THE GREATEST HISTORICAL LIE

BY

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The prestige of Professor Nicholas Jorga, ex-Premier, which was not particularly great in any case in the eyes of the younger generation of Rumanian historians, has been sadly dimmed in the realm of international science by Alexander Domanovsky's work entitled "La méthode historique de M. Nicolas Jorga". (Budapest, 1938.) In this book Alexander Domanovsky, a professor in the Budapest University, exposes Jorga's international misrepresentations, his errors arising from national conceit and a too fertile imagination, and his systematic mala fides. Professor Jorga, who withdrew to the shelter of his library after a series of political blunders, is now trying to heal the wounds dealt to him in the field of science with new laurels won in the sphere of politics. On 1st December he delivered a great, "scientifically grounded," political speech in Nagyvárad, a Hungarian town which, with many others of a similar character, was torn from Hungary by the unjust Edicts of Trianon, and assigned to Rumania. In that speech, in order to prove Rumania's unquestionable title to these places he quoted, besides the right of conquest, the theory of continuity, which though only 200 years old, has so often been advanced by Rumanian historians and politicians. What is this theory of continuity? In the XV and XVI centuries, when the attention of the Italian humanists began to turn towards Eastern Europe, and several of them, in their search for memorials of the classics, visited Transylvania and the Balkans, the relationship between the Rumanian language and Latin was

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established, and on the strength of the name "Rumun" used by the Wallachians, the legend arose that they were the descendants of the Emperor Trajan's legionaries who conquered Dacia, and had thus been the inhabitants of Transylvania before the arrival of the Hungarians. This theory, which for a long time merely flattered the national conceit of the Rumanians, was first used as a political weapon in 1791, when, on the strength of it, they asked the Transylvanian Diet of Estates to recognize their claim to the same rights as were enjoyed by the rest of the nations in Transylvania (Magyars, Szeklers and Saxons). Today, now that this theory which has nothing to justify it has been repeated so often by scientists and politicians, it has come to be accepted as a seemingly infallible dogma by the Rumanian people. But what has history to say to it? How and when did the settlement of Rumanians in Transylvania take place? Hungarian science is fortunately in the position to quote the decision pronounced in this dispute between Hungarian and Rumanian scholars by an arbitrator who, being a Czech, was certainly not biassed in favour of Hungary. Professor Karel Kadlec of the Czech University in Prague, who died a few years ago and was an eminent authority on the history of Central European and Slavonic law, made an exhaustive study of the question. The result of his work was published by the Prague Academy in 1916 in a bulky volume entitled "Valasi a valašske prevo" (Wallachians and Wallachian Law), but Jorga and the rest of the Rumanian historians refuse to take any notice of this book. In it the Czech scholar, who was thoroughly well acquainted with the Rumanian literature on the subject, after exhaustive study of all the sources of reference available, definitely rejects the theory of continuity and, accepting the findings of Hungarian historians and philologists, added to them his own data relating to the Rumanians living in the Slav countries. This book by Kadlec, which contains a comprehensive summary of the whole question, was supplemented by a work entitled "Romains, romans, roumains dans l'histoire de la Dacie Trajane" (Budapest, 1936. Etudes sur l'Europe Centre-Orientale) by Louis Tamás, in which the author refutes the philological arguments put forward of late by the Rumanians.

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When the Emperor Aurelianus considered that he was no longer able to defend Dacia against the attacks of the barbarians, he ordered the evacuation of that province. The Roman legions and colonists retreated to the right bank of the Danube between 260 and 272 A. D., thereby considerably shortening the Roman front. This we learn from three chroniclers who lived shortly after. Therewith all Roman life ceased in what was later to be known as Transylvania. No topographical names of Roman origin remained, nor are any Roman remains of later date than this period known, although many dating from before the evacuation are to be found. From 260 A. D. until the XIII century, for nearly a thousand years, we have not the slightest historical evidence of Rumanians in Transylvania. Had there been any there during that period, they must have come into contact with the peoples (Goths, Gepids and Avars) who in turn conquered Dacia, and the influence of those contacts would not fail to be discoverable in the Rumanian language and Rumanian civilization. But of such we find no trace.

There is also another, negative, argument against the theory of continuity. In the Latinized Roman provinces, where Roman life continued after the collapse of the Empire, where, therefore, there was a continuity of Roman civilization, as in Gallia, Hispania and even in the Balkan peninsula, there are to be found geographical names (of mountains, rivers and districts) which can be proved to have derived from the languages of the barbarians who became Latinized during the period of the Roman conquest. Only in Dacia Trajana do we fail to discover any. The names of the greater rivers (Szamos, Maros, Temes, Körös and Olt) do not conform to the philological development of the Rumanian language.

The oldest Rumanian place-name in Hungary is to be found in a document dating from the year 1202—1203; and in the Nagyvárad Register, which contains several hundreds of names recorded in the years 1205 to 1235 of places in County Bihar and the surrounding areas (which Jorga described in his speech of 1st December as ancient Rumanian territory), there are only two which perhaps may be of Rumanian origin. Not only was one of Hungary's greatest Kings, St. Ladislas, laid to rest in Nagyvárad, but even as

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late as the XV century Hungarians and Hungarians alone lived in the territories surrounding his tomb.

