BOOK REVIEWS

Sorin Mitu, *Românii și ungurii. Un război imagologic de o mie de ani (cu o continuare virtuală până în anul 2100)* [Romanians and Hungarians. A Thousand-Year Imagological War (with a Virtual Continuation Until the Year 2100)], Iaşi, Polirom, 2024, 612 p.

Ion CÂRJA
Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca
E-mail: ion.carja@ubbcluj.ro

In 2024, Professor Sorin Mitu presented us with one of his most beautiful and substantial books: *Românii și ungurii. Un război imagologic de o mie de ani (cu o continuare virtuală până în anul 2100)* [Romanians and Hungarians: A Thousand-Year Imagological War (with a Virtual Continuation Until the Year 2100)]. This is a topic that the distinguished academic from Cluj has reflected on extensively, and previously explored in other editorial projects, such as the following volumes: *Românii văzuți de maghiari: imagini şi clişee culturale din secolul al XIX-lea* [Romanians as seen by Hungarians: Cultural Images and Clichés from the 19th Century] (1998), and *Ungurii despre români. Naşterea unei imagini etnice* [Hungarians on Romanians. The Birth of an Ethnic Image] (2004), both written in collaboration with Melinda Mitu. This is therefore a long-term topic for Professor Mitu, who has chosen to examine an issue that has been widely discussed and written about in the shared space of the two peoples over time, from the perspective of comparative imagology.

The book opens with an argument in which methodological considerations are intertwined with aspects of the author's biography and life experience. This preludes the scientific approach and systematic research of the topic. The book is divided into five sections, comprising 22 chapters. The final section is titled *Instead of Conclusions: The Age to Come (A Virtual*

Continuation Until the Year 2100). Here, the author imagines the potential political evolution of Romania and Hungary, as well as Romanian–Hungarian relations and mutual perceptions.

The author has set himself an ambitious and far-reaching task: to "catalogue" the entire Romanian–Hungarian relationship from the perspectives of attitudes, perceptions, and mutual representations over the course of a millennium – from the arrival of the Hungarians in the Pannonian Plain to the present day. In doing so, he captures the contributions and specificities of the great eras of history in this area of imagological relations between the two peoples. The titles of the five sections of the book are suggestive in this regard: *The Middle Ages and Early Modernity (896–1699)*; *The Modern Era (1700–1918)*; *The Century of Extremes: Between the Wars (1919–1944)*, *The Century of Extremes: Communism (1945–1989),* and *The Recent Era (1990–2024...)*. The final part of the volume contains a concluding chapter entitled (*Instead of Conclusions...*), as well as Notes, a final Bibliography and an Index of names.

The book is structured according to the principle of chronological succession. It invites readers to embark on a fascinating journey through time, spanning a millennium. This journey allows readers to "encounter" two interacting models of identity and culture, which have given rise to a particularly rich imaginary, whether through peaceful or conflictual interaction. By examining the content of the book, we can gain an understanding of how ethnic and ethno-national perceptions were formed, how Romanians and Hungarians viewed each other, and how the major Romanian and Hungarian identity myths emerged and gained power under the influence of the nationalist ideology of late modernity.

Through its approach, considerations and conclusions, the work presents a compelling argument for an "unbiased" interpretation of Romanian–Hungarian relations. It calls for a history of mutual relations that transcends vindictive logic and perpetual polemics. It encourages us to move beyond the well-known axiom, "We were right; you are to blame." This approach would benefit both historiographies, which have been under constant pressure from nationalist logic since at least the 19th century.

