

A BRIEF ILLUSTRATED HISTORY
OF ROMANIANS

Neagu M. Djuvara (1916–2018) was born to a family of Aromanian descent that settled there in the late 18th century and gave Romania several notable figures. He obtained a degree in history from the Sorbonne (1937) and became a doctor of law (Paris, 1940). Between June and November 1941, he took part in the Romanian army's campaign in Bessarabia and Transnistria, and was wounded close to Odessa. Admitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1943, he was sent to Stockholm on a diplomatic mission related to the peace negotiations with the USSR on the morning of 23 August 1944, hours before Romania changed sides in the WW2. He worked as a legation secretary in the Swedish capital until September 1947, when the Communists took control of Romanian diplomacy. Djuvara chose to remain in exile, where he was active in various diaspora organisations. In 1961, he left for the Republic of Niger, where he would work for the next 23 years as a diplomatic and legal advisor to the country's Foreign Affairs ministry, while also teaching international law and the history of economics at the University of Niamey. In 1972, he obtained a state doctorate from the Sorbonne with a thesis on the philosophy of history, under the supervision of philosopher Raymond Aron; this was followed by a degree in philology from INALCO (Paris). From 1984 to 1990 he served as the secretary general of the *Casa Românească* cultural association in Paris. Following the fall of communism in Romania, he returned home and became an honorary member of the “A.D. Xenopol” Institute of History in Iași and the “N. Iorga” Institute of History in Bucharest.

His major works include: *On Romanian Nationality Law* (doctoral thesis); *Civilisations and Historical Patterns. A Comparative Study of Civilisations* (recipient of a French Academy prize); *Between East and West. The Romanian Principalities at the Beginning of the Modern Age*; *A Brief History of Romanians*; *The Genesis of the Romanian People*; *Mircea the Elder and His Wars Against the Turks*; *From Vlad the Impaler to Dracula the Vampire*; *The Journal of Georges Milesco* (autobiographical novel); *Somewhat Irreverent Memoirs and Stories*; *Bucharest–Paris–Niamey and Return or Memoirs of 42 Years in Exile (1948–1990)*; *Is There Such a Thing as True History?*; *Thocomerius – Negru-Vodă. A Voivode of Cuman Descent and the Beginnings of Wallachia*; *The Seventy-Seven Years' War (1914–1991) and the Premises of American Hegemony. An Essay in Political Science*; *Who Were Wallachia's Great Boyars? The Grădișteanu Family Saga (16th–20th Century)*; *A Reply to My Critics and the Foes of Negru-Vodă*; *The Mystery of the Stockholm Telegram of 23 August 1944 and Several Incredible Details Regarding Our Capitulation*.

NEAGU
DJUVARA

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ILLUSTRATED
HISTORY
OF ROMANIANS

Translation by Cristian Anton



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This book features photographs by Marius Amarie that were kindly offered by the National History Museum of Romania (pages 23 and 41 – Gepidic artefacts from Apahida; pages 27 and 39 – Artefacts from the Pietroasele hoard; page 35 – Inscribed 9th century ceramic vessel; page 270 – Sword of King Carol I; page 273 – Sword of Edhem Pasha; page 276 – The Steel Crown of Romania) as well as photographs offered by the National History Museum of Transylvania (page 12 – Dacian silver fibula and a bronze sword discovered at Beneşti). Humanitas would like to thank the two institutions for their support. We have also used images of charters and seals found in the National Historical Archives and photographs from the online archive of communism in Romania (IICCR).

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FOREWORD

This book is not an ordinary history book; it is not a textbook, and it does not profess to replace school textbooks. The idea for it came to me a few years ago, when Mrs Irina Nicolau, a specialist in ethnology and oral history, voiced her exasperation about the fact that our school textbooks – even after the revolution of December 1989 – were continuing to disseminate the same version of history, intentionally deformed over the past decades, and written in the same pretentious, dead language of officialdom, dressed up to disguise the poverty of thought and often the absence of any real meaning. It was she who persuaded me to summarise our country's past in the simplest and most fluent manner on audio tapes for today's younger generation. The present title is the transcription of those recordings, "purged" of the errors inherent to improvised speech and complemented where it seemed to me that the misgivings were too obvious – within limits, of course. I therefore let the story flow, free of interruptions, explanatory notes and citations – in short, avoiding the style which scholars call "academic" – to make it comprehensible to all, from history enthusiasts to those who have chosen to remain indifferent to our past.

