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Late medieval saddle, MNIT Collection, photo by Victor Vátavu

**STUDIES AND ARTICLES.
HISTORY AND MOVABLE
HERITAGE**

THE CROSSING ITINERARIES OF JOHN OF CAPESTRANO AND JOHN HUNYADI, 1455–1456*

IULIAN MIHAI DAMIAN**

Abstract: The present article reconstructs from a comparative perspective the itineraries of John Hunyadi and the Franciscan John of Capestrano (1386–1456), from their encounter in Győr (June 1455) to the death of the former governor in Zemun, near Belgrade, on 11 August 1456. The older scholarship on the subject is integrated with fresh information from new editions of Capestrano’s correspondence, Franciscan sources left unexplored by historical research, and a closer examination of the already-known documentation. The result is a much clearer and more coherent picture of the itineraries of the two historical figures, which modifies or completes the data already known. The comparative perspective, which emphasizes the relations between the two leaders, proves particularly useful for the periods when their itineraries overlap, such as during their joint journey through the eastern and the southern regions of the Hungarian kingdom (December 1455–January 1456), which has allowed the identification of stops that were previously unknown (such as Turda and Hațeg). The extraordinary mobility of the two personalities and the need to organize truly mobile “chancelleries” are discussed in the same comparative key. From a methodological point of view, the study is intended as a reflection on the need to overcome the limitations of the biographical approach in studying itineraries, especially by integrating contemporary tools from the digital humanities.

Keywords: medieval itineraries, John Hunyadi, John of Capestrano, mobile chancellery, crusade

Rezumat: Studiul de față reconstruiește dintr-o perspectivă comparativă itinerariile lui Iancu de Hunedoara și ale franciscanului Ioan de Capestrano (1386–1456), din momentul întâlnirii lor la Győr (iunie 1455) și până la momentul morții fostului guvernator la Zemun, lângă Belgrad, pe 11 august 1456. Cercetările mai vechi pe acest subiect sunt integrate cu informații noi, rezultate din noile ediții ale epistolarului lui Capestrano, surse franciscane rămase neexploatate de cercetarea

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Note: In order to keep the text within reasonable limits and to avoid repetition of already known information, references to sources have generally been limited to citing the latest available edition and English translations, if any. References to the original have been made only where no editions of the documents in question exist or where comparison with the original is necessary. The bibliography has also been limited to the most important and recent works. The names of localities appear in the text in their present form, except for small localities which are difficult to identify, where alternative names in other languages have been given.

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istorică și o mai atentă lectură a documentației deja cunoscute. Rezultă un tablou mult mai articulat și mai coerent al itinerariilor celor două personaje istorice, care modifică sau completează datele deja cunoscute. Perspectiva comparativă, care pune accentul pe raporturile dintre cei doi lideri, își dovedește utilitatea mai ales pentru perioadele când itinerariile lor se suprapun, precum în timpul călătoriei comune prin părțile răsăritene și sudice ale regatului Ungariei (decembrie 1455–ianuarie 1456), permițând identificarea unor etape rămase până în prezent necunoscute (precum Turda și Hațeg). Mobilitatea extraordinară a celor două personalități și necesitatea organizării unor adevărate „cancelarii” mobile sunt discutate în aceeași cheie comparativă. Din punct de vedere metodologic, studiul se dorește o reflecție asupra necesității depășirii limitelor abordării biografice în studiul itinerariilor, mai ales prin integrarea instrumentelor contemporane din sfera *digital humanities*.

Cuvinte cheie: itinerarii medievale, Iancu de Hunedoara, Ioan de Capestrano, cancelarie mobilă, cruciadă

Itineraries are invaluable tools for historians, evolving in conjunction with the advancement of methodologies and interests within the field. It is perhaps unsurprising that the initial rigorous application of this approach to the study of the medieval past was in the field of political history, with a particular focus on royal itineraries, as early as the nineteenth century. In this regard, the regional context addressed by this essay has a long tradition of studies, relating to those beginnings, albeit one that has been marked by inconsistency.¹ Consequently, notable and up-to-date scientific results have been obtained in the 1980s and, in particular, after the 1990s, with a significant discrepancy in comparison to the scientific output of Western Europe.² Two objective challenges have consistently hindered the progress of such studies: firstly, the precarious context of documentary preservation, characterized by extensive losses and, in particular, by the disappearance of entire series of chancellery registers kept by medieval institutions within the Kingdom of Hungary; secondly, the dispersion of this material across a multitude of disparate archival contexts. The advent of digitalized medieval collections in the public domain, following some admirable initiatives, has largely succeeded in overcoming this last challenge.³ Could a comparative approach in the study of itineraries be a solution to fill the gaps caused by documentary losses?

Traditionally, itineraries of historical figures share with biographies the same centrality of the individual as a protagonist of history. As such, they are imagined as constrained by the same boundaries of biographies, a genre that, since Plutarch, has always favored a parallel approach, but was unable to deal with crossed destinies. It is no coincidence that, in the case of the two prominent personalities who are the subject of the present study, historical inquiries on their itineraries have been in close connection with the major efforts to produce new biographies or specific studies focusing on their individual role.⁴ Even

¹ In particular, Ráth 1866 (first published in 1861) and Sebestyén 1938.

² The resumption of studies on itineraries is to be attributed to Pál Engel (1938–2001). See Engel 1984 and Engel 1987, followed by important contributions, including in particular Engel, Tóth 2005 and Horváth 2011.

³ The establishment of a digital system for the medieval collections at the Hungarian National Archives, which was made possible by Iván Borsa's vision and pivotal role in its creation, has set an example that has been followed by similar initiatives in neighboring countries.

