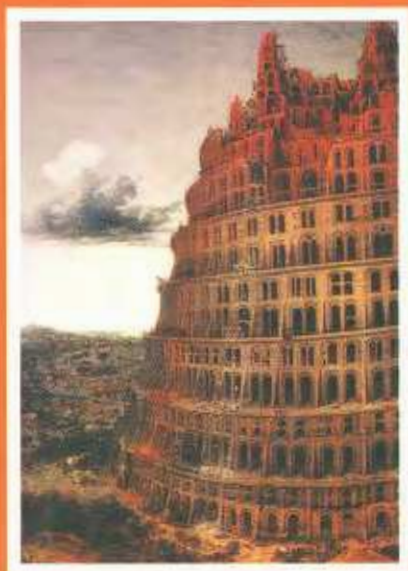


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*\*The orthographic system specific to each author / article was maintained. Proofreading is the author's responsibility.*

## **THE RISE OF MOLDOVAN-ROMANIAN NATIONALISM IN BESSARABIA (1900-1917)<sup>1</sup>**

*Ionas Aurelian Rus,  
Cincinnati, USA*

### **Abstract**

*In the article "The Rise of Moldovan-Romanian Nationalism in Bessarabia (1900-1917)", I analyze qualitatively, and, even more importantly, quantitatively, the rise of the Moldovan-Romanian national movement in Bessarabia between 1900 and 1917, before the beginning of the Russian Revolution. The quasi-non-existence of a Bessarabian Moldovan-Romanian national movement before 1900 was chronologically followed by the weak national movement of 1900-1917.*

*The article discusses extensively the "ethnic basis", and especially the Moldovan-Romanian "ethnic basis", including the prevalent primary Moldovan identity, which made the beginning of the nation-building process possible. It also emphasizes the facilitation of Moldovan-Romanian nation-building by exposure to the Russian-language educational system (or, more typically, a lack thereof). The impact of the class and economic sectoral structure, including the manner in which industrialization hindered the development of the national movement, is also analyzed. Widely overlooked data and nuances, as well as the impact of other variables, are also not ignored.*

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Professors Irina Livezeanu, Jennifer Cash, Jan Kubik, Myron Aronoff, Mark von Hagen, and Seymour Becker for their feedback on this paper and/or on my earlier research on this topic.

### Introduction

In the period before 1917, national identity in Bessarabia experienced two periods of development. The first phase, which can be described as an era of mass passivity, lasted from the first appearance of "Român" and "Moldovan" as ethnonyms for the local population until 1900-1905. The second phase - the emergence of the national movement - occurred between 1905 and 1917. This article discusses the evolution of national identity during these two phases, concentrating on two unusual aspects of the process of national development. First, national identity in Bessarabia developed in a complex relationship to modernization and urbanization. Second, two national identities developed simultaneously in Bessarabia out of the same ethnic group - one Moldovan, the other Romanian. Yet in the development of a *national movement*, both "Moldovan" and "Romanian" *nationalists* participated as members of a common cause.

The development of national identity in Bessarabia cannot be easily matched to processes of modernization or urbanization, as predicted by many theorists, such as Gellner and Hroch. For example, modernization in the form of expanding education, and the related growth of literacy, can be connected to the development of national identity in Bessarabia, but not so with modernization in the form of industrialization. The relationship between urbanization and Moldovan nationalism is also complex, as the spread of support for Moldovan nationalism was disproportionately rural rather than urban until 1917. Most of the nationalist activists of the period 1900-1917 also originated from the clergy and the traditionally free peasants, and especially the younger descendants of these groups, while only a minority came from either the nobility or the descendants of the serfs. Finally, the importance of issues related to class, and particularly the peasant focus on the redistribution of land, hindered the national movement in various ways before 1917.

The question of self-identification has made the issue of Moldovan-Romanian ethnicity and nationalism yet more complex. The proponents of the Romanian ethnic identity have viewed Moldovans as a regional, sub-ethnic group of the Romanian ethnic group. This line has tended to be disproportionately shared by those who were substantially better educated than average. The predominant self-identification of most Moldovans has historically been "Moldovan."

### Ethnicity and the Origins of "Romanian" and "Moldovan" Identities in Bessarabia

Dominant theories of national identity, such as those of Anthony Smith, Miroslav Hroch, Ernest Gellner, and Roman Szporluk, tend to suggest that there are clear trajectories through which ethnic groups become nations, and through which ethnic identity develops into a national identity.<sup>2</sup> The development of

<sup>2</sup> My own outlook is consistent with those of Anthony Smith and Roman Szporluk. I partly agree but also disagree with Miroslav Hroch's views, and I disagree with those of Ernest Gellner. For more details, see Ionas Aurelian Rus, "Variables Affecting Nation-Building: The Bukovinian Romanian Case from 1880 to 1918," presented at the 7th Annual Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN), Harriman Institute, Co-

Moldovan and Romanian nationalism in Bessarabia, however, begs more subtle treatment, beginning even with the definition of an ethnic group.

Anthony Smith attributes a number of characteristics to ethnic communities (*ethnies*), including a proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of a common culture, an association with a specific "homeland," and a feeling of solidarity shared by significant segments of the population.<sup>3</sup> While this might generally be true in the cases of more typical ethnic identities, in the Bessarabian Moldovan case, the patterns are more complex. There is only a subjective basis for a "Moldovan" nation (or ethnic identity). Bessarabian Moldovans (or "Moldavians"), are not distinct from the Romanians, except for some differences of sub-dialect and manner of expressing oneself.<sup>4</sup> Although the Bessarabian Moldovans are, by intersubjective ethnographic standards, ethnic Romanians, their predominant self-identification has historically been "Moldovan." Other elements of Smith's definition are shared historical memories, and one or more differentiating elements of a common culture. They are not necessarily useful in differentiating Bessarabians with a "Moldovan" identity from individuals who also possess a "Romanian" one, particularly during the period until 1917. Clearly, in Bessarabia, "Moldovan" and "Romanian" identities have historically been subjective.<sup>5</sup>

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lumbia University, April 2002. Also see Ionas Aurelian Rus, *Self-Determination, Moldovan-Romanian Nationalism, and Nationality Conflict in Bessarabia, 1900-1940*, Henry Rutgers Senior Honors Thesis, Rutgers University History and Political Science Departments, April 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), in the future cited as Smith.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the issue of dialects and languages, see Karl Wolfgang Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication; An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* (Cambridge: The Technology Press of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1953), 25-30. Rogers Brubaker notes that "The Romanian ethnocultural nation can also be understood to include Romanian-speaking citizens of Moldova, Ukraine, and other neighboring states." See Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 14.

