CHAPTER I

ROUMANIAN ORIGINS

"That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die."

Roumanian territory was originally inhabited by Scythians, Cimmerians and Getae, probably akin to the ancient Illyrians in the West, and so to all the earliest strata of Balkan peoples. These races, writes Professor Pârvan, the foremost Roumanian archaeologist, "drove back Iranian invaders eastwards and Celts to the west, and founded the greatest barbarian empire ever known in this part of Europe. The Getic kingdom of Burebista included Bohemia and Western Hungary, as well as Bessarabia and Bulgaria, but the Transylvanian Carpathians remained the basis of its power. Even the Roman conquests beyond the Eastern Alps and the Adriatic were not complete until Dacia had submitted".[1] The history of the Daco-Roman people, he points out, begins as early as the third century before Christ. Already under Burebista, the great king who was at the height of his power about 50 B.C., there was a steady infiltration of Roman citizens and traders, finding their way across the Julian Alps and down the Save and Danube valleys, but also through the heart of the Balkan peninsula—as is suggested by the fact that numerous coins of Apollonia and Dyrrachium have been discovered in Moldavia. Burebista was strong enough to threaten the Roman organisation of Thrace, and Caesar not long before his death appears to have contemplated an expedition to the Lower Danube. The civil wars that followed Caesar's death postponed all danger to Dacia from without, but the loosely-knit realm of Burebista soon fell a prey to internal dissensions, as a consequence of which the victorious Octavius was able to expel the Dacians from Thracian soil and even to send a punitive force across the Danube.

During the first century of our era the Romans consolidated their rule in Thrace and Moesia and left the Dacians unmolested on the northern bank of the river. It was not till the reign of Titus that serious hostilities broke out between them, and by this time Dacia again had a ruler of exceptional merit, Decebalus, "a worthy opponent of the Roman

[1] V. Pârvan, *Dacia*, p. 2.

power". After two Roman generals had suffered serious reverses, a third, Julianus, forced his way to the Dacian capital, won a victory at Tapae (in the east of the Banat), and forced him to sue Domitian for peace. That emperor's defeat by the Marcomanni prevented him from following up this success, and not merely did he leave Decebalus to all intents and purposes independent, but in the end purchased immunity from Dacian raids by the payment of an annual tribute. Meanwhile the influx of Roman settlers steadily increased: the Dacian king welcomed skilled workers, engineers and craftsmen of various kinds and constructed fortresses according to Roman technique. Even apart from these newcomers, there were already "a sufficient number of natives who understood the language, for letters to be written in Latin".[1]

With the accession of Trajan the humiliation of a tribute was speedily rejected by the Romans. In A.D. 101 war broke out between Decebalus and Trajan, who massed his army at Viminacium (in North-east Serbia), crossed the Danube into the modern Banat and after a stubborn resistance dictated peace in the Dacian capital, Sarmizegethusa. Decebalus retained his crown, but had to accept a Roman garrison and a civil adviser, corresponding perhaps to the first Resident appointed to an Indian native state. To secure his communication with the newly conquered province Trajan built his celebrated bridge across the Danube —the work of the architect Apollodorus of Damascus, but the strategic point which he chose for it was no longer Viminacium, but a point below the cataracts of the Iron Gates, near the pleasant modern town of Turnu Severin, from whence there was easy access to the heart of Oltenia, and to Sarmizegethusa up the valley of the Cerna. In 105–6 war broke out a second time, Decebalus made desperate efforts to shake off the yoke, and Trajan, warned of the danger by special messengers, embarked at Ancona and hastened back to the Danube, equally determined to crush all resistance finally. Forcing his way through the Carpathian passes, he took the capital by storm after a prolonged siege. Decebalus escaped in disguise, organised a fierce guerilla warfare, but was at last made prisoner and saved himself by suicide from the fate of gracing a Roman triumph. This triumph, when it came, was to be immortalised beyond all others by the Column of Trajan in Rome and its long series of reliefs of Dacian captives and victorious legionaries.[2] In modern times these

[1] V. Pârvan, *Dacia*, p. 159.

[2] Another monument of victory is the great circular ruin of the "Tropaeum Traiani" at Adam Klisi, in the Dobrogea.

memories have fired the imagination of the Roumanian race and are treasured as a kind of ancestral charter, in which the rival claims of Roman and of Dacian origin are blended and confused.

