Introduction

The 2,000 years of history of a people tempts the writer, and the reader, to seek out long-term trends to provide guidance through complex and contradictory evolutions. So it is with the history of the Romanians. From medieval times to the early twentieth century they followed stages similar to those of other nations in Eastern Europe and even of Europe as a whole: feudalism, of a sort, and a mainly agricultural economy and rural society, until the nineteenth century, and, then, down to the First World War, the transition, slow at the beginning, to an industrial economy and an urban society, where agriculture and the village nonetheless predominated. All the while, from the eighteenth century, the shape of a modern Romanian nation, intellectually at least, was taking form. Then came the interwar period, only twenty years long, when the modernization impulses accelerated, and then, for forty years, came the Communists, who pursued modernization with methods and goals of their own. The post-Communist years offer hints that the Romanians may once again be headed along the path taken two centuries earlier.

What especially may define the Romanians over the long term is their place between East and West. It grants the writer a wide perspective from which to arrange the events of their history. They confronted the dilemma of choice between these two poles from the beginning of their statehood in the fourteenth century, when the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia were founded. Or, if we are willing to stretch reason a bit, we may say that the East–West

encounter began for them even earlier. It came with encounters between the Thracians and Dacians, first with the ancient Greek cities along the Black Sea coast and then with the Romans, the conquerors of Dacia in the early second century. These connections with the West were ethnic, linguistic, and historiographical. Crucial contacts with the East followed, with the Byzantine Empire and the Orthodox world and their Bulgarian and Serbian heirs. The links here were pre-eminently spiritual and cultural, but political, too.

If indeed the Romania that emerged in the twentieth century was a synthesis of East and West, the political contest between the two poles began in earnest in the later fourteenth and fifteenth century, as first the Wallachian and then the Moldavian princes, nobles, and peasants were confronted by the relentless march of the Ottoman Turks north through the Balkans. As the Wallachian and Moldavian princes sought to stem the Muslim advance they thought of themselves as a part of Christian Europe and joined Western crusading armies at Nicopolis (1396) and Varna (1444). But in the same centuries they were forced to defend their countries against aggressive designs from the West, from Roman Catholic Hungary and Poland.

The establishment of Ottoman pre-eminence over the principalities in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which lasted until the early decades of the nineteenth century, could not but draw the Romanians toward the East. Yet, the suzerainty of the sultans, however great the economic burdens and the limitations on sovereignty it imposed, differed significantly from the Ottomans' conquests south of the Danube, which brought the incorporation of the Bulgarian and Serbian medieval states into the very structures of their empire. The Romanians preserved their institutions and social structure and over time exercised greater or lesser degrees of administrative autonomy. Although vassal status prohibited formal relations with foreign powers, neither principality was isolated from the West. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century they carried on trade and maintained diplomatic contacts, even if indirectly, with Central Europe. They were open to varied cultural and intellectual currents from the West, even though the great movements of ideas such as the Renaissance and the Reformation and the Catholic Reformation would, understandably in Orthodox

countries, have modest influence. The Enlightenment was another matter. From the later decades of the eighteenth century until well into the first half of the nineteenth century the Romanian educated classes, especially the younger nobles and the rising middle class, made the idea of progress and the means of achieving it – reason and knowledge and good institutions – their own. Their adaptation of Enlightenment principles is some measure of their approach to Europe. But it is from the era of the 1830s and the Revolution of 1848 and Romanticism that the contest between East and West for the soul and mind of the Romanians was fully joined.

Between the 1860s and the decades between the World Wars, which constitute the "national period," modern Romania took form politically, economically, socially, and culturally, in accordance with the European model. "Europe," the center and west of the continent, established itself as a distinct category in Romanian thought. The concept had a special significance for the Romanians; it meant the modern world, urban and industrial, dynamic and of a high civilization, and turned toward the future. The Europeanization of Romania, if that is the proper term, may be traced from a variety of perspectives: political-administrative, economic, social, and cultural and intellectual. An examination of each leads to the conclusion that Romania was being drawn deeply into the web of European relationships. But such a course was by no means smooth. Nor did it go uncontested. Many Romanians feared that their unique identity would be smothered in the West's embrace; they argued that they should achieve progress by finding models in and drawing inspiration from native sources that had weathered the tests of history.