<sup>5</sup> See Walter Feldman, "The Theoretical Basis for the Definition of Moldavian Nationality," in Ralph S. Clem, ed., *The Soviet West: Interplay Between Nationality and Social Organization* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), 47-48. In an attempt to relate to similar patterns, Thomas Hylland Eriksen argues that "identity is elastic and negotiable, but not infinitely flexible." See Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Pluto Press, 1993), 158. The self-styled "Moldovans" who do not accept a "Romanian" identity are much more likely to follow the Julian/Old Style religious calendar preferred by the Russian Orthodox Church and celebrate Christmas on January 7. Those who follow the Gregorian/New Style calendar and celebrate Christmas on December 25 as in Romania are for this reason much more likely to have a "Romanian" secondary identity that is less important than their "Moldovan" primary identity, but still present, or even a "Romanian" primary identity. See my arguments in "'Romanian' and 'Moldovan' Nation-Building and Voting Patterns in the Chernivtsi Region of Ukraine (1979-2002)," paper presented at the 11th Annual Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN), Harriman Institute, Columbia University, March 2006; and "'Moldovan' and 'Romanian' Nation-Building in the Odessa Region of Ukraine (1989-2004)," paper presented at the 12th Annual Convention of the Association for the Study of

To further complicate matters, many of those who have previously written on the subject have often used "Moldovan," "Bessarabian Romanian," "Moldovan-Romanian," and other similar terms interchangeably. Although it may cause confusion initially, I will also follow this same rule, as it should serve to reinforce the overlap – rather than distinctness – of these two "ethnic groups." Whenever necessary, I will specify the nature of the ethnic consciousness of the relevant groups.

Originally, "*român*" or "*rumân*,"<sup>6</sup> which would now be translated as "Romanian," meant "Roman." However, in the late medieval and early modern periods, the term "*român*" also began to be used to identify the local population in the principality of Moldova, thus acquiring an ethnic connotation. The term was apparently used in this context by only a minority of the population, however, while the majority called themselves "Moldovans." Both sub-groups, moreover, spoke the same language and shared a common culture. Thus, one "ethnic group" came to have two distinct ethnonyms. The documentary record indicates that the overwhelming majority of those with an exclusively "Moldovan" identity were peasants, and that those who had a Romanian consciousness were overrepresented among the intellectuals.<sup>7</sup> For those members of Moldova's elites who possessed both identities, the Romanian identity was ethnic, linguistic, and cultural, but non-political. By contrast, the "Moldovan" identity was used by the same people in reference to the population of Moldova, the Moldovan state, and had political connotations.<sup>8</sup>

During the Russian Tsarist period, the Moldovans/Romanians were officially counted as "Moldovans," and never as "Romanians." The latter term was not even a Russian census category during the pre-1917 period. The Moldovans/Romanians represented 47.58 percent of the province's population, or 920,919 out of 1,935,412 inhabitants, according to the Russian census of 1897, which classified the population by mother-tongue. Even if one adjusts for the Russified Moldovans, who were counted as Russian-speakers, the "Moldovans" represented only 52.15 percent of Bessarabia's population, or 1,009,400 people, according

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Nationalities (ASN), Harriman Institute, Columbia University, April 2007. Yet both identity groups followed the Julian calendar during the period discussed in this article.

<sup>6</sup> "*Român*" was the variant used in Moldova; "*rumân*" in Transylvania and Wallachia.

<sup>7</sup> Some of the various members of the elites, including Dimitrie Cantemir, whose books are available to present-day researchers, displayed a "Romanian" identity. The early modern peasant folktales transmitted from generation to generation identified the peasants as "Moldovans." See, for example, Vlad Georgescu, *The Romanians* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991), 15-16, 18, 41-42, 67, 70-71; Dimitrie Cantemir, *Descriptio Moldaviae* (Bucuresti: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania, 1973), 298-299, 337-341 and *passim* and *Cronica Ghiculeștilor* (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1965). Also see Ionaș Rus, "Românii și minoritarii în Basarabia interbelică," in *Revista de istorie a Moldovei*, 1:17 (January-March 1994), 29-30; and Rus, *Self-Determination*, p. 9-11 and *passim*.

<sup>8</sup> See Cantemir, p. 298-299, 337-341, 365-367, the use of ethnonyms in the folktales in Mihai Canciovici, *Domnitori români în legende* (București: Editura Sport-Turism, 1984) and Octav Păun and Silviu Angelescu, *Legende populare românești* (București: Editura Albatros, 1983), and the discussion in Rus, "Românii și minoritarii," and Rus, *Self-Determination*.



to Soviet sources. A Bessarabian-born Romanian historian arrives at an almost identical proportion, namely 52 percent.<sup>9</sup>

During the period of Russian rule in Bessarabia, which lasted from 1812 until 1917, most Moldovan-Romanians identified themselves as "Moldovans" rather than as "Romanians." However, the percentage of the latter group was growing. The documented cases of people officially classified by the Russian Tsarist authorities as "Moldovan" peasants who possessed a "Romanian" national consciousness included disproportionately literate people, even among the peasants.<sup>10</sup> Yet only 10.5 percent of all the adult Bessarabian Moldovan males, and 1.7 percent of the adult Moldovan females, could read and write according to the census of 1897. The American agricultural expert Louis Guy Michael observed that most of the literate Bessarabian Moldovan-Romanian peasants "felt a nearer loyalty to Bucharest [i.e., the capital of Romania] than to Petrograd [Russia's capital]" by 1915.<sup>11</sup> There was a great deal of overlap between literacy and a Romanian ethnic self-identification and nationalism, even though Moldovans went to Russian-language schools.<sup>12</sup>

