

**Nubar Hampartumian**  
**(4 December 1927–17 November 2013)**  
**Recovering an unjustly forgotten biography**

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**Abstract:** Based on new archival and oral sources, this paper attempts to reconstitute the main elements of the academic biography of the Classical archaeologist and Byzantine numismatist Nubar Hampartumian, punctuated with details of key moments of his personal life that help explain both his scientific achievements and failures. The paper is also intended to be a homage paid to his memory ten years after his demise. A collection of *testimonia* about Nubar Hampartumian and a list of his published works are appended, too.

**Keywords:** archaeology, Armenians, biography, Birmingham, historiography, Nubar Hampartumian, numismatics, Histria, Istros, Romania, United Kingdom

In November 2013, Nubar Hampartumian, 85 years old, passed away in the United Kingdom while working on his memories of the ancient site of Histria on the occasion of the centennial celebration of the archaeological research of the city.<sup>1</sup> Although he attempted to preserve his connections with Romania as close as possible after his emigration in 1975, by paying numerous visits and frequently meeting friends and former colleagues both in Bucharest and Histria, at his death, he was mostly forgotten in the Romanian archaeological and numismatic milieu. Quite tellingly, only one short obituary was published then in *Pontica* journal, by Irina Nastasi (Sodoleanu),<sup>2</sup> who commendably strived to reconstitute the main aspects of his life and career from scratch.

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<sup>1</sup> See the unfinished paper Hampartumian, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Nastasi, 2014. A second obituary, with similar biographical imprecisions, was published in England: Dunn, 2013.



Fig. 1. Nubar Hampartumian (1927–2013)

Ten years after Nubar Hampartumian's death, it is an appropriate occasion to look back on his academic activity and fill in the existing biographical gaps. Such an attempt is more convenient than ever as during a project<sup>3</sup> where I carried out research on the historiographic connections between Romania and Armenia I was lucky enough to discover a biographic source of great value that sheds light on many issues left unresolved both in the Histrian *vulgata* and the history of Romanian archaeology in general: the files of Nubar Hampartumian preserved in the archives of the Romanian communist secret police, the feared Securitate.

The greatest part of the data used in this attempt to recover the memory of Nubar Hampartumian is extracted from these files, whose digital copies are now preserved at the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS) and in the personal archives of Nubar Hampartumian's daughter and me. Providing precise references for each piece of information extracted from the Securitate archives – comprising hundreds of documents in seven different files<sup>4</sup> – would exceed the nature and scope of this paper. Suffice it to

<sup>3</sup> This research has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement No. 734645, "Knowledge Exchange and Academic Cultures in the Humanities. Europe and the Black Sea Region".

<sup>4</sup> ACNSAS, Rețea fonds, file 0461562, vols. 1 and 2; Rețea fonds, file 0202481; SIE fonds, file 0035658; Informativ fonds, file 0771630; Informativ fonds, file 0061057, vol. 123; Informativ fonds, file 0163374, vols. 1 and 2; Penal fonds, file 0001536, vols. 1, 4, 5 and 10.

say that the large majority of the data included in this work is drawn from three autobiographies required to Nubar Hamparțumian by the Securitate officers, from his reports regarding his personal situation, from syntheses about him written by the same officers and other structures of the ministry of internal affairs.<sup>5</sup> Special references are made in the footnotes to these documents and other papers in the files only when confusing or contentious issues are tackled.

The information from the Securitate archives is supplemented with certain documents from Nubar Hamparțumian's personal archives, kindly provided by Sylvia Hamparțumian, one of his daughters, and with the memories shared with me during an interview by the archaeologist Dumitru Vâlceanu (b. 1934),<sup>6</sup> colleague of Nubar Hamparțumian at the Institute of Archaeology of Bucharest until 1975, when both left Romania on the same day, the former to Italy and then the United States, the latter to the United Kingdom. I am indebted to both for their support.

Part of the biographical information presented in this paper was already included in an article examining Hamparțumian's relationship with the Securitate both as a victim and an informant.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, in the following, I will focus on his academic career and his personal life, hoping that by the recovery of his biography, his research on the Late Roman archaeology and numismatics of the Lower Danube region and particularly of Histria will be better known, assessed and put to use in future studies.

