



**Zsigmond Jako.** *Tarsadalom, Egyház, Muvelodes: Tanulmányok Erdély történelméhez.* Budapest: Magyar Egyháztörténeti Enciklopédia Munkaközösség (METEM), 1997. 479 pp. HUF 950 (paper), ISBN 978-963-8472-24-3.

Reviewed by Pongracz Sennyey (Bradley University)  
Published on HABSBUrg (June, 1998)

## Studies in Transylvanian History

A member of both the Romanian and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Zsigmond Jako began his distinguished career under the tutelage of Elemer Malysz in the 1930s. Following his university training in Hungary, he returned to his native Transylvania in the 1940s. Professor Jako, in his mid-80s, still teaches medieval history at the Babes-Bolyai University.

*Tarsadalom, Egyház, Muvelodes* is a collection of articles originally published between 1945 and 1992; the majority were published after 1979. The length of the articles varies between six and one hundred and eight pages. They are grouped by subject: under the rubric of "Society" there are seven articles, under "Church" there are four, and under "Culture" there are ten. As Jako himself recognizes, many of the articles are interdisciplinary in nature and do not fit neatly into these categories.

In the brief introductory essay, the author explains that he selected articles that are difficult to access (either because they were published in minor journals, or because of small print runs) to make them available to a wider audience. Numerous articles had the scholarly apparatus updated for this publication and others that had originally been published without footnotes are seen here with their complete documentation for the first time. Jako also articulates a theme that becomes a common thread through the articles in this volume: that after 1919, with the dissolution of the Monarchy, the study of the medieval and early modern history of Transylvania began a slow decline. With restrictions on travel and in the general exchange of information imposed between the communist countries, scholars working in Romania

had very limited access to works published in Hungary and vice versa. Yet, because the history of medieval and early modern Hungary remains critical to the study of the history of the successor states, this lack of communication was to the ultimate detriment of all parties concerned. The articles contained in this volume are meant, in part, to bridge this gap.

### I. Society

Opening the first third articles of the book are paleographical studies of charters issued in the fourteenth century representing the earliest documents for the history of the city of Dej. This is a *tour de force* of Jako's paleographical skills, as he convincingly shows that the documents believed to have been written in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries were forgeries. They were probably written in the second half of the fourteenth century in an effort to settle property disputes.

"Matyas kiraly erdelyi tarsadalompolitikajarol" is a brief study of some issues in the development of the office of the voivode and the power of the magnates during the reign of King Mathias (1458-1490). This article highlights a series of issues that deserve further attention, such as the role played by those elevated to the ranks of the nobility in the course of the wars against the Ottoman invaders. The case of Romanian nobles, and their relationship with the Romanian population of Transylvania, is an interesting yet hitherto little explored topic.

The next article, on the Szeklers, is a contribution to the social history of Transylvania between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. In this article Jako pays special

attention to the role of the Szekler light cavalry divisions which played such an important role against the Ottoman advance. With the advent of the Ottoman threat, the social organization of the Szeklers was stressed to the limit by the relentless need to mobilize, taxing the soldiers' ability to provide for themselves such basic requirements as a horse and weapons. The pressures eroded the social privileges enjoyed by the Szeklers who, in an effort to escape the burden of military service, became serfs. As a result, the rulers were deprived of critical fighting force. In 1608, land owners were forbidden to keep Szeklers as serfs, which ultimately allowed them to retain their traditional freedom, even if at the cost of military service.

The following article is a collection of three biographical sketches of Transylvanian voivodes during the reign of King Sigismund (1387-1437). The three officials in question, Laszlo Losonczi Dezsofi, Imre Bebek, and Frank Szechenyi, reached their high status during the reign of King Louis I (1342-1382). They thus represent a transitional period in the evolution of the aristocracy, between the era of the Angevins and the Luxemburgers. The three studies are small gems of medieval scholarship, and their brevity is a reflection of the paucity of extant documentary evidence available to the author in the 1980s. The next study continues the topic of the Transylvanian voivodeship. This is in part an historiographical discussion of the different interpretations of the origins, functions and, especially, the nominating process of Transylvanian voivodes after 1542. The article is followed by six fifteenth and sixteenth century charters concerning the nomination of voivodes.

The sixth article is a brief study of the origins of Mihaly Csaki, Transylvanian chancellor. Jako argues in this article that, contrary to the views posited by Ioan Lupas, the Csaki family was not of Romanian origin, but was in fact from Transdanubia.[1] He uses the case of the Csakis to illustrate the point that Romanian historiography cannot aim for accuracy by ignoring Hungarian historiography, and vice versa.

