

IN MEMORIAM

† CORNELIA BODEA
(1916-2010)

One of the most remarkable careers in Romanian historiography came to an end with the passing of Cornelia Bodea on April 28, 2010, just weeks after her 94th birthday.¹ But make no mistake: it is much more than a platitude to note that the contribution of an important historian in fact continues on long after his or her death; certainly this will be true of the work of Cornelia Bodea, whom it was my privilege to know and work with for nearly forty years.

Born in Austro-Hungarian controlled Transylvania during World War I on April 8, 1916, Cornelia Bodea came to academic maturity in interwar Greater Romania just as things were falling apart and despotic utopias made the era of tyrannies a sad reality across Europe. She was the daughter of a Transylvanian Romanian Orthodox priest and always remained the daughter of Ardeal and its steadfast loyalty to church and nation. (It was not merely coincidental that she donated her library to Arad – where it joined that of A.D. Xenopol – and that she chose to be buried in Arad at a church which she had privately refurbished.) Her father was her first role model and had the “privilege” of being incarcerated and persecuted by both the Austro-Hungarian authorities and Romania’s Communist rulers several decades later. She later recalled: “I lived an entire life according to the precepts of my father who told me: love your country, love your people ...”² Her faith was also important to her. Many conversations that my wife and I had with Cornelia over the last twenty years involved interesting questions, discussions, and debates on religious issues and the role of Christianity in daily life and thinking.

Cornelia Bodea studied at the University of Bucharest with such luminaries as N. Iorga (for her primary specialty, world history), C.C. Giurescu (Romanian history), Demostene Russo (Byzantine History), graduating *magna cum laude* in

¹ For a bibliography of Cornelia Bodea’s work up to 2005 (excluding reviews and popularizations), see *Bibliografie*, in vol. *Națiunea română. Idealuri și realități istorice. Acad. Cornelia Bodea la 90 de ani*, ed. by Al. Zub, Venera Achim, and Nagy Pienaru, București, 2006, pp. 9-18. For discussion, see my *Cornelia Bodea and the History of the Emergence of Modern Romania*, in vol. *National Development in Romania and Southeastern Europe: Papers in Honor of Cornelia Bodea*, ed. by Paul E. Michelson and Kurt W. Treptow, Iași, 2002, pp. 11-26; Al. Zub, *Academician Cornelia Bodea: Un istoric al resurecției române*, in vol. *Națiunea română*, ed. by Al. Zub, Venera Achim, and Nagy Pienaru, pp. 7-8; Ștefan Ștefănescu, *Academician Cornelia Bodea – o demnă “zărândană” în rândul marilor istorici români*, *ibidem*, pp. 21-29; and Stelian Mândruț, “*Istoria ca artă de a trăi*”: Cornelia Bodea, in “Anuarul Institutului de Istorie G. Barițiu din Cluj-Napoca,” vol. 46, 2007, pp. 17-23.

² Quoted in Vasile Stănescu, *Un om, o viață – schiță de portret*, in vol. *Națiunea română*, ed. by Al. Zub, Venera Achim, and Nagy Pienaru, p. 63.

1937. Iorga was her second role model, another inheritance from her father, who, along with a multitude of Transylvanian Romanians, regarded Iorga as the “apostle” of Romanian national awakening, and it was due to Iorga that she came to devote her life to the study of history, especially the history of the Romanian people in the 19th century.³

Concomitantly, she earned a degree from the Școala Superioară de Arhivistică și Paleografie in Bucharest and another from the Seminarul Pedagogic Universitar (1938). Her doctoral dissertation, on Moise Nicoară (a subject suggested by Iorga), was completed *magna cum laude* in 1941.⁴ She became librarian for Iorga’s Chair of World History in 1937, and then assistant at the University to Iorga’s successor and her third role model, Gh.I. Brătianu, in 1943, conducting the seminar on Bibliografie și instrumente de lucru.⁵

The 1940s and early 1950s were tragic both for Cornelia Bodea and for her people. In 1940, Iorga was assassinated by the Legionary movement. Northern Transylvania was handed over to Hungary by Hitler. During World War II, her fiancée, a doctor, was sent to the Russian front and disappeared on the Don, never to be heard of again. When Romania was Stalinized after 1944, she lost her post at the University, Gh.I. Brătianu was murdered by the Communist regime in the Romanian gulag at Sighet in 1953,⁶ and Romania settled down to a long and harsh period on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain.

Thus, “the time in which she put together her work was and is one of crisis *par excellence*, often acutely so, including the Second World War, the epoch of dictatorship, and the post-Communist transition. The greatest part of these times were spent in conditions hostile to the profession of history,” Al. Zub wrote.⁷ Despite all of this Cornelia Bodea succeeded in carving out and mastering an important and significant epoch in modern Romanian development. Fortitude

³ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

⁴ Published as *Moise Nicoară (1784-1861) și rolul său în lupta pentru emanciparea național-religioasă a românilor din Banat și Crișana, Partea I (-1825)*, Arad, 1943. In 2001, she returned to this beginning point with *Moise Nicoară. Gyula (Ungaria) 1784 – București 1861*, București, 2001.

⁵ See her *Profesorul Gh.I. Brătianu – așa cum l-am cunoscut*, in “Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secției de Științe Istorice și Arheologie,” 4th series, vol. 22, 1998, pp. 71-74; and *Gheorghe Brătianu – profesor universitar și director al Institutului de Istorie Universală*, in “Revista istorică,” vol. 14, 2003, nos. 5-6, pp. 5-11. On the seminar, see the recollections of one of her students, Șerban Papacostea, *Ce am învățat de la Cornelia Bodea*, in vol. *Națiunea română*, ed. by Al. Zub, Venera Achim, and Nagy Pienaru, pp. 60-62.

⁶ Prior to 2005 or so, Cornelia was very reluctant to even mention some of these personal details, but did relent a little with Iorga and Brătianu in the late 1990s and after. She had portraits of her father, Iorga, and her fiancée in her apartment, but we never learned the latter’s name. Since Romanian prisoners of war trickled back from Siberia until well into the 1950s, she hoped against hope for his return until the early 1960s. See V. Stănescu, *Un om, o viață, passim*.

⁷ *Națiunea română*, ed. by Al. Zub, Venera Achim, and Nagy Pienaru, p. 7.

became one of her hallmarks; through these crushing personal and national catastrophes, Cornelia Bodea persevered.

In 1956, she returned professionally to the Institute of History in Bucharest (later renamed after Iorga), where she was a stalwart until her “retirement” in 1975. She, of course, did not understand the concept of “retirement,” carrying out an entire second (and even third) career as a multiple Fulbright lecturer and Romanian cultural ambassador in the US, effective and constant representative of Romanian historiography at international conferences and congresses (I worked closely with Cornelia on the 1993, 1997, and 2001 Society for Romanian Studies International Congresses on Romanian Studies), as well as publishing new works that immediately became standards on modern Romanian history.

In 1992, she was elected a full member of the Romanian Academy, a step which however tardy bolstered the Academy’s lagging reputation as well as presenting her with new opportunities to display her historiographic abilities, especially as a synthesizer. Her contributions to the work of the historical section were noteworthy particularly for her fine touch with memorialistic and commemorative pieces, which were not mere puff pieces, but the product of an in depth grasp of the subject and relevant bibliography.⁸

My personal favorites among Cornelia Bodea’s works are 1) *Lupta românilor pentru unitate națională, 1834-1849*,⁹ which moved the study of the Romanian 1848 to the modern “precondition/precipitant/course of events” approach and prepared the way for unravelling the Revolution of 1848 in the Romanian lands; 2) *1848 la români. O istorie în date și mărturii*, three volumes,¹⁰ which provide an essential introduction and documentary guide through the decades before and during the Romanian 1848; and, finally, 3) her edited volume of *Bibliografia istorică a României*, t. II *Secolul XIX*, vol. I *Cadrul general. Țara și*

⁸ Examples include *Societatea Academică Română și membrii ei străini. 1867-1878*, in “Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secției de Științe Istorice și Arheologie,” 4th series, vol. 17, 1992, pp. 193-229; “The Grand Old Man of Roumania”: N. Iorga văzut de istoricii americani, ibidem, vol. 21, 1996, pp. 71-94; and David Prodan – centenar, in “Revista istorică,” vol. 13, 2002, nos. 3-4, pp. 207-219.

⁹ București, 1967. An English translation, *The Romanians’ Struggle for Unification, 1834-1849*, București, 1970, unfortunately omits the 89 documents included in an appendix of the original. For a summary, see P.E. Michelson, *Cornelia Bodea and the History of the Emergence of Modern Romania*, pp. 18-26.

¹⁰ Volumes 1 and 2, București, 1982; volume 3, București, 1998 (as part of a three volume set, with volumes 1 and 2 having the same pagination as the 1982 edition). See P.E. Michelson, *Cornelia Bodea and the History of the Emergence of Modern Romania*, pp. 13-15. Her last major book, entitled *Fața secretă a mișcării prepașoptiste române. Unitatea națională*, București, 2004, uses the same format as *1848 la români*, and constitutes a kind of completion of her 1967 and 1982/1998 publications. It was designed to substantiate the “intuition” of N. Iorga that the 19th century Romanian national awakening started in 1840, not 1848, questioning the standard “1848” version (p. xi).

locuitorii,¹¹ which is an indispensable guide to the background literature on the opening of modern Romanian history (would that it had appeared four or five years earlier when I was beginning my work on Romanian political development). My greatest regret is that she never got around to publishing her monumental and more or less completed *Emigrația românilor după 1848 și unitatea națională*,¹² which would have taken the story right up to the union of 1859 and would likely have reshaped discussion of the post-1848 era.

Though virtually her whole career was spent working in Bucharest, she remained (in the words of Al. Zub) a prominent example of a specifically Transylvanian style of erudition.¹³ This meant that whether her audience or archival source was English, German, French, Magyar, or Romanian, she was equally fluent, comfortable, and at home. She also formed part of a now largely departed Transylvanian generation for whom patriotism and scholarship were more or less different sides of the same coin. However, she was one of the few (David Prodan was another) who did not dissipate their energies in political pursuits but remained true to their last.¹⁴

To her credit, Cornelia Bodea stubbornly resisted those who dominated Romania politically, culturally, and academically from the 1930s to 1989 through dictatorial or totalitarian means. Perhaps she was aided by a male chauvinism that saw her and other females as harmless. Perhaps her steely personality was sufficiently hidden beneath a cheerful, cooperative, and hardworking exterior that caused her to be underestimated.

In the 1970s, when I first met Cornelia Bodea, she did not mince words in questioning the prevailing Marxist orthodoxy, telling me plainly that history could never be a science (definitely not part of the then received wisdom). She was proud that she never joined the Communist Party. Fortunately, because she persevered, she was able to pursue her chosen avenues on her own terms, albeit later than sooner. She seemed to take an ironic delight in the fact that in 1964, she was one of those called upon to help decipher Marx's notes on the Romanians,¹⁵ despite her "undesirable" origins and past – rightfully seeing this as a commentary on the quality of post-1944 Romanian Marxist historical work and workers.

The hallmarks of Cornelia Bodea's work remained constant over her career, despite the vicissitudes mentioned above. In the words of Al. Zub, she had "a

¹¹ București, 1972. See my review in "Southeastern Europe," vol. 1, 1974, pt. 2, p. 221.

¹² P.E. Michelson, *Cornelia Bodea and the History of the Emergence of Modern Romania*, pp. 15-16.

¹³ *Națiunea română*, ed. by Al. Zub, Venera Achim, and Nagy Pienaru, p. 7.

¹⁴ "Cornelia Bodea face parte din rândul celor puțini care știu să-și îndeplinească admirabil misiunea, fără gând de răsplată și fără amânări sterile." – *ibidem*, p. 7. Compare my *Silviu Dragomir, Romanian Militant Historiography, and the Revue de Transylvanie, 1934-1944*, forthcoming.

¹⁵ Published as Karl Marx, *Însemnări despre români (Manuscrite inedite)*, București, 1964. The publication of these notes was a cautious shot by the Romanians across the bow of Soviet claims to Bessarabia.

systematic, rigorous, and disciplined spirit” which was coupled “with a Benedictine work ethic.” The result? She was able to construct a “solid edifice with well organized spaces and numerous architectonic surprises.”¹⁶ She was always exigent, but never less so with her own work than with that of others. (I can vouch for her painstaking approach, having reviewed with her a number of articles in English because she wanted to get them right: for her, good enough just wasn’t good enough.)

Her historiographical approach is captured in a paraphrase of Vasile Pârvan’s method: “strângea pietrele în mână până țâșnea trecutul din ele.”¹⁷ Cornelia Bodea searched out and grasped historical materials from a wide and comprehensive variety of sources and then squeezed until the living past flowed forth from them.

Do the facts speak for themselves? Seldom: it is the task of the historian to assemble them and make them speak within the confines of historical method.¹⁸ Cornelia Bodea’s historical work was based on a unique and meticulous approach, described by Stelian Mândruț as “a double source hermeneutic, diachronic and synchronous at the same time, extracting and exhausting all meaning from archival and printed sources.”¹⁹

And she was equally emphatic about how her work would appear in print, censorship or no censorship. *1848 la români* was submitted to a publisher (Editura Politică because some of her materials would not be pleasing to Soviet or Hungarian cultural authorities) on the condition that no changes would be made. When they started wheedling about “necessary” revisions, she simply dropped the project for several years.²⁰

Acad. Bodea also felt free to opt out of the Academy’s post-1989 collective history, which she regarded as a useless rehash of the unpublished 1980s attempt at a “tratată,” and evinced a puckish satisfaction when this ill-conceived project turned out to be a failure. Already well past the age by which most people were retired, her commitment to her work and her life experiences allowed her to take a pretty hardline “my way or the highway” approach and get away with it. Perhaps more people should give integrity a try.