The Dacians had not been a mere collection of barbarous tribes, but had a rudimentary culture of their own, and "a well-marked social and economic structure".[1] They did not therefore accept Roman rule willingly, and many of their warriors withdrew to the free north and coalesced with the still migrant German tribes. For this reason Trajan organised the new province of Dacia on very special lines, bringing large numbers of colonists from every part of the Empire, and technicians to develop the rich gold, silver and salt mines of the future Transylvania. The inscriptions which survive show that some came from Greece and Asia Minor, some from Spain, some perhaps from Persia and Egypt, for there are altars to Celtic divinities, while on the other hand the cults of Mithras and Isis are represented. Trajan's main object seems to have been to erect a strong barrier against the wild tribes already stirring in the steppes of what is now Southern Russia. Dacia, then, was above all a mountain *massif*, a fortress intended to dominate the Wallachian plain in one direction and the valley of the Theiss in the other: but these were neglected and only thinly populated. A wall was built from the Carpathians to the mouth of the Dniester, near the modern Cetatea Alba (Akkerman): and the inhabitants of all that lay between it and the river Olt were merely in a loose tributary relation to the Romans. The capital town, Sarmizegethusa, on the south-west fringe of the great sickle-shaped Carpathian range, was rechristened Ulpia Traiana: Apulum (Alba Julia), Napoca (Cluj), and Porolissum (near Gherla) were also towns of some importance. Under Hadrian Dacia was divided into an Upper and Lower province, and the name of "Dacia Felix" became current: under Marcus Aurelius it was even split into three sections, though a "concilium trium Daciarum" continued to meet at the common capital.

It is no part of my present purpose to sketch the process by which the provincials of Dacia extended the traditions and culture of Rome towards the north-east, building upon an essentially agricultural basis, and no less certainly intermingling from the very first with the native population. It must suffice to state that the latest results of archaeological, ethnographic and linguistic research show that the process of colonisation and penetration was much more gradual, more prolonged

[1] V. Pârvan, *Dacia*, p. 189.

and more effective than was supposed by earlier writers. A new and transformed nation was already in the making, when the Empire fell into decay and was driven on to the defensive. Unfavourable conditions arrested the process for many centuries, but the elements remained, and the emergence of the blade of wheat from the rich native soil of the Wallachian plain is the symbol of a mystery which we must accept by an act of faith, since we cannot hope to explain it by rational methods.

The middle of the third century witnessed those first mysterious migrations of the peoples which were gradually to transform the ancient world and lay the foundations of modern Europe: and it was but natural that the pressure should first become acute upon the Danubian frontier. It was no mere accident that the Empire in its hour of danger should have been saved by a succession of able soldiers and administrators whose native province was more immediately threatened. The Illyrian emperors, from Claudius II to Diocletian and Constantine, seemed to be transferring the Roman world's centre of gravity from Italy to the Eastern Adriatic and the Middle Danube. Carnuntum (near Vienna on the Danube), Emona (Laibach), Siscia (Sisak), Sirmium (Mitrovica), Aquincum (Buda), Singidunum (Belgrade) were not merely strategic outposts, but flourishing centres of trade and culture.

Maximin, writes Professor Iorga, illustrates in his own person "the incessant, imperceptible colonisation", in an inverse direction, of which Dacia was already the object by the end of the preceding century. "The parents of the future Caesar, a Goth and an Alan, come from 'Scythia', the land where one barbarian follows the other, to Roman Thrace, where they devoted themselves to a pastoral life: the 'Life of Claudius' shows that such incomers generally brought with them their numerous flocks of cattle, sheep and horses. The son, who has already acquired a fair mastery of Latin in these Roman or Romanised surroundings, attends to his father's herds. Eager for action and booty, he becomes a soldier, a centurion, and rises ever higher in the military career: after loyal service he leaves the army, and obtains a grant of land in the remote Thracian district where his childish years were spent."[1] And yet the whirlpool of great events was to suck him in and raise him to dispute, to rally, and to disaggregate an empire. To him and to several of his successors, whose careers were not altogether dissimilar, there can have been no hard and fast line between the half-assimilated hordes

[1] *Gesch. des rumänischen Volkes*, I, p. 48.

from the north and the rude provincials, to whom mixed marriages were an every day occurrence and whose minds must have been bewildered by a babel of rival religious creeds, all of them in obvious decay and scarcely enjoying even lip-service from the ruling class. Dacia was by now undergoing a process which was already scarcely less familiar in Gaul than in Moesia, at the two opposite ends of Europe.

