

Cultural Dimensions of Elite Formation in Transylvania
(1770–1950)

Edited by
Victor Karady and Borbála Zsuzsanna Török

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IN TRANSYLVANIA (1770–1950)**

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I. Karady Victor (Ed.)

II. Török, Borbála Zsuzsanna (Ed.)

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Introduction

This book is the outcome of various, initially not concerted scholarly efforts to come to terms with a number of sociological, political, and otherwise historical problem areas of the formation of educated elites in Transylvania since the absolutist imperial reforms of the educational system and the professions (notably the health services) in the late eighteenth century up to the Second World War. Our project is inscribed in the recent series of scholarly efforts to apply the most advanced methods of investigation in social and political history to a regional target in East Central Europe.¹ We have attempted to bring together as many topical studies based on recent research as possible without the implementation of any strict principle of selection or preference. The only consciously adopted fundamental criterion here consisted of a full break from standard historical approaches and narratives along ethnic-nationalist lines.

At the core of our program lies the very multiethnic and multiconfessional composition of Transylvanian society, a uniquely complex societal setup in Europe (and probably in the world) as it was established following the Catholic Counter-Reformation. This historic region enjoyed, for a long time, a state-like autonomy and, later, the status of a separate province under St. Stephen's Crown up to its unification, first with Hungary, in 1867, then with Romania in 1919. It is well known that the province had a Romanian-speaking majority in modern times, but it also had a very large Hungarian, German, and other minority population; most of the latter being an especially large portion of the elite strata, whether traditional (the nobility) or newly emerging ones (Jews, Germans, and even Armenians being notably overrepresented in the entrepreneurial and the highly educated brackets). Transylvania remained nevertheless fully fragmented in a confessional mosaic without a demographically dominant faith. In 1910 the largest religious cluster, the Greek Orthodox, represented 30% of the population and the Uniates (Greek Catholics) 28%, while the others were dispersed in geographically and residentially unequal units among Calvinists (14.7%),

- 1 See in this context Cornel Sigmirean, ed., *Intellectualii și societatea modernă. Repere central-Europene* [Intellectuals and modern society. Central European signposts] (Târgu-Mureș, Editura Universității Petru Maior, 2007); Cornel Sigmirean, *Istoria formării intelectualității din Transilvania și Banat în epoca modernă* [The history of the formation of intellectuals from Transylvania and Banat] (Cluj: Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2000); Lucian Nastasă, *Intellectualii și promovarea socială în România: sec. XIX-XX* [The intellectuals and social advancement. 19-20th centuries] (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2004); Lucian Nastasă, *Itinerarii spre lumea savantă* [Itineraries towards the scholarly world] (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2006); Lucian Nastasă, *Suveranii universităților românești* [The sovereigns of the Romanian universities] (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2007).

Roman Catholics (13.4%), Lutherans (9%), Unitarians (2.6%) and Jews (2.1%). Ethnic relations in the age of modernizing nation states as well as competing and conflicting nationalisms regularly involved symbolic and political antagonisms, violence, and even wars on the one hand, and inequalities of all sorts on the other hand, especially with access to collective resources as different as power, authority, economic benefits, properties, chances of upwards professional mobility, and – more and more over time – education. Hence problems related to ethnic inequalities, tensions, and competition underlie most studies of the volume, all the more because some of this conflict situations were the outcome of agency specific to elite groups, notably those having to do with training, instruction, and higher learning. Hence, the key topics touched upon here concern schooling and higher education, different clusters of intellectuals (doctors, writers, and members of learned societies), as well as, unavoidably, politics – in the triple sense of state policies particularly regarding instruction and the educated strata, the political personnel itself (party politicians, cabinet members, high civil servants), and their agency, that is, ways of self-assertion, movements, institutions, ideological propensities and commitments.

The targets of these studies, of course, could not be deliberately chosen to form a coherent whole or to focus on certain intriguing questions identified beforehand by the editors. They draw exclusively on thematically dispersed and ongoing elite-related research in Transylvania and some neighboring regions, especially those which lie outside the classic trends of historiography. If the subjects of the studies have not been explicitly commissioned, we have done a careful inspection to spot the most recent and most original projects corresponding to our general agenda, whether they are due to scholars in or outside of the region, Hungarians, Romanians, or those of other nationalities (among them German and Dutch colleagues), or students engaged in passably different subdisciplines (social, political, or literary historians besides historical sociologists), which secures a multidisciplinary character to our undertaking. The studies presented here are (with one significant exception) clearly focused on Transylvania at large, with ample references to the neighboring territories of historic Partium and Banat. There are also occasional comparisons to other regions (Bukovina and Bessarabia) belonging to the provinces that were united with the Romanian Old Kingdom after 1918. One study included in the volume goes beyond the bounds of the region and is centered topically elsewhere (covering the whole Romanian ruling elite since the unification up to the end of the parliamentary regime, though comprising ample reference to the Transylvanian political class as well) and is thus justified by its intellectual scope and methodological originality.