A different pattern applied to the southwestern and southern Bessarabian counties of Cahul and Ismail. They had been temporarily returned to Moldovan rule from 1856-1859, and after the union of Moldova with Wallachia in 1859, fell under Romanian rule until 1878, when they were returned to Russia. The influence of Romanian schooling did create a significant proportion of inhabitants with a Romanian national consciousness. A substantial majority of these individuals were peasants who also knew literary Romanian, and not just the local spoken sub-dialect. This was facilitated by the fact that Romania, unlike Russia, followed a more pro-active policy in the areas of the promotion of literacy and education. This manifested itself through a policy of mandatory elementary education.<sup>13</sup>

The increase in the number of inhabitants with a Romanian self-identification should be seen as part of a process of nation-building. One might view the phenomenon as being rooted in a greater self-consciousness linked to modernity. Most of those with a Romanian identity, as compared with only a small

<sup>9</sup> Michael Bruchis, *The USSR: Language and Realities - Nations, Leaders, and Scholars* (Boulder, Colorado: East European Monographs, 1988), 276-278; and Alexandru V. Boldur, *Istoria Basarabiei* (București: Editura Victor Frunza, 1992), 492.

<sup>10</sup> Onisifor Ghibu, *Pe baricadele vieții: În Basarabia revoluționară (1917-1918) - Amintiri* (Chișinău: Editura Universității, 1992), 33, 47, 52-55; and Ioan M. Ciolan, Constantin Voicu, and Mihai Racovișan, *Transylvania: Romanian History and Perpetuation or What Official Hungarian Documents Say* (Bucharest: Military Publishing House), 145-146.

<sup>11</sup> See Louis Guy Michael, *More Corn For Bessarabia: Russian Experience 1910-1917* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1983), 113. This was largely due to the feeling that the landed estates would be redistributed to the peasants under Romanian rule.

<sup>12</sup> See Institutul Central de Statistica, *Recensământul General al Populației României din 29 Decembrie 1930* (București: Monitorul Oficial, Imprimeria Națională, 1938-1940), vol. 2, p. XXXII-XXXIII.

<sup>13</sup> See Alex Drace-Francis, *The Making of Modern Romanian Culture: Literacy and the Development of National Identity* (London, New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006), passim.

minority of the self-identified Moldovans, were nationalists.<sup>14</sup>

Although the Bessarabian Moldovans are, according to intersubjective ethnographic standards, ethnic Romanians, their predominant subjective ethnic identity has been "Moldovan." At the same time, for various reasons, during the early part of the twentieth century, many of them have acquired a "Romanian" ethnic consciousness, and a predisposition toward "Romanian" nationalism. As we shall see, these circumstances have had an important impact in influencing the national movement in Bessarabia.

### **The Bessarabian Moldovans/Romanians Before 1900**

Before around 1900, one cannot speak about a significant Moldovan national movement, or about the involvement in it of individuals who were not aristocrats. Modern nationalism was mainly an aristocratic phenomenon during that period. The masses, and especially the peasants, were rather passive and inert, despite their ethnic, and especially social, grievances. Yet the process of nation-building had already started.

Anthony Smith argues that the transformation of an *ethnie* into a nation takes place through a movement from passive subordination of the community to its active political assertion.<sup>15</sup> This is an important process related to, among other factors, the growth of national movements. I would argue that a national movement is, in Smith's words, "a social and political movement to achieve the goals of the nation and realize its national will."<sup>16</sup>

The "Moldovan-Romanian national movement in Bessarabia" is a useful, empirically based term or definition. It refers to networks and groups of nationalist, politically active Bessarabian Moldovan-Romanians, regardless of ethnic self-identification, whose goal was to promote Moldovan-Romanian nationalism. Some of these people had a predominantly "Romanian," and some of them had a primarily "Moldovan," identity and nationalism. It would appear that all the nationalist groups mentioned in this article included both categories of people. They worked for similar goals that transcended variations in ethnic self-identification. The size of the group with a "Romanian" consciousness in the national movement was substantially higher than among the general Moldovan population. In 1917, and possibly in previous years, most Moldovan-Romanian nationalist activists apparently did have a Romanian national identity. This is partly explained by the fact that the more politically mobilized sections of the population, namely the literate inhabitants, were particularly likely to have a "Romanian" identity.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Even so, it would be difficult to agree fully that Walker Connor's definition that "a nation is a self-aware ethnic group" is particularly useful for the Moldovan case. See Walker Connor, "A Nation Is a Nation, Is a State, Is an Ethnic Group, Is a...," in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds., *Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 43. After all, national consciousness could have a "Moldovan" or "Romanian" character.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, p. 72.

<sup>17</sup> For evidence of the continued existence of a Moldovan-Romanian national movement

The Moldovan-Romanian nationalist movement was very weak during the nineteenth century and during the first years of the twentieth. During the nineteenth century, it did not involve the masses employed in agriculture. The latter formed almost 90.4 percent of the Moldovan-Romanian population according to the Romanian census of 1930, and an even larger proportion during the period of Russian Tsarist rule (1812-1917).<sup>18</sup> Around 95.5 percent of the Bessarabian Moldovan-speakers were rural inhabitants according to the census of 1897, as were 93.2 percent of the Bessarabian Romanians according to the 1930 census.<sup>19</sup> The fact that the majority of the Moldovans who were peasants was so large arguably hindered the growth of the national movement. So did the fact that the Russian language was socially regarded as the appropriate urban language.<sup>20</sup>

Among the causes of this phenomenon that have been suggested by historians were the repressive Russification of the Russian Orthodox Church, school and administration, and the end of the use of the Moldovan language for any public functions. These changes are historically associated primarily with the period from the 1860s onward. However, the most important explanation for this pattern was the pre-political, pre-activist frame of mind of the overwhelmingly illiterate serf peasants and of their descendants. They represented about five-sixths of the Moldovan population, and, to a lesser extent, of the other non-noble sections of the group.<sup>21</sup>

The causes of the Russification policy practiced by the Russian state and religious authorities throughout the entire empire were complex, but they were during the post-1989 period, see, for example, William Crowther, "Nationalism and Political Transformation in Moldova," in Donald Dyer, ed., *Studies in Moldavia: The History, Culture, Language and Contemporary Politics of the People of Moldova* (Boulder, Colorado: East European Monographs, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> *Recensământul*, vol. 5, p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> See Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 92 and Irina Livezeanu, "Urbanization in a Low Key and Linguistic Change in Soviet Moldavia (Part 2)," *Soviet Studies*, XXXIII: 4 (October 1981): 590-591.

