

# Introduction

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**T**HE PRESENT SECTION OF THE review includes the papers presented at the second postdoctoral conference entitled “Young Historians-New Approaches. Investigating the Old Past with New Methods,” which was held in Cluj-Napoca on November 5, 2011. Bringing to the front a new generation of historians and their innovative research methodologies, the 2011 conference and the present volume tries to capture the attention of the Romanian academia, and not only, (hence the decision to publish the conference papers in English), on an array of concerns and research pursuits of the young historians from the University of Cluj.

From this perspective the section of the review stands in continuity with the preoccupations of historians of the Alma Mater Napocensis, who since the mid 1990s have been concerned with collegial dialogue and with the profiling of a unique identity in historiography created within the boundaries of the Faculty of History of Cluj. After almost two decades following the onset of these initiatives, an institutional program based on those ideas emerged. Without being explicit at the time due to caution or fear of redundancy, at the dawn of an era in which the compelling and agglutinating formulas became extinct for historiography, the program of the initiators of that time becomes manifest in its lines of force at least at three institutional levels. The first level aimed, on the one hand, at forming an association of historians from Transylvania and Banat, whose initial aim was to initiate professional debate in view of changing the orientation and initial training in the secondary and higher education national and world history curricula, as well as to function as an authorized body to promote history and historians in excellence positions in a Romanian society that was in search of its values in a democratic world. The core of this association would be made up of a group of young historians who have been acquainted and have worked together since they were students. Therefore, a second programmatic level arises, namely the need to restore or enhance the relationship between these young historians, professional and human relationship through meetings, conferences representing a forum for assertion of the historiographic debate, but also through critical, academic, and collegiate spirit, familiarity with current and

new trends in the areas of general historiography. Even though never highlighted, these conferences represented a real challenge, set out by the interpretations that they proposed, through topics addressed by a historiography with white spots and ideological shielding.

The third programmatic level is represented by the publication of collective volumes under the title “young historians.” The above mentioned association proposed a newsletter intended to reflect its current activity and an editorial program with the aim of publishing a collective volume covering the papers presented at colloquia and conferences. If the first part of the editorial program, namely the consistent publishing of the newsletter encountered difficulties and was abandoned, editing a collective volume was every time an opportunity of intellectual and historiography ferment.

This attempt, of creating the profile of a historiographic school in several editions, based on intellectual and professional solidarity, established and maintained during their studies, regardless of distance, institutional commitments, fields and research methods, through a lively collegial dialogue and beautiful friendships, became, in time, a trademark for historiography. The concern for such historiographical interactions established at the level of young historians was transmitted from generation to generation, consecrating itself as a paradigm of the history school of Cluj.

If in the mid 1990’s we can identify the first initiatives<sup>1</sup> (only chronologically speaking, because in terms of historiographic relevance, published volumes show real research value and historians who have since become authorized voices on various issues of Romanian contemporary historiography). At the beginning of the millennium other disciples of Clio took over this responsibility, who through a series of partnerships with Transylvanian museums (it is worth mentioning the financial support of Bistrița-Năsăud County Museum which hosted two editions of the “Young Historians” conference and supported the costs for publishing the related papers into two volumes) have transformed an initiative which was regarded with enthusiasm in a trademark of the school of history of Cluj.<sup>2</sup> A third generation inherited the historiographic mark and following the line of the second symposium held in Oradea in 1995, when the University of Oradea was also co-opted for the organization, received logistical, financial and professional support of the University of Alba Iulia.<sup>3</sup> The desire of newly established universities with training and research centers in history to become a part of the model initiated by the young historians of Cluj, proves once more, that the concept of “Young Historians” becomes a prestigious brand of historiography at least at regional level, of Transylvanian historians and history schools.

Institutional transformations that have occurred in the Romanian educational system and its repercussions on the historical system led to a series of repositioning and redefining of the “Young Historians” identity portfolio, with a tradition and a prestigious heritage that had to be honoured by the new generations. The structural changes that have occurred at the level of defining study cycles (undergradu-

ate, postgraduate, doctorate), which extended student life and brought together young researchers within “campus” as well as the new opportunities introduced by national enforcement bodies in a series of research programs aimed at the young doctors in history have opened new horizons to assert historiography. Once with the establishment of the doctoral school at the Faculty of History, a periodical was published, *Anuarul Școlii Doctorale*, which gathered the papers of young historians aspiring to professional consecration.<sup>4</sup> The periodical was supported by a series of other collective volumes that bring together studies and articles prepared following doctoral colloquia and conferences, with national or international participation. Supplements of prestigious magazines were pleased to publish these academic contributions.

The establishment at national level of postdoctoral scholarships, the result of research grants, have led to a strengthening of research and scientific innovation in academia, and to the creation of an intellectual and professional effervescence that seemed to be drowned in the flood of the new administrative and bureaucratic changes that have occurred at the level of higher education. This group of young historians who have managed to impose themselves more and more prominently within the academic world are a true “breath of fresh air,” but also a challenge to the academic world. With research scholarships in national and international institutions the “new generation” bases its historiography on systematic historiographical literature, on a detailed and sometimes innovative analysis of primary historical sources and on a strong effort of historiographical debate.