One can add that an unavowed but self-evident purpose of ours was to escape the pitfalls of what is usually regarded as a ‘politically sensitive’ object and produce a set of topically not necessarily convergent, investigations which disregard, if not ignore, the persistent political controversies (often imbued with nationalist craze) around the legitimacy of Trianon and the multiple changes of sovereignty that took place in the region during the first half of the last century. One of the implicit objectives of our enterprise has been precisely to attempt – with the modest means of a collective intellectual venture – to

contribute to the historic task befalling to enlightened intellectuals of our generation in this part of the world to 'overcome' our respective 'Trianon complexes' and work side by side to clarify without any extra-scholarly bias some important points of our common history in a properly professional spirit.

It was certainly not the product of pure chance that the actual gatherings hosting the presentation of the very first versions of the studies developed in this book were sponsored by the Central European University in Budapest, a university accredited both in America and by the Hungarian Ministry of Education, with multi-national staff and student body, heavily relying upon East-Central Europeans, together with Western scholars. As an illustration, the present head of the History Department is a Romanian and, since its seventeen odd years of existence, two Hungarians, one American, and another Romanian colleague have served in the same capacity. The History Department here has an established tradition in addressing the entangled histories of Transylvania in a larger regional comparative context. Students and their professors apply innovative approaches to the complexities of the topic, combining social and intellectual history, and the synchronic perspective of sociological methods with the diachronic perspective of historiography.² The synergy at the History Department, the attached Nationalism Studies Program, as well as the Jewish Studies Program has led to several collaborations with other universities and research centers mostly in East-Central and South-Eastern Europe (more recently in the framework of a *Comparative History Project* of the Higher Education Support Program and the Central European University or the collaborative project hosted by Pasts, Inc. on *Shared/Entangled Histories: Comparative Perspectives on Hungary and Romania*), gradually involving partners from the larger European academe and America. Parallel to the growing demand for larger continental and global contextualization of the narrower research topic, there is an equally keen sensitivity to such microstudies as illustrated by the book on "everyday ethnicity" in a historical context³ edited by Rogers Brubaker from the University of California, visiting professor at the Central European University. It is not astonishing thus that five of the eleven

- 2 Balázs Trencsényi, Dragoș Petrescu, Cristina Petrescu, Constantin Iordachi and Zoltán Kántor, eds., *Nation-Building and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian Case Studies* (Budapest: Regio Books/ Iași: Editura Polirom, 2001); Maciej Janowski, Constantin Iordachi, and Balázs Trencsényi, "Why Bother about Historical Regions? Debates over Central Europe in Hungary, Poland and Romania", *East Central Europe / L'Europe Du Centre-est. Eine wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift* 1-2 (2005): 5-58; Sorin Antohi, Péter Apor, and Balázs Trencsényi, eds., *Narratives Unbound: Historical Studies in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2007); Balázs Trencsényi and Michal Kopecek, eds., *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945): Texts and Commentaries*, vol. I., Late Enlightenment - The Emergence of the Modern 'National Idea' (Budapest: CEU Press, 2006); vol. II., *National Romanticism*, (Budapest: CEU Press, 2007); Dietmar Müller, Borbála Zsuzsanna Török, and Balázs Trencsényi, eds., "Reframing the European Pasts: National Discourses and Regional Comparisons", *East Central Europe* 1-2 (forthcoming, 2009).
- 3 Rogers Brubaker, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea eds. *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

contributors to this volume are actually associated with this university as doctoral students, alumni or staff and the initiative of the publication has also been taken by members of our faculty.

In concrete terms all but one chapter of the volume emanate from discussions at two workshops specifically organized by the editors on two occasions, in May 2005 and June 2006 in Budapest thanks to the support of Pasts Inc. Center for Historical Studies at the History Department of the Central European University.