Whereas 78 documents referring to the Saxons in Transylvania have come down to us from the period preceding the Mongol invasion (1211), we have only 4 in which mention is made of Rumanians in Hungary and Transylvania who were people dwelling in the border-lands. To these only 5 or 6 more were added up to the end of the XIII century, while the number relating to the Saxons had grown to 300. The most interesting document is one dating from the reign of Andrew III (1293, to be precise) containing the King's plan to settle all the Rumanians in Transylvania on one single Royal estate, 36,000 acres in extent.

In the XIII and XIV centuries Rumanians began to settle in Transylvania. Numerous documents throw a light on the social and legal standing of the new colonists, which was similar to that of the rest of the settlers belonging to other nations. Their position was also completely identical with that of the Rumanian colonists we find in Poland in the XIV and XV centuries. The Rumanian settlers on the Royal estates were in many respects better off than those who found homes with private landowners or on lands belonging to the Saxon communities of Transylvania. Thus, according to Kadlec, the Rumanians of Fogaras were in a privileged position, as the name by which they went, "boyars", shows. These semi-noble Rumanians attached to the Castle of Fogaras were obliged to undertake certain military services. Under the leadership of their voivode they received land in fief from the King, who employed them for frontier defence.

The Rumanians of County Hunyad, who had been settled by the King on lands pertaining to the fortresses of Deva, Hunyad and Hátszeg in the XIV century, also enjoyed special privileges. They, like the Rumanians of County Krassó and the Banate of Seremia, were employed in the fortresses. The Kings of Hungary being desirous of extending their sovereignty over the regions of the Lower Danube, took the Rumanian shepherds from the mountains into their service and sent them against the Turks, thinking that their early training would stand them in good stead when they had to fight among the hills. In the XIV and XV centuries

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the Rumanian districts began to enjoy a certain autonomy, which, however, according to Kadlec, was never able to reach a higher level of development, because constant warfare and the Turkish menace prevented consolidation. A more probable reason was that the outstanding men among the Rumanians were ennobled by the King of Hungary and, becoming absorbed in the Hungarian nobility, ceased to take an interest in a separate Rumanian autonomy. There was certainly no question of national policy behind this. The people of that age were not divided into hostile camps by national feelings, but by social conditions. The ennobled Rumanian became a Hungarian gentleman, and we have many Hungarian noble families of Rumanian origin, e. g. the Fiáths, Josikas, Macskásis, Gerlestyeis, Gámáns, Tivadars, Vajdas, Fodors, Bizereis, etc. etc.

Those mentioned above were the privileged Rumanians who were allowed to settle on the Royal estates. Most of the colonists, however, especially those settling on private land, won their new home for themselves by virtue of the "jus valachicum". This means that a group of Rumanians under the leadership of a "kenéz" or "Voivode" was allowed to settle on uninhabited land, mostly forest-land, and, as a reward for clearing and reclaiming it, were exempt from all manner of services for a certain period. The "kenéz", whose business it was to recruit colonists, usually received an estate, was invested with the authority of a judge and enjoyed indemnity from taxation. The settlers paid the King one in every fifty sheep and helped to build his fortresses, while the kenéz owed him military service. On private estates, when the term of indemnity from taxation expired, the settlers paid in services of labour, money and kind. The kenéz doing military service on a Royal estate was often made a noble in the XV century, with feudal rights over the settlers, who thus became his serfs and sank to the level of the Hungairan peasant serfs.

In consequence of this work of colonization, we find Rumanians widely spread in Hungary, from the Danube and Temes to the regions of the Maros and the Körös in Transylvania, along the Szamos, everywhere in the mountains

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except in the Székler and Saxon areas, and also in Máramaros.

At the time of the Turkish conquest (XVI and XVII centuries) the Rumanians of the mountainous regions were brought down to the Great Plain and settled in villages the inhabitants of which had been exterminated either by the Turks themselves or the hordes of Tartars from the Crimea so frequently let loose on Hungary by them. It was at this time that the Rumanians, who had suffered much less at the hands of the Turks, began to descend into the southern part of County Bihar, which Professor Jorga declares to be Rumanian soil. This expansion assumed much greater proportions in the XVIII century, after the Turks had been driven out and the Hungarian population had shrunk so much that there were not enough men available to people the devastated regions. The valley of the Szamos, Maros and the three rivers Körös became Rumanian settlement areas at this time. The widespread expansion was possible only because Rumanian peasants came pouring constantly from the two principalities, Moldava and Wallachia, to escape the terrible oppression of the Phanariots and Boyars. Here, in Transylvania and Hungary, but especially in the Banate, that is to say the country lying between the Danube, Tisza and Maros, social conditions were much better than in their old home.

This was how, in consequence of the havoc wrought by the Turks in Hungary engaged in the defence of Western civilization, one part of the Hungarian racial area became the home of Rumanians.

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