Shaped in a period characterized as “a state of flux” of the national historiography institutions, of the effort to assess academic programs and of the academic publishing and journals, the new generation of “young historians,” shifted from the doctoral level to the post-doctoral level, discovers the calling of honouring a prestigious tradition, and in the same time, launching a challenge to their teachers, who, not long ago were the ones to initiate those conferences and collective volumes.<sup>5</sup>

Who are those who form at least in part, of what I have generically called so far the “young historians” of the new generation? Here are some sketch lines to form a group picture. There are 22 researchers in various fields of historiography, of classical antiquity, the medieval, modern and contemporary age whose research shape regional, national and universal history investigations ascribed to traditional historiographical research methods or propose the application of some original research methods in the field of Romanian contemporary historiography. The vast majority of authors come from accredited institutional research centers of Babeș-Bolyai University, (Institute of Classical Studies, Institute for the Study of Church History and Religious Life, Oral History Institute). With two exceptions (a researcher from Alba Iulia and another one from Timișoara), in one form or another, the researchers come from the academic world of Cluj, but their presence is motivated by working in post-doctoral projects or through enrolment in other collaboration programs and projects with Cluj institutes.

The 19 studies included in this section are noteworthy due to their eclectic character, manifest not so much due to the differences in the chronological records, but due to the thematic and methodological perspectives. Subsequently, we take the risk to systematize the research areas of the young historians' papers enclosed in this volume, without claiming exclusive enclosure in a methodological or thematic framework. Often, the subject, the chronological spectrum in which a research can be placed and the methodological instruments used by the historian to define the hypothesis and the conclusion can place the research simultaneously in one direction or another.

The articles dedicated to classical antiquity deal with the institutional history of the Roman world in the Province of Dacia, but they differently seek to reconstitute sequences of military history institutions, such as the consular office in Dacia (George Cupcea), or are trying to define the "constitutional identity" in the very Roman province (Rada Varga). Research in the area of antiquity is surprising through a contribution dedicated explicitly and exclusively to research methodology through recovering directional magnetic data from an archaeological feature. (See the study signed by Felix Marcu and Călin A. Șuteu).

There is an entire section dedicated to studies involving the history of the church and religious life, of the way in which they define the identity of the confessional community confronted with regional identity (see the studies of Diana Covaci, Elena Crinela Holom and Sînziana Preda), studies focusing on the end of the nineteenth century and the recent history of Transylvania and the western Romanian region. The studies of historical anthropology and imagery represent another distinct chapter of this volume. These studies investigate, based on the Transylvanian Romanian press of the nineteenth century and on the travel literature, the image of the Hungarian nobility of Cluj (the article of Adriana Cupcea), or the representation of the Muslim woman (Elena Andreea Trif-Boia's article). On the same path of research we can integrate the study of Vlad Popovici and Alexandru Onojescu, probing the means in which, the myth of the national hero establishes itself, in the late nineteenth century, for the Transylvanian Romanians, based on a research hypothesis bravely formulated, that will hopefully lead to a lively debate in the future. Victor Vizauer's research which brings into focus the anthroponymic universe of the medieval world as portrayed in Latin documents of Transylvania and Hungary also belongs to the field of historical anthropology. The history of the promotion of Romanian modern culture, with benchmarks in the already mentioned studies, was completed by Monica Mureșan's research dedicated to the study of defining contributions concerning the national cultural heritage.

The history of political life has a well established section, in a time frame that includes the twentieth century, the interwar and communist periods. The contributions of the young historians investigate the integration of the regional leader in United Romania (Luminița Coman-Ignat), social and economic transformations due to agricultural collectivization (Sanda Borșa), communist propaganda opera-

tion within the administrative boundaries (Manuela Marin), the attempts to escape from communist Romania by crossing the “cold water” of the Danube border (Lavinia Snejana Stan), or studying bilateral relations between Romania and China in the context of promoting the local communist by Bucharest’s leadership (Mihai Croitor).

Last but not least, the history reconstructed by the young historians in this volume concerns the ethnic minorities’ history with two contributions dedicated to the Jewish minority. The first one is an interdisciplinary approach, resulting from the collaboration between a historian and a psychologist who investigates the ways in which the trauma of the Holocaust influenced emotionally the Jewish life in the second half of the twentieth century (Ioana Cosman and Aurora Szentogatai). The second contribution aims to explore the possibility of asserting a distinct identity, at the auto-referential level, for the Romanian Jew (Comina Paul).

Faced with such strong thematic and methodological evidence we can see in most cases, a continuity of research directions of the issues debated by these young researchers in their doctoral thesis, many of them already published. In certain situations one can notice a chronological shift of the researched issue to previous ages. There are also contributions which highlight unique issues for the historians themselves. Put together they point to a variety of primary sources used by the historians, from archaeological and epigraphic sources, to acts and institutional documents, letters and personal documents, newspaper articles, literary texts, iconography materials and interviews. The variety of the sources used in the historiographical drafting merge with the interdisciplinary character of the approach and reading, anthropology, philology, communication sciences, auxiliary sciences of history, oral history are all used to answer the bold questions addressed to the methodological sources by the young historians.

Mainly due to administrative reasons, since they are considered “targets” in individual post-doctoral research projects of the young historians, the studies grouped in the present section honors a trademark of Cluj historiography and reproduces in a new institutional configuration older ambitions of profiling a new and challenging historiographical horizon for the institutionalized academic historiography.

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### Notes

1. Sorin Mitu, Florin Gogâltan, eds., *Viața privată, mentalități colective și imaginar social în Transilvania* (Oradea, Cluj-Napoca, 1996).
2. Valentin Orga, Ionuț Costea, eds., *Familie și societate: studii de istoria Transilvaniei* (Cluj-Napoca, 1999); Valentin Orga, Ionuț Costea, eds., *Studii de istoria Transilvaniei* (Cluj-Napoca, 2000).
3. Radu Mârza, Laura Stanciu, eds., *Cum scriem istoria? Apelul la științe și dezvoltările metodologice contemporane* (Alba Iulia, 2003).
4. *Anuarul Școlii Doctorale. Istorie. Civilizație. Cultură*, I (2005); IV (2010).
5. Oana Mihaela Tămaș, ed., *Transylvanian Review: Thinking the Future through the Past*, XX, Supplement 2:1; 2:2 (2011).