As the Gothic menace grew, Decius, himself a native of Syrmia, rallied the forces of the Empire and won the title of "Restitutor Daciae" by defeating the invaders near Nicopolis on the Danube. But his triumph was short-lived: in 251 he and his son went down fighting in a great battle at Abritum, which has been roughly identified as in a swamp of the modern Dobrogea. The Goths on their side had suffered so severely as to lose for a time all powers of serious offensive: but a decade had not passed before civil disorder reduced the Empire to dire extremity and positively invited invasion. A last memorable rally was achieved by the Emperor Claudius, who won a decisive victory over the Goths at Naissus (Niš in Serbia) in 268, after they had penetrated into the very heart of Moesia Superior and seemed about to establish their strategic control over the entire peninsula. But Claudius, at once a great soldier and a just and constructive statesman, died prematurely after the briefest of reigns, and it became obvious that the situation could only be saved by a bold policy of cutting losses and a reorganisation of Empire strategy and defence. This was the task undertaken by Claudius's successor Aurelian, yet another successful and ambitious soldier of Syrmian peasant stock. In his brief reign of barely five years he took decisions which were to leave a permanent mark on history—checking the advance of the Alemanni and the secession of Gaul and Britain, destroying the short-lived empire of Palmyra, and giving to the city of Rome a circuit of walls more imposing and enduring than those of Servius Tullus. It was Aurelian, then, who also decided the future of the Roumanian race by his decision to evacuate Dacia in the year 271. He had come to the conclusion that the province formed too exposed a salient amid the waves of advancing barbarism, and that its strategic defence could not easily be combined with that of the wide Pannonian plain, in which the mighty Danube formed a natural boundary. The legions and officials were therefore withdrawn to the south of the river, and the name of Dacia was transferred to Upper Moesia (corresponding roughly to the central portions of modern Serbia). There is of course nothing that can be described as evidence regarding

the extent of the abandonment. It is safe to assume that the wealthier settlers withdrew, but the great mass of the population remained behind. That the traces of Roman rule are scantier in the Roumanian lands than in other provinces is partly explained by the relative shortness of full Roman occupation, but above all by the prolonged period of anarchy that followed.

Henceforth the territory which now forms Greater Roumania stood exposed to the shock of repeated invasions from the East. Beginning with the Goths and Gepids, almost all the many peoples who flooded into Southern Europe between the third and tenth centuries passed first over Roumanian soil. But it is to be noted that in every case the objective of invasion lay beyond: the glittering plunder of Byzantium and of the rich Italian cities beckoned the barbarians onward. The Dacia of Trajan was a mere stage on the road, and nothing is more surprising than that the Goths in particular should have left virtually no trace throughout the territory in question. The absence of Gothic words in the Roumanian language has sometimes been used to prove the lack of continuity of the Roumanian race on the northern bank of the Danube: but to such arguments, admittedly resting upon mere conjecture, it may fairly be replied that if the Daco-Romans had in the fourth century already been concentrated south of the Danube, Gothic influences upon their language would have been quite inevitable, in view of the extent to which the Goths established themselves in what we now know as Bulgaria.

THE BARBARIAN INVASIONS

As the Goths moved steadily onwards, their place was filled by the first Slavonic tribes, who permeated the whole Balkan peninsula and submerged more than one city of note, such as Philippi and Boroea. Following again upon their heels in the sixth century, the Avars settled in the Pannonian plain and penetrated to the Adriatic coast, only to be decimated and submerged in their turn by the advancing Croats and Serbs in the seventh century. In all this early period the fate of the native populations is quite obscure: conditions were of course rendered altogether fluid by constant invasion, yet it seems probable that the provincials were already akin with the natives farther north, and constantly intermarrying with them. At the same time the towns rapidly decayed, the highways became unsafe and neglected, and rural life was primitive in the extreme. Many centuries were to elapse before the foundations

of ordered government could be established. "The Slavs", says Professor Iorga, "had to come in order to render possible the formation of a Roman people in the East."[1] In face of common dangers, the two peoples seem to have fraternised, abandoning the great plains for the remoter Carpathian valleys: and it may be supposed that the numerous Slav place-names in Roumanian territory date from this period.