The bulk of the book is arranged for purely pragmatic reasons in three parts dedicated respectively to higher education and students, various elite clusters as actors or objects of political strategies and, finally 'comparative perspectives,' proposing two studies where Transylvanian problems crop up in the framework of interregional comparisons.

Joachim von Puttkamer, the author of an important comparative study of minority education under Hungarian rule in Slovakia and Transylvania during the nineteenth century⁴, introduces in his seminal exposé a project of considerable scope, consisting in the publication of the major pieces of legislation and local regulation of schooling in Transylvania during the long period between the Josephist endeavors to reshuffle, secularize, and place under partial state control the public educational system, and the final peace years before the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy and the administration of Transylvania as part of the Hungarian Kingdom. His contribution is all the more precious that it offers an abundant bibliography of recent and less recent publications on educational matters related to Transylvania for the whole period concerned.

Sever Cristian Oancea provides here a case study of the Transylvanian Lutheran-Saxon clergy in the *Vormärz*, one of the central topics of his doctoral dissertation in progress. The focal question of the attempted upgrading of the intellectual training demanded from Protestant ministers of the time was connected to the alternative of studies at home or abroad, notably in Lutheran Prussia, an emerging rival power to the Habsburg Empire. Political competition involves cultural rivalry here between Austrian and German universities resulting in the foundation of a Faculty of Lutheran Theology in Vienna and the sometimes outlawed peregrination of students concerned in Protestant centers of learning of the German academic market. This well focused piece of research raises one of the central issues of higher education in nineteenth-century East-Central Europe, the problem of wandering students, representing the majority or indeed all of those looking for advanced training in a period of often absolute scarcity (or even absence) of specialized higher educational supply in their home region.

Zoltán Pálffy's piece is an indirect prolongation of his recently published doctoral dissertation in English⁵ on the political and intellectual implications

4 Joachim von Puttkamer, *Schulalltag und nationale Integration in Ungarn. Slowaken, Rumänen und Siebenbürger Sachsen in der Auseinandersetzung mit der ungarischen Staatsidee, 1867-1914* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2003).

5 Zoltán Pálffy, *National controversy in the Transylvanian Academe. The Cluj/Kolozsvár University in the first half of the 20th century* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2005).

of the ethnic-national conflict around the University of Kolozsvár/Cluj in various historical junctures since the Hungarian era till the first Communist decade. Its specificity consists in the systematic confrontation of data, gained from the university archives, related to ethnic, confessional and social patterns of recruitment of large samples of students born in Transylvania and graduating from the Medical and the Legal Faculties of both Kolozsvár/Cluj and Budapest. This ingenious and systematic scheme of statistical comparisons sheds a harsh light on the hierarchy of global educational chances (probabilities of enrollment into a faculty), study choices (medicine compared to law and political science), and academic excellence (as measured by the age of graduation) of students, revealing a veritable gap between the intellectually best endowed (Jews, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics) and the most poorly favored (Eastern Christians), while other Protestants (Calvinists and Unitarians) were situated in between.

Victor Karady presents a shortcut to a larger scholarly enterprise covering more at length the problem area of the social inequalities of education in Transylvania under the post-1867 Dual Monarchy, when – thanks in particular to the foundation of the second Hungarian university in Kolozsvár/Cluj (1872) – Transylvania started to constitute a counterweight of sorts to the hitherto absolute hegemony of Budapest on the Hungarian educational market. Some results of this ongoing research have already been published, others are due to follow.⁶ To whom did the local schooling investments benefit preferentially and why? The response to these questions comes close to Zoltán Pálffy's conclusions. The recourse to some additional statistically objectified and confession related variables (inequalities in terms of urbanization, professional stratification, number and quality of schools, etc.) permit a sociological analysis of some major sources of disparities in this field.

The essays in the second part of the book, centered on problems of political elites and elite politics, are organized in an approximately chronological order of the topics discussed, ranging from the late eighteenth-century to the 1940s.

