APPRECIATION

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THE LIFE AND HISTORICAL WORKS OF DAVID PRODAN

David Prodan (1902-1992) was an outstanding Romanian historian whose recent death evokes reflections and a salute.¹

His parents were Orthodox Christian shepherds who practiced transhumance and who had some land in the rural community of Cioara, now named Săliștea, near the Mureș River in the western Transylvanian portion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Prodan's ancestors were serfs, many of whom cultivated and harvested cereals. He lacked requisite funds for an education abroad and so attended a local Hungarian school, where he mastered Magyar; owing to the sponsorship of his village priest, he was next in the classrooms of a Uniate Christian gymnasium in a nearby town. Ill health plagued him, with tuberculosis as a young man and ulcers later on.

His boyhood experiences convinced him of a need to learn as much as possible about his progenitors' way of life. Hence he followed lectures at Transylvania's University of Cluj—in Romania after World War I—for three years in the early 1920s, studying world history with Ioan Ursu (1875-1925), the peoples of Southeastern Europe with Silviu Dragomir (1888-1962), and Transylvanian history with Ion Lupaș (1880-1967). Backed by his professors, he secured a post—from 1924 to 1938—as an archivist at the Cluj branch of the state archives. During this time he married Florica, nee Vlădescu, from the Danubian port of Turnu Măgurele; she taught home economics and was expert in embroidery. Florica predeceased him.

in January 1991; they had no children. A misunderstanding with Lupaș, his dissertation director, delayed his doctoral studies for two years. After receiving his degree in 1938, he became a university librarian at Cluj until 1948.

Prodan's dissertation was on a revolt by serfs, nominally led by Horea—himself a serf, in the Transylvanian districts of Turda and, at Lupaș' suggestion, Cluj in 1784-1785. For this project he explored local archival manuscripts to portray the revolt's spread from village to village, including in his account false rumors that were believed by the illiterate populace, demonstrating thereby the rebellion's psychological and material premises. He shows that the uprising unfolded from a primarily Romanian-inhabited region to one that was ethnically and religiously mixed, the upshot being that cooperation rather than division predominated among the nationalities. For Prodan, the upheaval was not a heroic struggle with a well-defined program; rather, it was an amorphous, socio-economic conflict between serfs and nobles. Later he expanded his compass of the mutiny throughout Transylvania. He provided detailed evidence that he had discovered in the archives at Cluj, Vienna, and Budapest. In doing so, he mentions one of his progenitors and the destruction of nobles' manors by peasants in his native village. He concludes, as he did in his dissertation, that the revolt was not a full-blown revolution, for it focused chiefly on abolishing serfdom and did not include all classes, such as the merchants. He also points out that this insurrection awakened West Europeans to the Romanians' social and national requirements and aspirations.

During World War II, when Hungary annexed Northern Transylvania, Prodan moved many valuable library books from Cluj to Sibiu for safekeeping. He then assessed a Hungarian theory about the immigration of Romanians in the eighteenth century from the Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, which were under Ottoman Turkish suzerainty, to Transylvania in the Austrian Empire. Hungarian scholars contended that Romanians first arrived in Transylvania from the Balkan Peninsula in the thirteenth and fourteenth

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