
IN MEMORIAM

Keith Hitchins (1931–2020)

A Great Historian and Friend of Romanians

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IN THE forewords to all of his books, Professor Keith Hitchins expressed his sincere gratitude towards all those who inspired, supported and encouraged him in devising, carrying out and completing his historiographic and editorial projects. This public acknowledgement of the fact that what one has managed to create and publish—thus acquiring public notoriety, international prestige and academic titles—is not exclusively one's personal merit, but is due, to varying extents, to other people in one's family, circle of friends and of colleagues, reveals the spiritual qualities and moral values of a man. It only takes a glance around us to note at once that the obsessive cultivation of personal egos has given rise to a culture of self-sufficiency, where gratitude has truly become a rare commodity. However, as far as Professor Keith Hitchins, who passed away on 1 November 2020, is concerned, this is another reason why he was and will continue to be a *rara avis* in historiography, and from now on in the annals of history.

Keith Hitchins¹ was born on 2 April 1931 in Schenectady, in the federal state of New York, in the United States of America, as the son of Arnold and Lillian Turrian Hitchins, who were Calvinist or Reformed Christians of British—more exactly, Scottish—and Swiss—from German- and French-speaking areas—origin. He pursued his middle school and high school studies (completed in 1953) at Union College in his native town and his higher education at one of the world's most renowned and advanced universities, Harvard, where he obtained his Ph.D. in history in 1964. His doctoral thesis focused on the life and activity of Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna of Transylvania² and was written under the guidance of Professor Robert Lee Wolff (1915–1980). Due to the financial support granted to him by the Ford Foundation, in 1955–1956 and 1957–1958, he pursued specialized studies at the Universities of Paris and of Vienna, then conducted research and documentation work at the archives, libraries and universities of Bucharest (1960–1961) and Cluj (1961–1962), as the first grantee of the American Fulbright Program in Romania. In his capacity as researcher of the national movement of the Romanians of Transylvania, Hitchins made countless visits to the archives and libraries of Belgrade, Bucharest, Budapest, Cluj, Iași, Sibiu, and Sremski Karlovci, where he collected the documentary and bibliographical sources based on which he managed to build an articulate, innovative, balanced and professional discourse, which lends freshness and timelessness to his books.

The passionate young historian began his teaching activity as an instructor and assistant professor at Wake Forest University in North Carolina (1958–1960 and 1962–1965), then went on to become assistant professor (1966–1967) and associate professor (1967–1969) at Rice University in Houston, Texas. For half a century, from 1969 until the autumn of 2019, he was a full professor of history at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, specializing in Romania and Southeastern Europe. Completely dedicated to his mission, the American professor and historian never started a family of his own, so that the people closest to him were his colleagues and disciples, who were by his side until the end. His longevity in his university department is a clear and indubitable indication of the recognition, prestige and authority he enjoyed in both the Anglo-Saxon and international academic world in the field of Romanian and Southeastern European studies. In his six decades of activity, Professor Keith Hitchins amassed and built the most significant American collection in the area of Romanian studies after that of Harvard University, namely his personal library, which counts tens of thousands of volumes, being the most significant private collection of Romanian and Southeastern European history and culture in the USA. In a teaching activity spanning five decades, Professor Hitchins created a veritable school of Southeastern European history and Romanian studies at the University of Illinois-Urbana, as proven by the several dozen generations of students and es-

pecially doctoral students whom he mentored and trained during all those years. His works on history³ and historical bibliography,⁴ published in North America and in Europe, attest to the fact that his publications enjoy ample notoriety and unanimously recognized scientific authority, Keith Hitchins being the most important and currently the most quoted Anglo-American historian today on issues related to Romanian and Southeastern European studies.

From 1960 to 2017, Keith Hitchins carried out numerous research trips to Romania, spending extensive periods of time in Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca and Sibiu in particular. The many friends he made among resounding names of the Romanian historiographic, ecclesiastical and cultural world of the 20th century testify to his exquisite human qualities, as well as to his intellectual and spiritual virtues. All of these names are reverently and gratefully mentioned in the forewords to his books, and out of that array of intellectuals it is worth mentioning here certain famous historians and people of culture from both home and abroad, such as Emil Turdeanu, D. Prodan, Andrei Oțetea, Petru Comarnescu, Ștefan Pascu, Pompiliu Teodor, Cornelia Bodea, Liviu Maior, Lucian Boia and Vasile Pușcaș, as well as priest-professors Sofron Vlad, Ioan Beju, Aurel Jivi and Mircea Păcurariu. His years of research in Romania, his travels through the country, his scientific collaborations and amiable relations with Romanian academics in Cluj-Napoca, Bucharest, Sibiu, Alba Iulia, Iași, Târgu-Mureș and Timișoara enabled him to acquire a deep knowledge of Romanian history, culture, spirituality and realities, his publications being a clear indication in this regard.

