

**Borbála Zsuzsanna Török.** *Exploring Transylvania: Geographies of Knowledge and Entangled Histories in a Multiethnic Province, 1790-1918.* Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2015. 286 pp. \$142.00, e-book, ISBN 978-90-04-30305-8.

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**Published on** HABSBURG (May, 2018)

**Commissioned by** Borislav Chernev

The latest work of Borbála Zsuzsanna Török, *Exploring Transylvania: Geographies of Knowledge and Entangled Histories in a Multiethnic Province, 1790-1918*, traces the institutionalization of the *Landeskunde* discipline, together with its Hungarian adaptation called *honismeret*, throughout the long nineteenth century in Transylvania. The author defines both terms generally as the “scholarly mapping of a certain territory” and “the encyclopedic and systematic description of the land or the ‘fatherland’ [Transylvania]” (p. 1). Her book explores the evolution of *Landeskunde* and *honismeret* from their encyclopedic outlook during the Enlightenment to a singular focus on the nation and its history by the turn of the century. She states that, “indeed, Transylvania has been considered a ‘locus classicus’ of entangled and rival nationalisms” (p. 9). Up to now, only a couple of works provide a limited analysis of nineteenth-century Transylvanian cultural developments, including Török’s own earlier book edited together with Viktor Karády in 2008, *Cultural Dimensions of Elite Formation in Modern Transylvania (1770-1950)*.<sup>[1]</sup> Consequently, in the absence of a reference work that contextualizes major Transylvanian intellectual figures and institutions, her recent study provides insights crucial to any researcher taking an interest in the region.

At the same time, halfway into the book, Török’s work turns into a rather descriptive history of two prominent cultural associations of the region: the Saxon Society for *Landeskunde* (the *Landeskundeverein*) and the Transylvanian Museum Society (EME) established by regional Hungarian elites. A broader work investigating the diverse cultural currents crisscrossing the multiethnic Habsburg periphery, together with its representative figures, is yet to be published.

The introductory chapter sets the chronological and historiographical context for the book. It also discusses its argument and aims. Here, Török attempts to define the unique contribution of her research, yet her statement sounds rather vague and general: “we know little about knowledge practices in culturally saturated and intertwined milieus like those in Transylvania. My book intends to fill this gap” (p. 3). *Exploring Transylvania* aims to uncover “boundaries of knowledge circulation, an aspect,” in Török’s opinion, “ignored by the general euphoria in recent historical scholarship.” Focusing on the Saxon and Hungarian cultural milieus in Transylvania, she regards her work as a “genuinely comparative study, which brings to light entirely new facets,” without however detailing what those are (p. 5). In the end, the author acknowledges that she does not

regard Transylvania as a unique case “but rather as representative of the multiethnic provinces of the Habsburg, German, and Romanov empires” (p. 25).

The crux of the book, however, seems to be the clash between feudal forms of autonomy and modern governance spearheaded by Vienna and Budapest, as it unfolded in the cultural sphere of nineteenth-century Transylvania. Török goes on to comment on the Habsburg province more generally: its sociocultural mapping, the emergence of provincial cultural associations, transnational networks of local intellectuals, late specialization and national mission of learned societies on the model of Humboldtian scholarship, focus on “national” humanities by Transylvanian cultural associations together with their regionalist goal, and the role of these cultural associations in nationalist mobilization. The author deals less with the Romanian Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People (ASTRA), arguing that, in contrast to the Landeskundeverein and the EME, ASTRA was not dedicated to exploring the fatherland but had a national outlook right from the start.

Chapter 1 looks particularly at two entities of late eighteenth-century Transylvanian culture: the Saxon journal *Siebenbürgische Quartalschrift* and the Transylvanian Society for the Cultivation of the Hungarian Language. It charts their adaptation of Landeskunde—seen here as part of the so-called state sciences or *Staatswissenschaften* popular in the German-speaking lands. In short, Landeskunde at this time was about studying the fatherland in a scientific manner to enable modern governance and the formation of well-trained civil servants. But in Transylvania, the two scholarly initiatives applied Landeskunde and its Hungarian off-shoot, honismeret, to a different end—legitimizing the feudal privileges of Saxons and Hungarian nobles in face of the standardizing drive inaugurated by Vienna. Opposing the introduction of a single official language (Latin) and the level-

ing laws targeting all Habsburg citizens, Saxon and Hungarian intellectuals initiated legal studies outlining the unique status of their communities traditionally. In the Hungarian case, it led to efforts to improve Hungarian vernacular and calls to reinstate it as the official language of the province.

