

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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Borbála Zsuzsanna Török's *Exploring Transylvania* is an intellectual history of *Landeskunde*, a field of study important (but underappreciated) for understanding the development of national identities in East Central Europe. German in origin, *Landeskunde* (along with its rough equivalent in Hungarian, *honismeret*) is a rather capacious word, difficult to render precisely in English. Török defines it as “the encyclopedic and systematic description of the land or the ‘fatherland’” (p. 1). *Exploring Transylvania* traces how *Landeskunde*—in its Transylvanian Saxon, Hungarian, and Romanian forms—began in the eighteenth century as an aristocratic project framed by geography, but for which, by 1914, geography had become largely an expression of national specificity.

Török's principal aim is not to contribute to the vast literature on nationalism in East Central Europe, but rather to revisit the Enlightenment with a critical eye and to argue for the region's place within that historiography. Indeed, Török rejects the classic Republic of Letters model by preferring less monolithic “intellectual milieus” which embrace not only intellectuals, their work, and their networks of exchange, but also institutions, the role of the state, and spaces of sociability. Török's challenge geographically is to decenter

Paris and other European metropolises in favor of a polycentric view encompassing provincial capitals and cities, but not as mere “appendages” of the former (p. 25). Finally, Török emphasizes the ethnic and social heterogeneity of Transylvania not as the stigmata of a uniquely problematic history, but as a way to examine the “cultural division of labor and the dialogue and conflicts between the practitioners of provincial scholarship,” namely Saxons, Hungarians, and (to a much lesser extent) Romanians (p. 25). What we get is the subtly complex story of the dynamic interlocking relationships—indeed, entanglements—among personages, institutions, social groups, intellectual disciplines, the state, and the nation. Furthermore, it is a narrative that bridges nicely the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, a story of evolution more than rupture that nevertheless addresses major moments of change.

Chapter 1 establishes the rise of *Landeskunde* in Transylvania in the second half of the eighteenth century. Török shows how it began as the work of gentlemanly amateurs who took it upon themselves to gather data for the “comprehensive and encyclopedic mapping of the patria”—the “patria” in this case reflecting an aristocratic sense of Transylvania as defined by a historic constitution of corporate rights and privileges (p. 27).

These early scholars took inspiration not only from the international circulation of publications and academics, thanks especially to the peregrination of students to German universities, but also positioned themselves as defenders of the vernacular against the centralizing policies of Emperor Joseph II. They worked as polymaths; their aims were both public-minded and conservative. Collecting practical information—*Staatsmerkwürdigkeiten*, or “special features of the state” (p. 40)—on the particular natural as well as human history of the province was meant to improve its level of “civilization,” but also to aid the ruling Hungarian and Saxon elites in their control over the rest of the population (p. 56). While these elites did not operate along consciously national lines, Saxon burghers and Hungarian aristocrats had already set out on divergent paths. Saxons, better attuned to the broader world of German-speaking scholarship, gave their *Landeskunde* a more inclusive and supranational cast, while Magyar scholars placed *honismeret* in an “oppositional stance” against German culture (p. 42).

In chapter 2, which covers the Age of Reform of the 1830s and 1840s, Török examines the expansion of *Landeskunde* as it was taken up within the intellectual milieus created by the emergence of a Transylvanian public sphere. No longer confined to noble estates or aristocratic political agendas, it was during this period that *Landeskunde* started to become institutionalized within bourgeois voluntary associations—and their journals and museums. As a consequence, *Landeskunde* was embedded into the liberal worldview as a method of patriotic *Bildung*, but in the context of the nation as a “cultural community” rather than the “territorial vision of the feudal order” (p. 103). As participation from the urban and non-noble strata increased, the question of public education drew to the fore. New tensions arose among Saxon, Hungarian, and now Romanian proponents of *Landeskunde* over the composition of that public. The Hungarians, still largely aristocrats and thus commanding a greater share

of the provincial Diet, angled for museums to privilege Magyar *honismeret* as the representative image of Transylvania. Saxons and Romanians, by contrast, though themselves nationalizing, worried about Hungarian dominance and were more inclined to put forward an ethnically inclusive version that spoke of Transylvania as a whole.

Chapter 3 looks at the two decades after the revolutions of 1848, which Török shows to be crucial years of change in several key respects. Despite Habsburg “neo-absolutist” policies aiming to contain dissident political organizations and tamp down renewed nationalist agitation, the Transylvanian public sphere kept expanding, but also fragmenting “along lines of confession, occupation ... social status, and obviously language too” (p. 117). This, as Török points out, placed the region within the European international mainstream. New national *Landeskunde* associations emerged, their character even more widely pedagogical than before, and following “centrifugal geocultural orientations” (p. 161). The Saxon associations catered to a wider audience than the Hungarian ones, actively engaging with German-speaking intellectual societies throughout the continent and benefiting from post-1848 Austrian measures against Hungarian nationalism. Joining the Siebenbürgische Landeskundeverein (Transylvanian *Landeskunde* Society) became a source of sociability and prestige for the Saxon middle class, which allowed the association to support its work selling publications to a market of burghers hungry for *Bildung*. This period also saw the founding of ASTRA (Asociația Transilvană Pentru Literatură Română și Cultura Poporului Român), a Romanian association that shared with the Saxons the goal of popular education and nation-building. Transylvanian Hungarians, too, got their first *honismeret* association in the Erdélyi Múzeum Egeysület (Transylvanian Museum Society), which from its founding was both more socially and nationally exclusive than its counterparts. Common to all, however, was the twilight of

the polymath and the dawn of the specialist. Historical research into the specifically national regional past began to overtake other areas as *Landeskunde* was pressed ever more into the service of justifying divergent political futures.

In the fourth and final chapter, Török weaves together a fascinating multilevel analysis of the impact of the 1867 Compromise, popular nationalism, and the maturation of academic disciplines on *Landeskunde*. On the one hand, credentialed experts exchanged ideas and practices “as an international cross-cultural dialogue,” a product of the Europe-wide trend of academic professionalization, driven regionally by the growth of universities in Transylvania and elsewhere in the Dual Monarchy (p. 164). *Landeskunde* was no longer the pursuit of homegrown amateurs, but was now guided by specialists who strove to “indigenize” the “modern disciplines and their auxiliary sciences into the local scholarly agenda” (p. 221). On the other hand, the national focus of Saxon and Hungarian *Landeskunde* associations hardened as they enacted new methods of involving the literate public. The Saxons led the way in making the study of the homeland more local, as scholars enlisted the help of town pastors and other enthusiasts to document town histories and collect data on regional dialects. The Hungarians took a different tack, which they were enabled to do by the integration of Transylvania into the post-1867 constitutional framework. The Museum Society came to rely very heavily on government funding rather than voluntary public support, in the process becoming an instrument of state education policies. Ultimately, by 1914, Saxon *Landeskunde* and Magyar *honismeret* had arrived in almost the same place, but by different roads: as modes of tutoring the public to understand the province in specifically national terms.

Exploring Transylvania is not a book to be filed away in a single geographic or chronological pigeonhole. It is a worthy contribution to the ongoing task of “Europeanizing” the history of East

Central Europe while still taking the region seriously on its own merits. Likewise, it is a salutary challenge to often illusory barriers of periodization separating the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. And even though Török’s narrative contains a considerable number of moving parts, she does an admirable job of orchestrating them in a way that not only makes easy for the reader to engage with the text.

I would offer only two points of critique, neither of which should be taken as a blemish on this book. *Exploring Transylvania* makes for important reading for scholars of *Heimat*, because it not only takes the concept of *Heimat* out from behind the shadow of Germany (and, to a degree, German-speaking culture) but historicizes it within an understudied context. It is curious, then, that the term does not appear anywhere in the text—not even in a footnote to explain either ostensible distinctions from *Landeskunde* or its omission. While *Heimatkunde* (alongside *honismeret*, I would argue) and *Landeskunde* are not identical concepts, they are nonetheless so closely related as to make the absence of *Heimat* remarkable. The absence only feels more pronounced as the historical narrative progresses, especially in the final chapter, where we witness the Saxon *Landeskundeverein* invest itself ever more in reconstructing local histories. If this was a conscious choice on Török’s part, it would have been helpful to know its logic.

Second, the book’s attention to Romanian actors and voices falls away after chapter 3. This proves somewhat disappointing, as the instances of triangular comparison, though apparently outside the scope of Török’s research, only make the work even more intriguing. In fairness to Török, she states from the outset that her study only touches lightly on Romanian institutions. Her reasoning for this is that ASTRA, formed in 1861, always “dedicated itself to the more modern concept of the ‘nation,’ and not to the fatherland” (p. 3), whereas its Saxon and Hungarian counterparts

gradually shifted from fatherland to nation. However, as this transformation approaches its dénouement, ASTRA exits the narrative—that is, just when the Saxon and Hungarian cases seem to be converging with the Romanian, and with the possibilities for comparison arguably at their richest.

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