

In memoriam



Daniel Barbu (1957-2024)

With the death of Daniel Barbu, Romanian culture has lost one of its most creative, outside of the box thinkers, and iconoclastic scholars. The holder of three doctorates (in history, philosophy, and theology), he was at home in humane studies across the board and wherever he turned his attention, one could anticipate unexpectedly and often inconvenient insights. Of course, as is the case with non-conformist thinkers, this often led to controversy and hostility, especially in a Romanian intellectual climate that prides itself on a *spiritul critic* tradition that is more often observed in the breach than in actuality.

Born in 1957, Daniel Barbu graduated from the Academia de Arte in București in 1980.

He later obtained doctorates in History (Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca), Philosophy (Universitatea din București), and, after studies at the Université de Fribourg in Switzerland, in Theology (also from Universitatea din București).

He was a curator at the Muzeul Satului in București in 1980, and then at the Muzeul National de Istorie a României from 1981 to 1986. From 1987 to 1998 he was a researcher at the Institutul de Studii Sud-Est Europene, taught Political Science at the Universitatea din București from 1991 to 2020 (where he founded the department and was also twice department head). His final university appointment, beginning in 2020, was as a professor in Social Theology at the Roman-Catholic theological faculty at the Universitatea din București where he taught political theology, social theology, and church history. Over the years he also held a profuse number of professional appointments in Romania; at numerous

foreign institutions, including the *Pontificio Istituto Orientale* in Rome, the *École des Hautes Études* in Paris, and the University of Pittsburgh; as well as on a variety of journals and committees. He also gave dozens of lectures at universities across Europe and America. Barbu was also active in politics, serving in the Romanian Senate (2012-2016) and as Minister of Culture (2012-2013) among other functions.

Daniel Barbu's publications numbered over 400 articles in scholarly journals, books, and mass circulation cultural outlets; 13 books as well as editing or co-editing a diverse number of other volumes. He began his career as a medieval art historian, impressing academia from the start with his erudition and revisionist spirit.¹ Gradually, his interests shifted to Byzantine politics² and eventually to 19th and 20th century Romanian political culture. Mentored intellectually in this evolution by Alexandru Duțu and Valentin Al. Georgescu, Barbu came to see that the issue of political culture was one that transcended the traditional boundaries of Romanian history, having its beginning influences in the earliest Romanian culture of Moldova and Țara Românească and persisting right down to the present. This was clearly manifested in his *Bizanț contra Bizanț*³ and an edited companion volume, *Firea românilor*.⁴

Daniel Barbu's transition to modern and contemporary Romanian history was clearly outlined in what may still be his best political book: *Șapte teme de politică românească*.⁵ These themes were: modernization, Communism, revolution, constitutionalism, Christian democracy, alternation, and transition. It is an essential work on the short list of required books dealing with modern Romanian history and development.

Barbu's last books included a study of Christians in modern political life,⁶ a caustic memoir of his time in politics, 2012-2016,⁷ and *Pia libertas*,⁸ his most

¹ *Inter alia*, in a series of provocative articles and a book on *Pictura murală din Țara Românească în sec. XIV*, București, Editura Meridiane, 1986. It is unfortunate that his 1991 doctoral thesis on Romanian-Venetian art remained unpublished.

² Daniel Barbu, *Byzance, Rome et les Roumains. Essais sur la production politique de la foi au Moyen Âge*, București, Editura Babel, 1998, a collection of his articles on art, religion, and politics.

³ Idem, *Bizanț contra Bizanț*, București, Editura Nemira, 2001.

⁴ Daniel Barbu (ed.), *Firea românilor*, București, Editura Nemira, 2000, with contributions by Mihaela Czobor-Lupp, Cristian Preda, and Alexandra Ionescu. Other books along these lines included Daniel Barbu, *Republica absentă. Politică și societate în România postcomunistă*, București, Editura Nemira, 1999; idem, *Politica pentru barbari*, București, Editura Nemira, 2005; idem, *Indistincția. O cronică a sfârșitului politicii românești*, București, Editura Art, 2010.

⁵ Daniel Barbu, *Șapte teme de politică românească*, București, Editura Antet, 1997.

⁶ Idem, *Au cetățenii suflet? O teologie politică a societăților post-seculare*, București, Editura Vremea, 2016. See also his important contribution, *Invizibilitatea politică a omului evanghelic*, to Dorin Dobrințu and Dănuț Mănăstireanu (eds.), *Omul evanghelic. O explorare a comunităților protestante românești*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2018, p. 641-656.

⁷ Daniel Barbu, *Între timp. Amintiri din casa Cezarului*, București, Editura Litera, 2017.

⁸ Idem, *Pia libertas. Despre formele politice ale libertății creștine*, București, Editura Vremea, 2023.

profound consideration of “the purpose of the Christian faith in the life of the societies in which it is professed.” Ranging widely over Western history, theology, philosophy, and scholarship, this deeply learned work merits translation into a language of world circulation.

Daniel Barbu will be deeply missed, not only for his wide ranging and internationally informed scholarship, but also for his commitment to saying and writing what he thought, regardless of the consequences. Să se odihnească în pace!

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