The book poses the question, "How much and how hard did the Romanians fight with the Hungarians?", in the form of a subchapter title. By asking this question, the author aims to move beyond historiographical clichés and numerous other commonplaces in order to accurately assess the duration of the Romanian–Hungarian conflict. This is an original approach

to relations between the two peoples, through which the author attempts to demonstrate that there has never been a permanent Romanian–Hungarian conflict throughout history. His thoughts on the nature of bilateral relations over the last two centuries, which make up the modern and contemporary periods, are telling in this regard, stating that "the historical rivalry between Romanians and Hungarians has manifested itself in its true magnitude." Thus, since the two modern states, Romania and Hungary, came into existence in 1866 and 1867 respectively, a period of approximately 160 years, they "have been official allies for 91 years, through treaties signed and respected by both parties at every major stage of their historical existence. Between 1883 and 1914, Bucharest and Budapest were partners in the Triple Alliance. Between 1940 and 1944, they were part of the Tripartite Pact. Between 1955 and 1991, they were allies within the Warsaw Pact. Since 2004, both countries have been members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. *In effect*, this constitutes more than a hundred years of alliance. A hundred-year alliance between Hungary and Romania!" (page 19).

Sorin Mitu examines this "casefile" of the Romanian–Hungarian conflict, a topic that has been widely discussed and written about in both the past and present. Attempting to move beyond the well-worn clichés of historiographical discourse and the image of "the other," he considers the duration of these conflictual relations and the number of recorded victims. For instance, Romanian historians estimate that 40,000 Romanians died in 1848–1849, whereas Hungarian researchers estimate that 10,000 Hungarians died during this period. This attempt to "reassess" the duration and scale of the Romanian–Hungarian conflict is rather unusual in Romanian historiography, making the book highly original. When considered in a broader context and compared with other peoples or nations who have been enemies and fought each other throughout history, the scale of this conflict was nowhere near as terrible in terms of the number of casualties or how long it lasted. As it says on page 25, "the two peoples did not fight as much as they used to say."

We must acknowledge that this is an alternative approach to the topic. Its aim is to remove the study of Romanian–Hungarian relations from the well-trodden ground of fierce and endless controversy. This is truly a much-needed perspective in the historiographical debate on the subject, as well as in historical writing in Romania in general, as it shifts the focus from confrontation to dialogue with Hungarian historiography. This dialogue is based exclusively on scientific reasoning and a genuine desire to discover the truth.

Reading the book familiarizes us with images and representations — elaborate constructs of the collective imagination and mentality — which, according to the author, shed light on the long-term dynamics of relations between the two peoples. The interaction and coexistence of the two identity models, Romanian and Hungarian, alongside the many happy and unfortunate events, with a vast and rich collection of facts that have accumulated over time, has created a rich and diverse universe of imagological constructions and elaborations, from the earliest depictions of one group by another, dating back to the beginning of the Middle Ages, to the modern era and the present day. The book's merit lies in its provision of a documented and rigorous inventory of the entirety of the Romanian-Hungarian imagological "casefile." It serves as a veritable "database" of collective beliefs that Romanians and Hungarians have held about each other over time. The list of these images and representations is long and varied. It includes "the conquering Hungarian" and "the Wallachian shepherd," as well as multiple depictions of "the other" (be it Romanian or Hungarian) as different in ethnic, social and religious (confessional) terms. There are also romantic images, such as "the Romanian good savage," "the wild Moți," "the Daco-Romanian irredentists," "the revisionist Hungarian," "the polenta that doesn't 'explode'" and "the cheap Hungarian sausage," among many others, both older and more recent.

This book is based on an extensive research endeavor that falls under the methodological aspect and historiographical genre of studies on the history of the imaginary, particularly comparative imagology. Professor Mitu is a leading expert in this field, having contributed significantly to both theoretical debates on the issue and applied research based on Romanian sources and realities, particularly those of Transylvania. The author's approach can also be categorized as cultural historical research. This relatively new investigative perspective has become popular in Romanian historiographical research projects in recent decades.

Last but not least, despite being a dense and substantial work, it is a pleasure to read thanks to its clear, flowing, pleasant style. This book offers an alternative history of Romanian–Hungarian relations, providing a fresh, serene interpretation of their long-standing past. Written without bias or prejudice, it is instead characterized by great empathy and a deep commitment to the subject matter and its key players: the Romanians and the Hungarians.