Keith Hitchins was a thorough researcher, with an excellent mastery of the professional historian's tools, being also proficient in international languages (English, French and German) and familiar with most of the languages of the Southeastern European peoples (Serbo-Croatian, Hungarian, Russian, Slovak, Albanian, Bulgarian, Turkish); he was fluent in Romanian, as shown by the audio and video interviews given to various Romanian journalists in both Romania and the USA, some of which are available on the internet. Known in Romania for his studies and books on the national movement of the Romanians in Transylvania, on Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna, on the history of the Transylvanian Romanian elites and church, on modern Romanian history, and for his concise history of Romania, Keith Hitchins enjoyed the wide appreciation of the academic world and the reading public, which became familiar with him in 1970, when the first Romanian translation of a work authored by him was published.⁵ His appeal with the Romanian public is demonstrated by the abundance of his publications issued in their Romanian versions by publishing houses such as Dacia, Enciclopedică, Humanitas, Corint and Polirom,⁶ as well as by the academic titles and state distinctions bestowed upon him. His bibliography amounts to 55 books published as author, co-author, editor, and coordinator, issued by the publishing houses of the most prestigious higher education centers in the world

(Harvard, Cambridge, Oxford, Leiden, Louvain, London, Milan), circa 250 studies and articles, and approximately 290 reviews, forewords, afterwords and other pieces in specialized journals, collective volumes, cultural periodicals and encyclopedias in the United States, Europe and Asia.

I am compelled to stress that Keith Hitchins's book on the greatest hierarch of Transylvania, initially published in 1977 by Harvard University Press, then in its Romanian version (Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic, 1995, 342 pp.) done by Fr. Prof. Aurel Jivi, is his latest anthumous work to have been re-edited in Romania by Editura Enciclopedică in 2016.⁷ According to all the opinions of Romanian and foreign historians, "this ample reconstruction of the metropolitan's personality as a man of the church, a political leader, a prominent figure of the political stage of the Habsburg Monarchy," as Professor Pompiliu Teodor described it, this monograph by Keith Hitchins remains the best monograph on the great hierarch, a veritable "monument of Central-European historiography," demonstrating once and for all that "Andrei Şaguna's work constitutes a stepping stone in the history of the Romanian nation."⁸

The Romanian academia and political decision makers did not remain indifferent to the merits of the American historian's work, for he revealed unknown pages of our national history, but most of all, made Romanian history accessible internationally due to his publications issued by prestigious publishing houses and widely circulated journals. The first official and solemn recognition of the quality of his historical discourse occurred in 1985, when the Romanian Academy granted him the Nicolae Iorga Award. After the fall of the communist regime, the American professor returned to Romania almost every year, as his contacts with the country's cultural and academic environment were released from the bonds and limitations imposed by the secret police. Due to his merits, Keith Hitchins was elected honorary member of the Romanian Academy (9 March 1991) and subsequently became an honorary member of three of the Academy's institutes of history, namely A. D. Xenopol Institute of Iaşi (2008), George Barişiu Institute of Cluj-Napoca (2010) and the Institute for Southeast European Studies of Bucharest (2010). Furthermore, eight Romanian universities awarded him the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa*, in recognition of over half a century of scientific contributions and endeavors to enhance the Romanian-American cultural relations. The first Alma Mater Studiorum to integrate him into its academic community was Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca (1991), followed by Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (1993), 1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia (2001), Petru Maior University of Târgu-Mureş (2005), West University of Timişoara (2008), Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iaşi (2008), Andrei Şaguna University of Constanţa (2009) and the University of Bucharest (2012). Naturally, the scientific and intellectual community repeatedly paid homage to him and saluted the distinctions bestowed upon him

by the Romanian Presidency and the Romanian Royal House. Thus, as a token of high appreciation for his personal contribution to promoting Romanian history and culture, for his understanding of and interest in Romanian civilization, the President of Romania awarded Professor Keith Hitchins the National Order of Merit in the rank of Commander in 2000, and the same order in the rank of Grand Officer in 2017. Furthermore, King Michael I awarded him the Cross of the Romanian Royal House in 2008.

Unlike other historians, be they Romanian or foreign, Keith Hitchins loved Romania and appreciated Romanian historians and people of culture, as he kept in constant contact with them and was grateful to them for their help and support during his lengthy research projects. Moreover, it is important to mention that, after 1989, he made a significant contribution to pro-Romanian political lobbying in Washington, DC. Thus, Professor Keith Hitchins was a genuine friend of Romania and Romanians, an honest, professional and prolific historian, an ambassador of Romanian culture to the world. For all these merits, I believe that he is worthy of our homage and gratitude, as expressed in particular by the brief Romanian prayer: May God forgive him and let him rest in peace!



