



Bela Kopeczi, ed. *History of Transylvania*. Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1994. 806 pp. \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-963-05-6703-9.

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The Hungarian History of Transylvania

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The Hungarian project to write a new history of Transylvania, arising in the early 1980s, reached fruition with the publication of the three-volume synthesis in Hungarian in 1986. The handsome, expensive volumes were rapidly sold out (and repeatedly reprinted) in Hungary, harshly attacked in politically motivated Romanian reviews (though rarely accessible to historians there), and sparsely, but positively reviewed in the West (by Gerhard Seewann, Martin Rady and Norman Stone). Eager to reach an ever larger audience, the publishers brought out a one-volume version in 1989, then German, French, and finally English versions based on it. Hopes for a constructive debate on the work have been strengthened in recent years by the appearance of more substantive, though generally critical, Romanian reviews.

This version takes into account several of the Western reviewers' concerns: that it be available in Western languages, that the interpretations of the authors be reconciled, and (here the improvement is only partial) that some assertions be better documented, and sarcasm avoided. The chief points of controversy in interpretation are the continuity of the Daco-Roman population in the territory, the relationship of Transylvania with Hungary proper, the causes of Transylvania's reassignment in 1918, and Romania's treatment of its Hungarian minority thereafter. In these substantive points of interpretation there is little change from the first edition to this one.

The authors of the first part and the first chapter of

the second part (Gabor Vekony, Andras Mocsy, Endre Toth, and Istvan Bona) present the evolution of ancient Dacia and medieval Transylvania on the basis of archaeological and textual data and of international scholarship. The results of Romanian archaeology on the Dacian kingdom (Constantin Daicoviciu) are presented sympathetically, but in contrast to Romanian historiography it is argued that the Romans largely exterminated the Dacian population in the area they occupied, that subsequently the degree of Romanization of the province was small, and at any rate negated by the colonists' evacuation in the third century. Subsequent chapters examine Gothic, Carpic, Gepid, Hunnic, Avar, and Slavic domination. Bona's presentation of the earliest period of Hungarian rule (895-1172) differs from that of the late Laszlo Makkai, who wrote this section in the original edition, in that Bona attributes less reliability to the *Gesta Hungarorum* of Anonymus, a later account that is the principal support for those arguing Romanians were present at the time of the Hungarian conquest. Bona argues from archaeological evidence that the Hungarians occupied Transylvania from the east, before Hungary proper, while according to Makkai the occupation came from the west.

The second and third parts, by Makkai, Gabor Barta, Katalin Peter, and Agnes Varkonyi, reflect the contrasting methodologies of their authors. Makkai's treatment of the period through 1526, while not neglecting archaeological sources, is far more attentive to toponymic evidence of the population as well as the now more numerous written sources. In agreement with most Hungarian historians, he places the first sizable settlement of not only the Saxons, but also the Romanians in this period, and argues that Transylvania's voevode (vajda) was an agent of the Hungarian king, not a sovereign. Barta's chapter on 1526-1606 gives more summary treatment than Makkai or subsequent chapters to culture, but provides a detailed account of the power struggles that gave

birth to a principality of Transylvania that was forced to recognize Habsburg and Ottoman rule over Hungary proper. The chapters by Peter and Varkonyi on the seventeenth century present a survey of the many wars, original interpretations of internal policy and a colorful portrayal of society, high culture, religion, and such modern themes as the domestic environment (Peter, p. 340) and costumes (Varkonyi, p. 407). Independent Transylvania is not the romanticized “fairy garden” of some Hungarian accounts, but a diverse society that weathered periodic invasions to secure moderate prosperity through the mercantilism, diplomacy, accumulation of personal power, even duplicity of its autocratic Hungarian princes.