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Constantin BĂRBULESCU
Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca
E-mail: barbulescoo@gmail.com

Some time ago, I was chatting with a colleague—a fellow historian and friend—about the age up to which historians, and in fact scholars in the social sciences more broadly, tend to produce important work. After 50, he argued, nothing spectacular really happens anymore in terms of scholarly output. In other words, if you haven't made a splash with some innovative work by then, once you start descending the gradual slope into deeper old age, it becomes increasingly harder to believe you'll ever shine again on the academic stage with critical or commercial blockbusters. I agreed with him at the time—thinking, with some dread, mostly about myself—so as not to offend anyone.

Well, the book under scrutiny here is irrefutable proof that we were both seriously mistaken. Because just as Sorin Mitu was nearing the sobering milestone of turning sixty (by the time you're reading this, he will already have passed it), he produced a work that genuinely deserves to cause a stir in our small academic world.

You might wonder: what's so special about this book? Why should it be read? First, because it's written by Sorin Mitu—a well-known and highly regarded figure, both within our field and among the broader educated public. Personally, after devouring it in a single sitting, I found the book remarkable, exceptional—words I would continue piling on, were I not worried that such strong praise might do both the volume and its author a disservice. Clearly, I liked it—very much.

Twenty-seven years ago, Sorin Mitu published his doctoral thesis with the most prestigious Romanian publishing house of the time (*The Genesis of National Identity among Transylvanian Romanians*)—a book that has since become a classic on the ever-popular topic of national identity. To sum up briefly, between 1997 and 2024, Sorin Mitu devoted himself to advising doctoral students, teaching undergraduates, and conducting research, especially on Romanian nationalism over the past two centuries, as well as ethnic imagery—particularly in Transylvania.

Now, he returns in full force with a massive volume (which, as I'll explain later, should not intimidate readers) in which he pours his entire life's work researching the subject of national identities—identities that are shaped significantly, he argues, by both self-images and those imposed by others. In short: ethnic representations. Professor Mitu has spent his entire scholarly life studying what Romanians think of Hungarians and vice versa.

This is an ambitious, mature work in which the author dares to step outside the comfort zone of his specialization in modern history (how many of us do that? How many of us *can* do that?) and ventures into the longue durée—tracing the threads of history all the way back to the appearance of the Hungarians in this part of Europe; from the year of grace 896 to, well, yesterday. So, not merely a thousand years of history—but, to be precise, 1,128 years! As the old chronicler would say, "The mind recoils!"

The narrative of this book begins no less than at the moment when the first Hungarians—newly arrived in lands today considered "ours"—encountered the first Romanians. According to some authors, this would have been sometime at the end of the ninth century. But did they actually meet? According to modern Romanian historians, the answer is yes, since they uphold and build upon the theory of continuity, which holds that the ancestors of today's Romanians have lived more or less continuously on present-day Romanian territory—basically, forever. In other words, Romanians were already in Transylvania when the Hungarians arrived. Even Romanian jokes today affirm this view.

Hungarian historians, equally modern, subscribe instead to a rival theory—immigrationist—which places the ancestors of today's Romanians somewhere south of the Danube, arriving in Transylvania only after the Hungarians were already established there. Naturally, both historical theories dovetail neatly with the modern national ideologies of these two rival nations. That's exactly why they ought to be viewed with suspicion—the motive for intellectual "crime" is too obvious.

So, what came first: the chicken or the egg? Wisely and sceptically, Sorin Mitu refuses to answer this trap of a question, for the simple reason that, in the absence of clear, contemporaneous sources, it simply can't be answered. Whatever the case—whether it was the Hungarian arrival in Transylvania or the migration of Romanian shepherds into the area—Romanians and Hungarians eventually came to live side by side; right up to the present day.