⁴ For John Hunyadi a pioneering study is Pall 1976 (for his 1447 Wallachian campaign), followed by the major contribution of Engel 1984 (who reconstructed the itinerary for the years 1446–1452), and Rusu 1990.

recent works that draw on contemporary research methods and the opportunities offered by digital humanities appear to remain somehow constrained (at least for the time being) by the limitations of the biographical approach.⁵ Similar studies could actually receive a boost from a real “spatial turn” in the study of the itineraries, moving its focus from the individual to the connections with the others in time and space.⁶ Additionally, the development of sophisticated data management tools could enhance the analysis of large data sets, offering new insights into the complex dynamics of human interactions. In this regard, the present study aims to test the limits of the traditional approach to itineraries, establishing an example that will hopefully be useful for understanding the potential of a comparative method in their study.

It is surprising that no specific study has focused on the relationship between the two leading personalities discussed here, on how it started and developed over time, to the point where their destinies became closely intertwined during the victorious defense of Belgrade against the Ottoman armies (14–22 July 1456), a heroic undertaking that hastened their end in the months following the battle.⁷ This study aims to fill this gap, analyzing the moments in which their itineraries overlapped, with a particular focus on the lesser-known moment of their collaboration in the winter of 1455–1456, spent by both men on the move through Transylvania and the Southern Parts of the Hungarian Kingdom (for the sake of brevity, this region will henceforth also be referred to as Banat, understood as a historical province with boundaries that broadly correspond with those of the aforementioned region). A Franciscan source corroborates their itineraries during this specific period. It deserves to be critically discussed and corroborated with a series of corrections and remarks resulting from closer scrutiny of the epistolary of John of Capestrano, a vast collection of letters (over 650 preserved), which is the subject of a still ongoing editorial project.⁸ Something as half of them are, in fact, related to Central Europe and offer the unique possibility to better reconstruct his itinerary from 1451 to 1456, as well as his capacity of networking with political figures, clergy, intellectuals and laymen of the region.

They have provided the basis for the most important biographies and monographs on Hunyadi, such as Held 1985 and Engel 2001, and for more specific studies on his outstanding personality and family, the most influential being Rusu 1990, Drăgan 2000 and Pop 2020. Mureșanu 2021 (an English translation of the 2nd Romanian edition of 1968) is more generic precisely because it had not benefited from the advances made in the studies on the itineraries.

A reconstruction of Capestrano’s itinerary was attempted by Ottokar Bonmann and included the second edition of his biography by Johannes Hofer; see Hofer, Bonmann 1964–1965, I, 520–529; the Hungarian itinerary before Belgrade is discussed in more detail in vol. II, 349–371.

⁵ For instance, in relation to John of Capestrano, see Basili 2024, a valuable doctoral thesis in digital humanities supervised by Letizia Pellegrini (University of Macerata).

⁶ See Schlögel 2016, esp. xviii–xxiii.

⁷ John Hunyadi died on 11 August, in the camp of Zemun (Semlin, in German sources); Capestrano on 23 October, in the Franciscan convent of Ilok, unable to recover from the fatigue of the battle. For the 1456 siege of Belgrade see the recent collection of sources published by Mixson 2022, with many references.

⁸ A modern, critical edition of this impressive epistolary was only recently undertaken with the publication of the 56 letters related to Poland and Silesia (see CEIC–P) and the 188 related to Medieval Hungary and Transylvania, as a result of a collaborative project involving Hungarian and Romanian scholars (see CEIC–H). For the editorial European project, see Pellegrini 2010 and Pellegrini 2018. The inventories provide an overview of the remaining contents of the *Corpus*. See Chiappini 1927 and Gál, Miskuly 1989–1992.

Government in motion

Perhaps an excellent, less considered, common denominator for the two personalities concerned by this study, so different by origins, interests, and occupations, can be found in the extraordinary mobility that characterized their activity, even after they rose to the highest positions in the political and religious bodies in which they had spent their careers. This exceptional degree of mobility, which situates the two men within the patterns of the Renaissance (although neither being qualified to be considered a proponent of its ideals), resulted in the formation of itinerant “chanceries” around each of the two leaders, characterized by distinct operational strategies and roles. There are some pioneering aspects in those “chanceries” that warrant further reflection over the next pages.

Undoubtedly, in the meteoric carrier of John Hunyadi, born into a Romanian family of the lesser nobility originating from Wallachia who found its vocation in soldiering, his exceptional military talent was matched by incredible activism and efficiency already in the early stages of his career, a time when he gathered significant experience not only in his homeland but also abroad.⁹ At the zenith of his career, when he acted as lord governor of Hungary (1446–1453), supreme captain of the kingdom and captain-general of the Southern Regions, he was constantly on the move. Referring to this period, Antonio Bonfini, the court historian of his son Matthias, elected king in 1458, described him as “so swift and zealous in performing his duties, so patient and untiring in listening to people of every condition, that, called upon to dispense justice, he exercised his role whether sitting or standing, walking or riding.”¹⁰ Historians who have studied his itineraries have been able to confirm the accuracy of this statement: during the seven years of his governorship, John Hunyadi rarely stayed in one place for more than two months, and was constantly on the move in the exercise of his multiple duties, which ranged from political and military to legal and administrative. Similar remarks have been made for the other periods in which he held major offices, as voivode of Transylvania (1441–1446) and captain-general (1453–1456).¹¹ The necessity of defending the southern frontier against the advancing Ottomans, which greatly facilitated his political ascent, only partially explains his itinerant and energetic style of government. Contrasting aspects may have been at work here: he emulated the Renaissance model of the self-made Italian *principe*, under the influence of the various *condottieri* he encountered throughout his life (starting with Filippo Scolari *de Ozora*, whose squire he was at the beginning of his apprenticeship¹²); paradoxically enough, however, this style of government responded to the “medieval” expectations of his countrymen for the physical presence of their leader in the territory, especially in time of crisis (as it was the entire period he held the reins of power in Hungary).