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Nubar Hamparțumian was born in Buzău as the second child of two impoverished Armenian immigrants, Apet Hamparțumian (1892–1968) and Florica Kirkorian (1895–1982), who had left their home district of Kemah, in the Ottoman Empire, in their early youth or childhood, just a few years before the great massacres of 1915. His father ran the coffee shop „La Brazilia” in the central square of the city and, since 1938, he spent his childhood between his courses at the „Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu” High School, the best in Buzău, and the shop, where he helped his father. The family, including his elder sister, Vartanuș Sylvia (1922–2017), moved to Bucharest after the shop and the house they rented in Buzău were burnt down during the fierce German-Soviet

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<sup>5</sup> E.g. Autobiography, June 1953: ACNSAS, Rețea fonds, file 0202481, ff. 20–21; Autobiography, 27 February 1960, ACNSAS, Rețea fonds, file 0461562, vol. 1, ff. 16–23; Autobiography, 5 January 1977: ACNSAS, SIE fonds, file 0035658, ff. 51–52, etc. Nonetheless, some of the information in these documents should be cautiously used, as explained in Iancu 2022, p. 53, n. 133–134 and below, n. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Vâlceanu, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Iancu, 2020.

fighting of 27–28 August 1944 that also led to the destruction of the nearby emblematic City Hall.

In Bucharest, the Hamparțumians started over with the help of the local Armenian community. They earned their living from a new coffee shop opened at 97 Edgar Quinet Street, close to Casa Capșa, paying a small annual fee of 8000 lei,<sup>8</sup> and they lived in a house at the address 15 Dimitrie Onciul Street, close to the Armenian neighbourhood. Hamparțumian graduated the last two grades at the nearby “Mihai Viteazul” High School between 1944 and 1946, but failed to get into the Polytechnic University and started BA studies in Mathematics. However, in 1947 he quit and got into the Faculty of History and started studying assiduously archaeology. He wrote in June 1953: „There I found my true way”.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, in July 1951, at his graduation, he passed the state exam fourth out of 86 candidates, with 8.5 out of 10.

In the same summer, he took part for the first time in archaeological excavations at the Greek city of Histria, the site which decisively marked his entire academic career. „For the manner he worked there”,<sup>10</sup> on 15 September 1951, he was appointed assistant at the recently re-established Regional Museum of Constanța, which had been relocated since 1948 in the annex of the Casino, at 16 Februarie Street (nowadays the Aquarium of Constanța). After only a few months, he was promoted to director<sup>11</sup> and assigned the task of organizing the permanent exhibition of the museum, which opened on 1 May 1952 and enjoyed great success: the target of visitors established for the whole year was reached in only one month and a half. Various other curatorial tasks were assigned to Hamparțumian, according to the preserved work plan for 1952, which he was able to carry out successfully: restoration of the exhibited objects, recovery of artefacts discovered in Dobrudja that had

<sup>8</sup> This piece of data originates from a notebook listing the students at the general course of Ancient History of 1950, preserved in the personal archives of Ion Barnea. I am indebted to Iuliana Barnea for notifying me about it.

<sup>9</sup> ACNSAS, Rețea fonds, file 0202481, f. 21.

<sup>10</sup> ACNSAS, Rețea fonds, file 0202481, f. 21.

<sup>11</sup> This date cannot be reconstituted with certainty: in the autobiography of 1953, Hamparțumian declared that he was appointed director after one month, in the autobiography of 1960 and in his interrogation of June 1953 (ACNSAS, Penal fonds, file P0001536, f. 51), after three months, in his letter of 24 May 1979 to the staff of the Museum of Constanța, on 15 November 1952 (thus, after two months). Neither the date of his dismissal from the museum is clear: while the letter of 1979 mentions the date of 20 September 1953, several documents in ACNSAS, Rețea fonds, file 0202481 variously point to different earlier dates in August or September 1953. The letter is cited in Covacef *et al.*, 1979, p. 33, n. 126.

been moved to the National Museum of Antiquities in Bucharest, acquisition of new objects from various villages in Dobrudja, making the inventory of the artefacts and the books in the museum's library.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, he continued his archaeological work at Histria, being mentioned for the first time as a team member in the report dealing with the excavations conducted in 1952.