Part Four’s authors are the late Zsolt Trocsanyi, Ambrus Miskolczy, and Zoltan Szasz. Far shorter than in the three-volume history is the section on the eighteenth century by Trocsanyi, here coauthored by Miskolczy. Missing is Trocsanyi’s original analysis of population and religious movements in this century; there is due attention to the Habsburgs’ perpetuation of Transylvania’s separate status, enlightened absolutism, and the noble resistance to it, but the section on 1800-1830 is surprisingly brief. Miskolczy’s treatment of Hungarian, Romanian, and Saxon politics before and during 1848 is lively, well documented, and usually fair. Still, one wonders, reading the words of a Romanian extremist (p. 493), why those of a Hungarian counterpart are not offered for comparison. The brief union of Hungary and Transylvania is seen as a boost to the constitutionalist forces, and special attention is given to the unsuccessful attempts at Hungarian-Romanian cooperation against Austrian and Russian intervention in 1848-49.

Part five is the only one by a single author, Zoltan Szasz. The judgment on Austrian absolutism is milder than that of many Hungarian accounts, asserting (p. 531) that its positive initiatives were vitiated by the monarch’s repeated experimentation. With the end of these experiments, the reunion with Hungary in 1867 brought a constitutional framework that favored socioeconomic development for all Transylvania’s peoples. Unfortunately for their relations, the Hungarian government retreated from the moderate nationality policy enunciated in 1868 even as Romanian political assertiveness found a truly broad social basis. Citing his research in Vienna, Szasz suggests that Franz Ferdinand’s coolness toward the Hungarian-Romanian negotiations in 1914 may have sealed their failure. Military and diplomatic circumstances are made responsible for the fall of historic Hungary in 1918. The chapter’s concluding statement (p. 660) is controversial: “The annexationist peace treaty, which

also involved a serious violation of the national principle, was condemned equally by the revisionist bourgeoisie of the defeated countries and by the international working class movement.” Part Six, by Bela Kopeczi, is a relatively laconic survey of events through 1948, in which population figures are cited as evidence of assimilatory processes, with equal attention given to Hungarian and Romanian atrocities in World War II. The treatment of the socialist period, present in the three-volume work, is left out.

The authors’ comparative approach and careful assessment of the multilingual historiography testify to their sincere intention to move the scholarly discussion forward. Sadly, some passages work against this intention. Unattributed rumors about the bribery of the Hungarians’ rivals (by General Giorgio Basta in 1600-1 (pp. 299-30); of the Transylvanian electorate in 1863 (p. 549) or allies (some Romanian voters in 1910 (p. 631) seem to be accepted at face value; the alleged support of Transylvanian “public opinion” for the Hungarian position in 1848 (p. 516) and 1863 (p. 551) cannot be documented. More legitimate points of interpretation, but still controversial, are those based on the authors’ more or less Marxist preference for economic development over ethnic separatism. Much could also be said about imperfect translations or use of terminology; among the latter, there is no clear distinction in the use of the terms *Konigsboden/kiralyfold* and *Sachsenland/szaszfold*. But for the most part the translation is fluid and clear.

Among the volume’s chief virtues, shared with earlier editions, is the remarkable selection of 154 illustrations: color photographs of artifacts and graphic arts, and (since the mid-nineteenth century) black and white photographs of Transylvanian people and localities. The most interesting of the latter are the many shots of urban scenes and ethnic types taken by Josef Fischer in the 1930s. The 26 excellent maps include two on the endpapers that librarians should take care not to obscure when processing the volume: please use the inside pages for name plates and date slips! Especially valuable are the bibliographic essays in the appendix, which address key historiographic controversies with the Romanians and introduce readers of English to much inaccessible literature. The use of Hungarian placenames throughout the work may not be the best solution, but readers will find their equivalents in the index.

History of Transylvania is a work that deserves to be taken seriously for its scholarly qualities, consulted for its wealth of historical and bibliographic information, and debated for the many complex issues that it presents

with more or less thoroughness, but always with a firm grounding in the work of those who have preceded them in this difficult territory.

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