanians. They were, to be sure, eager to emancipate the Romanian peasant from serfdom and to promote the economic development and expand the educational opportunities of Romanians, but they considered these matters secondary in importance to the political question. In autonomy, they sought the ultimate defense of nation. From the beginning, they showed no hesitation in deciding who should lead the struggle for autonomy. They chose themselves, as if the responsibility was theirs by right, but, unlike previous elites, they were determined to draw the mass of peasants into the struggle for political emancipation by involving them in public meetings and national congresses.

The elite's notion of autonomy steadily evolved as events took their course in Transylvania between March 1848 and the summer of 1849. They had constantly to take into account the changing balance of forces between the Austrians, who were intent on maintaining imperial structures, and the Magyars, who asserted the rights of the ethnic nation (their own) and whose ultimate goal was the restoration of an independent historical Hungary. In the early months of the revolution, the Romanian elite sought administrative rather than territorial autonomy. They were guided partly by demographic patterns and partly by history. On the one hand, they recognized the impossibility in many areas of drawing clear-cut boundaries between different, intertwined ethnic communities, and, on the other hand, they were reluctant to tamper with existing political structures out of fear that Transylvania's own autonomy might be compromised. The maintenance of Transylvanian autonomy became a matter of utmost urgency in the spring of 1848. Magyar leaders demanded the union of Transylvania with Hungary, an act that the Romanian elite, led by the

philosopher and teacher Simion Bărnuțiu, opposed because it would reduce the Romanians to a small minority in Greater Hungary and doom their own aspirations to nationhood. Bărnuțiu, who became the spokesman of all those who made the claims of nation paramount, pointed out that Magyar liberals offered the Romanians political and civil rights only as individual citizens in the new Hungary, thus denying them the status of a nation. True freedom, he argued, could only be a national, a message that gained a larger and larger audience as the spring wore on.³⁴

The decisions Bărnuțiu and others made at the great assembly at Blaj on May 15, 1848, attended by some 40,000 persons, mostly peasants, signified the triumph of the idea of nation. They proclaimed the independence of the Romanian nation and its equality with the other nations of Transylvania, and they expressed their determination to work for a new political order based on liberal principles. For the first time in such a public manifesto they linked the progress of the nation to economic development, and, accordingly, they demanded the abolition of serfdom and equality of opportunity for Romanians in the artisan trades and commerce. They also gave special attention to the need for a literate, well-informed citizenry to ensure that the new liberal political institutions they envisioned functioned properly, and thus they urged the creation of a modern school system. But they insisted that instruction be done only in national schools and in the national language. Finally, they subordinated the church to the nation.

³⁴ *Revoluția de la 1848-1849 din Transilvania*, Vol. 1, Ștefan Pascu and Victor Chereșteșiu, eds. (București, 1977), pp. 90-92; Silviu Dragomir, *Studii și documente privitoare la revoluția Românilor din Transilvania în anii 1848-1849*, Vol. 5 (Cluj, 1946), pp. 108-110; Simion Bărnuțiu, *Românii și Ungurii: Discurs rostit în catedrala Blajului 2/14 maiu 1848*, Gheorghe Bogdan-Duică, ed. (Cluj, 1924), pp. 294-298.

They voiced again long-held desires of both Greek Catholic and Orthodox to free their churches from Hungarian Roman Catholic and Serbian Orthodox “interference” in their affairs. But now they went further. Ignoring the objections of Greek Catholic and Orthodox bishops and many faithful, they proposed, in effect, the creation of a Romanian national church that would embrace both Greek Catholics and Orthodox and eliminate once and for all the religious division of the nation.³⁵ Their concerns were hardly canonical. Rather, they wanted an institution that would serve their political and social causes.

At the conclusion of the assembly, members of the elite, together with Orthodox clergy and lay intellectuals, formed a “Permanent Committee” (later to be called the National Committee) to mobilize support for their demands and direct the campaign to achieve them. They also dispatched deputations to the Transylvanian diet in Cluj and to the Imperial Court in Vienna to seek approval of their idea of nation and of the new political order they advocated for Transylvania. But they found little sympathy for their cause in either place.

During the next twelve months, the energies of the elite were absorbed in the struggle for political autonomy. Despite great odds, their expectations mounted as they responded to ever changing conditions in Transylvania and in the Habsburg Monarchy as a whole. Their struggle passed through several phases. The first was reached at another, small national congress in September 1848, at which the Permanent Committee requested Austrian authorities, who had temporarily wrested control of Transylvania from Magyar revolutionaries, to allow them to set up an independent Romanian civil administration and convoke an elected constituent assembly with the ultimate

³⁵ Alexandru Papiu-Ilarian, *Istoria Românilor din Dacia Superioară*, Vol. 2 (Vienna, 1852), pp. 294-298.

objective of creating an autonomous Romanian “duchy” in Transylvania.³⁶ Needless to say, neither in Transylvania nor in Vienna, did the Austrians approve, but later when the military situation turned against them in favor of the Magyars they eagerly called on the Romanians for help. At a hastily organized conference in December 1848, Romanian leaders pledged continued support to the imperial cause and restated their national aspirations. But now they assumed that an autonomous Romanian duchy, even though lacking a fixed territory, had already come into being. They decided to ask Emperor Francis Joseph to recognize its existence formally by designating the National Committee, as they now called themselves, a provisional government until conditions allowed the Romanians to organize themselves as a constituent part of the empire.³⁷ Although the Austrians were noncommittal, the Romanian elite persisted in believing that the old empire was being transformed into a federation in accordance with principles of political liberty and national equality that would enable all its people to develop freely.³⁸

The culmination of the elite’s efforts to gain recognition of the Romanians as a political nation came on February 25, 1849, when a delegation from the national conference in December, expanded to include representatives of the Romanians of the Banat, Bukovina, and Hungary, presented Francis Joseph with a formal plan to organize a Romanian duchy and invited him to assume the title, “Grand Duke of the Romanians.”³⁹ In this

³⁶ FM, Oct. 18, 1848.

³⁷ Nicolae Popea, *Memorialul Archiepiscopului și Mitropolitului Andeiu baron de Șaguna sau luptele naționale-politice ale Românilor, 1846-1873*, Vol. 1 (Sibiu, 1889), pp. 230-232.

³⁸ FM, Jan. 24, 1849.

³⁹ Popea, *Memorialul*, pp. 248-249.

bold proposal the elite, now led by the forceful Orthodox Bishop Andrei Șaguna, spoke in the name of all the Romanians of the Habsburg Monarchy, whom they were determined to unite, if not territorially, then at least administratively. By ignoring historical frontiers, long-established constitutional structures, and even the distinct histories of the Romanians of the various provinces, they had, in effect, reaffirmed the primacy of the ethnic nation.

Unhappily, none of this was to be. The elite was too far ahead of the Imperial Court in Vienna, which not only looked to the past for guidance, but also had the power to restore it. On March 10, the Council of Ministers dismissed the whole idea of a Romanian duchy. It rejected the creation of a separate Romanian territory because it would violate the recently adopted constitution, which recognized the areas inhabited by Romanians – Transylvania, Bukovina, and Hungary – as historical crown lands, whose boundaries could be changed only by special legislation, and it declared an autonomous Romanian administration for civil affairs equally unconstitutional, since the powers the Romanians sought had been granted to the imperial and provincial diets. Romanian appeals proved fruitless.⁴⁰ When the last Hungarian field army surrendered in August 1849 revolution in the Habsburg Monarchy came to an end. The old order was restored in Transylvania, and the Romanian elite was compelled to withdraw from politics for the next decade of absolutist rule.

VI

The end of the Revolution of 1848 brought to a close an important stage in the evolution of nation among the Romanians

⁴⁰ Mihail Popescu, *Documente inedite privitoare la istoria Transilvaniei între 1848-1859* (București, 1929), pp. 38-40, 42.

of Transylvania and thus provides an opportunity to review the course of events since the beginning of the eighteenth century and judge their nature. We must look again at the modernist paradigm: that nations were modern phenomena dating from the French Revolution; that they were wholly products of the modern age in the sense that they could appear, indeed had to appear, in response to modern economic and social conditions, in particular, the development of capitalism and industry; that they were the result of fundamental economic, social, and cultural changes taking place in Europe in recent times and thus were not deeply rooted in history; that the ties that bound the members of nations together were those of citizenship and social communication; and, finally, that nations were created, that is, they were imagined and constructed by elites and thus were not natural entities existing from the very earliest times.

The Romanian case between 1700 and 1849 coincides to a limited degree with the modernist paradigm. There can be no doubt that the elites, in a sense, constructed the Romanian nation. It was they who conceived of the ethnic nation, who elaborated its distinctive features and devised a national ideology, and who led the movement for political autonomy in 1848. They were also responsive to the continually evolving economic, social, and cultural conditions in Transylvania in the course of a century and a half. The changes in the composition of the elites from the clerics of the eighteenth century to the secularists of the 1830s and 1840s and the development of the idea of nation itself from that which had inspired Bishop Klein to the conception put forward by the generation of 1848 cannot otherwise be explained.

These similarities notwithstanding, the Romanian case suggests that certain modifications are necessary in the modernist explanation of the emergence of nation. The nation

discovered and affirmed by Romanian elites was not a construct; it was not simply an entity they imagined as a response to the economic and social imperatives of the modern age. Rather, the elites of the eighteenth century built on a sense of community that was already strong in 1700: the memory of shared experiences in the past, the folk customs and myths, the language, the Eastern Orthodox religious tradition, and the social and political exclusion that drew the community together. The generation of 1848 then used these foundations as the moral and legal justification for political autonomy. The elites' idea of nation thus had strong roots in the past. There is other evidence, too, that the idea of nation was not wholly a product of modernity. Romanian society and Transylvanian society, in general, in the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century were agrarian. They were not by any definition capitalist and industrial, even though changes in the economy of the principality were accelerating after 1800. Nor was the transformation of the ethnic community of 1700 into the nation of 1848 by any means automatic or inevitable. If it had been, there would have been no need for intellectuals, that is, for those who were continually measuring themselves and always in search of themselves, and there would have been no passion in the creation and defense of nation.