<sup>20</sup> See Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics*, p. 90 and passim. Similar patterns were also discernible in the case of the Ukrainian national movement in the region of Kherson neighboring on Bessarabia. See, for example, Oliver H. Radkey, *Russia Goes to the Polls: The Election to the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, 1917* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), passim. Also see Gheorghe Cojocaru, "Cu privire la problema Adunării Constituante în Basarabia în anul 1917," part 2, in *Revista de istorie a Moldovei*, no. 3 (7), July-September 1991. Also consult Ionas Aurelian Rus, "The Roots and Early Development of "Moldovan"-Romanian Nationalism in Bessarabia (1900-1917)," in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie A.D. Xenopol*, vol. 33, 1996, p. 287-301. The only case of weaker nationalism among a major group in the European part of the Russian Empire was the Belarussian one. On the Belarussian case, see Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 53-54 and passim, and Nicholas P. Vakar, *Belorussia: The Making of a Nation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1956), passim.

<sup>21</sup> Consult, among others, Prince Serge Dimitriyevich Urussov, *Memoirs of a Russian Governor* (London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1908); and Grigore Constantinescu, "Din Vremuri Țariste," in Iurie Colesnic, *Basarabia Necunoscută* (Chișinău: Universitas, 1993), p. 35-36

generally intended to enhance efficiency, uniformity and loyalty toward the state throughout the polity. They had, from the point of view of the Russian authorities, many unintended consequences. These were popular apathy, discontent and ambivalence toward the authorities.

The multi-ethnic, multi-cultural character of Bessarabia also played a role in preventing the early development of Moldovan nationalism, or at least increased the number of its actual or potential opponents, and negatively affected its potential viability. Russian official statistics and archival data show that in 1817, Moldovans formed 78.2-86.9 percent of the population of the province. The percentage of non-Moldovans increased from 1812 onward, even between 1812 and 1828, when Bessarabia was briefly a Moldovan autonomous province of the Russian Empire.<sup>22</sup> The Moldovans formed 58.2 percent of Bessarabia's population in 1835, 51 percent in 1858 and 47.6 percent in 1897.<sup>23</sup>

The key explanation for this demographic change was the colonization of the province, especially up to the 1860s, with, or other forms of immigration into the province of the members of, a number of non-Romanian ethnic groups. These included Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, Bulgarians, Gagauz (Christian Turks originating from Bulgaria), Jews, and others.<sup>24</sup>

A number of demographic characteristics of the province also increased the difficulties of nationalist mobilization. One was the fuzziness of ethnic boundaries, especially outside the peasant class, caused by Russification. Differentiations were less clear-cut than in some other areas of the world. This partly explains the great salience of class identification. There is a universal consensus that hundreds of Moldovan nobles, thousands of Moldovan urban inhabitants became completely or partly Russified, that is, switched their colloquial language to Russian. Tens of thousands of rural ones became completely or partly Russified or Ukrainianized (that is, switched their colloquial language to Russian). Some of these cases occurred before the 1860s, and an even larger number occurred subsequently.<sup>25</sup>

Up to the last decade of the nineteenth century, the only politically minded and politically active Moldovan group was the numerically small landed aristocracy.<sup>26</sup> Only 4,031 out of 2,521,277 Bessarabians (0.16 percent) were nobles in 1916.<sup>27</sup> Only 22 percent of the Bessarabian nobles used "Moldovan" as their native language in 1897, while most used Russian.<sup>28</sup> Throughout the nineteenth

<sup>22</sup> George F. Jewsbury, *The Russian Annexation of Bessarabia: 1774-1828* (Boulder, Colorado: Columbia University Press, 1976), 77-161.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Bruchis, *The USSR: Language and Realities*, p. 276-278.

<sup>24</sup> See Jewsbury, *passim*.

<sup>25</sup> Dumitru Dogaru, "Năpădenii, un sat de mazili din Codru," *Sociologie Românească* 2:7-8 (July-August 1937): 297; *Recensământul*, vol. 2, p. 50-51; and L. T. Boga, "Populația," in Ștefan Ciobanu (ed.), *Basarabia: Monografie* (Chișinău: Universitat, 1993), 71.

<sup>26</sup> Consult Urussov; and Colesnic, p. 35-36, 250.

<sup>27</sup> Boga, p. 71.