There is no doubt that the energy and mobility of John Hunyadi’s rule, both hallmarks of the Renaissance, were “beyond anything that had been seen before” in

⁹ See recently Cîmpeanu 2019, 158–198, and Cîmpeanu 2024, 25–31.

¹⁰ Bonfini 1936, 158 (decas III, lib. VII): “in negotiis expediendis usque adeo festinus et ardens, item in audiendis in omni genere hominibus patiens et indefessus, ut sedens, stans, incedens equitansque rogatus ius diceret.”

¹¹ During the governorship period only once stayed three months in a single location (in Buda, from February to April 1447), and twice he remained two months in a single place; see Engel 1984, 980–986; Rusu 1990, 174–175.

¹² Cîmpeanu 2019, 186–187. For the Renaissance personality of John Hunyadi see Rusu 1999, 56–76.

Hungary and remained unmatched even by the last Jagiellonian kings before Mohács.¹³ Nevertheless, it is evident that beneath the romanticized image of the governor dispensing justice and issuing charters from the saddle of his horse, as depicted by Bonfini, there is a much more complex reality. The unfortunate loss of the Hunyadi family archive for this period presents a significant obstacle in reconstructing various aspects of how his moving administration functioned. Nevertheless, scholars who have investigated this topic have identified several noteworthy aspects. Firstly, they have observed the existence of a mobile chancery, which was able to withstand the rigors of travel and the lack of a fixed residence. Secondly, they have highlighted the continuity between the personal and the official chanceries, and the mobility of some of their members over time. Thirdly, they have emphasized the functionality of the information system, the governor's permanent reliance on correspondence and couriers, and the quality of the staff involved (with attention, for example, to the governor's commitment to supporting the studies of clerks associated with his chancery).¹⁴ Furthermore, it has been observed that some of them were rewarded with estates and important titles, and sometimes even appointed to the administration of fortresses and domains.¹⁵

Similar observations can be made about the personality of John of Capestrano and the way he organized his own mobile "chancellery," especially after 1451, during his one-way journey north of the Alps. Mobility implicitly characterized his long career as an itinerant preacher, which lasted four decades and was overlaid by numerous other direct assignments in the direct service of the popes (notably as papal commissioner, diplomat and inquisitor general, with special powers). More stable, but by no means static, were his two terms as vicar general of the Cismontane Observance (1443–1446, 1449–1452), a period during which he restructured the movement in a *de facto* independent structure of the Franciscan Order. From 1451, when he left Italy at the invitation of Emperor Frederick III to preach in Vienna, Capistrano's personality assumed a real European dimension, travelling on a "grand tour" through Moravia to the borders of Hussite Bohemia, Bavaria, Thuringia, Saxony, Silesia, Poland, reaching finally, Hungary. By the end of his life, Capestrano's stamina was legendary among his contemporaries. During the battle of Belgrade, when he had just reached the ripe old age of 70, his confrere and biographer John of Tagliacozzo described him as an unassailable model for all the other participants in the siege:

In the presence of myself and others, urging the most illustrious John Hunyadi to the cause of defense, he confessed that in seventeen days and as many nights, during the siege of the Turks, he had slept barely seven hours. All his associates, though young, he exhausted and overtook them in hardships; none of the strongest secular men could withstand him, and even the very strong and swift horse which had been given to him by the lord Hunyadi, to the amazement of all, was worn out by exhaustion. The intense heat, the most severe cold, the sun during the day and the moon at night,

¹³ Rusu 1999, 69.

¹⁴ Komjáthy 1956; Rusu 1990, 175–176; Rusu 1999, 68–70.

¹⁵ Elekes 1952, 307; Bónis 1971, 165–166.

the constant harassment, the incessant activity, the untiring labor were the causes of his illness.¹⁶

After missing his own bloodshed at Belgrade by the hand of the Turks, dying of exhaustion seems to have been the last of Capestrano's heroic deeds, in the hope of being recognized as a martyr (allusions to martyrdom are quite common in his epistolary; after Belgrade, Pope Calixtus III himself addressed him as "almost a martyr").¹⁷ The apologetic nature of Tagliacozzo's account is obvious, but miraculous or not, Capestrano's incredible energy certainly made a strong impression on the contemporaries, starting with his own younger confreres.

An in-depth reading of the new critical editions of Capestrano's letters related to Central Europe may explain his almost thunderous success in Central Europe (including his future fame) through his capacity to create a network around him, which can be represented as a series of concentric circles around his figure. The "inner circle" included his companions, the Franciscan friars that accompanied him from Italy, a privilege due to his position of vicar general of the Cismontane Observants, that he managed to maintain even when he no longer held that office. This group of Friars Minor, headed by their charismatic leader, travelled through Central Europe, from town to town, in wagons provided by their sponsors, carrying their books, registers, charters, and even relics. Their number was quite consistent – symbolically 12 men upon leaving Italy in 1451, including here his future four early hagiographers (Nicholas of Fara, Jerome of Udine, John of Tagliacozzo and Christopher of Varese), together with other disciples, many of them destined to important carriers (the most successful – Gabriel Rangone of Verona, future cardinal and papal legate in Hungary and Bohemia a decade later). Actually, the composition of the *curia Capistrani* varied from 1451 to 1456, including friars of different nationalities and competences (e.g., as translators for German, Capestrano made use of at least 40 different Franciscans, by some estimates). Besides translating and organizing his preaching, this group on the move was entrusted with virtually all the aspects of Capestrano's activity: some of the friars acted as his proxies, supervising the reformation of the newly acquired convents and the Franciscan communities, as representatives and envoys to various courts, or as sub commissioners with various roles (including delicate matters such as inquisition and crusade); other friars functioned as secretaries and clerks for the "Old Man" (as his closest collaborators seem to have nicknamed him), in charge of writing letters and recording them, or of keeping various registries. From the perspective of the organization and functioning of a moving chancellery, as well as the role and influence of its various members, Capestrano's informal *curia* represents an extremely well-documented example, which undoubtedly merits further study.

