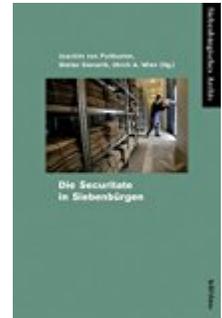


Joachim von Puttkamer, Stefan Sienerth, Ulrich A. Wien, eds.. *Die Securitate in Siebenbürgen*. Köln: Böhlau Verlag Köln, 2014. 432 pp. \$56.00, paper, ISBN 978-3-412-22253-6.



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Die Securitate in Siebenbürgen (The Securitate in Transylvania) is the result of the annual conference of the German- and Romanian-based Arbeitskreis für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde (Association for Transylvanian Studies) in Jena, Germany, in 2010. The basic idea behind this project, which was realized with the support of the Institute for German Culture and History in South Eastern Europe in Munich (IKGS), was to focus on minority groups in Transylvania in the communist era. The book is divided into three parts in order to provide a broad overview of the methods employed by communist Romania's secret police, the Securitate, to besiege and undermine the country's minority groups, "especially in the fields of their most visible and most important forms of expression, churches and literature" (p. 7). Five contributions are devoted to "The Securitate in Romanian Society" as a general phenomenon; six articles cover "The Minorities and the Infiltration of the Protestant Churches"; and another five deal with "The Securitate and Literature." The book is rounded off with Anton Sterbling's essay,

"The Motif of Freedom and the Activities of the Securitate."

The chapters in the first section stand out through their critical, indeed often highly original, examinations in the field of research as a whole. In the first article, provocatively entitled "The Resistance that Wasn't: Romanian Intellectuals, the Securitate, and 'Resistance through Culture,'" Dragoș Petrescu puts an end to the widespread assertion that there was a broad "resistance through culture" in communist Romania. His intensive study of records proves quite the contrary, as several groups of intellectuals kept rather good relations with the regime: "Such cases, which generated ample public debate, lead to the conclusion that resistance through culture meant rather a strategy with which to ensure the same degree of vertical mobility as well as professional respectability. On no account were they a form of dissidence" (p. 35).

In his contribution "The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Securitate," Gerd Stricker shows

the difficulty of the questions of guilt, collaboration, and a lack of resistance. However, he leaves the reader a little puzzled: Stricker rightly criticizes the restricted access to the records of the Orthodox Church, which obstructs efforts to ascertain the degree of mutual exploitation and collaboration between the church and the regime. At the same time, the author's conclusion that the problem of the Romanian Orthodox Church's political past will solve itself "by biological means" does not really give a helpful answer to the issues currently at hand (p. 68).

Georg Herbstritt's study, "Transylvania in the Records of GDR's State Security Service," is devoted to comparative and inter-relational approaches between East Germany and Romania. He states that the "foreign" Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (MfS) of the GDR and the "local" Securitate in fact had similar working methods, even if their respective interests in the region essentially differed: the MfS merely gathered information on Transylvania, while the Securitate implemented real acts of suppression. However, the Romanian German writers were of particular interest to both services: with their transnational activities and communication channels, these writers were constantly suspected of transferring and spreading subversive ideas among the citizens of both the GDR and Romania. Herbstritt states that the MfS records can contribute very little to the regional history of communist Romania.

Martin Jung's chapter, "A Burdensome Heritage: The Present-day Perspective of the Securitate in Romania," provides a sound overview of different issues concerning the aftermath of the communist era and the Securitate's legacy. He examines developments in dealing with the relevant archival materials, treatment of former informants and collaborators, legislation, and corporate *Aufarbeitung* after 1989. Ultimately Jung locates "the Securitate in the common narrative of 'Communism in Romania'" by analyzing the highly publicized report of the Presidential Commis-

sion for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania (Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România, CPAD-CR): with the Romanian parliament and President Traian Băsescu's adoption in 2006 of the commission's final report, the primarily oppositional narrative against the group of profiteers of the events in 1989/90 around President Iliescu has gained official status in Romanian discourse (p. 111).[1] Jung's assessment is rather ambivalent: On the one hand, one might establish a rather high degree of disappointment with how the country has developed since 1989. On the other hand, Jung recognizes several milestones of *Aufarbeitung*, for instance, the increasing accessibility of the Securitate records, which have been administrated by the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității, CNSAS) since 1999.