All the testimonies up to this moment point out to a rather lonely, silent, and hard-working student, presumably a result of his modest social standing and precarious ethnic situation, as before the Second World War, most of the Armenians in Romania were stateless persons holding the so-called Nansen passports. He displayed the same character and consuming love for history and archaeology during his fruitful stay at Constanța: living in a small room in the museum, he used to spend a lot of time studying and only rarely going out to the city, saving money to support his family as his father had retired from trade in 1951.<sup>13</sup>

However, this promising start was shattered on 2 June 1953 when he was arrested for joining during college a small clandestine extreme-right youth group, a so-called Legionary Blood Brotherhood (Frăție de Cruce). For his involvement in reading legionary books and providing ridiculously small amounts of money and food for the families of the Legion's imprisoned members, he was charged with conspiracy against the social order and sentenced to three years of detention. He spent only two in jail, being released on 6 October 1955 due to the decree of pardon no. 421/1955.

As shown by the list of people who could provide references on him, appended to the autobiography of June 1953, his primary connections belonged to the academic milieu of the University of Bucharest, specifically professors and colleagues involved in classical archaeology and ancient history, working at that time at Histria: Emil Condurachi, Iorgu Stoian, Dionisie Pippidi, Dumitru Berciu, Sebastian Morintz, Petre Alexandrescu, as well as Gheorghe Popilian, Ion Dragomir, Nicolae Ciachir.

He was particularly close to Emil Condurachi, very influential at that time as director of the National Museum of Antiquities and member of the Academy (corresponding – 1948; full – 1955), who might have helped him to get director of the Museum of Constanța. Condurachi did not cease to support Hamparțumian during his trial and imprisonment: he positively testified as a witness at the tribunal and gave Hamparțumian his leather jacket to wear

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<sup>12</sup> Covacef *et al.*, 1979, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> ACNSAS, Rețea fonds, file 0202481, f. 8.

in detention.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, after Hamparțumian earned his living for a year as a seller and clerk for a cooperative in Chitila, Condurachi brought him in September 1956 to the newly founded Institute of Archaeology of Bucharest to work as a documentarian on fixed-term contracts.

First, he worked in the Numismatics department of the Institute (1956–1960), led at that time by Bucur Mitrea, where he developed his first main specialization, the study of Late Roman and Byzantine coins, weights, and seals, and published his first papers in *Studii și cercetări de numismatică*, in 1958 and 1960. At the same time, he resumed participation in the excavations at Histria, where he was in charge of the Roman numismatics. At the request of Emil Condurachi, he also took the responsibility of running the current administration of the site during excavations. Since 1960, along with the architect Dinu Theodorescu, he supervised the archaeological research at the Late Roman enclosure wall, where the Direction of the Historical Monuments (DMI) undertook restoration. Since 1961, he was also in charge of the excavations in the Late Roman necropolis in the Basilica *extra muros* sector, which brought him closer to the study of Roman and Byzantine art and religion, his second main specialization. Consequently, he was transferred first to the Museum Department of the Institute of Archaeology and finally, in 1965, started working as a researcher in the Department of Greek-Roman Antiquities and Archaeology.<sup>15</sup> However, he was still plagued by his troubled past: getting a permanent position as a senior documentarian in the summer of 1961 was fraught with objections from the Party Committee of the Academy.<sup>16</sup>

Overall, the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s were a period of fruitful academic activity for Nubar Hamparțumian, with numerous contributions on the numismatics of Histria, culminating with his study on the Roman coins published in 1973 in the third volume of the monograph series devoted to the site and with an ever-growing focus on the religious transition from paganism to Christianity and the reflection of religious beliefs in art. His geographical areas of interest expanded as well, with punctual collaborations for small-scale excavations and the study of objects from sites from all over southern Romania, such as Oinac, in Giurgiu County, Sânbotin, Râureni and Buridava, in Vâlcea county, or the Iron Gates, resulting in short preliminary

<sup>14</sup> Vâlceanu, 2021. Partial confirmation in ACNSAS, Informativ fonds, file 0163374\_001, f. 21 and in ACNSAS, Penal fonds, file 0001536, vol. 4, f. 211.

<sup>15</sup> ACNSAS, Rețea fonds, file 0461562, f. 48, report delivered on 23 February 1973 by Vladimir Dumitrescu, head of the Museum Department.

<sup>16</sup> Conclusion based on Constantinescu, 2001–2002, p. 203 and ACNSAS, Rețea fonds, file 0461562, f. 42–43.

reports and articles. A more important site was Sucidava (Celeiu, Olt County), where Hamparțumian led excavations in the Roman necropolis of the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century AD for two consecutive years, in 1966 and 1967. As a consequence, he also started a Ph.D. thesis at the Institute of Archaeology of Bucharest on the captivating and highly relevant topic of the end of the Roman-Byzantine domination on the Lower Danube, under the supervision of Ion Barnea, which he was not able to complete as he left Romania in August 1975.