<sup>28</sup> The data are from Seymour Becker, *Nobility and Privilege in Late Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1985), 185. Also consult, among other sources, Charles Upson Clark, *Bessarabia: Russia and Roumania on the Black Sea* (New

century, numerous Moldovan nobles periodically demanded the greater use of the Moldovan, as opposed to the Russian, language in the public sphere. They requested political autonomy for Bessarabia even less frequently.<sup>29</sup>

During the 1860s, there were a few unsuccessful petitions signed by peasants who demanded that the *de facto* switch from the Moldovan to the Russian language in teaching in the village schools, which was occurring during that decade, be reversed. The petitioners also demanded more Moldovan-language schools. Yet these petitions quantitatively pale in comparison to those of 1869 in favor of the improvement of the lot of the peasants. Numerous literate inhabitants of 135 Bessarabian villages, most of whom had a Moldovan ethnic majority, signed the latter petitions.<sup>30</sup>

Some Moldovan students learned very little in the Russian schools because of their lack of knowledge of the Russian language, repeated a number of grades, or, even more typically, simply did not attend school. The American agricultural expert Louis Guy Michael was in charge of managing the "More Corn for Bessarabia" program (1910-1916) of the provincial government. He explains that the Moldovans "were often irregular in their attendance at school taught in Russian by Russians." This explains why on average they got less out of school than the members of other ethnic groups did.<sup>31</sup> As a result, only slightly more than 6 percent of all the adult Bessarabian Moldovans could read and write in Russian according to the census of 1897.<sup>32</sup> The low level of literacy explains why the Moldovan/Romanian national movement became a mass movement only after the period discussed in this article.<sup>33</sup>

In the early stages of the national movement, mass education was not the key factor. The education of the elites and of the "modernized peasants," who were potential local/village leaders, was more salient. The ten best students in numerous rural schools were selected to take part in the boys' and girls' clubs which participated in the "More Corn for Bessarabia" program.<sup>34</sup>

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York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1927), 111-112.

<sup>29</sup> See Ștefan Ciobanu, *Basarabia: Populația, Istoria, Cultura* (Chișinău: Universitاس, 1992), 47-60; Ion Nistor, *Istoria Basarabiei* (Chișinău, Cernăuți, București, 1991); and Boldur, p. 454-455.

<sup>30</sup> Consult Nistor; Boldur, p. 483-484 and Petre Ștefănuță, "Obiceiuri și Credințe de la Nișcani în legătură cu locuința," *Sociologie Românească* 3:7-9 (July-September 1938): 366-369.

<sup>31</sup> See Michael, p. 51; and Colesnic, p. 230. Michael was directly involved in the teaching of groups of schoolchildren how to raise corn in a more efficient, American-style way. He was a good observer of the educational process in Bessarabia.

<sup>32</sup> See, among other sources, Keith Hitchens, *Rumania, 1866-1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 248; and David Mitrany, *The Land and the Peasant in Rumania* (New York: Greenwood Publishers, 1968), 510.

<sup>33</sup> See Rus, "Roots," p. 287-301 and Irina Livezeanu, "Moldavia, 1917-1990: Nationalism and Internationalism Then and Now," *Armenian Review* 43:2-3, 153-193.

<sup>34</sup> See Michael, p. 50 and *passim*.

**The National Movement (1900-1917)**

The period from roughly 1900 to 1917 can be seen as the time when a politically significant modern Moldovan national movement emerged and became a long-term force. For the first time, most of its members were non-aristocratic. In fact, they originated from some of the groups of the population that could be classified as neither nobility, nor the illiterate descendants of semi-serfs. They came from the more socio-economically and culturally advantaged clergy and the traditionally free peasants, and especially the younger descendants of these groups. However, this movement was not very strong, and the Moldovans in most localities were not touched by it. It did not obtain the actual support of a large section of the Moldovan population. Nor was it able to build itself as a mass movement through channeling the existing popular discontent on other issues, such as the agrarian question; into sympathies for it. The average Moldovan peasant perceived this issue as more important than the national question. Industrialization and urban tradition had nothing to do with the national movement.

Anthony Smith's definition applies well to this case. Nationalism is "an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential 'nation.'"<sup>35</sup>

Moldovan-Romanian nationalist groups emerged in 1898-1905.<sup>36</sup> During the 1905-1907 Russian Revolution, a number of Moldovans, though, because of passivity, inertia and other reasons, not very many of them, took part in it. They clearly demonstrated their opposition against Russification, and their desire for cultural and territorial autonomy. Even larger numbers of peasants showed that they desired more land from the unpopular, mostly urban-dwelling, absentee landowners. The latter happened to be overwhelmingly Russian or Russified. They were leasing land to unpopular, mostly Jewish, *arendars*, leaseholders who subleased it to the peasants.

The various Moldovan nationalist currents, which were emerging during the 1905-1907 revolution, were not united. The ephemeral "Moldovan Cultural Society" was a continuation of previous aristocratic nationalism. It demanded the end of Russification and a return to teaching in Moldovan. The nationalism of this group was, as one can see from its program and activities, cultural rather than political. It had 400 members in 1905, and 600 in May 1906, including both men and women.<sup>37</sup> However, the Moldovan nobles did not make a common front even among themselves. Various factions among them were always in different partisan camps, which were at odds with each other over all sorts of eco-

<sup>35</sup> Smith, p. 74. Also see the discussion of the spread of national consciousness and of the changes in values in Deutsch, p. 152-155 and *passim*.

<sup>36</sup> Consult Nistor; Boldur; Colesnic, and Ciobanu, *Basarabia: Populația*; Hitchins, p. 249. Also see Michael Davitt, *Within the Pale: The True Story of Anti-Semitic Persecutions in Russia* (London: Hurst and Blackett, Limited, 1903), 56. Also see "Manifestul Program al partidului național-antisemit," in Jean Ancel, ed., *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry During the Holocaust* (New York: The Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1986), vol. 1, p. 3, vol. 11, p. 65; and Constantinescu, p. 288-289.

<sup>37</sup> Constantinescu, p. 289.

conomic, financial and other issues.

A populist, national democratic group that emerged during the 1905-1907 revolution included only a slightly larger number of "nationalist activists." I define the latter category as people who did more than just passively read Moldovan nationalist newspapers, or sign nationalist petitions. They were mostly current or former students of the Theological Seminary of Kishinev (Chişinău), the capital of Bessarabia. They organized themselves around the newspaper *Basarabia* ("Bessarabia"). Apparently twenty-six out of thirty contributors to the newspaper, all of whom were males, were young people.<sup>38</sup> The group obtained the support of a number of priests, teachers, other intellectuals, and non-aristocratic agriculturists, especially young literate ones. It demanded education in the Moldovan language, land reform, Bessarabian autonomy, universal suffrage, and the creation of a cooperative movement.<sup>39</sup> In all-Russian politics, the leadership and activists of the group were mostly Socialist Revolutionaries in sympathies. They were non-Marxist, left-wing, rural-oriented, or peasant-oriented populists.