Importantly, Török outlines the difference between Hungarian honismeret and Saxon Landeskunde, describing how the former lost the supranational dimension of the latter and, instead, concentrated on collecting knowledge on and for the Hungarian nation. As a result, the feudal nation acquired the double meaning of, on the one hand, a legal category and, on the other, a cultural as well as a linguistic one. Chapter 1 also details the impact of academic peregrination by Transylvanian scholars to the German universities in promoting Landeskunde, the role of Freemason intellectuals like György Aranka and Johann Binder in spearheading the feudal rights of the traditional estates of Transylvania (Hungarian nobles, Saxons, and Székelys), and the increasing self-perception by local intellectuals as provincial and their Enlightenment-influenced conception of a civilizational hierarchy of Transylvanian peoples.

The second chapter mainly focuses on the Saxon Society for the History and Literature of the Fatherland and the failed attempt to establish a Hungarian national museum in Transylvania during the so-called Age of Reform (1828-48). Török traces the increasingly national dimension of these initiatives under the influence of Prussian cultural developments, such as muzealization, “education along neohumanist values,” state support for the institutionalization of scholarship, and a “historicized and national interpretation of culture” (p. 59). This chapter also reveals how debates in the Transylvanian Diet on establishing a state-funded museum divided its members along national lines, a division that eventually unfolded in the local press as well. On the one hand, the

central aim of these institutions was *műveltség* in Hungarian or *Bildung* in German—cultural and moral self-improvement as well as “the emergence of autonomous citizens, freed from feudal bondage” (p. 91). On the other hand, the practice of Landeskunde and honismeret in this period continued the promotion of a cultural ladder whereby Saxon and Hungarian elites still regarded past feudal estates as superior to more disenfranchised communities, such as the Romanians. Nevertheless, the author identifies a drift from previous political conceptions of the term “nation” toward an ethnolinguistic understanding.

Contextualizing the initially repressive post-1848 Habsburg regime against Hungarian national politics, the book’s third chapter describes the establishment of the Landeskundeverein seemingly supported by Vienna and that of the EME as a cultural beam of postrevolutionary Hungarian opposition to Habsburg neo-absolutist rule. It charts the Saxon society’s increasingly nationalist outlook, with important figures such as historian Georg Daniel Teutsch popularizing works inspired by romantic nationalism. The part looking into the EME’s establishment in 1859 outlines the prominent role played by Székely aristocrat Imre Mikó in its founding. Under his initiative, history and honismeret would legitimate Hungarian supremacy over Eastern civilization. The EME, while regional in scope, hid a Hungarian national agenda. But during the subsequent liberalizing political atmosphere, the museum lost its oppositional stance, decreased in popularity, and became “a satellite of Pest” (p. 153). Both the Saxon and the Hungarian institution increasingly favored the ethnic aspect of their respective community rather than the previous legal one.

Finally, the fourth chapter traces the evolution of the two societies during the emergence of a Hungarian nation-state as a result of the 1867 Compromise which transformed the Austrian Empire into the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. Török argues that a clash between calls for profes-

sionalization and an increasing nationalist stance underlines this evolution. Also, while the Landeskundeverein had to cope with a hostile, Magyarizing regime, Budapest boosted its financial support for the EME. The inauguration of Hungary’s second university in Kolozsvár—the historic capital of Transylvania and the EME’s headquarters—transformed the EME into a prestigious research institution. At the same time, the Landeskundeverein had to cater to a mass audience to sustain itself. As a result, prominent members of the association rejected calls for demystifying its community’s idealized history, and their work remained entrenched in dilettantism and romantic nationalism.