Notes

1. The bio-bibliographical dates are extracted mainly from the following papers and volumes: Vasile Pușcaș, “Keith Hitchins, Historian of the Central Southeastern European Area,” *Transylvanian Review* 6, 1 (1997): 99–130; id., “Keith Hitchins: Honesty and the Writing of History,” *Transylvanian Review* 20, 3 (2011): 88–100; “A Keith Hitchins Bibliography,” *Transylvanian Review* 20, 3 (2011): 101–125; *Keith Hitchins at 85* (Bucharest: Enciclopedica Publishing House, 2016), 115 pp.
2. Keith Hitchins, *Orthodoxy and Nationality: Andreiu Șaguna and the Rumanians of Transylvania, 1846–1873* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), 332 pp.
3. Keith Hitchins, *The Rumanian National Movement in Transylvania, 1780–1849* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 311 pp.; id., *Studien zur modernen Geschichte Transsilvaniens* (Klausenburg: Dacia, 1971), 158 pp.; id., ed., *The Nationality Problem in Austria-Hungary: The Reports Alexander Vaida to Archduke Franz Ferdinand’s Chancellery* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 188 pp.; id., *Studies on Romanian National Consciousness* (Pelham, NY, etc.: Nagard Publishers, 1983), 259 pp.; id., *The Idea of Nation: The Romanians of Transylvania, 1691–1849* (Bucharest: Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1985), 221 pp. (reprint 1988); id., *L’Idée de nation chez les Roumains de Transylvanie (1691–1849)* (Bucharest: Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1987), 237 pp.; id., *Die Idee der Nation bei den Rumänen in Transsilvanien* (Bucharest: Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1989), 224 pp.; id., *Rumania 1866–1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), X + 579 pp.; id., *The Rumanians, 1774–1866*

- (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), XI + 337 pp.; id., *A Nation Discovered: Romanian Intellectuals in Transylvania and the Idea of Nation, 1700–1848* (Bucharest: The Encyclopaedic Publishing House; The Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, 1999), 229 pp.; id., *A Nation Affirmed: The Romanian National Movement in Transylvania, 1860–1914* (Bucharest: The Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1999), 407 pp.; id., *Romanian-American Relations: Diplomatic and Consular Documents, 1859–1901* (co-authored with Miodrag Milin) (Bucharest: The Foreign Languages Press Group “Romania,” 2001), 401 pp.; id., *The Identity of Romania* (Bucharest: Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 2003), 216 pp.; id., *The Identity of Romania*, 2nd enl. edition (Bucharest: Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 2009), 307 pp.; id., *Ion I. C. Brătianu: Romania* (London: Haus Publishing, 2011), 219 pp.; id., *A Concise History of Romania* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 327 pp.; id., *Romania: Storia e cultura* (Trieste: Beit, 2015), 384 pp.; id., ed., *Rumanian Studies*, vols. 1–5 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970–1986), 225 + 215 + 221 + 222 + 180 pp.
4. Keith Hitchins, *Hungarica 1961–1974: Literaturbericht über Neuerscheinungen zur Geschichte Ungarns von den Arpaden bis 1970* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1981), 144 pp.; Keith Hitchins, Lucian Boia (editor-in-chief), et al., *Great Historians from Antiquity to 1800: An International Dictionary* (New York–Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1989), XXIII + 417 pp.; Keith Hitchins and Lucian Boia, *Great Historians of the Modern Age* (New York–Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1991), XXIV + 841 pp.; Keith Hitchins, *Mit și realitate în istoriografia românească* (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 1997), 323 pp.
 5. Keith Hitchins, *Studii privind istoria modernă a Transilvaniei* (Cluj: Dacia, 1970), 165 pp.
 6. Keith Hitchins and Liviu Maior, eds., *Correspondența lui Ioan Rațiu cu George Barițiu (1861–1892)* (Cluj: Dacia, 1970), 253 pp.; Keith Hitchins, *Cultură și naționalitate în Transilvania* (Cluj: Dacia, 1972), 93 pp.; id., *Conștiință națională și acțiune politică la românii din Transilvania (1700–1868)* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1987), 256 pp.; id., *Biserica Ortodoxă Română în secolul XVIII: Conscripții*. *Statistici* (co-authored with Ioan N. Beju) (Urbana–Sibiu: n.p., 1991), 212 pp.; id., *Conștiință națională și acțiune politică la românii din Transilvania (1868–1918)* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1992), 243 pp.; id., *România 1866–1947* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1996), 621 pp.; 2nd edition 1998, 573 pp.; 3rd edition 2004, 659 pp.; 4th edition 2013, 659 pp.; id., *România 1774–1866* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1998), 407 pp.; 2nd edition 2004, 407 pp.; 3rd edition 2013, 407 pp.; id., *Istoria României* (co-authored with M. Bărbulescu, D. Deletant, Ș. Papacostea, and P. Teodor) (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 1998), pp. 351–485 (with successive revised and enlarged editions, 2002–2014); id., *Afirmarea națiunii: Mișcarea națională românească din Transilvania, 1860–1914* (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 2000), 391 pp.; id., *Despre Biserica românilor din Transilvania: Documente externe, 1744–1754* (co-edited with Laura Stanciu and Daniel Dumitran) (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2009), 491 pp.; id., *Scurtă istorie a României* (Iași: Polirom, 2015), 367 pp.
 7. Keith Hitchins, *Ortodoxie și naționalitate: Andrei Șaguna și românii din Transilvania 1846–1873* (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 2016), 378 pp.
 8. Pompiliu Teodor, Foreword to Hitchins, *Ortodoxie și Naționalitate* (2016), 9–21.