The program of this nationalist group, more than that of the above-mentioned aristocratic nationalists, is consistent with Miroslav Hroch's model of the fight of the nationally activated population in "small nations." The Czech Marxist historian's model is useful even though the Bessarabian Moldovans do not fit perfectly in the category of "small nations" under "foreign" rule as described by Hroch. This is due to the Moldovan vs. Romanian identity issue. Hroch argues that these nationalist movements fought for "equal rights, national language and culture, for a share in economic prosperity, for social liberation and political autonomy." This characterization certainly applies to the above-mentioned populist movement.<sup>40</sup>

The Russian civil and Orthodox Christian religious authorities grudgingly allowed the publishing of various Moldovan/Romanian newspapers, whether in the Latin characters used in Romania, or, more commonly, in the Cyrillic ones used in Russia. Nevertheless, they harassed these publications and the national movement in general. They accomplished this through censorship, occasional arrests, and transfers of "subversive" elements to other parts of the empire, starting in 1906-1908. One of the changes that was not reversed was the introduction of teaching in Romanian at the theological seminary. This was the place where most of the "nationalist activists" were studying, or had previously studied.<sup>41</sup> In 1905, a

<sup>38</sup> Ştefan Ciobanu, "Din istoria mişcării naţionale în Basarabia (Ziarul Basarabia)", in Colesnic, p. 276-277.

<sup>39</sup> Andrei Popovici, *The Political Status of Bessarabia* (Washington, D.C.: School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, 1931), 113, 116-117.

<sup>40</sup> Miroslav Hroch, "How Much Does Nation Formation Depend on Nationalism?" in *East European Politics and Societies*, 4:1(1990): 109-113. Hroch's model of national mobilization is useful for understanding the Bessarabian Moldovan case, yet his selected cases are more straightforward and less ambiguous than the case discussed in this article. See Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe, A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>41</sup> Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Decline of Imperial Russia* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger

church congress decided that Moldovan could again be used in church services. However, elementary schools for Moldovans continued to be in Russian.

It is rather clear, as I have argued elsewhere, that the politicized Moldovan-Romanian national movement of 1905-1907 was still rather weak.<sup>42</sup> There were many thousands of Bessarabian Moldovan-Romanian nationalists and readers of the Moldovan nationalist press. However, the number of known nationalist activists was apparently about one thousand before 1917. Because of the repression, many individuals of nationalist leanings stopped engaging in nationalist activities, or became less active. As a result, by 1910, according to the local Russian Orthodox archbishop, only fifteen to twenty priests were nationalist activists. They were actively and energetically involved in the Moldovan national movement, and were therefore regarded as dangerous. There were roughly a thousand, mostly Moldovan, Bessarabian Eastern Orthodox priests.<sup>43</sup>

The national movement did not yet have any resonance with the average Moldovan. In 1905-1906, some Moldovan grievances were expressed through meetings convened in a few localities. Mass petitions addressed to the central authorities called for the distribution of land to the peasants, and for national linguistic rights, in that order. Nevertheless, in numerous, possibly even in a clear majority of the, villages, nobody was involved in the national movement.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, no activity in favor of Moldovan nationalism or the Moldovan language occurred in them during the period of Russian Tsarist rule. Not surprisingly, the national movement was not able to get its members elected to the Russian Duma (parliament). The newspaper *Cuvânt Moldovenesc*, founded in 1913, had a circulation of only 10,000 by the middle of World War I.<sup>45</sup>

Only a minority of the agrarian discontent was channeled towards the national movement, which was demanding land reform. Most rural discontent manifested itself through spontaneous agrarian unrest. The non-nationalist character of the agrarian strife is significant. It would seem to indicate that most peasants found their Moldovan identity relevant only in terms of language, traditions and culture, not in the political and social arenas. Besides, even the above-mentioned petitions signed by peasants show that land reform was apparently a more important priority than ethno-linguistic rights. John Armstrong correctly argues that "a lower class (especially in sedentary agricultural societies) cannot constitute a group as persistently conscious of its identity as an ethnic collectivity."<sup>46</sup> However, the motivation of the desire for land reform was largely based in interests, which can sometimes counterbal-

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Publishers, 1969), 235.

<sup>42</sup> See Rus, "Românii și minoritarii," p. 30-31.

<sup>43</sup> Popovici, p. 107; Nicolae M. Enea, "Culte," in Ciobanu, *Basarabia: Monografie*, p. 301.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, T. Al. Stirbu, "Vălenii de lângă Prut," *Sociologie Românească* 3: 10-12 (October-December 1938): 521.

<sup>45</sup> See Nistor, p. 272-273.

<sup>46</sup> Boldur, p. 377-378, and John Armstrong, "Nations before Nationalism," in Hutchinson and Smith, p. 143.



ance the impact of ethnicity.

In the period up to 1917, only a small minority of the non-aristocratic nationalist activists were the descendants of *țărani* (peasants) who had obtained land through the land reform of 1868 that was implemented in the province. Instead, they were largely the educated sons of clergymen. Most of the young "nationalist activists" of rural origin were the sons (or, in one case, the daughter) of Orthodox Christian priests, deacons and cantors. The Orthodox clergymen together with their families represented only 0.30 percent of the population of the province (7,496 people in 1916).<sup>47</sup>

Somewhat less commonly, they originated from the class of non-aristocratic agriculturists who had always been free and had historically owned their own land (*răzeși*). This group represented about 12 percent of the rural population of central Bessarabia. Even less commonly, the activists originated from the group of *mazili* (peasant-nobles, the descendants of the nobility), who represented 2.03 percent of the population in the province in 1916.<sup>48</sup>

One cause of this pattern was the fact that these individuals were not literally from land-hungry small peasant backgrounds. Their families had the mentality of peasant proprietors rather than of dependent peasants, and were on average better off economically than the latter. Part of the explanation, derived from a large number of individual biographies, is that the people of these social backgrounds had benefited from a more privileged upbringing. This included greater educational opportunities, parental interest in their education, and the internalization of their parents' urgings to channel them toward education, than most Moldovan *țărani* had experienced.

