

Professor Keith Hitchins (1931-2020)

Abstract:

Probably the generosity reflected by such a warm smile was the feature imposing from the start upon everyone who met Professor Keith Hitchins. The feature made such a meeting to be just the first in a succession desired to be as long as possible, and to become, oftentimes, an intellectual amity, even if the age gap prompted the younger interlocutors to see him rather like a mentor. For that very reason, the separation from him can only be an occasion to remember the joy so many times felt in the lovely moments spent together. The generosity manifested at the level of interpersonal relations was matched by an admirable comprehension for the history of Southeastern Europe and, mainly, for the history of Romania, to which he devoted himself as early as the time when he studied at Harvard University, when he drew close, prompted by his professor Robert Lee Wolff, to the personality of the Orthodox Metropolitan of Transylvania, Andrei Şaguna, and then to the precursory events of the Romanian national movement.

*His doctoral thesis, *The Rumanian National Movement in Transylvania, 1780-1849*, published by Harvard University Press in 1969, was owed to this direction, Harvard University Press also publishing in 1977 the monograph *Orthodoxy and Nationality: Andrei Şaguna and the Rumanians of Transylvania, 1846-1873*. Underlain by the elaborate research carried out in Romanian and Central European archives and libraries, but also by the European historiographical perspective pointed out, years ago, by historian Pompiliu Teodor in the preface of the Romanian edition of the monograph cited herein,^[1] the two works faithfully followed these directions in the next decades, reflected in his books printed in English or in their Romanian versions.*

*More numerous after the fall of the communist regime, Hitchins's works were not absent before either, if we consider the volume of 1987, *Conştiinţă naţională şi acţiune politică la românii din Transilvania (1700-868)* [*National Consciousness and Political Action among Romanians in Transylvania (1700-1868)*], which brought new inspiration by addressing the issue of popular religiosity and by emphasizing the primacy of the spiritual factor at a time when Romanian historiography was governed by the principles of dialectical and historical materialism. He was starting from the premise that the popular anti-union reactions of the mid-eighteenth century proved the people's attachment to traditional religious forms and showed that rural society was guided by religion to a much greater extent than by political or economic circumstances.^[2] Alternatively, the most learned members of the uniate clergy, under the influence of early European Enlightenment thought, devised a new path of development based on the idea of nation, trying to harmonize the Orthodox rural tradition with the intellectual dynamism of Europe, in order to give birth to a new entity – the modern Romanian nation.^[3] Later, the historian extended the analysis devoted to the confessional disorders in Transylvania, noticing, in the context of the movement led by the monk Sofronie from Cioara, its characteristic organizational refinement and the long-term consequences of the establishment of the Transylvanian Orthodox Episcopate – the development of education and culture in the Orthodox confessional milieu. In parallel, the uniate ecclesiastical elite was conceiving of its Church as an*

expression of the national spirit, combining the spiritual heritage of Eastern Orthodoxy with the assertion of Latinity through religious union.[\[4\]](#)

In the same years, Keith Hitchins published in Mitropolia Ardealului review, in collaboration with Ioan N. Beju, director of the Metropolitan Library of Sibiu, documents relevant to the ecclesiastical history of the Transylvanian Romanians, identified in external archives originating mainly from the archive of the Aulic Chancellery of Transylvania.[\[5\]](#) *He thus inaugurated a fundamental direction of research which Romanian historians were able to systematically follow only after 1990. The richness of archival investigations undertaken during this period in the Central European archives, primarily in Budapest and Vienna, is evidenced by the volume of documents published later, in collaboration with Laura Stanciu and the author of these lines, regarding the external sources of the first decade of confessional confrontations between uniate and non-uniate Romanians in Transylvania.*[\[6\]](#) *This volume had the merit of having put into circulation, among unpublished documents, a series of primary sources previously known only through some copies and excerpts, thus facilitating a more thorough and modern analysis of the evolution of the confrontations and factors involved (authorities, communities, individuals).*