Much more important than the Avar invasion was that of the Bulgars, a kindred Ural-Altaic tribe who swept across the plains of what we now call Moldavia in the second half of the seventh century and soon established themselves firmly between the Danube and the Balkan range, taking as their first capital Preslav—the already Slavised Marcianopolis. The Bulgarian empire reached its zenith in the ninth century under the savage Krum and that Eastern edition of Clovis the Frank, the politic and calculating Tsar Boris, who accepted Christianity at the hands of the Slav apostles, Cyril and Methodius. It is, however, to be noted that the Daco-Roman population, which was subjugated by the Bulgars as they passed through their territory, had already accepted Christianity before their arrival—though probably in the same imperfect and superficial manner as Scotland in the days of St Ninian.

In passing, it is interesting to note that most of the essential words relating to church observance are of Latin derivation. *Dumneẓeu* (Dominus Deus), *pagan*, *crestin*, *biserica* and *tâmpla* for Church—which are thus dated to a period later than Constantine the Great, when basilicas and temples first acquired such use—*altar*, *cruce*, *mormânt*, *cimitir*: *preot*, *sânt* (*sînt* or *sfânt*) and *sânta scriptură* for Saint and Holy Scripture: *inger* (angelus) *martur*, *drac* (draco) for Devil: *eremit* and *eretic*: *Dumineca* (Sunday), *Florii* (Palm Sunday), *Rusalii* (Whitsun): *botez*, *cuminecare* and *ajun* for baptism, communion and fasting: *căsătorie* for marriage, and *cuninie*, the nuptial crown worn at the Orthodox marriage ceremony: *Tatal Nostru* and *Crez* for Our Father and the Creed. It is no less characteristic of the situation in those early times that most of the words for ecclesiastical dignities and for vestments should be Greek—*mitropolit*, *arhimandrit*, *arhipastor*, *episcop*, *energumen*, *eparhie*, *epitrafil*, *mineiu* (mass book), *octoih* (hymn book).

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During the eighth and ninth centuries the Bulgars extended their sway, not merely over the future Roumanian principalities on the Lower Danube, but also over much of Moesia and of the central Pannonian

[1] *Gesch. des rumänischen Volkes*, I, p. 63.

plain. They thus became the neighbours of those ephemeral Slav states which preceded the Magyar conquest, and in particular of the Great Moravian empire, whose capital was at Nitra in Western Slovakia, but which at its height stretched far to the south and to the north also. This explains the close contact between the Bulgarian and Moravian courts at the time of the Slav Apostles—so puzzling to the modern reader who thinks in terms of twentieth-century geography and cannot conceive of Bulgaria and Moravia as contiguous. Here too lies the clue to the confusing habit, adopted by the pioneers of antiquarian and philological studies a century ago, of using as convertible terms "Old Bulgarian", "Old Slovene", "Old Slavonic", to describe the language in which the two apostles composed the first Slav liturgy and for which they prepared the famous Cyrilline alphabet.

The first development of Slav Christianity lies beyond the purpose of this volume, but it is well to point out at the very outset that the Roumanians, though already Christianised in a somewhat superficial manner, owed to their early subjection to Bulgar rule the adoption of a Bulgaro-Slav rite which they did not shake off till the middle of the seventeenth century. We shall see that, as late as the middle of the nineteenth, Roumanian liturgical books were still being printed in Slavonic characters. There is no evidence whatsoever as to the exact period at which the Bulgarian rite was adopted by the Roumanians, though it seems reasonable to suppose that it took place under Boris or Simeon. That it provided a strong rival influence to that of Byzantine hellenism, or in a certain sense a buffer between the two, cannot be doubted.

It is customary to claim that the long centuries of barbarian invasion destroyed the continuity of the original Roman element. But such an assertion rests upon dangerous theories of racial purity, long since abandoned by all serious students of Roumanian origins. All that can be safely affirmed is that a population in which a strong pre-Roman native element was transfused and blended by Roman blood and influences, was submerged by a series of fresh invasions until the original admixture created under Roman rule found itself driven to the remoter mountainous regions. We are already in the domain of keen controversy, but whatever deductions may be drawn, nothing can obscure the essential fact of the racial and linguistic survival of something approaching a common stock in the bend of the Carpathians, in the Pindus and the remoter valleys of Epirus, and of minor fragments in Istria and Northern Dalmatia.