An abiding preoccupation of Romanian politicians and intellectuals was the crafting of an administrative system that would ensure stability for their young state and enable its people to make progress in every field of human activity. They were inspired by diverse patterns: the French centralization of power, the Belgian assurances of citizens' participation in the political system, and the order and consistency of the English constitutional system, among others. Yet, those Romanians who drew up constitutions and enacted laws did not imitate. They adapted, as they took generous account of their own history and prevailing economic and social conditions and carefully weighed their own ambitions.

The Romanian economy was steadily drawn into the international commercial and financial system beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century as Europeans gradually discovered the value of Romanian agricultural goods and raw materials for their cities and industries, the availability of Romanian markets for their own products, and the profits to be had from investing in Romanian industries and financial institutions. So strong did these Western currents become that by the outbreak of the First World War many branches of the Romanian economy were dependent on European banking and commercial interests. Even the modest farmer of grains was subject to the ups and downs of the international market. The same course of development continued during the interwar period, but Romanian governments were more determined than their predecessors to maintain control over the national economy. Yet in the long run, the chief benefit to Romanians of their integration into the international economic order may have been the incentive to modernize their own economy.

The structures of Romanian society during the nineteenth and twentieth century were also becoming more like those of Western Europe. Such an evolution was largely the consequence of economic development and urbanization and the growing complexities of urban life, but it was no less a response to changes in the mental climate. Most striking perhaps was the rise of the middle class, which in the later decades of the nineteenth century assumed leadership of both the economy and political life and took pride in being modern and European and claimed to represent the interests of the whole nation. The urban working class was also growing, but its role in the broader society remained ill-defined and modest. The peasants, the majority of the population down to the later twentieth century, remained a bulwark of tradition. They were reluctant to change, even under pressure, especially during Communist times. But change they did.

It may be in writing and thinking about themselves from the eighteenth to the twentieth century that the Romanians revealed the true measure of their Europeanness. At the beginning of modern times they were observers of the Center and West. Then they slowly merged their own creativity of the mind and spirit with movements and schools elsewhere in the continent. By the beginning of the

twentieth century adaptation gave way to innovation, as Romanian writers, historians, and social thinkers helped to shape continental values and thus expanded the concept of Europe.

For the second half of the twentieth century the question naturally arises about how Romanian Communism fits into the long-term Europeanization of the Romanians. Or we could simply ask if the Communists were Europeanizers. They certainly professed disdain for the private entrepreneurship and market forces prevalent in the West, and they showed no inclination to embrace Western-style multi-party politics and the parliamentary system. They were also intent on wiping away as much of the national tradition as they could, at least at the start of their tenure. They also held up for emulation another model – the Soviet Union and its experience in constructing Communism – and for a decade after coming to power in the late 1940s they dared not deviate from the Soviet-prescribed path. But after the death of Joseph Stalin, as changes occurred in Soviet relations with the East European bloc and with the West, Romanian Communist leaders became bolder and embarked on a project that could be called "national Communism" or, as some would have it, "national Stalinism." In any case, it entailed a re-evaluation of the country's history and certain traditions and suggested the value of at least a partial rapprochement with Europe. Romanian Communists remained Communists, and thus they set boundaries beyond which their vision of Europe could not pass.

The collapse of Communism in 1989 opened the way to a new, genuine reconciliation with Europe. The "return to Europe," as the events of the time are sometimes called, was not at first smooth, as the accretions of four decades of Communism took time to wear away, but the process seems well under way. Perhaps the question to be asked is whether the great experiment of the synthesis of East and West has run its course.

I

Beginnings

Distant origins and the debate about them lie at the heart of Romanian identity. From at least the seventeenth century down to the present, self-identification has engaged the energies of scholars and, not infrequently, of churchmen and politicians, who for their own reasons have been at pains to explain how the Romanians came to be. In their diligence historians, archeologists, and linguists, in particular, have brought to light the most diverse evidence to support the most diverse theories about origins, but sometimes their reasoning has belonged more to myth than to science. Nonetheless, these notions of origins and the interpretations they begot would prove crucial for the image the Romanians gradually formed of themselves and would decisively shape their relationship to "Europe," that is, whether to turn east or west for models and inspiration.