The 1990s affirmed Keith Hitchins position as one of the most knowledgeable researchers of Romanian modernity, through a volume of studies that continued the investigation of the relationship between national consciousness and political action,[\[7\]](#) *but also through a new series of works in which the author proposed a re-evaluation of the history of the Romanian national movement in Transylvania, starting from the eighteenth century and until the outbreak of the First World War.*[\[8\]](#) *He thus revealed the change in the structure of the Romanian elite, from a predominantly clerical one in the eighteenth century to one in which the secular intelligentsia aspired to assert their primacy, followed by the representatives of the middle class, who gave it a bourgeois character.*[\[9\]](#) *The historian also included in this series the Romanian version of the monograph dedicated to Metropolitan Andrei Şaguna, which was thus made better known to Romanian historiography. A volume published in 1997 revealed another topic that came to the author's attention, in addition to those related to the national movement and the problem of identity: the history of the workers' movement and socialist thought, whereby the historian addressed another dimension of the modernization of Romanian society.*[\[10\]](#)

The culmination of his dedication to the history of Romania was illustrated by the two syntheses devoted to the subject, first published in English, through which he offered a broad perspective on modern and contemporary Romanian history between 1774 (the year of the Treaty of Kuciuk-Kainargi) and 1947 (marking the establishment of the communist regime in Romania).[\[11\]](#) *This time considering the entire Romanian territory, the historian followed the transition period from agrarian economic and social structures and medieval political forms to a society shaped by urban and industrial values, united by loyalty to the unitary state,*[\[12\]](#) *in the first case, and in the second one, the matured phase of the nation's formation and its integration into Europe.*[\[13\]](#) *The recognition of the quality of his historiographical work was represented by his collaboration to a synthesis of the history of Romania, for which he wrote the part dedicated to the modern period, subsumed to the idea of accomplishment the Romanian nation.*[\[14\]](#) *Another result of the collaboration with representative Romanian historians was his contribution to the two-volume international dictionary of historians, edited by Lucian Boia under the auspices of the International Committee of Historical Sciences and the International Commission on the History of Historiography.*[\[15\]](#) *In 2014, he also published a brief history of Romania with Cambridge University Press, which came out the following year in Romanian.*[\[16\]](#)

Any recollection of this historian's passion for the international reflection on the

subjects of Romanian history cannot omit the five volumes of Romanian studies published by Brill Printing House between 1970 and 1986,[\[17\]](#) with contributions of some historians who became better known to the Romanian public only after 1989, such as Emil Turdeanu, Barbara Jelavich, Katherine Verdery and Catherine Durandin, contributors to the latest volume of the publication.[\[18\]](#) Interested in more recent years in the general history of Southeastern Europe, on which he was preparing a work intended to be published in the Oxford History of Early Modern Europe series,[\[19\]](#) but also interested in the history of Near Asia, to which he dedicated the journal he published between 1995 and 2008,[\[20\]](#) Keith Hitchins was honored in various homage publications, such as those published by the Encyclopedic Publishing House in 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016, by Vatra journal in 2006,[\[21\]](#) and through academic titles (honorary member of the Romanian Academy, of the historic institutes of Iași and Cluj-Napoca, of the Institute of Southeastern European Studies in Bucharest, doctor honoris causa of the main universities in Romania, among which was also the one in Alba Iulia, in 2001). He was among the members of the research project The Union of Transylvanian Romanians with the Church of Rome, coordinated by the Pro Oriente Foundation and the University of Vienna, addressing topics of Romanian and Southeast European ecclesiastical history.[\[22\]](#) From 2007, he was also a member of the editorial board of the journal published by the history department of the University of Alba Iulia, *Annales Universitatis Apulensis Series Historica*. These lines are offered as a modest homage to the historian, professor and man, Keith Hitchins, with the conviction that the meetings with him have always been a privilege.

Farewell, dear Professor!

Keywords: Keith Hitchins, Romanian history, obituary