The last article in the section entitled "Society" is an attempt to make a quantitative study of the students registered in the Calvinist Bethlen School (*Kollegium*) between 1662 and 1839. Based on the data gathered here, Jako analyses the place of origin of the registered students, the careers they chose after graduation, and their social origins. Although this makes for an interesting study, the patchy nature of the sources available (registration books) means the results are of somewhat questionable value.

## II. Church

The first of the church history articles, "A kolozsmonostori apatsag es hiteleshely a szekularizacioig," is a 108 page long history of the Benedictine convent of Kolozsmonostor (Cluj-Manastur). This work was originally published as the preface to the publication of the records of the convent of Kolozsmonostor.[2] The study covers the history of the convent from its origins in the eleventh century to 1556, when the convent was dissolved. The emphasis of this work is on institutional history and on the convent's function as a place of authentication (*hiteleshely*), which continued after the dissolution of the religious community. This is by far the longest work of the volume. In contrast to the other articles contained in this collection, this is a brief monograph in itself.

The second article on church history describes the activities of the Hoffhalter family of book-printers in Transylvania. Originally from Poland, Raphael Skrzetusky modified his name to Hoffhalter after he left Poznan to study the book printing trade. In 1563, he moved from Vienna to Debrecen on account of his Protestant sympathies. In 1565, he moved to Varad, since his Antitrinitarian views were not welcome in Debrecen either. The Hoffhalters published thirty-two titles between 1565 and 1569, some in Varad and others in Alba Iulia. The titles dealt mostly with theology, but works of law and politics were also published. Most of these were in Hungarian, but a significant number of Latin texts can also be found among the works published by the family press.

The next study is an account of the whereabouts of the most important extant sources for the study of the administration of the tithe during the years of the Transylvanian principality. These documents are in the archives of the Transylvanian National Museum, *Erdelyi Nemzeti Museum*. Most of them were not accessible in 1945, when the article was originally published. Unfortunately, this reprint of the article does not inform the reader of the fate of these documents since 1945 or of their availability today. While the purpose of the work lies in pointing readers towards potentially useful source collections, its value is compromised by its obsolescence.

The last article on church history was written on the occasion of the quadricentenary of the Istvan Bathori school of Cluj. The school was the product of the Counter-Reformation, and it was first a Jesuit and later a Piarist institution. Although listed among the articles on church history, this is, in fact, a work on the history of education in Transylvania, albeit with important reli-

gious overtones. As such the article serves as a bridge between church history and cultural history, which forms the next section of the book.

### III. Culture

The first article grouped under the term “Culture” was originally published as the introduction for a Hungarian translation of the Richard de Bury’s *Philobiblon*, and it describes author’s work and career in broad brush strokes. Of all the articles contained in this volume, this is the least concerned with Transylvania and Transylvanian culture. This article seems to have been included in the volume solely to promote its availability.

In the next article, Jako points out the possible relationship between the Heltai and Hoffgreff printing presses. The activities of the two printers intersected on numerous occasions, and Jako attempts to clarify this relationship based on a few newly available sources. The third article in this section is also about publishing, offering new data on the life of Gyorgy Hoffgreff, a book printer. Based on the reading of additional documents, Jako argues that Hoffgreff was in fact from Transylvania, more precisely from Cluj. Jako also posits that Hoffgreff had worked with Honterus, the Saxon reformer, was part of his inner circle, and that in Wittemberg Hoffgreff met with Caspar Bruschi. Jako argues consequently that Hoffgreff must have been a well educated individual, and that his printing shop must have started operating later than 1548, although the exact date is unclear.

The fourth study in the section on culture provides new insights for the study of material culture in Renaissance Transylvania. It focuses on houses, and the material culture found inside homes, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although limited by the available resources, Jako shows that Cluj was indeed influenced by the Renaissance. The material culture found in the city was all the more noticeable since Cluj was the most important city in Transylvania during the period of the Principality, and hence had more resources than most other regional cities. However, Jako points out that many other Transylvanian cities would probably show Renaissance influences, although further research is needed to document it.

An article on Miklos Olah (1493-1568) was written on the occasion of the quadricentenary of his death and originally published without its scholarly apparatus, which is provided in this volume. In this rather brief work (six pages), Jako highlights the fact that most of the Esztergom archbishop’s correspondence has not yet been pub-

lished, including the large number of letters exchanged with European artists and scholars. (His correspondence with Erasmus of Rotterdam has been published). Moreover, scholars have not explored the archbishop’s role as a supporter of the arts. Relying on the iconography of the archbishop, and on his last will written in 1562, Jako proceeds to document the fact that the archbishop had a number of buildings erected in his honor, and that support of the arts was an important endeavor in his career. The extent of his works and influence remains to be researched.

