

PREFACE

This volume of studies is the result of a collaboration between “Ioan Raica” Municipal Museum of Sebeş, Kazan Federal University and the “1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia. The collaboration gave several university scholars and researchers from the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan the opportunity to publish the results of their research on Russia and nearby regions from the early Middle Ages to the present day. Grouped in several sections, the 32 articles written by 48 authors with very diverse institutional backgrounds have been drawn up in accordance with the publication rules of the *Terra Sebus: Acta Musei Sabesiensis* journal, i.e. they use abbreviated quotes in the footnotes and then provide details at the end of the articles, under the bibliographical abbreviations. Given that the volume is an English language publication, it was decided that the Russian titles be written in Russian but with Latin letters instead of Cyrillic, to facilitate their understanding by readers who use English.

With a surface area of over 17 million square kilometres, today’s Russian Federation is 70 times bigger than the United Kingdom, which makes it a “geographical dimension” hard to ignore in the contemporary world, but also difficult to understand, especially by West Europeans and North Americans. Without claiming that this volume has fully encapsulated the long and fascinating history of Russia, we can say that it does provide the reader with unique information. It analyses cultural, economic, social and political aspects of the big evolutionary stages of the Russian state, which has had several names along the centuries - The Great Principality of Moscow, The Russian Empire, The Soviet Union and The Russian Federation. The *Miscellanea* chapter also includes studies whose diversity exceeds the geographic and cultural borders of Russia and approach interesting aspects of the lives of certain Asian communities (slavery and elites in early Turkic society, the typology of culture during the Ming dynasty) and aspects from the medieval history of Western Europe (hagiographies, the study of castles).

It may easily be observed that although located at the periphery of Europe but in the centre of Eurasia, the Russian space is more closely linked to the European continent than to the Orient, as proven by the

cultural articles from this volume. Music, painting, architecture, literature and poetry have always been more adapted to the European horizon than to the Asian one, in spite of the obvious influences of other cultural regions.

Considering that in the contemporary world Russia has lost the role of superpower it held during the Cold War, and that today it is profoundly isolated, to an extent previously only seen between the two World Wars, this volume aims to build a bridge between Russian and Western culture, leading to a better knowledge of events from the Russian perspective on a time axis stretching from the second half of the first millennium AD to present times.

In the course of almost twelve centuries of Russian history, never has the burden of choosing the right path been heavier than at the dawn of this millennium. The Russian Empire has always been both European and Asian. Nevertheless, a quarter of a century after the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, Russians must make a decision which may prove crucial in their country's evolution. To quote Christian Daudel, professor of geography and geopolitics at the University of Saint-Étienne, "in the long-term, Russia does not have a future without Europe, just like the European Union does not have a future without Russia"; in other words, the two major territorial entities will inevitably reach a point where they must draw up common strategies to satisfy their mutual interests.

The Editors