Katharina Lenski reveals in her article, "The Broken Mirror: Methodical Considerations on Dealing with the Stasi Records," how closely scientific and personal motivations coincide in this field of research. As the co-founder of the Thüringer Archiv für Zeitgeschichte, she declares herself personally involved, both as a scientist and a civil rights activist in the GDR; it was obviously the quality of her own experience that raised her doubts about the reliability of surveillance records. Therefore, rather than limit herself to the sources of the service archives, she consults a variety of different sources. In this fashion, one can escape the great temptation to simply adopt the worldview offered by the secret service records; instead she draws on "diaries, letters, photographs, records from memory, samizdat and all the documents [...] which may provide information about the concrete reality of thinking and living of each person" (p. 117).

Raising a rather concrete claim through the title of the volume--the activities and reception of the secret service in a certain region of communist Romania--this volume only partially meets

the expectations raised: as mentioned above, the articles in the first section fortunately go far beyond the issues promised by the volume's title and pose important questions about issues concerning ethnic or confessional minorities in Transylvania. Regarding the book's structure, however, the interdisciplinary approach could have been pursued with more consequence: section 3, "The Securitate and Literature," may have deserved to be integrated into the general historical context, as the majority of these contributions, though written predominantly by literary scholars, deal with historical issues. Cristina Petrescu's chapter, "A Witness against the Securitate: Herta Müller vs. the File 'Cristina,'" shows, in particular, the value of applying interdisciplinary approaches combining literature, political science, and history.

On the other hand, apart from the five papers discussed above, which deal with general non-regional issues, nearly all contributions dwell on minority issues: seven papers cover questions on the German minority (Silviu B. Moldovan, Hannelore Baier, Virgiliu Tărău, Liviu Burlacu, Stefan Sienerth, Michael Markel, and Cristina Petrescu), while just one examines the Hungarian minority (Stefano Bottoni), and two deal with religious confessions with explicit reference to Transylvania (Dezső Buzogány and Corneliu Pintilescu). Thus, at its core, this volume is actually about the German minority group(s) in Romania. However, the minority-related case studies in sections 2 and 3 provide a wide range of interesting, at times innovative, aspects to the study of the Securitate records, offering the basis for more comprehensive and comparative projects. Nevertheless, Transylvania ("Siebenbürgen") is definitely more than the history of its confessional and ethnic minorities. Therefore, the corresponding research would benefit from turning to questions of contact points, parallels, and commonalities between the "majority" and the "minority" instead of emphasizing "the special fate of the minorities" (p. 7).

The heterogeneity of this volume, with its ethno-regionality, national perspectives, and transnational approaches, can be seen as a result of the fact that the historiography of the issue "Securitate and minorities" is still in its infancy. However, this should not have impeded an attempt to produce a concluding synthesis at the end of the volume, something that is conspicuously missing. It seems that one of the results is the realization that it is not particularly useful to apply "the region," as such, as a heuristic category. However, the question of "the regional" in authoritarian and centralist Romania should not be considered worthless. It would only require a modified research design to make this approach more fruitful. Group-related aspects (for example, the collective assignment of guilt to the Romanian Germans after World War II, as described by Hannelore Baier in her paper "Target and Tool: The German-speaking Minority Groups and the Securitate") can be complemented with further, preferably differentiated, biographical pictures from the region. This is demonstrated by Stefano Bottoni in his study "Integration, Collaboration, Resistance: The Hungarian Minority in Transylvania and the Romanian State Securitate," by comparing the biographies of the Romanian Hungarian politician Imre Mikó and the Roman Catholic bishop of Alba Iulia Aron Márton. Stressing the discrepancy between personal beliefs and collective responsibility, this comparison reveals that it makes no sense to simply cite the content of the Securitate records without daring to offer a sophisticated and courageous interpretation. It is this approach that will show us the undoubtedly tremendous gaps in the Securitate records, as those documents were written for internal recipients, such as the superiors and henchmen of the party nomenclature, rather than for posterity.

The majority of the contributions in this volume reflect, whether consciously or not, the personal involvement in this period of suppression and fragile biographies. Even if this subjective position is revealed in the contributions concerned,

it seems that there is a general lack of reflection on this hybrid phenomenon of coming to terms with one's personal past and one's scholarship. Making fruitful what cannot be avoided remains a task for further research.

Note

[1]. Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania, *Final Report*, by Vladimir Tismaneanu et al. (Bucharest, 2006), accessed May 12, 2015, http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/RA-PORT_FINAL_CPADCR.pdf.

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