In this context, it may be useful to consider a brief comparison with Hunyadi's mobile chancery, which offers an interesting point of contrast despite the two realities

¹⁶ *Admirabilem ac stupendam de Turcis victoriam* (10 February 1461), ed. in Wadding 1932, XII, 444–446, cit. 444 (the English translation is my own). The episode is mentioned, with fewer details, also in the first account of the Battle of Belgrade (*Etsi non ignorem*, 22 July 1460), Wadding 1932, XII, 750–796: 769; see the English translation by Mixson 2022, 147–216: 176.

¹⁷ A Papal letter of August or September 1456 designated him as "invictum Dei preconem et iam in vita fere martyrem," CEIC–H, 378–379 (n. 177).

being of unequal importance and belonging to distinct institutional spheres. The different cultural backgrounds of the two leaders are clearly reflected in the structure of their mobile chancelleries. Given his lack of a literate education, it seems inevitable that John Hunyadi may have had to rely entirely on others to organize his itinerant administrative apparatus.¹⁸ In contrast, Capestrano had a robust academic background, being a lawyer *in utroque jure* and having served as a royal judge in Perugia before joining the Franciscans, a fact reflected in the meticulous organization of his “chancellery.” It has been observed that he was the first vicar general of the Observance to keep a register of documents issued, similarly to the minister general of the Order.¹⁹ The necessity of maintaining regular communication with the papacy, cardinals, and other prominent figures, including lay princes and humanists, drove him to adopt epistolary and diplomatic models consistent with the rank of his correspondents and in tone with the trends of his time. This included writing; it has recently been observed that some of “his” letters (actually transcribed by his younger companions) represent the earliest examples of humanistic writing in Hungary and Transylvania.²⁰ In comparison, none of these elements are present in John Hunyadi’s letters to the Franciscan contained in his epistolary, which are very pragmatic texts with no literary pretensions. A further examination of Hunyadi’s correspondence may confirm that many Renaissance textual elements that are discernible in some celebrated letters bearing his signature actually originated from the chancellor John Vitéz of Zredna and his entourage.²¹

Crossing paths from Győr to Transylvania

It was assumed that John of Capestrano first encountered John Hunyadi in February or March 1455, during his stay in Wiener Neustadt, while the former general governor was leading the Hungarian delegation present at the third imperial diet convened to address the Ottoman threat to Central Europe (*Türkenreichstage*).²² The proceedings of this assembly, held at the imperial residence from 25 February to 23 March, resulted in the same inconclusive outcomes as the previous two diets of Regensburg and Frankfurt (May and October 1454). It must be noted that the precise arrival and departure of the former Hungarian governor are not well documented, and his mention in the opening oration of Enea Silvio Piccolomini (1405–1464, pope Pius II from 1458) is to be taken with caution.²³ Instead, Hunyadi’s presence in Kittsee, near Bratislava, at the end of March, can be linked to his return to Hungary after the assembly.²⁴ Capestrano was in Vienna before Christmas

¹⁸ As governor he was assisted by a council of six members (Rusu 1990, 175). A document of 3 March 1450 makes reference to his lack of literacy, citing instances where he had authenticated forged documents in his capacity as governor (Teleki 1853, 248–256, d. 118).

¹⁹ RegObs, 12; Sedda 2018, 41–42.

²⁰ Dincă 2020, 116.

²¹ Such as “Europe,” a very modern concept at the time, which is strikingly often mentioned in letters signed by the Governor (Vitéz 1980, 69–70, n. I–25; 90–95, n. I–37), by Hunyadi and others (such as Vitéz 1980, 198–200, n. II–22) or by Vitéz himself, (Vitéz, 213–216, n. II 39), and reappears in his orations (Vitéz, 252–254, n. III–6 and 255–269, n. III–7); see the recent discussion in Bisaha 2023, 46.

²² Hofer, Bonmann 1964–1965, I, 527; II, 332–333.

²³ Piccolomini mentioned Hunyadi in his oration *In hoc florentissimo* (25 February), but he was not present in Neustadt at the time, according to Cotta-Schønberg 2024, 38–39.

²⁴ Sebestyén 1938, 83; Rusu 1990, 14.

1454, and his presence in Neustadt is documented between 27 March and 30 April 1455.²⁵ This does not mean, however, that he could not have been present also at the early stages of the imperial diet. It seems reasonable to posit that direct contact between the two leaders discussed here may have occurred before Capestrano's arrival in Hungary. Nevertheless, further investigation into this matter would inevitably lead to the unresolved question of Hunyadi's participation in the imperial diet of Neustadt, which is beyond the scope of this essay.