It may very well have been that her major projects were such that they could only have been carried out by someone with her particular talents and attainments ... and nearly three-quarters of a century of effort at his or her disposal. Cornelia Bodea’s work and example could be a model – but her rare combination of character, perseverance, Transylvanian heritage, drive, linguistic skills, and mastery of the historian’s metier are just that: rare. If it provides a difficult if not impossible model to emulate, her work can still serve as an inspiration. For

¹⁶ *Națiunea română*, ed. by Al. Zub, Venera Achim, and Nagy Pienaru, p. 8.

¹⁷ Radu Voinea, *Academician Cornelia Bodea așa cum o cunosc*, *ibidem*, p. 54.

¹⁸ See Ș. Papacostea, *Ce am învățat de la Cornelia Bodea*, pp. 60-62, for a description.

¹⁹ S. Mândruț, “Istoria ca artă de a trăi”: *Cornelia Bodea*, p. 17.

²⁰ For details, see Vasile Stănescu, *Un om, o viață*, p. 67.

scholars of the Romanian 19th century in particular, Cornelia Bodea's writings will long remain essential to the ongoing work of deciphering Romanian national emergence and development.

Șerban Papacostea concluded his contribution to the 2006 Bodea festschrift as follows: "The scholarly activity of Cornelia Bodea is an exemplary case of total devotion to her work. Passion, an unstoppable power of work, perseverance and tenacity at all stages of creative work – the search for sources, their interpretation, their integration into a scheme of general development – are distinctive signs of an authentic intellectual vocation, from which she never allowed herself to be distracted by personal adversities and difficulties. These are the defining characteristics of Cornelia Bodea the historian."²¹

Stelian Mândruț concurred: "The dignity, erudition, and professionalism of Cornelia Bodea constitutes today a sure example of scholarly life ... served with unbending devotion and with a remarkable critical sense ..."²²

These characteristics led to one final achievement that needs to be singled out here: because of her unbending scholarship and integrity, Cornelia Bodea was a major force in building the credibility held by Romanian historiography abroad, especially in the United States and Great Britain. This fact was underlined by a number of her American friends in 2006.²³

In the end, perseverance and fortitude were the key to Cornelia Bodea's other virtues. This is because, as C.S. Lewis noted, one "cannot practise any of the other virtues very long without bringing this one [fortitude] into play."²⁴ She will be missed, but her work will continue to nourish, inspire, and illuminate for a long time in the future.

Paul E. Michelson

²¹ Ș. Papacostea, *Ce am învățat de la Cornelia Bodea*, p. 62. Compare this with Stelian Mândruț ("Istoria ca artă de a trăi": *Cornelia Bodea*, p. 17): "Ființând și acționând constant din perspectiva cărturarului marcat de un civism deplin angajat și dovedind o continuă tinerete spirituală aflată mereu sub semnul noutății, canalizându-și energia manifestată în căutarea și rezolvarea problemelor de documentare în arhive, biblioteci ori prin elevate reuniuni de profil, Cornelia Bodea a realizat un proiect științific conturat gradat într-un spirit disciplinat, riguros și sistematic, tocmai prin explorarea și exploatarea resurselor inedite accesibile în țară și străinătate, reconstituind etape ale trecutului mai depărtat sau apropiat, într-o amplă și migăloasă construcție istoriografică."

²² Stelian Mândruț, *Cornelia Bodea la Biblioteca Centrală Universitară din Cluj*, in vol. *Națiunea română*, ed. by Al. Zub, Venera Achim, and Nagy Pienaru, p. 88.

²³ Radu R. Florescu, *Academician Cornelia Bodea – ambasadoare a culturii românești în S.U.A.*, in vol. *Națiunea română*, ed. by Al. Zub, Venera Achim, and Nagy Pienaru, pp. 69-72; Ladis K.D. Kristof, *Revitalizarea memoriei anului 1848 în România și Statele Unite de către Cornelia Bodea*, *ibidem*, pp. 79-80; and Paul E. Michelson, *Colleague, Mentor, and Friend: Cornelia Bodea and the Americans*, *ibidem*, pp. 73-78.

²⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York, 1960, p. 76.