One group consisting mostly of peasants (though not exclusively), the other mostly of nobles (again, not exclusively). Which means that in the medieval era, the images held of "the Other" were primarily rooted in social, rather than ethnic, distinction. That is, the noble (usually Hungarian, though not always) looked down on the peasant (usually Romanian, though not always), just as the peasant-serf didn't feel any particular love for his lord.

This medieval social antagonism—eventually fused with and mapped onto ethnic categories (Romanians/peasants vs. Hungarians/nobles)—would, over time, give rise to the negative ethnic stereotypes that Hungarians developed about Romanians and vice versa. Still, up until the end of the 16th century, this conflation didn't result in systematically derogatory ethnic discourse on either side.

But in the following century, with the dawn of modernity, something does change. As the author puts it, beautifully, we begin to see "the first ethnic gossip and invective" (95). The former social distinction—Romanian peasant as subordinate—now fuses with the ethnic one, and takes root. No longer are Romanians viewed as partners in the old medieval sense, but as serfs, bearers of a glaring social otherness (105). In the eyes of the nobility, peasants—rebellious, lazy, ignorant, ill-willed—become synonymous with Romanians.

These ethnic images start appearing—tentatively, at first—even in official legal documents. More steps follow. In 1784, the uprising of Horea marks another leap. But the real rupture, Mitu argues—and I wholeheartedly agree—comes during the 1848 Revolution, especially during the civil war from October 1848 to August 1849. That is the first time thousands of Romanians and Hungarians take up arms against one another, solely (though not only) because they are Romanian or Hungarian—with familiar consequences: thousands dead and a historical trauma that still lingers today. It's during this period—from the ruins of Abrud and at Mihalț—that the negative ethnic stereotypes Romanians hold about Hungarians are crystallized. It's also now that Avram Iancu becomes, and remains, a national symbol.

1848 is the parting of the waters—the beginning of the "eternal" conflict between Romanians and Hungarians. A conflict that Sorin Mitu strives mightily to show is neither eternal nor innocent. And when you think about it, Transylvania's civil war, for all its victims and massacres on both sides, cannot really compare to the Vendée War (1793–1796), where 25% of the region's population perished. As the author notes, others have succeeded in killing

each other far more systematically and effectively than Romanians and Hungarians ever did.

These sorts of contextualisations are extremely helpful—especially for the contemporary reader, who tends to be poorly acquainted with world history—and point us toward another of Mitu's areas of expertise: global history.

But let's return to our Romanians, who, after 1848 and particularly after 1867, struggle under the so-called "Hungarian yoke"—at least, that's the narrative embraced by Romanian intellectual and political elites both then and now. There is some truth here, to be sure—but statistical data from the late 19th century and the years just before World War I show that the yoke was fairly loose. In fact, thanks to the rule of law and liberal ideology of the Dual Monarchy, Romanians managed to hold their heads high and preserve their national identity—most notably through some 2,000 denominational schools teaching in Romanian.

Thus, in dualist Hungary, only about 20–30% of Romanian children were educated in state-run Hungarian-language schools. And the 1910 census reveals that just 15% of Transylvania's non-Hungarian residents (mostly Romanians and Saxons) could speak the state's official language. After 1918, it's Romanian rule that follows...

We'll stop here, since our aim is not to summarize Sorin Mitu's entire book—readers can do that for themselves. Our more modest goal is simply to whet our readers' appetites. This is a premium product, worth savouring slowly.

What's particularly interesting here is that Mitu himself—and his life experience—is omnipresent in the narrative: from the introduction, where he recalls Imi, his Hungarian childhood friend who, on Easter, fails to understand and takes the entire basket instead of a single red egg; to personal family vignettes, like the uncle who was a member of the Iron Guard (a quote from whom, by the way, appears dutifully somewhere in the book); to the bewilderment of people from the Old Kingdom at seeing Transylvanian couples practicing bilingualism.

More than in perhaps any of his other works, Sorin Mitu is everywhere in this one. In the end, the volume is boldly confessional—which, for me, only increases its value.

The book is also significant because it offers a real methodological lesson in how to write history on an extremely sensitive, ideologically explosive

topic. Mitu approaches the ethnic imagery in Transylvania with deep empathy—for the topic, for the people who created these images, and for those who spread them. He uses humour to disarm the traps of the subject—and it works beautifully.

As in all his work, Sorin Mitu pulls off the rare feat of liberating himself from the Romanian nationalist angle and historiography—in other words, from within national ideology. That's a venture very few Romanian historians even attempt (and those who do—Lucian Boia, for instance—know the risks involved).

Does Mitu fall instead into the ideology of the opposing camp? Not at all. He positions himself above and beyond both competing nationalist ideologies. I almost said "beyond good and evil," but that would be a mistake—because Mitu's historical judgment is always moral: he consistently sides with the weak, as any well-meaning person—historian or otherwise—should.

So, whose side is Professor Mitu on? The Romanians' or the Hungarians'? His genial, generous answer: both, of course. In fact, Sorin Mitu openly embraces the identity of *homo transilvanicus*: a Romanian-Hungarian hybrid being, sympathizing with and emotionally attached to both sides of the linguistic and ideological divide; a Hungarian-Romanian who feels just as at home in Bucharest as in Budapest; someone who no longer buys into either Romanian or Hungarian nationalist mythology.

In the end, he is a professional historian in search of truth and balance, striving to escape the vicious circle of nationalist ideologies and the historical narratives they generate. In Romania—and I suspect in Hungary too—this kind of attitude is iconoclastic and, at a certain point—especially in the future—potentially dangerous.

And that's exactly why this book shatters the foundation of Romania's historical mythology. I'd place it alongside other monumental works that have shaken our local historiography in recent decades—*Myth and History in the Romanian Consciousness* (published the same year as Mitu's 1997 thesis; coincidence?) or Marius Turda's unsettling *In Search of the Perfect Romanian*. These are the books that stir things up, shake the bowl so thoroughly that nothing settles quite the same afterward.

I've always imagined Romanian historiography as a glass bowl filled with water, with a thick layer of sand at the bottom. Most history books, at best, manage to add a few extra grains of sand that settle gently beside

the rest. Truly great books, however, vigorously stir the entire bowl—kicking up the whole base layer and reconfiguring everything. This book is one of those.

And yet nationalist ideology and its attendant historiography also have a magnetic pull—like iron filings attracted to a magnet, they impose a specific order on what would otherwise be chaos. It's hard to say which of these opposing forces—disruption or order—will eventually prevail. Or whether one should prevail.

Which brings us, at last, to style. Writing style matters, because it shapes readability. We don't write just for our academic peers—we also write for an informed general public, right? And let's face it, a book of this size—one that takes both hands to hold—isn't likely to get read if it's written in a baroque style (no offense to anyone). Fortunately, that's not the case here.

If you've read any of Sorin Mitu's earlier books, you already know his prose: fluid, unpretentious, and highly readable. He's not just a great historian—as a writer, he's exceptional. Alongside Constanța Vintilă, he belongs to that blessed category of historians who actually write well. I've always envied them, and I'm not ashamed to admit it.

This volume is an erudite journey through a thousand years of history—from the Middle Ages all the way into the present—and even into the future, where, in a playful, three-part counterfactual scenario, we meet Sorin Mitu again in three different projections of how Romanian society—and the world—might evolve: a progressive paradise, a sovereigntist hell, or a vaguely defined purgatory.

A few months ago, when the book first appeared, any one of these possible outcomes still seemed plausible. Now? I'm not so sure... but the sovereigntist hell seems more likely. Still, I could be wrong... I hope I'm wrong.

And in the end, *Romanians and Hungarians* is, above all, a book about the self—a reflection, written in old age (forgive me, professor!), on one's personal life, the times one lived through, and the world in which one still lives. And how deeply human and comforting that vision is.

We each have something to learn from Sorin Mitu's story. The greatest achievement of both the book and the man who wrote it is this: that by reading it, by getting to know the author and connecting with him and his text, we come away—undoubtedly—better people.

Happy reading!

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Vlad POPOVICI
Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca
E-mail: vlad.popovici@ubbcluj.ro

Attempting to present Sorin Mitu's book to the public—the synthesis of a lifetime's work by one of the most renowned and influential Romanian historians of recent decades—can sometimes leave the reviewer with the disheartening impression of performing "román munka." In the end, after an intellectual marathon covering a millennium of interethnic relations, one finds that only a set of reading notes has emerged, reflecting deeply personal and subjective interests rather than the wealth and the thematic and interpretative diversity of the work itself. Then, what comes to mind is how even reputable historians have reviewed similarly vast works in exhaustive fashion, often with somewhat questionable results, leading to the conclusion that, ultimately, it is the diversity of opinions—rooted in the diversity of formative experiences—that powers knowledge creation, at least as long as it does not descend into the mire of exaggeration or pseudoscience.

Therefore, the present reading notes will unavoidably bear a deeply personal character. This is due not only to the inherent limits of condensing hundreds of thousands of words into about 2,500, but even more so because "Romanians and Hungarians" is a book that must be read—and will most likely be absorbed and internalized by most readers—in a personal register, through their own life experiences and interactions with Romanians, Hungarians, or merely with the broader imagological struggle between the representatives of these two ethnic groups.

For the potentially curious reader who stumbles upon this text before delving into the book itself, a few words regarding its structure and contents are in order. The work opens with an introduction in which the personal and professional roots of the author's endeavour intertwine with the methodological and historical foundations of his research. Perhaps its most provocative aspect, both for traditionalist historiography and the wider public, is the demonstration that, over time, even during the great and bloody armed clashes of the last two and a half centuries, Romanians and Hungarians inflicted far less harm upon each other (when considering both the chronological scope of these conflicts and the scale of human losses) than

the representatives of other classic historical conflict dyads, such as the Irish and English, the Russians and the Caucasian peoples, the French and Maghrebis, the French and Germans, or the French revolutionaries and the Catholic loyalists in the Vendée (equally French, one might say, though perhaps, at the time, they would not all have agreed to this ethnic label). The human losses of the Romanian-Hungarian armed conflicts, ranging from hundreds to thousands, are tragically eclipsed, even in the disputed territories, by the hundreds of thousands of Jews (many with mixed cultural and national identities, Hungarian or Romanian) and tens of thousands of Roma who were killed during the Holocaust.

The body of the analysis is organized chronologically into five parts, covering the Middle Ages and early modernity, the modern era, the interwar period, the communist period, and the post-1990 era. Each section comprises a varying number of thematic chapters, grouped in a stained-glass fashion that allows the author to build his argument by selecting those subjects for which the existence of sources (for earlier periods) or their selective use (from the nineteenth century onwards) make them most suitable for investigation. From "Genetic and Linguistic Profiles, Myths, and Cuisine," to "Popular Images: the Hungarian is a dog, the Romanian is a dog only if he has no pig" or "From the Wisdom of the Romanian People: Jokes about Hungarians," the arc traced by Sorin Mitu reveals how historical traumas and stereotypes—identifiable as early as the medieval period—are mirrored in a multitude of spheres, including the construction of national identities, reaching into both the modern and contemporary eras and manifesting even at the level of popular humour or opinion polls. There is, of course, a Conclusion, in which the author outlines three equally dystopian possible trajectories of Romanian-Hungarian relations until the end of the twenty-first century, each with its own darker or lighter facets (no spoilers!).

Yet, since my aim here is not to guide the reader step by step through the universe of Sorin Mitu's book, but merely to entice them to read it—or to revisit it, should they have done so already—I shall instead dwell on those threads that struck me as most relevant. And, in the spirit of the book, I will begin with a personal recollection.