In the next article Jako explores the potential origins of Bishop of Transylvania Ignac Batthyany’s scholarly interests and influences, the philological significance of his works, and his efforts to organize scholarly research. Jako shows that, contrary to what was hitherto argued, Batthyany did not acquire his research skills during his studies in Rome, but at an earlier time. Jako also concludes that Batthyany’s works should be ranked next to the great Hungarian historians of the seventeenth century, such as Pray, Katona, etc. Finally, the bishop’s library, the Batthyaneum, deserves special attention for the quality of the material collected. His “society of scholars,” however, did not last long after his death.

The seventh article describes efforts of Arnold Ipolyi, in the 1860s, to trace the fate of the codices of the Royal Library of King Mathias taken by the Ottomans after the occupation of Buda. Ipolyi did in fact discover that a large number of Corvinas were in Constantinople, although he was unable to purchase any of the volumes from the Sultan’s archives. But his efforts bore fruit in 1869 when Emperor Franz Joseph was presented with four Corvinas by the Sultan, and in 1875, when the Ottoman government returned another thirty-five volumes to Hungary.

In the next article, Jako proposes the use of personal correspondence to further research in Transylvanian intellectual history and compensate for the dearth of extant material evidence. To illustrate his point, he analyses the correspondence of Daniel Koleseri (1663-1732), a doctor from Sibiu. Koleseri had a large personal library, and more importantly an extensive collection of letters with contacts from Turkey, Russia, Italy, France and England. Jako argues that these letters offer a new source for the cultural and intellectual history of Romania. In this article, Jako explores only Koleseri’s correspondence with intellectuals from northern Germany.

In “Miskolczy Karoly, a helynekvutatas es helytorteneti bihari uttoroje” Jako endeavors to correct the claim that Imre Revesz (1826-1881) was the first Hungar-

ian historian to turn his attention to place names and local history. Instead, he shows that Karoly Miskolczy (1809-1870) had blazed the trail with his study of Biharea. The last article in this volume is a tribute to the memory of Lajos Kelemen, a historian and Jako's colleague. Kelemen was the director of the Transylvanian museum and archives, and renowned for his skills as a teacher.

This collection of articles covers a wide spectrum of subjects and periods of Transylvanian history. Jako's training in paleography and source criticism are most clearly manifest in the articles covering medieval Transylvania. The value of the articles addressing the early modern period lies not so much in their scholarly results as in the directions they suggest for researchers of Transylvanian history. In this sense, the entire volume has an important educational role to play, particularly since so many of these articles are difficult to access in Romania and Hungary, either because the journals in which they appeared are frequently unavailable in libraries or because they are now so expensive.

All articles, with the exception of the last one in the collection, rely on an impressive array of primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources include Romanian, Hungarian, German, and Polish works. The sources are treated with great care, and the breadth of primary sources employed is impressive.

The recurring theme of the volume is Jako's perception of the shortcomings in the training of post-war Romanian medievalists, and it deserves additional comment. In the author's view the isolationist policies followed by communist government, combined with their nationalist ideology, cut Transylvanian historians off from scholarly works produced in Hungary and other

successor states. As a result errors became embedded in Romanian historiography, such as the ones he tries to correct in the first and sixth articles of this collection. Moreover, Jako is concerned by the fact that there are very few young Romanian scholars who know Hungarian, German and Latin (p. 92), thus denying Romanian scholarship access to a substantial body of primary and secondary sources that are directly relevant for Transylvanian history. These concerns are raised repeatedly in many of these articles, giving them an exaggerated pathos. Had this interesting historiographical issue been addressed in an introductory essay, its rhetorical effectiveness would have been much greater.

Given the importance of the author's career, one must bemoan the fact that the editor of this volume only granted the back cover for the briefest of biographical sketches. Considering the pedagogical emphasis of this collection of articles, a more thorough biography would have been a valuable addition, far more useful than the index of personal and place names appended at the end.

#### Notes:

[1]. Ioan Lupas, "Doi umanisti romani in secolul al XVI-lea", *Memoriile Sectiunii Istorice*, Ser. III. Tom. VIII. Nr. 5 (Bucuresti, 1928), p.9-17).

[2]. Jako Zsigmond, ed., *A kolozsmonostori konvent jegyzokonyvei: 1289-1556*. (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1990), 2 vols.

Copyright (c) 1998 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the reviewer and to HABSBERG. For other permission, please contact <reviews@h-net.msu.edu> and <habsburg@ttacs6.ttu.edu>.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/habsburg>

**Citation:** Pongracz Sennyey. Review of Jako, Zsigmond, *Tarsadalom, Egyhaz, Muvelodes: Tanulmanyok Erdely tortenelmehez*. HABSBERG, H-Net Reviews. June, 1998.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=2110>

Copyright © 1998 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu).