

# A SHORT HISTORY OF ROMANIA





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# A SHORT HISTORY OF ROMANIA

Fifth Edition



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## SUMMARY

<b>FOREWORD</b> .....	5
<b>I. VLACHS – ROMANIANS</b> .....	7
<b>II. THE ORIGINS</b> .....	9
• The Geto-Dacians • Burebista • Trajan's Column	
<b>III. CONTINUITY</b> .....	14
• Did the Dacians disappear? • The sources are silent • The Goths. The Huns. The Gepidae. The Longobards. The Avars... • The Slavs • Christianization • The unity of language • The Romanic people	
<b>IV. FEUDAL STRUCTURES</b> .....	30
• The "Romanic Islands" • The arrival of the Hungarians • The Transylvanian Tableland • South and East of the Carpathians	
<b>V. RESISTANCE AND SUBMISSION</b> .....	38
• "The Turks are coming" • Wallachia • Transylvania between the Hungarian Kingdom and the Ottoman Empire	

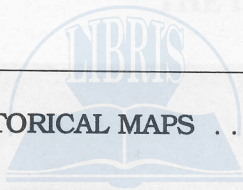


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• Three heroes of the anti-Ottoman struggle • From tribute to domination • The dream of a Dacian Kingdom • A contradictory society • *The Leopoldine Diploma* • Cantemir and Brâncoveanu • Phanariots and Phanariotism

<b>VI. NATIONAL AWAKENING</b> . . . . .	65
• Inochentie Micu • Horea • Tudor Vladimirescu • Western ships in the Danubian ports • The Organic Regulations • Signs of renewal • The 1848 generation • The Romanian revolution	
<b>VII. MODERN AGE. ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONTRADICTIONS</b> . . . . .	85
• Under Europe's guarantee • Alexandru Ioan Cuza • From the "October Diploma" to dualism • The foreign prince • From suzerainty to independence • The "Belgium of the East" • Romanian irredentism • Transylvania under dualism • Russification in Bessarabia	
<b>VIII. THE WAR FOR NATIONAL UNITY</b> . . . . .	116
• Neutrality • Ferdinand I • Romania's War • Towards the Great Union • The Recognition of the Union	
<b>IX. ROMANIA – A MEDIUM-SIZED COUNTRY OF EUROPE</b> . . . . .	131
• Other dimensions, other structures • The ethnic minorities • The system of external alliances • Spiritual fulfilment	
<b>X. UNDER THE DICTATORSHIPS</b> . . . . .	140
Carol II and the royal camarilla • The dramatic course of history • Ion Antonescu • The Sovietization • The implementation of communism • Taking advantage of both sides • The last dictatorship • Dynastic Socialism	
<b>XI. AT LAST, DECEMBER '89!</b> . . . . .	169
<b>ROMANIAN PERSONALITIES</b> . . . . .	183



**HISTORICAL MAPS** ..... 193

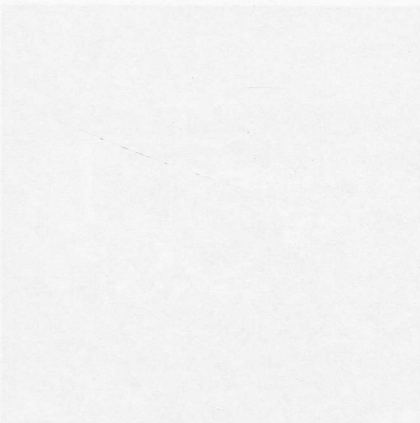
**LISTS OF RULERS** ..... 213

**RULERS AND PRINCES  
OF THE ROMANIAN COUNTRIES  
(IN WALLACHIA, MOLDAVIA, TRANSYLVANIA)** ..... 215

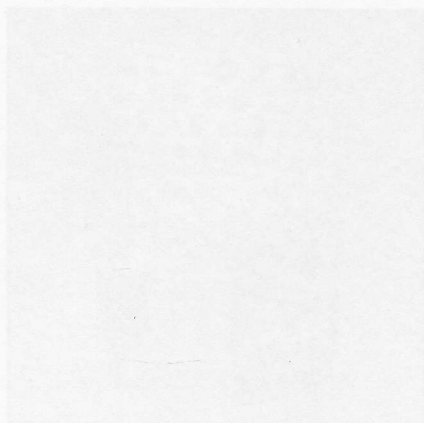
**ROMANIA'S HEADS OF STATE** ..... 231

**THE PRIME MINISTERS** ..... 234

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** ..... 239



The Greek colony of Thera founded in the seventh century BC



Greek-Dacian helmet (Pruha, circa fourth century BC)



## I. VLACHS – ROMANIANS

Greek, Latin and Slavonic sources going back to the ninth–tenth centuries reveal the existence of a new ethnic group in the Carpathian-Danubian-Balkan area; they were variously described as *Vlahi*, *Valahi*, *Wolohi* or *Blachi*, according to the source. The ancient Germans used the term *Walch-Walach* for a Celtic population (the Volsci tribe Julius Caesar mentioned in *De bello Gallico*), then for the Romanized Celts, and later for all Romanic populations, as shown by Leo Weisberger (*Deutsch als Volksname. Ursprung und Bedeutung*). With the Germans the term became *Walch* and *Welche*, being applied to the Latin-speaking people, including the Romanic population in Bavaria and Austria during the Middle Ages. The Germans passed the term on to the Slavs (perhaps in the sixth–seventh centuries), in a region where the latter came into contact with the Romanized population. From the Slavs the term was taken over by the Byzantines who, in Macedonia, in Thessaly and elsewhere came across a numerous Romanized population that was not Slavic, yet was given a name based on a Slavic word. In Hungarian, Valach became *Olach*.

Chronologically, the earliest source is the chronicle left by the Armenian Moses of Choren, in the ninth century, who referred to the “unknown country called Balak.” A clearer mention is made in *Oguzname*, the first Turkish chronicle that describes the events spanning the seventh to the eleventh centuries and which was written around 1035–1040. Another description – *Vlachorynchini* (Vlachs from the river Rynchos) –

dates from AD 850, and is to be found in a late historical note preserved at the Kastamonitou Monastery, on Mount Athos. In the following centuries, accounts about the north-Danubian Vlachs (Romanians) became numerous. Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (AD 913–959) called them *Romans*, to distinguish them from *Rhomei* (Byzantines). As the fortunes of the Byzantine Empire changed during the second half of the tenth century, due to the ability of such military emperors as Nicephorus II Phocas (AD 963–969) and John Tzimiskes (AD 969–976), the Byzantine rule was restored on the Lower Danube and the Romanian territory came to border on the empire of Constantinople. That was when the Romanians from the Balkans surfaced again in the Byzantine sources. In AD 976, Kedrenos mentioned the Romanians living in Macedonia, in an autonomous political formation. Kekaumenos described them as the descendants of former Roman colonists (in this context, he referred to the battles between Trajan and Decebalus). Kinnamos, writing about the events that took place in 1167 on the Lower Danube, considered the Vlachs to be “colonists who had come much earlier from Italy.” Nicetas Choniates referred to them in similar terms. Concurrently, the sources started mentioning the north-Danubian Romanians too. In the eleventh century, the Varegs often mentioned a country of the Vlachs (Blakuinen, Blokuinannland). The first eastern Slavic chronicle, *Nestor’s Chronicle* or *The Tale of Past Times*, called them *volohi* and referred to them in connection with the Hungarian conquests in the Danube area. By the end of the century, the Vlachs were extensively dealt with in *Gesta Hungarorum* by Anonymus, *Gesta* by Simon of Keza, *Chronicum Budense*, *Chronicon Pictum Vindobonense*, and *Chronicum Dubnicense*.

Subsequently, the Vlachs were more and more often present in chancery documents and descriptive sources. In the Balkan area not ruled by Byzantium, the Vlachs appeared later in the sources, after chanceries had been set up in the newly founded Slavic states (in Herzegovina by 1270, in Ragusa by 1300, in Croatia and Bosnia in 1300, in Dalmatia in 1360, and in Istria a century later).

All these sources attest to a new ethnic group in Europe, a new people, the Vlachs. Archaeologically, the fact was confirmed by the presence, in the eighth and ninth centuries, of a large and unitary Carpathian-Balkan material culture, the *Dridu Culture*, which, generally, coincided with the eastern Romanity space and was based on the traditions of the provincial Roman-Byzantine civilization of late antiquity.



## II. THE ORIGINS

### • The Geto-Dacians • Burebista • Trajan's Column

Who were those *Vlachs* so abundantly present in historical sources from the ninth century onwards? They were attested both north and south of the Danube, as smaller or larger islands of Latinity in a Balkan peninsula swamped with the Slavs. And how can one explain the silence of the sources until the end of the first millennium?

The *Vlachs* in Southeastern Europe called themselves *Români*. Among all the Latin European people they were the only ones who preserved the name of Rome, in forms suitable to their dialects: *Români*, *Rumani* – north of the Danube, *Armâni* in Thessaly and Macedonia, *Rumeni* in Dalmatia; as the great scholar Nicolae Iorga said, “we remained Romanians because we could not part with the memory of Rome.” At the end of the first millennium, and later on, they did not use the term *Vlach*, except in their correspondence with foreigners who used precisely this term (even the Poles employed the name of Wallachia for Moldavia up to the seventeenth century). They were a product of the eastern Romanity, of the ethnic amalgamation between Dacians and Romans, of the Romanization of the former, which had begun before the conquest of Dacia by Trajan and continued, even after the Roman army and administration left it in AD 271, until the seventh–eighth centuries. The Romanians are, therefore, the descendants of the Romanized Dacians. Of course there were several other ethnic additions, as is normal in a process of ethnogenesis taking place in such a troubled epoch.



• **The Geto-Dacians** (called **Getae** by Hecateus of Miletus, Sophocles, Herodotus, Thucydides, Strabo and by all Greek sources) started being mentioned as early as the sixth century BC, as the people living in the territory stretching from the Lower Danube to the Black Sea and down to the Balkan Mountains. While narrating the campaign of Darius I against the Scythians of the north-Pontic steppes (513 BC), Herodotus mentioned that the Getae were the only ones who opposed the Achaemenid king during his advance from the Bosphorus to the Danube. He described them as the “bravest and the most righteous among the Thracians.” The Latin sources (Caesar, Pompeius Trogus, Horatius, Virgil a.o.) also mentioned Dacians as a distinctive group among the Thracian tribes. From the first century AD to Pliny the Elder and Tacitus the term *Dacia* was used to designate the territory they inhabited.

The Geto-Dacians were of Thracian origin, coming from a rich Indo-European ethnic stock. During the Neolithic and Eneolithic, their predecessors had developed a refined and colourful culture, well illustrated by the finds at Hamangia, Gumelnița, Cucuteni, etc. The Geto-Dacians came into direct contact with the Greek world and civilization through the Greek colonies established on the western shore of the Black Sea: Istros (Histria), Callatis (present-day Mangalia), Tomis (now Constanța) a.o. Imported goods such as ceramics, vases of bronze or precious metals, ornaments, weapons and especially coins were found not only in the outer Carpathian area, close to the Danube – obviously a zone of commercial exchanges – but also in the distant reaches of Moldavia and Transylvania. Greek imports were documented in some 140 settlements on the Romanian territory, while hoards of Greek coins or local counterfeits were discovered in 170 others. The Geto-Dacians also entered into contact with the Celtic civilization, which they partially assimilated. In 326 BC, in a battle against the Getae, the Macedonian general Zopyrion lost some 30,000 men, and he himself died in action. Around 300 BC, another Macedonian general, Lysimachus, who later became king of Thracia, was twice defeated by king Dromichaetes, the first Geto-Dacian ruler to assert himself in the history of Southeastern Europe.

**Burebista** (ca. 82–44 BC) united the Geto-Dacians in a large state. Strabo wrote: “When he became the king of his people, who were exhausted by frequent wars, the Getae Burebista raised them so much through exercise, abstention from wine and obedience to order that, in a matter of years, he built a powerful state and made the Getae the masters

of almost all their neighbours, and he came to be feared even by the Romans.” According to the same historian, Burebista had an army of 200,000 men (a much exaggerated figure, to be sure). The Dacian state had thus become a fearsome political and military force in the region between the Middle Danube, the Black Sea and the Balkan Mountains. A Greek inscription at Dionysopolis (at present in Bulgaria) describes Burebista as “the first and the most powerful among all the kings that ever reigned in Thracia.” He defeated the Celts of Pannonia and imposed his authority over the Greek city-states on the northern and western shores of the Black Sea, which extended from the mouth of the River Bug to Burgas Bay. During the battle of Pharsala (48 BC) he supported Pompey against Caesar. He died after 44 BC, a victim of a conspiracy. After his death, the state he had established lost some of its initial area. Cotyso, Coson, Dicomes, Rholes, Dapyx and Zyraxes, who came after him, ruled over smaller states in the outer Carpathian area, mere strips of land from the former powerful state. Gradually, they fell under the influence of Rome. The political centre of the Dacians shifted to southern Transylvania where kings Deceneu, Scorilo and Duras prepared the ground for the rise of Decebal.

• **Trajan’s Column.** The Dacian area had been absorbed into the Roman Empire’s sphere of influence more than a century before its military conquest. The impact of Roman civilization was felt throughout the Dacian society, in its way of life and its customs. No doubt, there existed a number of similar features between Dacia and Gaul before the latter’s conquest by Caesar. Dacia had a numerous population (the names of 20 tribes are known), which was quite unitary and sedentary. In *De re rustica*, the Roman writer Columella describes the Dacians as good at farming and processing iron – as proved by a large number of agricultural implements and tools, as well as by various weapons discovered during archaeological diggings – and precious metals (especially silver). They used the potter’s wheel and had quite extensive knowledge of medicine, botany and astronomy. Ancient authors mention two main categories in the Dacian society: *tarabostes* (a word of Dacian origin), which comprised the sacerdotal aristocracy, and *comati* – the warriors. Their villages and semi-urban settlements were strongly fortified. When, at an early date, the Greeks and the Romans came into contact with the Dacians, they were impressed by their religion, based on unshakable belief in their supreme god, Zalmoxis, and in immortality, as well as by their scorn for death.