The purpose of *Teodora Daniela Sechel* was the development of an important topic of her doctoral dissertation. Her essay is a scrupulous discussion of the impact of the imperial reforms of the 1770s on the Transylvanian medical personnel. Van Swieten's reforms, implemented by law in 1770 and applicable in the whole Habsburg Empire, targeted the reorganization of medical education, the integration of the medical personnel

6 See Lucian Nastasă, *The University of Kolozsvár/Cluj and the Students of the Medical Faculty (1872-1918)* (Cluj: Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center, Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2004); Lucian Nastasă, "The Social Functions of Education in a Multi-Cultural and Post-Feudal Society. The Transylvanian Paradigm", *Educational Inequalities and Denominations. Database for Transylvania, 1910* ed. Victor Karady and Peter Tibor Nagy (Budapest: John Wesley Publisher, forthcoming 2008); Victor Karady and Lucian Nastasă, *The Students of the Faculties of Arts, Sciences and Pharmacy at the University of Kolozsvár/Cluj (1872-1918)* (Cluj: Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center, Budapest-New York, Central European University Press, forthcoming); Victor Karady and Lucian Nastasă, *The Students of the Faculty of Law at the University of Kolozsvár/Cluj (1872-1918)* (Cluj: Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center, and Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, forthcoming).

in an administrative structure under central auspices and a special scheme (quarantine stations) to prevent or minimize the risks of epidemics. In Transylvania it allowed the foundation of the Medical Lyceum in Kolozsvár/Cluj and the extension of its training functions beyond physicians and surgeons to pharmacists and midwives. Moreover it helped the transformation of the staff of health care into a corporation of men with special expertise but also of enlightened learning. Doctors particularly, irrespective of their noble or common descent, would henceforth enter elite circles, often as founding members of learned societies to develop considerable agency in spreading enlightened knowledge on the region and to the interested public of the region.

Borbála Zsuzsanna Török also follows one of the topical issues of her dissertation defended years ago on the comparison of the major German and Hungarian learned societies in nineteenth-century Transylvania, dedicated to the study of the region from the viewpoint of their respective national-ethnic interests.⁷ Thus the Saxon *Verein für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, became a major scholarly enterprise for the study of the Saxon past as well as geographical, ethnographic, philological, and socioeconomic aspects of the presence of Saxons in the province. A civil initiative, the *Verein*, was the manifestation of the intellectual sociability of Saxon urban elites maintaining strong scientific links with German scholarly circles all over Europe. Its Hungarian counterpart was a much more aristocratic foundation with similar initial objectives. Among its specific traits one remarks a membership recruited in all confessional groups with significant Hungarian participation (including Jews), its secular nature (rarity of ecclesiastics), the presence of lady members and supporters and its progressive specialization in four large disciplines (humanities, natural sciences, medicine, and law). Following the foundation of the University of Kolozsvár/Cluj (1872), there is a virtual merger under state support (and thanks to public subsidies) of the Hungarian Museum Association and the University, both becoming institutional agents of a more or less conservative type of Magyar nationalism.

Judit Pál offers a strictly centered investigation of the consequences that the political transition staged by the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise entailed for the composition of the state-appointed governing body of the Transylvanian territorial units, the lord-lieutenants (*főispánok*). Her inquiry dissipates the myth of a complete ‘change of the guard’ after the reign of the ‘Bach Hussars’ during the post-1849 years of absolutism. The factual presentation of the progressive reforms of the regional administration arrived at its final conclusion in 1872 only when all the territory (the Szekler and

7 Borbála Zsuzsanna Török, “The Friends of Progress: Learned Societies and the Public Sphere in the Transylvanian Reform Era”, *Austrian History Yearbook* 36 (2005): 94-120; Borbála Zsuzsanna Török, “Patriotic Scholarship: The Adaptation of State Sciences in late 18th Century Transylvania”, in *The Intellectual History of Patriotism and the Legacy of Composite States in East-Central Europe* ed. Márton Zászkaliczky and Balázs Trencsényi (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming 2009); Borbála Zsuzsanna Török, “Scholarship in the Public Sphere: Competing Ethnic Traditions”, *Reframing the European Pasts: National Discourses and Regional Comparisons*, *East Central Europe* 34, no. 1-2 (forthcoming 2009).

Saxon districts included with their earlier elected heads of self-administration) was cut up in counties and fully integrated into the Hungarian county network. The selection of these high standing civil servants followed in part traditional principles (majority of aristocrats with strong local roots) and responded, above all, to political interests of the government, irrespective of religion if not of cultural-national ties (to the benefit of Magyars).