It is beyond doubt that Capestrano's arrival in Hungary was primarily intended to attend the royal diet in Győr (around 21–25 June 1455), where the prelates and barons of the kingdom hoped in vain to persuade King Ladislaus V to attend.²⁶ The assembly had been summoned to defuse the highly tense domestic political situation and to coordinate the response to the imminent Ottoman attack. Both leaders delivered speeches during the plenary meetings, rallying among the war hawks. Nevertheless, historians have been unable to provide a satisfactory explanation for how the two men converged so fast on a common policy, especially since this involved a series of difficult measures from the outset, which were not ratified by either the royal authority or the Holy See (as the "George/Đurađ Branković affair," undoubtedly the most illustrative example).²⁷

If not for the time spent in Wiener Neustadt, the two may have taken advantage of the period in the run-up to the diet to establish a common course of action (Capestrano was already in Győr on 6 June, and had already begun his preaching; Hunyadi is attested here on 12 June).²⁸ The involvement of intermediaries facilitating communication between the two must, however, be considered, a fact that is partially reflected in the correspondence. One of them must have been *frater Petrus*, a Franciscan mentioned as a messenger in the first preserved letter of John Hunyadi to Capestrano, dated 20 May 1455. In light of the evident trust placed in him by both leaders, it seems highly probable that (as the editor György Galamb suggests) the individual in question was Peter Soproni, a figure who will be discussed later.²⁹ Other Franciscans may have acted as mediators between the two leaders, such as the two Hungarian friars Ladislaus Tari (*Thari* or *Hungarus*) and Michael Székely (*Siculus*), for whom King Ladislaus V, at the request of John Hunyadi, intervened on 6 March 1453, asking the Cismontane vicar general to authorize their mission *in Kylya, in finibus Moldavie*, in order to erect a convent dedicated to St. Bernardino.³⁰ The

²⁵ Hofer, Bonmann 1964–1965, I, 527.

²⁶ Four cross-referenced epistolary sources confirm the information: a letter signed by the ecclesiastical authorities, magnates and nobles present at the Diet, addressed to Pope Callixtus III (dated 23 June), drafted by John Vitéz de Zredna and therefore included in his epistolary (Vitéz 1980, 198–200, n. II–22), a joint statement of the prelates and magnates present (25 July, edited by Pettkó 1901, 178–180, n. 24) and the two reports of Capestrano to the Pope: the first preserved, dated 21 June, in CEIC–H, 177–180 (n. 50); the second, dated 4 July, in CEIC–H, 181–53 (n. 52). The Diet must have begun a few days before Capestrano's first known report, considering that in the preceding days he had sent the pope some recommendations in letters now lost.

²⁷ CEIC–H, 181–185 (n. 52); see Damian 2011, 96–119; 246–248; Andrić 2016.

²⁸ CEIC–H, 174–175 (n. 47); Sebestyén 1938, 83; Rusu 1990, 14.

²⁹ CEIC–H, 142–143 (n. 34). John Hunyadi, among other high-ranking clergymen and magnates, subscribed a more official letter, dated 21 May, rejoicing at Capestrano's entry into Hungary—CEIC–H, 144–145 (n. 36); cardinal Dénes Szécsi, archbishop of Esztergom, wrote to Capestrano in similar terms, empowering the same *frater Petrus* to represent him, CEIC–H, 143–144 (n. 35).

³⁰ CEIC–H, 8–9 (n. 8).

letter probably refers to the fortress of Chilia in the easternmost part of Moldavia (today Kilia, in Ukraine), which its voivode had ceded in 1448 to the Hungarian governor in order to assist him in his (unfortunately futile) plan to support Constantinople from the Black Sea. Scarce notices survive on the existence of this Franciscan *locus*, which would have been Hunyadi's third foundation in favor of the Franciscan Observants (after the convents of Șumuleu Ciuc and Teiuș).³¹ The governor's esteem for the two Hungarian Franciscans appears certain, as was the trust they would enjoy in the eyes of Capestrano. In September 1453, Ladislaus Tari became the first guardian of the Cracow convent.³² Michael Székely accompanied Capestrano in Hungary, becoming his main collaborator in local ecclesiastical affairs and later, for two terms (1462–1465 and 1471–1473), vicar general of the Hungarian Franciscan Observants.³³

A third potential mediator, whose role has been insufficiently considered, is also worthy of mention. When the governor was conveying his appeal through the royal chancellery, Capestrano was in Wrocław, where he had been hosted for several months by Bishop Peter II Nowak (1447–1456), supporting him in his reforms.³⁴ Bishop Nowak must have had a good understanding of Transylvanian affairs and important connections, considering that, from 1427, he held a canonicate in Alba Iulia for about a decade. Regardless of how the relationship between John Hunyadi and John of Capestrano was born, from their meeting in Győr until the end, their destinies and itineraries remained closely intertwined. Following the conclusion of the Diet from Buda on 20 July 1455, the former governor facilitated Capestrano's journey to Buda, even assisting with the organization of his arrival. He recommended postponing his visit to allow the pilgrims coming from the northwest to arrive, particularly those from areas affected by the Hussite heresy, such as *Terra Matthei* and the surroundings of Kremnica. However, on 22 July, Capestrano was already in Buda, engaged in a full activity program, and remained in the city until mid-August.

The precise date on which the former governor departed Buda for Transylvania is uncertain. However, on 20 August, he was already in Bistrița, his barony, acting as hereditary count.³⁵ It would appear that Capestrano should have followed him immediately to the Southern Regions of the Hungarian Kingdom and Transylvania, Hunyadi initially insisting on hurrying to catch up with him in Hunedoara, in the vicinity of which he was from 7 to 14 September.³⁶ Both he and his wife, Elizabeth Szilágyi (ca. 1410–1483), were counting on the thaumaturgic abilities of Capestrano (and the relics of St Bernardino he was carrying) to restore the health of their daughter-in-law, Elizabeth (ca. 1442–1455), daughter of the Count Ulrich II of Cilli (Celje) and granddaughter of the despot Branković, who had fallen seriously ill with the plague. In a letter to Capestrano, the former governor

³¹ Pall 1965; Damian 2011, 208.

³² Karácsonyi 1922, I, 330–334, 341; Cevins 2008, 128; CEIC–P, 312–315.

³³ Karácsonyi 1922, I, 342; Cevins 2008, 621.

³⁴ Capestrano stayed in Wrocław more than in any other Central European city: from 5 February to 21 August 1453 (with some interruptions, when he visited the countryside) and, again, from 29 May to 23 July 1454). Hofer, Bonmann 1964–1965, I, 526.