All these academic accomplishments were all the more noteworthy as Hamparțumian was haunted again by problems with the Securitate and justice. First, in 1960, he was briefly arrested as it was discovered that he had nurtured legionary sympathies not only in 1948–1949 but also in 1950–1951. Under the deceptive threat that he would be thrown once more in jail (it was legally impossible as he had already served a sentence for the same charges), he was forced to sign a collaboration agreement on 27 February 1960 and was assigned the tasks of providing information on his former legionary mates from college and prison, as well as on his colleagues in the Institute of Archaeology who had previously been charged or convicted for extreme-right views and actions: Vladimir Dumitrescu, Radu Ciuceanu, Vasile Boroneanț, Constantin Ionescu-Cârligel. The successive reports of his handling officers show that after a brief period of dutiful collaboration with the Securitate at the beginning, his activity became much less satisfactory, due both to the objective fact that he did not interact meaningfully with most of the targeted people and to his subjective decision to passively resist the orders by finding excuses for his ineffectiveness.<sup>17</sup> It is relevant that apparently none of his colleagues ever suspected that he was an informant of the Securitate.<sup>18</sup>

Second, in 1969 he received a six-month prison sentence for embezzling 6945.50 lei during his administration at Histria in 1965. The correspondence between the Economic Police and the Securitate<sup>19</sup> confirms what most of his colleagues maintained afterward without any supporting documents;<sup>20</sup> Hamparțumian simply acted as the unwilling middleman of the director Emil Condurachi and had to suffer alone all the consequences as the latter was not

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<sup>17</sup> Iancu, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Petre Alexandrescu, who in his memoirs (Alexandrescu, 2022) was keen on assessing which archaeologists collaborated with the Securitate and usually provided right assessments, does not surmise any connection between Hamparțumian and the communist secret police.

<sup>19</sup> ACNSAS, Rețea fonds, file 0461562, ff. 64–67; f. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Vâlceanu, 2021; Alexandrescu, 2022, pp. 157–158; ACNSAS, SIE fonds, file 0035658, f. 102, f. 109.

prosecuted due to his connections to the higher echelons of the Communist Party. Nevertheless, he was early released after three months spent in prison and was promptly hired back at the Institute of Archaeology, on 1 October 1970,<sup>21</sup> by Dionisie M. Pippidi, the director who succeeded Emil Condurachi.<sup>22</sup>

Another controversial biographical element is the reason why he signed the greatest part of his papers up to his emigration in 1975 (but not all!) as “H. Nubar”, instead of “N. Hamparțumian”.<sup>23</sup> He seemingly maintained in the United Kingdom that his refusal to join the Communist Party was the reason why this occurred.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, the informant “C. Marinescu”, who can reliably be recognized as Virgil Cândea, confusedly reported on 26 December 1977 that “following his release from prison [in 1970], he was reintegrated into the Institute of Archaeology, but without the right to sign his own scientific works”.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, there is no strong evidence in Hamparțumian’s Securitate files to support the assumption of a politically imposed restriction. As Dumitru Vâlceanu rightly observed, no other colleagues in the Institute of Archaeology faced the same treatment, despite being far more staunch in their opposition to the Party: even Vladimir Dumitrescu, a former legionary dignitary who was imprisoned between 1952 and 1955 and whose monograph on the prehistoric site of Hăbășești was published in 1954 without his agreement under the name „D. Vlad”, was allowed immediately after his release to sign his works with his name.<sup>26</sup> One way to reconcile all these conflicting accounts would be to assume that Hamparțumian started using the nom de plume “H. Nubar” as the result of a temporary politically-motivated restriction in the 1950s and then voluntarily stuck to it in most of the works he published in Romania.

However, Hamparțumian managed to turn the detrimental events in his favour. In 1972, he met at Histria the British sculptor and painter Anthea

<sup>21</sup> ACNSAS, SIE fonds, file 0035658, f. 51.

<sup>22</sup> ACNSAS, SIE fonds, file 0035658, f. 109, report delivered on 3 February 1978 by the informant “Andrei”, whose identity I could not establish. Emil Condurachi resigned in June 1970 and Dionisie M. Pippidi was formally appointed director on 7 January 1971, see Constantinescu, 2001–2002, p. 210.