THE DACIANS

Central to the Romanians' long-standing debate about beginnings and identity was the nature of the Roman conquest and settlement of Dacia, the land that was to form the core of modern Romania, both geographically and psychologically. No less important in delineating an acceptable self-image was the fate of the Dacians, the indigenous inhabitants of the land, who were subjected to Roman rule and acculturation for a century and a half.

In the centuries before the Roman conquest of the early second century AD the territory bounded roughly by the Danube, Tisza, and Dniester rivers was home to various Thracian peoples, the most important of whom historically were the Getae and the Dacians. The two were distinct but related peoples, and some historians, from ancient times to the present, have treated them as one, calling them Geto-Dacians. In any case, the Getae inhabited the lower Danube basin and had regular commerce with Greek cities along the Black Sea coast founded as early as the seventh century BC in what is now Dobrudja. The *Histories* of Herodotus, written in the fifth century BC, are one of the earliest narrative sources of information about them and regularly refer to them as a Thracian people. The lands of the Dacians lay in the center of the Carpatho-Danubian basin straddling both sides of the southern Carpathian Mountains. Strabo in the first century BC tells us that the Dacians spoke the same language as the Getae, and Dio Cassius some two centuries later pointed to numerous similarities in their cultures.

The Geto-Dacians, or simply Dacians, as I shall call them, were united into a powerful confederation under a noble, Burebista, who became their "king" in about 82 BC. Ambitious and bold, he assembled a powerful army that enabled him for a time to expand his territory to the middle Danube. His most important conquests, beginning about 55 BC, were the Greek cities on the Black Sea coast, acquisitions that intensified the spread of Greek commerce and technology to the interior of the Dacian lands. Greek artisans and builders were familiar inhabitants of his capital, Sarmizegetusa, which lay in the mountains of present-day southwestern Transylvania.

Burebista inevitably came into conflict with Rome, whose legions had reached the lower Danube by the reign of Augustus (27 BC–AD 14). He was unwise enough to interfere with Roman ambitions and to involve himself in Roman power struggles. He carried out raiding expeditions across the Danube into Thrace, where the Romans had established themselves, and he took the side of Pompey in the civil war which had broken out in 48 BC between him and Julius Caesar mainly because Pompey seems to have recognized his conquests on the Black Sea coast. He had thus made an enemy of Caesar, who was victorious over Pompey and would undoubtedly have mounted a punitive expedition against him, if he had not been assassinated in 44 BC.

Burebista suffered a similar fate at the hands of disaffected nobles at about the same time, and without his forceful leadership his "kingdom" rapidly disintegrated, as tribal chiefs claimed their independence. A succession of rulers asserted their authority from their center in southwestern Transylvania, but not until the accession of Decebal, who united the Dacian tribes, did a Dacian kingdom, somewhat smaller than Burebista's, again take form. The reign of Decebal, which began in about AD 85, witnessed almost continuous warfare between the Dacians and the Roman administration south of the Danube, now organized as the province of Moesia, which extended from the Black Sea to Singindinum (present-day Belgrade). In AD 89 Decebal and the Emperor Domitian (AD 81–96) reached an accord under which Dacia became a client kingdom of Rome and in return received financial subsidies and technological assistance. It brought peace to the region for a decade.

Dacia between the reigns of Burebista and Decebal reveals itself in the written records and in archeological remains to have been a complex society divided into two main classes – aristocracy and commoners. It was from among the former that kings and leading officials and the clergy came, while the mass of the population supplied labor and taxes. This majority was largely rural and lived in village communes, which seem to have had collective responsibility for taxes and such labor services to the king as the maintenance of fortifications. Urban life was, nonetheless, well developed. Sarmizegetusa possessed the attributes of a true city, and it was a significant artisan and commercial center, besides being the seat of royal administration.

