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SILVIU DRAGOMIR ON BELIEF AND NATION

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Review of Sorin Şipoş, *Silviu Dragomir – istoric*, (Oradea: Editura Universităţii din Oradea and Chişinău: Editura Cartdidact, 2009), 547 p.

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Without being considered, or considering himself, an initiator of research on the historian's life and work, Sorin Şipoş¹ is the first to succeed in carrying out a complex, serious and objective analysis. This is justified by the fact that the author has not erected a triumphant monument to the historian Silviu Dragomir in his book. Making use of objectivity based on thorough investigation, he has managed to outline a genuine image of the historian.

The widest monograph on the historian Silviu Dragomir signed by Sorin Şipoş was first printed in 2002. Yet, in 2009, the book was republished for several reasons explained by the author in the note to the latter edition. We particularly refer to access to some new documents that the author could not get reach of a few years ago. Some of them are the survey entitled *Cavalerii ioaniţi şi românii* donated by the historian's family to the Library of the Romanian Academy and the historian's security file dating back to 1955-1962 currently at the National Council for the Study of Security Archives.

Thus, the work on *Silviu Dragomir – istoric (Silviu Dragomir – Historian)* introduces the personality of a prestigious figure of the past century both through his contribution to culture and the important political role he held at the time.

The book by the historian from Oradea is made up of five chapters. The first one is an introduction referring to sources, methodology and historiography. The work ends with final considerations on the topic. The preface is signed by the well-known academician and professor Ioan Aurel Pop. The first chapter traces the guidelines of the work and the final objective and methodological tools used to reach the aim of the work. The second chapter begins with a biographical sketch of Silviu Dragomir, where the author shows the origin, education – village and family, elementary and primary studies, his student years in Chernivtsi and Vienna – and the didactic and political activity of the historian – as a professor at the Theological Institute of Sibiu (1911-1919) and his years of intellectual and political maturity at the University of Cluj (1919-1947). The chapter ends with further information on his political vision, his sentence and relationship with the Securitate. Starting from the premise that “truth is not absolute and each generation eventually have their own truths”², the historian Sorin Şipoş confesses that “for this reason, we have paid attention to the future historian's education and environment, his political options and last but not least to the place of Orthodoxy and nation within the Romanian nationalism”³. According to the author of this book, all these details are useful to understand Silviu Dragomir's subsequent way of thinking.

As of chapter 3, Sorin Şipoş details the quality of Silviu Dragomir as a historian of Middle Ages stressing the rigour of the research on mediaeval studies, the critical method he always used in his research and the fact that he possessed the “investigation tools, particularly palaeography and

diplomacy". Integrated to the positivist trend, Silviu Dragomir investigated several aspects in the history of mediaeval Transylvania, of Romanians' past in the area at the time. In this chapter, the author debates on the main topics developed by the great historian: Romanians in northern Balkans, the research of northern Balkan Roman origin in the context of the new political realities in Romania and the Romanians, Hungarians and Swabians in Middle Ages Transylvania. It is within this latest context that Silviu Dragomir's manuscript on the Diploma of the Ioannite Knights, an important document for his historiographic work dating back to 1247, is analysed.

One of the most relevant chapters of the work is chapter 4, which underlines the contribution of Silviu Dragomir to the historiography on the religious union of the Romanians in Transylvania. The author manages to explain the "sometimes fair" allegations of the Greek-Catholics against the historian, according to which "he was easily influenced by the Christian-Orthodox unity where the national is subsumed to the confessional". According to Sorin Şipoş, Silviu Dragomir's attitude is explainable if we consider his educational background, particularly the context of his time. If in the Old Kingdom Romanians were identified with Orthodoxy without hurting anybody's feelings or causing any problem, in Ardeal, imposing this belief, or any other belief, hurt the feelings of at least part of the inhabitants. In this part of today's Romania, religious belief has long overcome confessional borders and has become part of the fight for national identity. According to the author, "Silviu Dragomir considered Orthodox faith as part and parcel of Romanian nationalism".

