

KEITH HITCHINS

Dennis DELETANT*

With the passing of Keith Hitchins in Urbana, Illinois on 1 November, 2020, the historiography of East Central Europe, and in particular of Romania, has lost one of its seminal figures. Keith's scholarship established him as the reference point for anglophone students and the informed public of the turbulent past of the Romanians. He brought to his analyses an equilibrium which provided a model that, through translation of his work into Romanian, offered an example to young historians.

Keith was born on 2 April, 1931 in Schenectady, New York. After graduation from Union College, he went to Harvard as a Ph.D student working on the Romanian National Movement in Transylvania under the supervision of Robert Lee Wolff. Unable to pursue his research in Romania at the time, he spent a year at the Sorbonne in 1957-58 where he studied with Emil Turdeanu and Jean Boutière. The conclusion of a US-Romanian cultural agreement in 1960 enabled him to become the first American Fulbright scholar to work in Romania. He spent two years in the country, carrying out research initially under Andrei Oțetea in Bucharest and David Prodan in Cluj. He gained his Ph.D in 1964 and took up a teaching post at Wake Forest University (1958-65), from where he moved to Rice University for a year. He joined the faculty at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Campaign in 1967 and spent the rest of his academic career there. An honorary member of the Romanian Academy from 1991, he was awarded the National Order of Merit by President Klaus Iohannis in 2017.

My contact with Keith dates from the publication in 1969 of his path-breaking *The Rumanian National Movement in Transylvania, 1780-1849*. For a newly-appointed teacher of early Romanian literature at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at the University of London, the book proved invaluable since it represented an example of outstanding scholarship, delivered with the detachment of a foreigner from national and confessional prejudices. I expressed these sentiments in a letter that I wrote to him and received gracious thanks. The same qualities characterized his study *Orthodoxy and Nationality: Andreiu Șaguna and the Rumanians of Transylvania, 1846-1873*, that appeared in 1977. Once again, I was indebted to Keith since my teaching obligations were extended to cover the history of Romania in the following year and Șaguna was not only the central figure in the national movement in the two decades after the 1848 revolution, but

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was also extraordinarily active as an Orthodox prelate, as a theologian, and in organizing education. The exchange of occasional letters paved the way to our first meeting, in autumn 1988, in Cluj, in the office of Pompiliu Teodor, Professor of History at Babeş-Bolyai university.

Our shared dismay at the draconian austerity measures imposed by Ceauşescu on the long-suffering Romanian people translated our relationship into one of friendship, a friendship that was renewed after 1989 when our association revolved around Şerban Papacostea in Bucharest. Perhaps fittingly, the opportunity for Keith and I to discuss our respective projects was provided on a number of occasions by Şerban who, taking advantage of our fortuitous presence in the capital, invited us both either for morning coffee and cakes in his study, or for an afternoon version in which the cakes were supplemented by fruit salad, and the coffee by Romanian vermouth.

Keith's major project in the early 1990s was a monumental history of Romania spanning the years 1774 to 1947. The typescript proved to be so voluminous that Sir William Deakin, who alongside Alan Bullock, was one of the editors of *The Oxford History of Modern Europe* in which series Keith's contribution was contracted to appear, became concerned and asked me to cast an eye over it. I and a second consultant suggested that the typescript be divided into two volumes and indeed it appeared as *Rumania, 1866-1947* (1994) and *The Romanians, 1774-1866* (1996). Unique in English, meticulously researched, both books are a testament to Keith's almost monastic devotion to his *métier* and stand as works of reference.

Şerban's study also provided the crucible for *Istoria României*, a 600-page volume published by Editura Enciclopedică in 1998. Şerban himself initiated the project and invited Keith and I to join him as authors, alongside Mihai Bărbulescu and Pompiliu Teodor. The book was revised and reprinted in several editions over the next five years by Editura Corint. Keith, Şerban and I discussed the revisions to our own chapters and took much pleasure in the positive feedback that we received from Romanian students who informed us that in several universities it had been adopted as a core course-book. It was in this setting that Keith's personal qualities were also displayed, his interest in his graduate and postgraduate students, his altruism, his objectivity, and his humility. He was an admirable example of the dedicated scholar and teacher.

Major publications

- *The Rumanian national movement in Transylvania, 1780–1849.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1969.
- *Orthodoxy and nationality: Andreiu Şaguna and the Rumanians of Transylvania, 1846–1873.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1977.
- *Rumania, 1866–1947.* Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1994.

- *The Romanians, 1774–1866. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1996.*
- *A concise history of Romania. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 2014.*