The economy was based on agriculture, which provided most of the inhabitants with their main source of income. The main crops were grains – wheat, barley, and millet. But mining, especially of iron, gold, silver, and salt, and artisan crafts, including metals, ceramics, glass, and masonry, were well developed. Dacian artisans thus produced a variety of weapons and tools and products of all kinds for daily life. Influences from both the Roman and Hellenistic worlds were evident in the forms and decorations they chose, influences that were strengthened by a flourishing commerce. In return for processed goods and luxuries such as perfumes and lotions, which were intended for the upper classes, the Dacians sent to the

Danube and Black Sea coastal cities grain and animal products, salt, wood, honey, and wax. This trade seems to have been in the hands of foreign, not Dacian, merchants.

By the reign of Decebal the Dacians had achieved a level of civilization well suited to their needs. In architecture, especially in the some eighty fortresses and the numerous religious sanctuaries that archeologists have identified, they gave evidence of a solid knowledge of mathematics and engineering. They possessed a written language, and in the few specimens that have survived, mainly inscriptions and an occasional word or two from Greek and Latin authors, they used the Greek and Latin alphabets. In religion, according to Herodotus, the Getae practiced the cult of Zamolxis, a priest who, according to tradition, had been a disciple of Pythagoras and had returned to his native land to serve the Dacian supreme god Gebeleizis and preach the immortality of the soul. Other, later sources present Zamolxis as a god himself and suggest that the Getae knew how "to make themselves immortal" through secret rituals. Yet, information about the religion of the Getae and Dacians is so fragmentary that greater precision about beliefs and practices is difficult.

ROMAN DACIA

The Roman conquest of Dacia at the beginning of the second century AD brought an end to the autonomous evolution of Dacian society and civilization. Absorbed henceforth into the cosmopolitan Roman world, both were utterly transformed.

The Emperor Trajan (AD 98–117) initiated a more consistently aggressive policy toward the Dacians than his predecessors had pursued. Shortly after ascending the throne he inspected the imperial frontier along the Danube from Pannonia to Moesia and took immediate measures to strengthen its fortifications. His anxiety about protecting the Roman provinces of Upper and Lower Moesia had been aroused by frequent Dacian attacks across the river during the reign of Domitian, notably the raids into Dobrudja in AD 85–86. Although a peace had been concluded with Decebal in AD 89 which restored a relative calm along the Danube frontier and encouraged a lively trade, Trajan had evidently decided that the Dacians were a permanent menace to the security of Rome's Balkan provinces,

especially if they allied themselves with other enemies of Rome such as the Parthians. The mineral wealth and agricultural productivity of Dacia also undoubtedly persuaded him to extend Rome's grasp beyond the Danube.

For the campaign of AD 101–2 Trajan assembled a sizable army to send against Decebal, perhaps two to three times the size of the Dacian force of some 50,000 that opposed him. Two columns of Roman legionaries crossed the Danube at different points, the one at Viminaceum on a bridge formed of river barges where Trajan himself was in command, and the other further east at Dierna. The two columns met at Tibiscum and marched together on Sarmizegetusa, Decebal's capital. At Tapae they encountered the main Dacian army and defeated it, forcing Decebal to sue for peace. Trajan imposed harsh terms with the aim of removing permanently the Dacians' threat to Roman predominance along the Danube. He forced Decebal to withdraw from what is today the Banat and Oltenia, to demolish the walls surrounding the most important Dacian fortresses, to accept the status of a Roman ally, which meant the end of an independent foreign policy, and to receive a Roman garrison in Sarmizegetusa. He may have refrained from destroying the Dacian kingdom in the expectation that it might prove useful in keeping other "barbarian" peoples at bay. Yet, he seems to have thought the peace just achieved merely a truce, his long-term ambition being to transform Dacia into a Roman province. Evidence of his resolve is his commissioning of the architect Apollodorus of Damascus to construct a bridge across the Danube at Drobeta, a project that was begun in AD 102, right after the defeat of the Dacians. The bridge was intended to link the province of Moesia Superior with the newly conquered territories north of the river.

The violations of the terms of peace by Decebal – he did not carry out the required demolition of fortress walls; he sought allies against Rome from all the surrounding peoples and from the Parthians; and he recruited new soldiers – hastened Trajan's resolve to undertake a second campaign against him in AD 105–6. This time after the military victory he showed no restraint: he abolished the Dacian kingdom and, in effect, forced Decebal to choose suicide rather than grace a Roman triumph. Trajan commemorated his conquest of Dacia and at the same time provided a graphic account of the