³⁵ Ub, V, 504–505 (d. 2985).

³⁶ Specifically, on 8 September in Dobra (Jófű), CEIC–H, 215 (n. 69); on 9 a little further west, in *villa Morsina* (nowadays Margina), Feneșan 2016, 134–135 (d. 41); and on 14 in Hunedoara, CEIC–H, 217–218 (n. 71).

detailed the arrangements for the journey that had been made with the city authorities of Szeged and his castellan of Timișoara, Ladislaus Pocsaji.³⁷ It seems reasonable to posit that Capestrano probably left Székesfehérvár behind and headed south-east for this reason.³⁸ On 13 September, he was already in the vicinities of Cenad. Here, Bishop Peter Himfi hosted him for almost a month, more than initially expected.³⁹ Epistolary and narrative sources show Capestrano's excitement of being "stationed in Christendom's most distant cathedral church, [...] at most fourteen miles [...] from the most treacherous Turks."⁴⁰ It was during this period that he may have accepted the invitation to visit Arad and Lipova, whose civil and ecclesiastical authorities wrote to him warmly, mentioning, as a kind of mantra intended to appeal to the preacher, the presence in their ranks of infidels and schismatics, who could benefit from his preaching.⁴¹

There are good indications that Capestrano's journey to Transylvania had been agreed in advance with Hunyadi. On 14 September 1455, the former governor informed the famous preacher that he would not be able to meet him in Szeged as planned but would have to set off with his men to Brașov and from there "to Moldavia or to the Wallachian parts" [of Transylvania].⁴² While the urgency is clear, Hunyadi's letter does not reveal the reasons of this change of program. However, his charters confirm his presence in eastern Transylvania and better clarify the purpose of his armed intervention. On 25 September, he was near Sibiu, in Roșia, on 15 October, in Lunga (near Târgu Secuiesc), and between 9 and 19 November, he was attested in Brașov.⁴³ The motives behind the captain-general's deployment to the region were attributed to the definitive rupture with his erstwhile protégé, Vladislav II of Wallachia (ruling from 1447 to 1456). However, the reasons that drove Hunyadi to occupy the fortress of Făgăraș and the surrounding country, the traditional stronghold of the Wallachian voivodes in Transylvania, remain unclear, as do the exact sequence of events. Nevertheless, it situates the conflict that resulted in the occupation of the fortress by Transylvanian troops between July 1454 and 16 December 1455 (when a castellan appointed by Hunyadi is mentioned).⁴⁴ It remains uncertain whether, in the autumn of 1455, the captain-general was advancing eastward intending to occupy the

³⁷ CEIC-H, 215 (n. 69).

³⁸ In Székesfehérvár he preached for about two weeks, attested from August 18 to September 3 according to the *Itinerar* reconstructed by Ottokar Bonmann, see Hofer, Bonmann 1964–1965, I, 527.

³⁹ From 14 September to 21 October, according to Bonmann's calculations (see Hofer, Bonmann 1964–1965, I, 527). Capestrano's letters from Cenad are dated 17 September (CEIC-H, 218–228, n. 72 and CEIC-H, 228–230, n. 73) and 22 (CEIC-H, 231–232, n. 75).

⁴⁰ Capestrano's letter to Pope Callixtus III from 17 September, is in CEIC-H, 218–228 (n. 72), and with an English translation in Mixson 2022, 57–58.

⁴¹ On 18 September, the representatives of the urban community of Lipova mentioned the existence of "multi pagani, schismatici et increduli [...] quos ipsa vetra paternitas potest ad fidem convertire," CEIC-H, 231 (n. 74), while on 5 October, the Provost and the Chapter of the Church of St Martin mentioned that in Arad "nunc vilissimi scismatici pro maiori parte inhabitant," CEIC-H, 233 (n. 76).

⁴² "[...] tandemque forte a Brasoviis ad ulteriora adibimus, puta Moldoviam vel partes Transalpinas," CEIC-H, 217–218 (n. 71).

⁴³ Roșia (*Weressmarth*), 25.09.1455: Ub, V, 506 (d. 2988); Lunga (Nyujtód), 15.10.1455: MNL OL DL 107291; Brașov, 08.11.1455: Ub, V, 509, (d. 2992); 15.11.1455: DRH-D, I, 447–448 (d. 328); 19.11.1455: Ub, V, 511–512 (d. 2995).

⁴⁴ Ub, V, 512–513 (d. 2997), see Cîmpeanu, 2020, 34–36.

fortress or defend his previous acquisition against a reaction from the Wallachian voivode. The former hypothesis appears to be more plausible.

From Hunyadi's ambiguous message to Capestrano on 14 September, it can be deduced that he intended to maintain secrecy regarding the expedition's objective. This would have been an ineffective strategy had Vladislav's troops been attempting to reoccupy the Făgăraș fortress. Conversely, the correspondence with Capestrano indicates that the decision to intervene was made abruptly, between 8 and 14 September, and promptly enacted. Following the occupation of Făgăraș, attempts at diplomatic mediation to resolve the conflict appear to have been made. The first one remained unsuccessful. Despite this, on 15 November 1455, the captain-general granted protection to the Wallachian merchants, presumably at the request of the magistrate of Brașov, to prevent the political conflict from affecting trade.⁴⁵ The decision seems to have encouraged a peace agreement. On 23 December, when "peace and concord were fixed and regulated," the conflict broke out again, with the Wallachian voivode sponsoring raiding expeditions during the winter and even attempting to recapture the fortress of Făgăraș in the spring.⁴⁶ In the end, the dispute was settled militarily on the eve of the Belgrade campaign by Vlad III Țepeș, supported by Hunyadi, who captured and killed Vladislav II, becoming the new Wallachian voivode. On 3 July 1456, the captain-general was finally able to declare that the defense of Transylvania against the Ottomans was now assured, and he had achieved the goal he had set himself the year before.⁴⁷

At the beginning of winter 1455, however, John Hunyadi was forced to limit his objectives for defending southeastern Transylvania and maintain an uncertain alliance with Wallachia. He departed from the region compelled by the necessity to organize military preparations in the rest of Transylvania and Banat, and also to honor the agreements made with Capestrano since Győr or Buda. On 16 December, he was in Târgu Mureș and, two days later, in Reghin.⁴⁸ It seems plausible to suggest that he was already in Bistrița by 21 December, and, undoubtedly, on 23 December.⁴⁹ It seems likely that he would have the Christmas festivities here.

In the meantime, Capestrano seems to have moved slowly through the Southern Parts of the Hungarian Kingdom towards Transylvania. It is difficult to reconstruct his itinerary, as his letters provide little information. The only undeniable fact is his presence in Caransebeș on 30 October 1455, when, in the local convent, the renowned preacher welcomed as Franciscan tertiary the Romanian nobleman Jacob Macskási and his wife Anna into the Order's confraternity.⁵⁰ It was one of the most significant Franciscan

⁴⁵ The charter states clearly that "dissensions, discord and enmity, controversies and hatreds [...] that have arisen between us [...] could in no way be appeased, pacified or extinguished," DRH-D, I, 447–448 (d. 328); so, no peace was yet established between the two rulers as it was suggested by Cîmpeanu 2020, 35.

⁴⁶ DRH-D, I, 449–450 (d. 329).

⁴⁷ Rezachevici 2001, vol. I, 103–104.

⁴⁸ Târgu Mureș, 16.12.1455: Ub, V, 512–513 (d. 2997); Reghin, 18.12.1455: Szabó 1872, 169 (d. 141).

⁴⁹ Bistrița, 21 or 28.12.1455: MNL OL DL 24959, regest in Wenzel 1880, 424–425. It must be an error in the date of this document, preserved only in an 1884 copy: "datum Bistricie die dominico proxime post festum Beati Thomae Apostoli." The feast of St. Thomas was on Sunday, 21 December 1456. For Bistrița, 23.12.1455: DRH-D, I, 449–450 (d. 329).

⁵⁰ CEIC-H, 236–238 (n. 79).

convents in this border region, closely linked with the Observant movement from its very beginnings, shortly after 1366. The convent was dedicated to *Sancta Maria Nigra* and found its vocation in the process of “aggregating” the Romanian population to the Roman Church, particularly the local nobility, whose social status was contingent upon the preservation of the Latin rite.⁵¹

It seems plausible to suggest that between Capestrano’s departure from Cenad and this date, he may have accepted the invitations to preach in Arad and Lipova. In their letters, representatives of both communities appointed representatives to arrange the details of his visits.⁵² In light of Hunyadi’s instructions to his castellan of Timișoara, who was entrusted with Capestrano’s journey through Banat (presumably providing him with the wagons needed for transportation), it is unlikely that the preacher would have avoided the most important political and economic center of the region. In their letter, the citizens of Lipova stated that they had “learned with certainty that your venerable paternity is on its way to the city of Timișoara.”⁵³ Considering these aspects and the region’s viability, there is a strong possibility that, after leaving Cenad, Capestrano reached Caransebeș via Arad, Lipova, and Timișoara.

We do not know where Capestrano was on 23 October 1455, when Elizabeth Szilágyi wrote to him from Hunedoara, informing him of the subsequent deterioration of his daughter-in-law’s health; he must have been relatively far away, since the wife of the former governor confined herself to asking for his prayers (and not his presence).⁵⁴ In any case, the Franciscan was in Hunedoara by 8 December, as attested by an important source for reconstructing his itinerary, which unfortunately is of no further use for the time he spent in Transylvania. The register of miracles (*Liber miraculorum*) kept by his disciple Conrad of Freystadt records on this date and location the miraculous recovery of the priest Matthew of Sântandrei (Hunedoara) after he had reportedly presented himself to Capestrano.⁵⁵ This testimony offers the second date that can be taken as certain in the Transylvanian itinerary up to this point.

The third milestone on his journey, which is taken for granted in all Capestrano’s biographies, was Alba Iulia, where he spent Christmas in the company of Mathew of Łabiszyn, bishop of Transylvania (between 1443 and 1461).⁵⁶ Actually, in this case, the information is also based on the bishop’s invitation, dated Alba Iulia, 18 December.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, there is no reason to doubt that Capistrano’s visit took place. The letter from

⁵¹ For further information see Damian 2022.

⁵² Capestrano was probably still in Cenad on 5 October, when a sizeable delegation of canons set out from Arad to welcome him (“dominos Ladislaum cantorem et Demetrium decanum et concanonicos nostros”), CEIC–H, 233 (n. 76); the community of Lipova was represented by its *plebanus*, CEIC–H, 231 (n. 74).

⁵³ CEIC–H, 231. The town council of Lipova maintained communication with the preacher, as evidenced by a damaged letter dated 1456, CEIC–H, 383 (n. 183).

⁵⁴ It is the last record of the young bride-to-be, who must have died shortly afterwards. See Damian 2011, 102–104, 118.

⁵⁵ BNF Cod. NAL 1763, f. 194r; ed. in Delrome 1918, 441 (n. 2517): “VIII decembris, in Hunyad. Presbiter Mattheus de Sent-Andreas per menses quatuor adeo fuit infirmus, quod tanquam aridus, non poterat se movere nec volvi in lecto nisi quantum iuvabatur. Vovit sancto Bernardino, venit ad Patrem, signatus dixit se sanatum, laudans Deum.”