In the closing years of the ninth century (896 is the traditionally

accepted, but somewhat arbitrary, date) the Magyars—another tribe of Ural-Altaic stock, akin to Hun, Gepid, Avar and Turk—crossed the Carpathians, broke to fragments the loosely knit Moravian state, and, by occupying the old paradise of the Huns, the great plains of the Danubian basin which they hold to this day, drove a permanent wedge between the Northern and Southern Slavs. At first retaining their nomadic habits, they seemed bent on following the track of earlier invaders into Italy and Germany. But Otto the Great's decisive victory near Augsburg in 955 checked their marauding raids and drove them to rest content with Pannonia as their home. Late in the ninth century they too had accepted Christianity, but this time definitely from Rome rather than Byzantium: and their Duke Stephen in 1000 accepted the kingly Apostolic Crown from Pope Sylvester and laid the foundations of the royal power on mainly feudal lines. Early in the eleventh century, as we shall see, the Magyars established their rule over Transylvania also, which till then had formed several isolated and loosely knit duchies, whose rulers were probably of Bulgarian blood. In 1102 they conquered Croatia, which then included the northern part of Dalmatia as far as the river Narenta, and which henceforth for just over eight centuries maintained a special autonomous position under the Holy Crown of St Stephen. It is not until the beginning of the thirteenth century that history breaks its long silence and reveals the existence of a "Vlach" or Roumanian nation.

The Magyars were the last of the conquering hordes to establish permanent settlements in Europe. Their successors, the Petchenegs, were no less formidable in their day, but their name has vanished as completely as that of the Avars and Gepids. They seem to have perished in internecine warfare, in strife with Byzantium, and in quarrels skilfully fomented by the empire with other neighbours. There remained yet another Asiatic tribe, the Cumans, who followed the Petchenegs across the Moldavian plains and were eventually welcomed as settlers in Hungary by King Béla III.

From this brief outline of known events—stripped so far as possible of controversial statements—it is only too obvious that the straw with which the historian is expected to construct his bricks is quite unusually scanty. The evidence is at best mainly circumstantial. With its aid two main theses have been constructed, which in their most extreme forms may be summarised as follows.

The Roumanians claim that they are the true descendants of Trajan's

colonists, that Transylvania is the cradle of the race, and that historic continuity has never been lost. In their view the withdrawal during Aurelian's reign only affected the military and official classes; the bulk of the population remained behind, and though doubtless much reduced through long centuries of anarchy and modified by intermarriage with various invading tribes, managed to preserve its racial identity, withdrawing during periods of extreme stress into the remote fastnesses of the Carpathians.

The Magyars in their turn argue that continuity is a myth; that the abandonment of Dacia by the Roman element was complete; that in any case Romanisation of the provinces cannot really have struck very deep in so short a period as 163 years, and that of the colonists who originally crossed the Danube, the great mass were not of Roman blood at all. Arguing from the large admixture of Slav elements in the modern Roumanian language, they lay greater stress upon their Slavonic than upon their Latin origin. They point to the absence of any records showing them to have occupied their present territory during the Dark Ages, and proceed to argue that the Roumanians of to-day are descended from nomadic Balkan tribes who only crossed to the north bank of the Danube in the thirteenth century, and then gradually overflowed into Transylvania, in response to the welcome extended by the Hungarian kings to foreign settlers.

Into the controversy between Magyar and Roumanian certain Slav and German writers have intruded. In all four cases it is easy to detect an *arrière-pensée*. The Roumanian from obvious pride of race is anxious to prove his untarnished Roman descent, and hopes thereby to establish his claim as the earliest surviving owner of the soil. The Magyar, in his turn, claims to have arrived in Transylvania at least three centuries earlier than the Roumanians, and, engrossed as ever in his theories of historical right and tradition, jumps to the political conclusion *prior tempore*, *potior jure*, which is to justify his denial of political equality to the Roumanian helots on Hungarian soil. To strengthen his thesis still further, he sets out to prove that even in Wallachia they are merely thirteenth-century newcomers, which, if once established, would of course destroy for ever all idea of continuity in Transylvania. Led by this further theory, he is only too ready to exaggerate the rôle of the Roumanian element in the Asenid (or Bulgaro-Vlach) empire of the thirteenth century; and here he is at once met by the Slav, whose main desire is to minimise that rôle, to emphasise the essentially Bulgarian