At first, the Vlachs were reluctant and turned away from the revolt urged upon them by Peter and Asan, looking askance at the magnitude of the undertaking. To overcome the timidity of their compatriots, the brothers built a house of prayer in the name of the Good Martyr Demetrios. In it they gathered many demoniacs of both races; with crossed and bloodshot eyes, hair disheveled, and with precisely all the other symptoms demonstrated by those possessed by demons, they were instructed to say in their ravings that the God of the race of the Bulgars and Vlachs had consented to their freedom and assented that they should shake off after so long a time the yoke from their neck; and in support of this cause, Demetrios, the Martyr for Christ, would abandon the metropolis of Thessaloniki and his church there and the customary haunts of the Romans and come over to them to be their helper and assistant in their forthcoming task.

They [Asan and the barbarians around him] were not content merely to preserve their own possessions and to assume control of the government of Mysia; they also were compelled to wreak havoc against the Roman territories and unite the political power of Mysia and Bulgaria into one empire as of old.

One of the captive priests, who had been carried off to the Haimos as a prisoner of war and knew the language of the Vlachs, begged Asan to release him and appealed to him to show him mercy. Asan, throwing his head back in denial, refused and said that it had never been his policy to set Romans free but to kill them; for this was also God’s will, and he had let him live a long time.

Nicetas (or Niketas) Choniates, *Historia*

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This chapter deals with the controversy between Bulgarian and Romanian historians on the medieval history of the two peoples. The debate has a prehistory. The first known person to write about a medieval past shared by Bulgarians and Romanians alike was the philologist from the Transylvanian (Latinist) school Gheorge Şincai (1754–1816) in his 1811 history book. In search of traces of the Romanians after the withdrawal of the Romans (claimed as ancestors by the Latinist school), he wrote that they were united with the Bulgars after the latter’s arrival in the Balkans and fought the “Greeks” (Byzantium) under the Bulgars’ name. The First Bulgarian Kingdom (founded in 680 or 681) was thus “Bulgarian-Romanian.” With King Samuil or Samuel (reigned 997–1014), whom Şincai claimed was Romanian, “kingship passed from the Bulgarians to the Romanians.” The Second Bulgarian Empire, founded after the revolt of the Vlachs Peter (in Bulgarian: Petăr; in Romanian: Petru) and Asen (in the sources and in Romanian: Asan) south of the Danube and which reached its peak under the rule of their brother Ioannitsa (Bulgarian: Kaloyan, Romanian: Ioniţă), was already the “Romanian-Bulgarian empire.” The Transylvanian historian and politician August Treboniu Laurian (1810–1881) followed in Şincai’s steps in referring to the First Bulgarian Kingdom as “Bulgarian-Romanian” and to the second as “Romanian-Bulgarian.” So did the Moldavian-born Romanian statesman and historian Mihail Kogălniceanu (1817–1891) in claiming the “kingdom of the Transdanubian Vlachs” (that is, the Second Bulgarian Kingdom) survived until 1393, when it was destroyed by the Turks. For a time the Romanian claims remained unnoticed by the Bulgarians, who were suppressed under Ottoman rule.

The beginnings of the controversy can be traced to an 1867 article in the newspaper Românul concerning plans for coordinated action against the Ottoman Empire under Romanian leadership. The article made reference to the union between Bulgarians and Romanians in the Middle Ages under the dynasty of Peter and Asen, which, the writer claimed, was Romanian. The claim was countered by a nationally-minded Bulgarian author (probably Angelaki

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3 Boia, *History and Myth*, 115. Laurian also claimed that many Roman and Byzantine emperors were Romanians from the Balkans.