The "nationalist activists" came from overwhelmingly Moldovan villages, in which the members of their ethnic group represented between 80.73 percent and 98.60 percent of the population according to the Romanian census of 1930.<sup>49</sup> I have data on the attitudes toward Moldovan nationalism of the parents of more than two dozen nationalist activists. Only four of them, including the only non-aristocratic important female activist in the national movement, seem to have been brought up in families in which the parents were Moldovan-Romanian nationalists. Parents with "Romanian" nationalist views brought up two of them. Two others came from households with "Moldovan" nationalist parents, yet the activists, as adults, acquired a "Romanian" identity. This illustrates the process of the growth of the number of nationalists, and especially of nationalists with a "Romanian" identity, over time. However, all of them had absorbed a feeling of ethnic identity from their villages.

The role of industrialization, which Ernest Gellner and other theorists emphasize as a factor in the development of nationalism, was unimportant in Bessarabia, at least among Moldovans.<sup>50</sup> Anthony Smith and other analysts have

<sup>47</sup> Colesnic, p. 250; and Boga, p. 71.

<sup>48</sup> Hitchins, p. 241.

<sup>49</sup> Ghibu; Colesnic; and *Recensământul*, vol. 2.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Ernest Gellner, "The Dramatis Personae of History," *East European Politics and Societies* 4:1(1990):126-127, 131 and Hroch, "How Much," p. 106.

accurately observed the fact that nationalism is not the product of the bourgeoisie, or of capitalism, and does not "serve" the interests of one particular class in opposition to other sections of the same nation.<sup>51</sup>

By 1900, there were very few Moldovan industrialists, merchants, proletarians, bureaucrats, or urban inhabitants in general. According to the Russian census of 1897, 47.6 percent of the inhabitants of Bessarabia spoke Moldovan as their mother-tongue, 19.6 percent spoke Ukrainian, 11.8 percent Yiddish, and 8.2 percent Russian.<sup>52</sup> By comparison, 37.2 percent of all urban inhabitants were Yiddish-speakers, 24.4 percent were Russian-speakers, 15.8 percent spoke Ukrainian, and only 14.2 percent Moldovan.<sup>53</sup>

Jews represented 76.4 percent of all of those engaged in commerce, and 35 percent of all the artisans, of the province in 1897. By 1902, 49.3 percent of the workers in enterprises employing 6 to 50 persons, and 74.8 percent of those working in enterprises with 50 to 500 persons had been born in the Russian and Ukrainian provinces of the empire, and were overwhelmingly Russians, Jews and Ukrainians. In 1923, only 40.46 percent of all the industrial entrepreneurs were Romanians, including 12.86 percent of those in urban areas, as compared to 72.14 percent who were Jewish, and 43.97 percent in rural localities. In 1930, only 19.08 percent of those actively employed in industry, including handicrafts, were Romanians. By contrast, 38.75 percent were Jews, and 25.26 percent were Russians and Ukrainians. Only 16.62 percent of those employed in the textile and garment industries, including 18 percent of those who were employed in textile enterprises, were Romanians, and 50.03 percent were Jews. Only 10.91 percent of those actively employed in commerce were Romanians, while 69.97 percent were Jews. Among merchants, the percentages were 17.61 percent and 63.17 percent in 1938.<sup>54</sup>

The members of the Moldovan industrial and commercial classes were not involved at all in the national movement before 1917. Moreover, comparatively few pre-1917 Moldovan nationalists were the offspring of the members of the Russian estate of the "townspeople". This statistical category included 564,200

<sup>51</sup> Smith, *passim*.

<sup>52</sup> See Livezeanu, *Cultural*, p. 90.

<sup>53</sup> Livezeanu, "Urbanization," p. 592.

<sup>54</sup> See Edward H. Judge, *Easter in Kishinev: Anatomy of a Pogrom* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 26; Hitchins, p. 243; Ciobanu, *Basarabia: Populația*, p. 44-45; Clark, *Bessarabia*, p. 23 and *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia Inc., 1948), vol. 2, p. 247. Consult Isaac M. Rubinow, *Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia* (New York: Arno Press, 1975), 554 and Eugen Weber, "Romania," in Hans Rogger and Eugen Weber, eds., *The European Right: A Historical Profile* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1966), 529-530. Also see Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1983), 277; Victor Scărlătescu, "Comerțul Intern," in *Aspecte ale economiei românești. Material documentar pentru cunoașterea unor probleme în cadrul planului economic*, 1939, p. 207; Const. I. Lungu and T. Al. Știrbu, "Basarabia economică," in Ciobanu, *Basarabia: Monografie*, p. 396-402; *Enciclopedia României* (București: 1938-1943), vol. 4, p. 360; *Recensământul*, vol. 7, p. L-LIV; and Ministerul Afacerilor Interne, Direcția Generală a Arhivelor Statului, Serviciul Iași, Fond Reședința Regală a Ținutului Prut, Dosar nr. 2 (1748), 1940 (folder no. 2 or 1748 for the year 1940), f. 162, 184.

urban and rural inhabitants (22.38 percent of the total provincial population), and 4,330 "merchants" (narrowly defined) in 1916.<sup>55</sup> The Moldovan nationalist activists were substantially more likely to live in urban localities than the average Moldovan. Yet they were less likely to be of urban descent. This is indicative of the fact that Moldovan nationalism did not correlate with an "urban tradition", but with recent urbanization.

Roman Szporluk's category of nations without a modern economy, where nevertheless nationalism is developing in the area of civil society/culture is useful for understanding the case of the Bessarabian Moldovans.<sup>56</sup> One has to agree that the Eastern European pattern postulated by Szporluk, that nationalism first appeared in the area of culture, is applicable to the Bessarabian Moldovans.<sup>57</sup>

The years from around 1900 until 1917 should be seen as the time when a somewhat politically significant modern Moldovan national movement emerged and became a force. Although it was not strong, the authorities could not ignore it. Although for the first time mostly non-aristocratic, it did not touch most of the Moldovans.