Apart from investigating these developments, chapter 4 also contains lengthy descriptive passages on the EME’s finances, internal organization, and archaeological research; and on its disciplinary focus, including debates on the geographic origins of the Romanian community. These appear somewhat detached from the book’s aim of exploring the century-long transformation of Landeskunde/honismeret. The main focus on factual details concerning the Landeskundeverein and the EME overshadows the richness of the fin-de-siècle Transylvanian cultural milieu. The region indeed witnessed the emergence of many other cultural societies and institutions—what the author terms as an “associational boom” (p. 178)—that also explored the province, such as the Transylvanian Carpathian Association, the Transylvanian Ethnography Museum, the Székely National Museum, and the Transylvanian Hungarian Cultural Association, which the author only mentions in passing. Also, ethnography, apart from history and archaeology, rose during this period as one of the most important scholarly disciplines studying the various communities in Transylvania in a scientific and systematic manner. Important figures such as Hermann Antal (first chair of ethnography at Kolozsvár University) and János Jankó (first director of the Transylvanian Ethnography Museum) became nationwide influential figures in the

field, instrumental in legitimizing Hungarian national supremacy.[2] Yet Török only looks at history and archaeology.

Perhaps the conclusion forms the book's most contentious part, as the author attempts to integrate her work into more general debates on the circulation of knowledge and center-periphery categories. Consequently, she compares knowledge circulation between western Europe and Transylvania with that between western European states and their overseas colonies. She finds the concept of periphery of knowledge production as an overarching term encompassing experiences in Transylvania and, for example, the British colonies. To a certain extent, the author conflates terms like "province" and "peripheries" as categories of analysis with the self-perception of contemporaries she studies as peripheral and provincial.[3] Furthermore, ground-breaking studies in the field of global history challenge her argument about knowledge circulation between supposed centers and peripheries. Because knowledge does not have agency in itself but rather serves the local goals of various agents, it cannot simply be "transported" geographically (p. 234). Instead, as authors like Kapil Raj and Sebastian Conrad have pointed out, knowledge is always locally produced rather than resulting from a one-way diffusion channel and plain acceptance.[4]

Overall, *Exploring Transylvania* has a more limited focus than what its ambitious title implies. Nevertheless, Török brings to light the main trends affecting knowledge production in Transylvania across ethnic communities, while managing to avoid a teleological narrative that would predictably end with the supremacy of nationalist thought by the end of the nineteenth century. Her book now forms part of the larger body of literature on the province crucial to any researcher attempting to understand modern Transylvania as well as, more broadly, the evolution of the politics of cultural and national identification in the Habs-

burg Monarchy from the Enlightenment to the early twentieth century.

#### Notes

[1]. See also Balázs Trencsényi et al., eds., *Nation-Building and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian Case Studies* (Budapest: Region Books, 2001); and Anders Blomqvist, Constantin Iordachi, and Balázs Trencsényi, eds., *Hungary and Romania beyond National Narratives: Comparisons and Entanglements* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013).

[2]. Some of the more important works dealing with these developments are Marius Turda, "The Magyars: A Ruling Race? The Idea of National Superiority in Fin-de-Siècle Hungary," *European Review of History* 10 (2003): 5-33; and Levente Szabó, "Narrating 'the People' and Disciplining 'the Folk': The Constitution of the Hungarian Ethnographic Discipline and the Touristic Movements (1870-1900)," in *We, the People: Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe*, ed. Diana Mishkova (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009), 207-236.

[3]. Rogers Brubaker and Friedrich Cooper, "Beyond Identity," *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1-47.

[4]. Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in Southeast Asia and Europe, 1650-1900* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); and Sebastian Conrad, "Enlightenment in Global History," *The American Historical Review* 117 (2012): 999-1027. Researching areas closer to Transylvania, Diana Mishkova, Balázs Trencsényi, and Marja Jalava have recently arrived to similar conclusions in their edited volume, *Regimes of Historicity in Southeastern and Northern Europe, 1890-1945: Discourses of Identity and Temporality* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), esp. introduction, 1-20.

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**Citation:** Petru Szedlacsek. Review of Török, Borbála Zsuzsanna. *Exploring Transylvania: Geographies of Knowledge and Entangled Histories in a Multiethnic Province, 1790-1918*. HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. May, 2018.

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