It is a very abridged story; for example, I did not list the names of all the voivodes (or princes) who were fighting for the throne during the 15th or 16th century, nor those of the Phanariote princes replaced by the sultan in Constantinople once every two or three years (when they were not beheaded or hanged at his orders) throughout the 18th century. It should not be mistaken for a work of *vulgarisation*. I am not fond of the word "vulgar" used

as a derogatory term, which would suggest that the story is not only simple, but also simplistic or puerile.

The reader will quickly realise that, under the guise of light storytelling, I had the audacity to tackle the most delicate and controversial issues in our history, under the assumption that the high school student too has an adult mind, instead of a fragile one that should be spared and offered a sweetened, rosy image of our past. Nothing serves our country better than knowing (or acknowledging) the truth, as much of it as we mortals can perceive – as God alone knows *the whole truth*. For that reason, do not be surprised if I sometimes happen to say “some authors believe that...” or “I believe that...” etc.

It is often said that one must be *objective* in searching for the truth. I am not fond of this word either: if you look it up in a dictionary, you will find that “objective” used to mean “outside consciousness” and therefore, logically, can only be applied to the study of inanimate objects. Yet historians primarily deal with *people* – individuals or groups, therefore subjects, not objects, and in order to understand these subjects they too have to be subjective. They will be trying very hard to relate with various mentalities and opinions, one after the other, some of them contradictory (individual, national, religious, doctrinal etc.). Their impartiality can only stem from a succession of partialities, constructed as honestly as possible. If we proceed in this manner, not only will we not be able to pursue an alleged “national” agenda in describing and explaining the past, but we will not be tempted to hide some facts or manipulate others in the name of this false patriotism, under the pretext that we must respond to the fabrications of our Hungarian, Bulgarian, Greek or Russian neighbours, and of others. *Lies should not be met with more lies*. The only rational answer is complete academic integrity. This is the only way we will assert ourselves before the international scientific community and take our rightful place in Europe and the world.

I have kept the somewhat ambiguous title of “The History of Romanians” – as opposed to “The History of Romania” of which we tend to speak more and more nowadays – firstly because it is traditional; secondly, because “Romania” is a term applied to the country inhabited by Romanians only after the Union of 1859 –

therefore, can we really call our territory in the Middle Ages “Romania”?; and finally, because it enables me to briefly mention other branches of the Eastern Roman world found outside the territory of present-day Romania, such as the Aromanians or the Vlachs that founded the Second Bulgarian Tsardom, the Asen dynasty (Romanian: *Asăneşti*).

However, the scope of the book goes beyond the history of “Romanians” in its strictest sense, both ethnically and temporally. Temporally, because we will be going further back in time, before the human group speaking the Romanian language was formed, and getting closer to the peoples who mixed to form this group, meaning the Romanian people; this was a long process, very difficult to follow and explain because of the scarcity of documents. We must briefly mention the Geto-Dacians, then the Romanised Italic and Mediterranean peoples brought by Roman colonisation; perhaps even some remains of Germanic barbarians (Goths, Gepids etc.) but most importantly the great Slavic migration, which left deep traces in our language, customs and institutions, and which must be seen as the third major component in the ethnogenesis of the Romanian people. I also see a fourth significant component, namely the *Turkic* peoples arriving from Central Asia in successive waves, such as the Avars, the Pechenegs, the Oghuz Turks and the Cumans, most of whom spoke Turkic languages, related to Ottoman Turkish. For example, the Pechenegs and the Cumans ruled over our territory east and south of the Carpathians for 350 years, and it was there, in the lands which our neighbours called “Cumania” up to that time, that the first organised Romanian state appeared at the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries, namely Wallachia (Romanian: *Tara Românească*). I will try to demonstrate why I believe that the Turkic component has not been sufficiently explored until now. In any case, it is only *after* this complex mix of peoples and the formation of the language we call “Romanian” that we can speak of a Romanian people. Therefore, we have to begin telling the story over one thousand years before this process was completed.

Secondly, from an ethnic point of view, we have to speak about the peoples that not only did not mix

with the Romanians (such as the Hungarians, Saxons, Ruthenians) but became the dominant and privileged groups across wide areas of our territory until recent times. Other foreign elements were added later on, some of whom were easily assimilated into the Romanian majority – like the Greeks and other Balkan peoples – but also others who were more difficult to assimilate, whether we have kept them at a distance, or they have sought to preserve their individuality – such as the Gypsies, Armenians and Jews. We must mention all of them, for they have shared the same territory with the Romanians, and the influences of one group over the others are countless and difficult to quantify.

Lastly, I will emphasise the impact which our neighbours have had on the founding of the Romanian states and the birth of the Romanian nation. One by one or simultaneously, the Bulgarian Tsardom, the Byzantine Empire, the Kingdom of Hungary, the Serbian Despotate, the Kingdom of Poland, the Ottoman Turks, the Austrians and finally, the Russians have played a part in the destiny of our people. This will provide us with almost concentric views over larger and larger areas – South-Eastern Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, and Europe as a whole – for we must even mention faraway France, whose role was crucial to our adoption of Western views, customs and institutions during the past century, and which made an overwhelming impact on the modern Romanian language. Without a broader perspective, without including Romanians in the broader history of Europe and the world, their history will remain *incomprehensible*.

One final remark: no author should imagine that the history that he or she is writing is the definitive one, which future generations will identify with. Every generation forms a new vision of the past and may uncover unexpected things from that past which could change its vision yet again.

Aware of the volatile and precarious nature of historical writing, I now leave these preliminary observations aside to begin the story of our people, *as I see it at the end of this century and millennium*.

Bucharest, October 1999

The lines above have told you the story of how the book called *A Brief History of Romanians* came to be, back in the late 1990s. Since then it has sold tens of thousands of copies and became very well known in Romania, as well as having been translated into six languages, including English and French. It made our history more accessible to others and, I hope, offered a vision free of the constraints of academic writing, which would spark more interest in our past.

Then some time ago, Humanitas Publishing House proposed an illustrated version of the book, which sounded like an excellent idea from the start. When accompanied by illustrations, a history book becomes even better and easier to understand, for we are offered the chance to see how ancient artefacts discovered by archaeologists actually look like, or catch a glimpse into how the authors of the wonderful illuminated manuscripts saw the barbarians or medieval warriors. As we get nearer to the modern age, the iconography becomes even richer and we get to know Romania's princes and monarchs, their allies and their enemies, the politicians – good and bad – their triumphs, tribulations or even tragedies, and sometimes even the common people going about their daily lives. The photographic discourse focuses on the most important documents, even if their condition is not optimal. But you will also find images of wonderful artefacts: pieces of pottery, jewellery and weaponry. Some of them come from unexpected sources, often unknown to the public, and are accompanied by detailed captions that complement the information provided in the text itself. Together, the text and illustrations that accompany it intertwine to form a new, enhanced historical account – and hopefully, one not lacking in originality.

Bucharest, May 2013

I. THE BEGINNINGS



*Pottery of the Cucuteni culture
(4800 to 3000 BC)*

If you look at a physical map of Romania, observe the shape of the Transylvanian Plateau: you could say that our country forms a great circle around Transylvania. Well, that was where the Romanian nation was born.

But who were the inhabitants of the Transylvanian Plateau 2,500 years ago? For trying to find who lived there before that time is far too difficult an undertaking. We cannot push this study into prehistory as part of such a condensed account; it is true that archaeology has revealed very ancient traces of human habitation in our present-day territory, going back thousands, even tens of thousands of years. However, we currently lack any means of identifying the race or races of those ancient inhabitants, or of understanding the least bit about their customs and beliefs, and even less about the languages they spoke. Describing those civilisations, lost in the mists of time, would serve us little in trying to understand how those whom it is safer to consider our ancestors have appeared in this space. From the many archaeological remains found all over the country, it is only certain that wave after wave of successive migrations came in from the south, from the west and from the east, and it is impossible to tell what race they were, and how they mixed or wiped each other out just by looking at the shape of dwellings and graves, or the style of tools and ceramics. Let us limit our account to those peoples whom scientists of the previous century have called “Indo-European”, for they spread westwards across the whole of Europe, as well as south and east, all the way to India.

Around four or five thousand years ago, starting from the present day territories of Belarus, Western Ukraine and Poland, peoples speaking the same language started to spread slowly but relentlessly across our continent, and over time came to rule it all. They were not of a single race (meaning that, in anthropological terms, they did not all belong to the same physical type). It was thought during the past century that all Indo-Europeans originally resembled modern-day Scandinavians, and that they were tall, blonde and dolichocephalic (that is, their skulls looked egg-shaped when seen from above). This was a mistaken conception: Indo-European was only a language. Archaeology has proven that all kinds of peoples could be found in this original crucible, and that they ended up speaking the same language after living together or near one another for thousands of years. It is from these Indo-European-speaking peoples, who colonised Europe in successive waves, some at rather long intervals, that almost all of the peoples living in Europe today are descended.

Bronze ritual chariot from Bujoru, Teleorman County, belonging to the Basarabi culture. It dates back to the 8th century BC, two centuries before the first mention of the Getae in the Histories of Herodotus.





Sword discovered at Benestî, Sibiu County, dating from the late Bronze Age. The marks on its edge reveal that it was used in battle.

I say *almost all* because small enclaves were left unchanged by the Indo-European migrations, and following these, came several other peoples speaking entirely different languages. Of the latter, the Finns, the Estonians, the Hungarians and the Turks are the foremost examples, while of the remaining pre-Indo-Europeans, only the Basques form a distinct ethnic and linguistic group to this day, in the north of Spain and south-west of France. Some anthropologists claim that Sicily too was mainly populated with pre-Indo-European peoples; the Sicilians, however, have adopted the language of their Roman rulers and no traces were left of any language that preceded Indo-European idioms.



Dacian silver fibula from Transylvania, where other similar pieces of jewellery were found. Fibulae were used by both women and men to fasten various items of clothing.

The Geto-Dacians

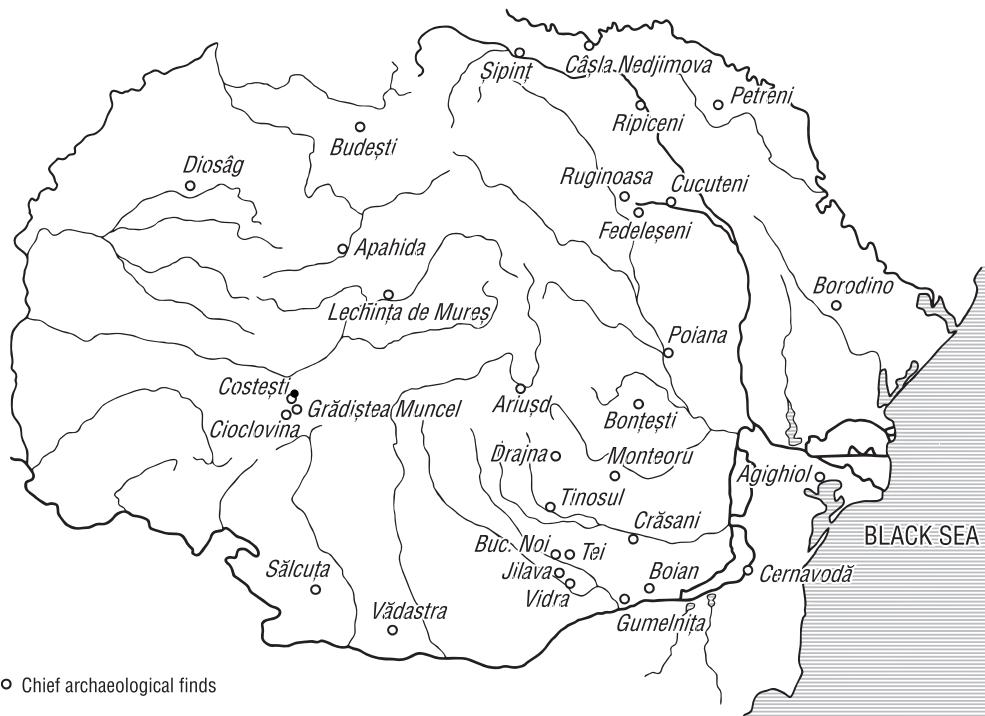
Let us return to the territory defined by the Carpathian Mountains and the river Danube. Here, archaeological and documentary sources reveal the presence of an Indo-European people who had probably arrived during the second or third millennium BC. Some called them *Dacians* (especially in Transylvania) others *Getae* (in Wallachia, Dobruja and Bessarabia).

To the south there lived the Thracians. Many historians believe that the Geto-Dacians were in fact a Thracian tribe, relying on a single sentence from the Greek historian Herodotus (5th century BC). Today it seems that this is not exactly true. They may have been close relatives of the Thracians, but their languages (or what little we can make of them) were not very similar, for in the Geto-Dacian language we do not find the same place names, nor the same royal names as in Thracian, and



Dacian silver ring from the 1st century AD, part of the hoard found at Măgura, Teleorman County

Prehistoric Dacia, from the Paleolithic until 512 BC



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