My first shot in this imagological war occurred when I was seven years old, in the spring of 1990. At the time, the events of 20 March in Târgu Mureș / Marosvásárhely and their echoes in the Romanian media led to the unfortunate outcome whereby one of my female classmates in the second

grade, whose surname was Ungur (incidentally, a Romanian by every measure), became the target of intense bullying from the boys, for (pseudo-)ethnic reasons. Now, thirty-five years on, that shameful and foolish behaviour strikes me as stemming equally from the dynamics of gender interaction at a young age, but that does not negate the presence of the imagological component. It was a small "friendly fire" incident in a much larger war, which would probably have remained unknown to history had Sorin Mitu's work not prompted me to recall and record it in writing.

I made a point of introducing the previous paragraph, whose ego-historical nature is less specific to book presentations, because the book's main distinguishing feature is the admirable blend of the author's personal experience—often reflected through childhood and adulthood vignettes—and his vast professional expertise acquired over nearly four decades devoted to the study of Romanian-Hungarian interethnic relations. This interweaving is complemented by a remarkable delicacy of interpretive tact, a key ingredient that confers depth, authenticity, and analytical balance to the work.

Sorin Mitu frames his subject both in relation to the epistemic space at his disposal—bounded by the self-assumed limits of knowledge—and in relation to research initiatives that partially overlap with his own inquiry. He therefore does not claim to answer all the questions raised by the subject, whether they are purely scientific or ideologically infused (Who were the first in Transylvania? What was the proportion of Romanian nobles within the *Natio Hungarica*? Did Hungarians kill more Romanians, or vice versa?), on the one hand because the sources do not always allow the historian to formulate a response, and, on the other, because this is a work of imagology. From this vantage as a specialist in comparative imagology, Sorin Mitu observes, for example, how, as early as the sixteenth century, the discourse of a given author changes according to circumstances and frustrations; how contemporary authors refer to the same population sometimes from an ethnic perspective, sometimes from a social position; or how differently the imagologically competing ethnic groups (Romanians and Szeklers) end up being accused of the same reprehensible acts (101–102). Sorin Mitu works with sources without granting any one of them absolute authority, remaining ever attentive to the nuances required by others, according to the questions posed by historians: "only these [solid truths] are solid insofar as we are aware of the precise limits within which our cognitive endeavour unfolds. Including, therefore, the slices we make." (73)

Staying within the realm of method, one of the red threads running through the entire work is the constant analysis of the perspectives of the two historiographies on various historical events, as well as the recurrent and somewhat bitter conclusion that the dialogue between them has not always been complete or fruitful, but has often turned into either a fierce battle or a dialogue of the deaf. However, Mitu notes that, regarding topics sensitive from the perspective of history interwoven with Hungarians, Romanian historiography has consistently chosen to ignore even indigenous sources (the Hungarian Chronicle, the Cantacuzino Chronicle) and the nonconformist theories of recent Romanian works (Neagu Djuvara) when these did not correspond to the official or self-imposed line. Moreover, to this day, it insists on glossing over more delicate moments, such as the Romanian-Hungarian cooperation of late 1918 and even the pro-Hungarian stance of some Romanian politicians of the time. Conversely, the historiographical aporia "oppressed but prosperous" flourished, especially in the historiography of the nineteenth-century national movement, insidiously nourishing another socio-historiographical myth, tenaciously propagated through the mass media, that the treatment of ethnic minorities in Romania is the most liberal in Europe.

Another red thread of the book is the constant presence, in the construction of reciprocal images, of individual and collective frustration and complexes, sometimes highlighted by the author, sometimes emerging naturally from dozens of pages of analysis. Mitu is fully aware of this inescapable component of imagological studies. "But what do you do when the social phenomena you are studying are merely emotions?" (259), he asks semi-rhetorically, attempting to resolve the issue through a methodologically balanced position. Is the history of Romanian-Hungarian relations a history of emotions? Most likely, YES; whatever analytical model might be applied to this ethnic dyad in Central Europe, the matter of psychological—especially collective—weight must always be taken into consideration.