John Neubauer is bringing here a fascinating case study of interethnic literary relations in Transylvania, that is, contacts between authors of different languages in a period of explosive nationalism and often antagonistic cultural claims. Transylvania was a training ground of outstanding Hungarian (Endre Ady, Dezső Szabó, and Sándor Reményik), Romanian (Ioan Slavici, George Barițiu, and Octavian Goga), as well as some original German writers since the late nineteenth century, who frequently knew, met and occasionally appreciated each other. They could sometimes reject attempts at but also foster and support drives of cultural hegemony. Each large language cluster founded cultural circles, journals and associations in support of, among other things, its literary creativity. (In the years 1877–1888 Hugo Meltzl, a professor of the Arts Faculty of Kolozsvár/Cluj, published what apparently became the first ever journal of comparative literature in Europe.) The essay follows details of the complex relationships between individuals, circles and movements belonging to different national literary traditions till the interwar years, when – especially after the mounting tide of right extremism and the appearance of the Brown Plague in the 1930s – open intercultural cooperation became more and more impossible between authors with national commitments.

The second part of the book is closed by *Gábor Egry's* study of the Hungarian party in the 1940s. The author pursues here his ambitious research on the birth and development of "Transylvaniam" since the late Dualist period and its transformations and distortions in the inter-war years under Romanian rule as well as in the 1940s during the Hungarian take over of Northern Transylvania.⁸ Though the Hungarian Party and other ethnically based civic or cultural organizations (like *EME* – Transylvanian Museum Association, *EMGE* – Transylvanian Hungarian Economic Association, *EMKE* – Transylvanian Association for the Popularization of Hungarian Culture) of the erstwhile dominant minority community performed various specific – mostly cultural – functions, their role proved to be essentially political as representative bodies defending the collective interests of the Magyar community, its public self-assertion and self-presentation, but also the maintenance of its dual status as part of the Hungarian nation with a particular and presumably superior moral standing. Throughout his analysis the author stresses the personal, ideological, institutional, as well as middle-class bound continuities of the Hungarian organizations and their staff which had to reconsider its policies and commitments with regard to the 'Motherland' in the war years. This was the short historical juncture when the unification with the post-Trianon rump state was implemented – not always to the benefit of Transylvanians – and

8 Gábor Egry, *Az erdélyiség színeváltozásai* [Transfigurations of Transylvaniamism] (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2008).

official nationalist politics comprised more than ever a growing measure of quasi-paranoid xenophobia and anti-Semitism.

Our last section is shorter than the two previous ones, made up of the buttress chapters of the book, but it offers hitherto neglected comparative vistas.

Marius Lazăr's important contribution exceeds Transylvania proper, since it deals with the formation of the Romanian state and its ruling elite since the unification of the two principalities and the beginning of the parliamentary regime till its very ending under the 'royal dictatorship', followed by various totalitarian experiences. Transylvania is touched upon indirectly in the last chronological part of the study. This is indeed a report of a sophisticated sociological survey confronting the Romanian high political personnel (members of government) with canonized literary authors of the times – amounting altogether to 683 individuals. These are identified by a number of characteristics relevant for their public career and constructed into sensitive statistical variables (like social class background, education, socioprofessional destiny, the type of political capital detained and membership in a generational cluster). Beyond essential but classic correlations in early periods of post-feudal political modernization qualified here as the 'social origin effect', the 'social status effect' or the 'educational effect' – stressing the fact that those better endowed with social assets have better chances to accede to positions of power and authority – some results of the study point to the concentration of political influence in the hands of less and less persons ('historical effect') and the progressive prevalence of what the author terms as 'transactional capital' as against historical status in political careers. Though the political and the cultural field appears to remain largely distinct throughout, as shown by the main social characteristics of their agents, both fields go via marked historical changes. The political field was particularly marked by instability both in form of frequently changing governments and the fragile party loyalties of their members. The study closes with a large scale historical typology of the Romanian political class.

Mariana Hausleitner continues her investigations of the territorial margins of the Romanian state, following her fundamental research on the national integration of Bukovina⁹ with a concise but systematic comparison of three regions attached to Romania after the First World War, Bessarabia, Bukovina and south-western Transylvania (Banat). Both the ethnic structures and the state policies differed in these territories as well as the degree of established or newly generated conflict zones between national constituencies. A piece of still ongoing research, the article leads us to the years of the Second World War and with it the most tragic chapter of this part of the world, including the Holocaust and various forms of ethnic cleansing, in which local minorities and majorities took a heavy and often bloody share under the aegis of respective (Romanian, Soviet, and Nazi German) governments in charge.

Our book has come up to its original purpose if it succeeds to propose a significant sample of ongoing innovative research centered on complex socio-historical issues of modern Transylvania in presocialist times.

9 Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung der Bukowina* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2001).