<sup>23</sup> See below the list of his works.

<sup>24</sup> Dunn, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> The identification of “C. Marinescu” with Virgil Cândea is based on the handwriting of the report (ACNSAS, SIE fonds, file 0035658, f. 102–103) and the references to the Cultural Association “Romania” which he led as secretary between 1972 and 1990. Without any doubt, Cândea confuses Hamparțumian’s two terms in prison, since he was unaware of the former: there would have been no reason for the interdiction in the 1970s after a penal sentence without any political ground.

<sup>26</sup> Vâlceanu, 2021.



Priscilla Frederica Alley, born Oswell (1927–1993), who was first married to Roland Alley, keeper of the Tate Modern collection. He was able to marry her in January 1975 and to move to the United Kingdom on 27 August 1975, only after he was officially granted permission by the State Council of Romania, probably based on his statements that he was eager to keep his Romanian citizenship and to continue abroad his work as an agent of the Securitate. Although in the first place the Foreign Intelligence Department did not show interest in him,<sup>27</sup> as the regime ardently desired to improve his standing among the Western states, the Securitate reactivated him on 31 May 1976 and positively appreciated his activity up to 1980 – when he apparently dropped contact with his handlers – even though it consisted only of common academic undertakings.<sup>28</sup>

Hamparțumian's beginnings in the UK were tough. In the first few months in London, he washed dishes at a bank canteen and assisted in setting up art exhibitions. Additionally, his relationship with his wife deteriorated rapidly, leading to their break up and eventually to divorce in 1979. He even considered returning to Romania, and only the advice and the money lent from an Armenian friend who lived in Paris made him change his decision.<sup>29</sup> However, through hard work and a remarkable ability to use the few feeble connections he had in the first place, he managed to avoid the bleak fate of many other emigrated intellectuals who never reached in the West the same professional position and social standing they had had in Romania.<sup>30</sup>

He started as a freelance translator of Romanian archaeological monographs for the British Archaeological Reports supplementary/international series: no less than eleven books written by Romanian scholars were thus published in the United Kingdom from 1976 to 1982. He was also a part-time lecturer in archaeology at Croydon College of Art and Technology between 1976 and 1978 and a part-time special assistant at the Department of Coins and Medals of the British Museum between 1977 and 1981, where he got hired on the recommendation of his older colleague from Histria, Gabriella Bordenache Battaglia, a good friend of the director's wife.<sup>31</sup> In 1978, with support from

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<sup>27</sup> ACNSAS, Rețea fonds, file 0461562, f. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Iancu, 2020, p. 56. The formal decision to remove him as an informant is dated 27 October 1983.

<sup>29</sup> Vâlceanu, 2021.

<sup>30</sup> On the hardships faced by the Romanian intellectuals who emigrated during the communist period, see Alexandrescu, 2022, p. 267–273. Surprisingly enough, he did not mention the case of Nubar Hamparțumian.

<sup>31</sup> Vâlceanu, 2021.

Anthony Bryer, founder of the Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman, and Modern Greek Studies at the University of Birmingham, whom he met at the British Museum, he started holding lectures at Birmingham and, one year later, finally got a permanent job as Keeper of Coins at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, that offered him “exceptional prospects” as he confessed in a letter to his sister on 3 July 1979.<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately for him, because of financial reasons and his move from London, he had to withdraw in the same year from a Ph.D. started in 1977 at the Department of Classics of King’s College, under the supervision of Averil Cameron, on the topic “Relations between the Byzantines and the Barbarians on the Lower Danube in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries”.

Even without a Ph.D. title, he quickly became highly appreciated in the British academic milieu, constantly attending symposiums and conferences along with the most reputed Western byzantinologists and joining the Royal Numismatic Society and the Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies. Moreover, in 1980, he was elected a member of the British National Committee of the International Association of Byzantine Studies.

His private life thrived as well. In 1978 he met Jane Isaac (1947–1992), archivist-in-charge at the Lichfield Joint Record Office and secretary of the Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society, whom he married in 1979. He moved with his wife to Lichfield, near Birmingham, and had two daughters, Amy (b. 1980) and Sylvia (b. 1981). In August 1980, he got British citizenship but he did not renounce Romanian citizenship. In fact, ever since he moved to the UK, he has visited Romania almost annually, since 1978, together with his wife, Jane, and afterward with his daughters, too.