It is indicative, in this respect, that the negative image of Romanians in Hungarian writings becomes increasingly visible in the sixteenth century, against a backdrop of general frustration and the tensions that followed the Battle of Mohács (*Több is veszett Mohácsnál*!). From there, to the Trianon and further, up to March 20, 1990 or even the debates over the skating rink near the statue of Matthias Corvinus in Cluj's Union Square, the entire history of the interaction between the two peoples—especially interactions mediated

by the press, politicians, or historians—seems to be one of frustration. The major milestones along this road are well known, and Sorin Mitu discusses or at least touches on each: 1784, 1848–1849, 1867, 1918–1919, 1940, 1944, 1956, 1990, and the story continues, according to the conclusions each reader chooses among those proposed by the author. The imagological war of a thousand years can thus always be reread through the lens of an emotional history—of complexes, frustrations, fleeting impulses that, collectively, rarely seem positive.

Naturally, it is difficult to read about Romanians, Hungarians, their interactions, and reciprocal ethnic images without referring to other works addressing the subject. In this regard, reading Sorin Mitu's book offers the opportunity to observe, on a much broader geographical and chronological scale, using different types of sources and methodological tools, dynamics similar to those analysed by Rogers Brubaker in his research focused on the Cluj urban microcosm. In fact, Mitu dedicates a subchapter to everyday ethnicity (445–455) and an entire chapter to the special situation of Cluj/Kolozsvár (chapter 20). The conclusions are not perfectly identical—nor could they be, as the research questions differ—but they exhibit striking similarities, sufficiently notable to be considered complementary. Even though Brubaker refers primarily to the everyday social reality, while Mitu uses factual material largely to study reciprocal imagology, both studies indicate that ethnicity, its assumption, and the derivatives of identity choices in daily life are fluid aspects, often overestimated, hard to fit neatly or maintain, in the long term, within the strict boundaries of the ethnic cubicles so beloved by nationalists and top-down nationalism.

Without question, the most entertaining part of the book, for the general public and probably for most historians, is the one that discusses the ethnic jokes (chapter 21). From the "good old days" when young men would climb into girls' windows, to the omnipresent jokes about blondes, the anthropological universe of popular humour offers the author an endless source of ethnic images drawn from the essence of folk wisdom, which serve only to confirm—with a more colourful lexicon and through the use of trivial or even obscene expressions—the results obtained from analysing traditional historical sources and historiography. One of these findings is of particular interest to us as historians, but also as Romanians and as people, as it would certainly rank among the book's key takeaways (and of Sorin Mitu's life's work). It concerns the asymmetry in the mutual interest of the two ethnic

groups, reflected from jokes to historical writing: while Romanians have made Hungarians the primary representative of ethnic otherness and strive to maintain the intensity of the imagological struggle of the past millennium, Hungarians spread their attention more evenly among the former ethnic groups within the Kingdom of Hungary and other European nations. This, of course, does not make the jokes any less enjoyable (or less trivial), and the fact that the author chose to include this source in the imagological repertoire presented is commendable, and hopefully will serve as an example for future Romanian practitioners of comparative imagology.

At the end of its 550 pages of text, plus roughly 50 pages of notes and bibliography, Sorin Mitu's "Romanians and Hungarians" stands out both as an impressive fresco of comparative imagology with a historical grounding and as an exercise in intellectual probity that explores the subtleties of interethnic relations through a wide array of tools. The balance between analytical rigor and personal empathy enables the author to recast a theme often fraught with tension into fertile ground for critical reflection and authentic dialogue. The volume not only offers a multitude of answers, but also highlights those questions with no definitive solutions, urging the reader to reconsider both the old and the contemporary fissures, as well as to cultivate mutual understanding in a society rooted in a fabric of myths, emotions, and often fragmentary histories.