In this chapter, the historian Sorin Şipoş urges to impartiality and supports his point of view with solid arguments. "We all know that officially, after 1700, almost all Romanians turned to the Greek-Catholic Church under the authority of the Holy See." Yet "Orthodoxy was difficult to defeat and the relationship between the Orthodox and the Greek-Catholics was unbalanced; for instance, on the eve of WWI, the two confessions were sensibly equal in Transylvania"⁴.

On the other hand, the investigation of documents whose authenticity has not yet been verified and the opinions in this respect have entailed several scenarios not thoroughly covering historiographic reality.

The question Silviu Dragomir was concerned with all throughout his life was what had made the Orthodox hierarchs change their faith. Right after graduation of theological studies at the University of Chernivtsi, he started his research in bishopric archives. His surveys and works are thoroughly analysed by professor Sorin Şipoş, who systematically brings to the foreground the historian's moments of objectivity, as well as his moments of subjectivity, ceaselessly seeking to relate to the historical context of either the time the work referred to or the time when it was written. Thus, we have the opportunity to observe the relation between

history and politics in Silviu Dragomir's work, who had always been concerned with the question: "In the over 200 year past of the union with the Western Church, I have never had a better opportunity to ponder upon the reasons making us insist in our division taking away from us the most powerful means of defence in front of the enemy – the firm union amongst ourselves"⁵.

Trying to reveal the mystery of Silviu Dragomir's way of thinking, the historian Sorin Şipoş stresses moments when Silviu Dragomir supported Russia, which he sometimes presented as a protector of Orthodoxy in Transylvania in certain contexts. Yet in difficult times for Romania, such as the events occurring in 1940, he vehemently supported the resistance against the Soviet army in the Crown Council.

The details shown by the author have been grouped thematically and chronologically with some core moments for the union with the Church of Rome: the beginnings of the religious union, the finalisation of the religious union of the Romanians, Inochentie Micu Klein, between belief and nation, the movement led by Visarion Serai, Orthodox solidarity in 17th – 18th centuries, the events in Halmagiu, the movement led by the monk Sofronie from Cioara, the intervention of General Bucow in Transylvania, the issue of the authenticity of primary sources on the union with the Church of Rome in 1697-1701. A very valuable source used by Silviu Dragomir and mentioned by professor Sorin Şipoş is the *Rosenfeld Collection* from the Brukenthal Library in Sibiu.

Consequently, the national element is subsumed to the confessional element in the synthesis on the religious union and torment triggered amongst the Romanians by the change of faith.

The investigation of the national phenomenon according to Silviu Dragomir is still debated in the last chapter of the work. Here, Sorin Şipoş introduces Silviu Dragomir as a historian of the 1848 Revolution through his posthumous monograph on Avram Iancu. The historian stated that documents of the time were insufficient to revive the 1848 revolutionary turmoil. As Sorin Şipoş points out, despite the wants of the book, the historian Silviu Dragomir managed to make an analysis of genuine issues of the revolution that were subsequently deepened due to a more consistent documentation.

The work is actually a classic monograph using modern methods. The style of the author, characterised by harmony and balance, is completed by rigorously supported statements. Every researcher working with primary sources and archive documents can infer the genuine value and energy invested by the author in researching and processing the documents that he shows with clarity, concision and sobriety. We also have to stress the fact that the vast bibliographic resources confirm, if confirmation is still needed, the great value of the book.

Notes:

¹ An already well-known and highly regarded researcher in Romania and abroad, Sorin Şipoş is currently a Vice-Dean at the Faculty of History, Geography and International Relations at the University of Oradea, a member of the Oradea-Debrecen Institute for Euroregional Studies, an editor-in-chief of the *Munţii Apuseni* magazine and a member of the Editorial Committee of the *Eurolimes* journal. As a specialist in mediaeval history of Romania, in the history of Transylvania and history of minorities, Prof. Sorin Şipoş Ph.D has dedicated most of his scientific activity throughout the past decade to Silviu Dragomir, a historian from Cluj.

² Sorin Şipoş, *Silviu Dragomir – istoric*, (Oradea: Editura Universităţii din Oradea and Chişinău: Editura Cartdidact, 2009), 275.

³ Şipoş, 275.

⁴ Şipoş, 277

⁵ Şipoş, 283.