Some nationalist activists originated from some of the groups of the population that could be classified as the traditional middle strata, even though the term middle class would not be appropriate. They tended to be the descendants of the members of these groups. However, industrialization and urban tradition had nothing to do with the national movement. Moldovan-Romanian nationalism did not become a mass movement before 1917. This was partly because of the greater salience of the agrarian question, which was perceived by the average Moldovan peasant as more important than, and separate from, the national question.

### Conclusions

The first two phases in the development of Moldovan-Romanian nationalism were the era of mass passivity, which lasted up to around 1900-1905, and the period of the emergence of the national movement (from 1900-1905 to 1917). During the latter period, numerous Moldovans did possess an ethnic identity and other proto-nationalist characteristics.

Some elements of modernization facilitated nation-building in Bessarabia. This can certainly be said about education, and the related growth of literacy, but not about industrialization. The relationship between urbanization and Moldovan nationalism is complex. Support for Moldovan nationalism was disproportionately rural rather than urban. This went hand in hand with the disproportionately urban places of residence of the nationalist activists. Yet the urban nationalists were not of urban descent, but literate, more or less educated first-generation inhabitants of the urban localities.

The background of the individuals who were involved in the national movement for the period up to 1917 has much explanatory power. They were typically the sons of priests or the sons of other categories of the population that were

<sup>55</sup> Boga, p. 71, 241.

<sup>56</sup> Roman Szporluk, "In Search of the Drama of History: or, National Roads to Modernity," *East European Politics and Societies* 4:1 (1990): 141-144, 146.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141-143.

intermediary between former "peasants" as defined by the laws, and the aristocracy. Most of the illiterate descendants of these "peasants" were primarily (and originally exclusively) concerned with the issue of agrarian reform, and they were substantially underrepresented among the supporters of the national movement. Moldovan-Romanian nationalism in Bessarabia up to 1917 may be partially explained by cultural factors and by structural factors related to the dismantling of feudal patterns, but not by economic performance or development narrowly defined.

The importance of issues related to class, and particularly the peasant desire for land reform, hurt the nationalist cause in various ways before 1917. The aristocratic character of the early national movement was eventually surmounted since the nobility never controlled the activities of the non-nobles in the national movement. But the issue of self-identification has influenced Moldovan-Romanian ethnicity and nationalism. The proponents of a Romanian ethnonational identity have perceived the "Moldovans" as a regional, subnational group or identity, and this view has been correlated with a higher level of education. The identity of most Moldovans, then, has historically been "Moldovan."<sup>58</sup>

Recenent: dr. Irina Livezeanu  
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<sup>58</sup> See Rus, "Variables." This paper was a pilot project for my dissertation, *Variables Affecting Nation-Building: The Impact of the Ethnic Basis, the Educational System, Industrialization and Sudden Shocks*. In this larger study, which is summarized in this paragraph, I am looking at the impact of the above-mentioned four independent variables on nation-building, on the evolution of the spread and intensity of nationalism. I am introducing to the study of nation-building something that is de-emphasized in the current scholarship, namely a systematic quantitative measurement of the intensity of nationalism on four dimensions (integrative, satisfactoral, identificational and symbolic). Their sum is the intensity of nationalism score. This provides a framework for the quantitative testing of the impact of various independent variables. Some of the pre-existing theories are confirmed; an ethnic basis (language, culture, identity, etc.) similar to the desired end-product and the growth of education help nation-building. Others are disconfirmed. It has been widely assumed that industrialization fosters nation-building, but my research indicates that it tends to hinder it. Sudden shocks (collapses of empires, wars and revolutions) change the intensity of nationalism scores significantly during very short chronological periods.

**Dr. Jennifer R. Cash**  
Department of Anthropology  
University College London  
United Kingdom  
jreneacash@yahoo.com

**Dr. Ludmila Cojocari**  
Institute of History and Political  
Sciences  
Free International University of  
Moldova  
Republic of Moldova  
lcojocari@gmail.com

**Dr. Olga Filippova**  
Department of Sociology  
Kharkiv University of Humanities  
Ukraine  
ofilip@iatp.org.ua

**Dr. Joanna Januszewska-Jurkiewicz**  
Institute of History  
University of Silesia  
Poland  
joanna.januszewska-jurkiewicz@  
us.edu.pl

**Dr. Irina Livezeanu**  
Department of History  
University of Pittsburgh  
USA  
irinal@pitt.edu

**Dist. Prof. of History Paul E.  
Michelson**  
Department of History  
Huntington University  
USA  
pmichelson@huntington.edu

**PhD researcher Mihai Nicoară**  
Faculty of History and Philosophy  
"Babes-Bolyai" University of Cluj-  
Napoca  
Romania  
mihai20nicoara@yahoo.fr

**PhD researcher Gabriela Popa**  
Department of History and Civiliza-  
tion  
European University Institute  
Italy  
gabriela.popa@eui.eu

**Dr. Ionas Aurelian Rus**  
Raymond Walters College  
University of Cincinnati  
USA  
ionasrus@eden.rutgers.edu

**Dr. Marsha Siefert**  
Department of History  
Central European University  
Hungary  
siefertm@ceu.hu

**Dr. Vladimir Solonari**  
Department of History  
University of Central Florida  
USA  
vsolonar@mail.ucf.edu

**PhD researcher Ala Svet**  
Institute of History and Political  
Sciences  
Free International University of  
Moldova  
Republic of Moldova  
alaset@gmail.com

The Editors, ***INTERSTITIO. East European Review of Historical  
Anthropology***

**Rethinking History Center  
Institute of History and Political Sciences, FIUM  
str. Vlaicu Pîrcălab 52, of. 705a,  
MD-2012, Chişinău,  
Republica Moldova**

**E-mail: [rethinkinghistorycenter@yahoo.com](mailto:rethinkinghistorycenter@yahoo.com)**

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