In terms of publications, his first few years in the UK were particularly fruitful. He was able to capitalize on much of his previous work from Romania, publishing articles about the finds in Histria, Sucidava, Pietroasa, Apahida, and Concești in collective volumes along with reputed scholars such as Vladimir Blavatsky, Friedrich Karl Dörner, Warren Treadgold, Margaret Mullett and Averil Cameron. Supported by Dionisie M. Pippidi, he also published in 1979 in the prestigious collection “Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l’Empire romain” (EPRO) from Leiden his important catalogue of finds depicting the Thracian horseman, which he assembled as a member of the Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest and revised for publication in London.

Later he published less and focused more on his curatorial work at the Barber Institute, which involved re-cataloguing its numismatic collection,

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<sup>32</sup> ACNSAS, Informativ fonds, 0163374, vol. I, f. 137.

over 15000 Roman and Byzantine coins,<sup>33</sup> assisting scholars and students interested in Roman and Byzantine numismatics and organizing numerous exhibitions which gained wide appreciation. The catalogue “Coinage of the Twelve Caesars”, published in 1993 with Eric Taylor, serves as a steadfast example of his true aptitude in this area.

Not even the terrible loss of his wife in a car crash on 17 September 1992 and his retirement at the age of 71 in 1999 distanced him from his lifelong passion for numismatics and archaeology. His last written thoughts were directed towards “the enchanted city of Histria”.<sup>34</sup>

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I end this recovered biography other than is usual in standard obituaries and biographical works with an array of memories and assessments of Nubar Hamparțumian, collected from various sources and contexts.

*Emil Condurachi, Romanian ancient historian and classical archaeologist, professor at the University of Bucharest and head of the excavations at Histria, testimony made in the courtroom on 12 January 1954 (ACNSAS, Penal fonds, 0001536 file, f. 211):*

“I know the defendant, I am not his relative and not in conflict with him.

I have known Hamparțumian since 1947–1951 and sought to follow his evolution up to 1953, as he was part of my Section.

In his first year, he was shy, but in the second and third years, he stood out as he chose a more difficult Section.

I know him less from a political point of view, he was not a member of the UTM [the Union of Working Youth].

As a student, I know him as a good element. From private talks, I noticed that in 1950 he started to have a clearer picture concerning the Marxist science. He admitted to me that he could make use of the Marxist science in history but without any conclusions for his private life.

In his last year, these misunderstandings started to be rectified. I did not see any hesitations neither toward work, nor toward the right interpretations.

After [unreadable] 1952, after he was appointed director of the Museum of Constanța, with his shy character he was able to accomplish better things than others who were much livelier.

I am surprised that he is today in the dock.

He was positively remarked in the professional group which he belonged to.”

<sup>33</sup> Part of his work was turned to good account in Kent, 1985, where Hamparțumian’s contribution is acknowledged.

<sup>34</sup> Hamparțumian, 2014, p. 17.

*Gabriella Bordenache Battaglia, Italian-Romanian classical archaeologist, older colleague at Histria, letter from Rome to Romanian classical archaeologist Petre Alexandrescu, 13 May 1972 (the personal archives of Petre Alexandrescu):*

“For the enclosure wall of Pârvan will Nubar alone be enough? He is smart and has a good knowledge of the issue, but he is a bit disorderly, slow; would he grasp and comprehend all the facets displayed by the beautiful late ancient enclosure wall?”

*Petre Alexandrescu, memories recorded on audio tape between 2002 and 2006, published posthumously in “Continutul scufundat. Conversații despre trecut”, edition supervised by Vlad Alexandrescu, Iași, 2022, p. 237:*

“He was an Armenian, who was a former colleague of mine in college, mediocre, kind, nice, and *yesman*, and he accepted this [to run the current administration of the site]”.

*Jonathan Shea, British byzantinologist, acknowledgment in his unpublished PhD thesis, “The Late Byzantine city: social, economic and institutional profile”, defended at the University of Birmingham in June 2010:*

“My friend Nubar Hampartumian has been a constant source of encouragement, political discussions, amusing lunches and advice about numismatics, life in general and everything in between.”

*Lucian Herscovici, Israeli modern historian, born in Romania, online comment of 12 October 2012 to the media article Vartan Arachelian, „La o aniversare – Republica Armenia”, 9 October 2012, <https://acum.tv/articol/59113/>, accessed August 2023:*

“I remember a discussion I had with an elder friend, holding a Ph.D. in history and archaeology, Nubar Hampartumian, from Bucharest (I have not heard anything about him for a long time, I hope he is still living). It was in 1971. He said (I quote from memory): „You, the Jews, you were lucky, a state was established for you. We, the Armenians, on the other hand...”. I replied, without knowing too much at that time (I was a youngster) that there is an Armenian state, Soviet Armenia. He replied that this is only part of Armenia and above all, that it is part of the USSR.”

*Zoe Petre, Romanian ancient historian and classical philologist, memories in the paper “Fantoma lui Pârvan / Le fantôme de Pârvan”, MCA n.s. 10, 2014, p. 21:*

“Nubar Hamparțumian, full of humour despite his youth broken in prison, a passionate numismatist and always eager to give a hand to a colleague.”

*Dumitru Vâlceanu, Romanian classical archaeologist, telephonic interview given to the author on 12 July 2021:*

“Nubar was not a talkative person. He rarely talked about his family and his origins. [...] He was not interested in politics. He never expressed anti-Communist positions. Besides the fact that he was taciturn, he was wise enough for those times not to speak his mind, as there were snitches everywhere. [...] Although he was taciturn, he was easily approachable. He had good humour. He was an easy-going person. He was nice. You could easily establish good relations with him. [...]

He was first and foremost a numismatist, a numismatist of high qualification. [...]

He had good relations with everybody. At Histria, he was a good friend of Catrinel Domăneanțu. He was also a friend of others from Condurachi's group, Maria Coja, Puiu Suceveanu. He was a friend of everyone, I do not know if he had any enemies. [...]

He remained attached to Romania. He was one of the emigrants who did not regret that left the country, as he got in England more than he could ever get in Romania, but always kept a certain attachment to Romania. Once he called me: ‘I met a young gypsy girl from Romania who distributes newspapers about the support of emigrants. I go each Thursday, when she distributes the newspapers, to meet her and talk to her.’ He was not a snob and missed Romania [...] I don't think I have ever talked about his Armenian ethnicity with him, but I assume he was not very attached to it. I think he was individualistic, I mean not very committed to the fate of a community or a cause. However, I am convinced that he knew many Armenians and was known by many, as evidenced by the fact that I met several people who knew him, even an accountant in America. [...]

In England, after he got some money, he married this young girl with whom he had his two daughters. He managed to restore his life better than ever, better than if he had stayed in Romania. Finally, he was very happy.”

*Sylvia Hamparțumian, daughter, notice purportedly written for this paper, 6 August 2023:*

“My father was an inspirational person to all that knew him; everyone who met him found him to be kind, humorous, charming, intelligent but above all

generous. Whenever I meet his friends and colleagues now, they recall warm and funny anecdotes about him.

Although he suffered an extremely difficult life, and encountered prejudice and injustice throughout (both in Romania and in the UK), he never dwelled on it or expected sympathy. He was a proud Armenian, who spoke often of his family and heritage.

My father did not like to talk about his own past very much, but he always felt joy when he reminisced about his time in Histria. It was an extremely special place to him, and I think somewhere he found true happiness. Some of my warmest memories of him are when we would visit Histria each summer as a family, along with my mother and sister. He was treated with such respect and admiration, it made me so proud of him.

My parents' love of history and archaeology would inform our weekends and holidays, regularly visiting archaeological sites, historical places of interest and museums around the UK. My father would often talk passionately about ancient history and the Byzantine Empire.

My sister and I sadly lost our mother when we were young, but we were lucky to have such a wonderful father who shaped our lives, beliefs and values and continues to do so.

Discovering further details about the more challenging parts of his past in the 10 years since his passing, has only reaffirmed what a remarkable person he was to go through such hardship and still inspire all who encountered him.”

*The author's personal assessment, 14 August 2023:*

I was not fortunate enough to meet Nubar Hampartumian in person. In fact, I first heard of him in September 2013, just a couple of months before his death, during my first archaeological season at Histria, when I visited the Basilica *extra muros* sector. His name sounded so exotic to me and my colleague, Iulian Ganciu, that we even used to repeat it out loud from time to time as an awkward invocation of a mysterious spirit dwelling among the ruins, the green schist rocks, and the waves of the Sinoe lake. I would have never imagined at that time, while I was giving those silly shouts, that an unlikely set of circumstances would render me so intimate with his biography: indeed, after so many hours spent getting information from people who personally knew him and deciphering the sometimes puzzling documents in his Securitate files, I ended, partly involuntarily, in getting acquainted even with some of his innermost secrets. It is by no means easy to reach a definitive conclusion because of his complex character.

Silent and introverted, as he seemed to many people during most of his life in Romania, he showed himself to be vivid and humorous when his hardships finally come to an end in the UK. He was always kind and generous, although he could have easily turned mean and ill-natured as a result of his misfortunes. For example, forced and cheated into becoming an informant of the Securitate, he tried to minimize the negative effects that this could bring to others. Moreover, despite his accomplishment in the UK, he never cut off his ties to Romania, where he suffered so much, but he constantly cherished and visited what he loved back there: his family, his friends, and Histria. In truth, he even passed this love to his daughters. Diligent, smart, and sometimes opportunistic, he was able to overcome all the setbacks and rise again all the numerous times he had to start over. Perseverance and discretion, instead of boldness and flamboyance, were keys to his success. He was a survivor, modest, inconspicuous, and strong like the rocks of the Anatolian plateau where his roots were from, but he never had the chance to see.

He was very passionate about his work, particularly about numismatics. He did not write much, though, certainly as a result of his misfortunes, but probably also because of a certain inclination towards more concrete activities, such as curatorial work, where he excelled. Nonetheless, he left behind two significant volumes, one for each of his specializations, a few studies and articles that stand out for their concision and soundness of reasoning, and an array of translations that helped to bridge the gap between Romanian and Western archaeology at the time.

I firmly believe that in a more favourable context Hamparțumian could have become a much more influential scholar. His destiny shows, however, that “not the times are under the helm of men, but the pitiable men under the helm of the times”, as the chronicler put it. Thus, I deemed it worthy not to be forgotten.

## LIST OF WORKS BY NUBAR HAMPARTŪMIAN<sup>35</sup>

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2. *Corpus Cultus Equitis Thracii IV. Moesia Inferior (Romanian Section) and Dacia, Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain* 74, 4, Leiden, 1979. [N. Hampartumian]
3. *Coinage of the Twelve Caesars*, Birmingham, 1993. (with Eric Taylor) [N. Hampartumian]

### Studies, articles and notes

4. “Un nou pond de la Callatis”. *Studii și Cercetări de Numismatică* 2, 1958, 367–370. [H. Nubar]
5. “Monede bizantine de la începutul secolului al VII-lea și sfârșitul cetații Histria”, *Studii și Cercetări de Numismatică* 3, 1960, 183–195. [H. Nubar]
6. “Arheologia greco-romană în Dobrogea”, *Studii. Revistă de Istorie* 15, 6, 1962, 1411–1424. (with M. Coja) [H. Nubar]
7. “Aspetti delle circolazione monetaria di Histria nell'epoca romana”, *Dacia* n.s. 7, 1963, 241–256. [H. Nubar]
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13. “Deux tombeaux de médecins découvertes dans les nécropoles de l'époque romaine en Dacie”. In *XXII<sup>e</sup> Congrès International d'histoire de la médecine, Bucharest – Constanza (30 Août-5 Septembre 1970)*, Bucharest, 1972, 309–310. (with Wanda Wolski) [N. Hampartumian]
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15. “Child-burials and superstition in the Roman cemetery of Sucidava (Dacia)”. In M.B. de Boer, T.A. Edridge (eds.), *Hommages à Maarten J. Vermaseren. Recueil*

<sup>35</sup> At the end of each bibliographical entry, in square brackets, it was noted the name under which the work was published.



- d'études offert à l'occasion de son soixantième anniversaire le 7 avril 1978*, vol. I, Leiden, 1978, 473–477. [N. Hampartumian]
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21. “Șantierul Histria”, *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche* 4/1–2, 1953, 91–152. (with E. Condurachi *et al.*; without individual contribution) [N. Hampartumian]
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28. Ioan Glodariu, *Dacian trade with the Hellenistic and Roman world*, BAR supplementary series 8, Oxford, 1976. [N. Hampartumian]
29. Gheorghe Bichir, *The archaeology and history of the Carpi from the*

- second to the fourth century AD*, BAR supplementary series 16, Oxford, 1976. [N. Hampartumian]
30. Dorin Alicu, Emil Nemeş, *Roman lamps from Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*, BAR supplementary series 18, Oxford, 1977. [N. Hampartumian]
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