⁵⁶ Temesváry 1922, 354–372; Engel 1996, I, 71.

⁵⁷ CEIC–H, 255–256 (n. 91).

the bishop of Transylvania differs from the formal invitations the preacher received from other authorities. First, it is a reply to a missive that the Franciscan had sent him, which is now lost. Nevertheless, the letter's content can be deduced, at least in part, from the reply. It seems that Capestrano had informed the high prelate of his intention to visit Alba Iulia and of the professional nature of the visit. Secondly, Capestrano appears to have informed the bishop of the recent confirmation by Pope Callixtus III of his authority as inquisitor general and papal commissioner (a mandate derived directly from authority and, as such, requiring ratification by each new pontiff).⁵⁸ In his reply, Bishop Mathew assured the friar of his full cooperation as the competent diocesan authority and his willingness to offer "advice, help and support." He also made an interesting comment on Capestrano's mandate and title, defining him as "inquisitor general of heretical and, more specifically, schismatic pravity in other borderlands," a pun explaining his full understanding of the intentions of the Franciscan to purge from "schism and heresy" the local Orthodox population.⁵⁹ With the Transylvanian bishop adhering to the Capestrano's conversion plans, all the stars were finally about to align. In early January 1456, the first measures were taken. It is not the appropriate context to examine the specifics and implications of Capestrano's initiative, which have been previously addressed.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, it is crucial to underscore that, in conjunction with the crusade, it constituted a pivotal objective of his mission in Banat and Transylvania.

The relationship between the famous preacher and the Transylvanian bishop deserves a closer examination. In the opinion of the erudite historian of the Order of Friars Minor, Lukas Wadding (1588–1657), the visit of Capestrano to Alba Iulia signified a turning point in the attitude of Bishop Matthew towards the Franciscans. He based his assertions in particular on a letter reproduced in full, which he had discovered in the register of Capestrano's letters, a historical source that, as already mentioned, was subsequently lost. The letter, addressed by John Hunyadi to the Transylvanian bishop (dated Braşov, 22 November 1455), is of significance also as it contributes to our understanding of the former governor's itineraries, particularly given that it has not been utilized by Hungarian or Romanian historical research. There is no reason to doubt its authenticity. The language and style, its diplomatic elements and the date and place of issue align perfectly with the known correspondence of the "Count of Bistriţa."⁶¹ It seems reasonable to conclude that, as Hunyadi was acting at Capestrano's request, he sent a copy of his letter to the Franciscan, who decided to have it transcribed in his register of letters.

The letter can be summarized as follows: disturbing news had reached the former governor about the intentions of the bishop to "persecute and afflict the humble friars of the order of the Minorites, known as the Observants, to the extent that they were to be brought to utter shame, and forced to beg in your diocese because they lack the charity of

⁵⁸ Capestrano already knew of the confirmation of his powers, but it was not until 22 February in Buda that he actually received the papal bull sealed in lead, see CEIC–H, 284–286 (n. 114).

⁵⁹ CEIC–H, 255: "officio generalis inquisitionis heretice pravitatis, et signanter in aliis finibus scismatice pravitatis."

⁶⁰ Damian 2009; Damian 2011, esp. 119–128.

⁶¹ Wadding 1932, XII, 332–333 (n. 287). With the exception of a few linguistic corrections, the only aspect requiring amendment in the Wadding edition is the title of the bishop and the name of the diocese, which should be *Transilvanensis* rather than *Thussinensis*, an obvious misreading of the abbreviation.

the faithful.” Furthermore, he was alarmed by his intentions to excommunicate them and to proclaim their excommunication during the forthcoming diocesan synod, convened for the second Sunday of Advent (7 March 1456). Finally, Hunyadi urged the bishop to reconsider his stance towards the Franciscan Observants, emphasizing their potential as “fruitful helpers for the benefit of the Christian peoples.” Furthermore, he recommended that he restrict his disciplinary actions to paternal reprimands directed at those who engage in reckless behavior.⁶² Judging by the bishop’s letter to Capestrano from 18 December, Hunyadi’s missive had its intended effect. It is even possible that the bishop himself initially wrote to Capestrano on “his own initiative,” apparently to consult him on a question of canon law relating to benefits, as attested by a damaged letter that is now illegible.⁶³

However, it can be stated with certainty that the well-informed Wadding correctly identified the ultimate source of the alarmist information about the bishop’s intentions, namely the guardian of the Teiuș convent, John Geszti. Through his contacts with Capestrano and Hunyadi, the founder of the convent he ran, the Franciscan was the first to be interested in resetting relations with the Transylvanian bishop. Information is scarce regarding this Franciscan friar, who collaborated with Capestrano in his initiatives to convert the “schismatics” from Transylvania and Moldavia, and maintained long-term epistolary relations with him.⁶⁴ After Capestrano’s death in 1461, the former guardian of Teiuș compiled a collection of miracles attributed to him.⁶⁵ The connection with John Geszti is significant concerning Capestrano’s itinerary in Transylvania. Capestrano probably stayed at the Franciscan convent of Teiuș, before and after his visit to Alba Iulia in December 1455. It is clear that on the 18th of that month, when Bishop Matthew dispatched his invitation, Capestrano could not have been very far from Alba Iulia, and as a possible location, Teiuș appears to be ideally situated.

A shared itinerary through Transylvania

All of the biographies and analyses of Capestrano’s itinerary conclude that Alba Iulia represented the final point of his journey in Transylvania. However, in preparing the second edition of Johannes Hofer’s work, Ottokar Bonmann incorporated a note indicating the possibility that Capestrano may have reached Turda without, however, being able to determine the timing of this visit.⁶⁶ In fact, in his tireless search for sources relating to

⁶² “[...] intelleximus enim quod V. P. etiam ad hoc aspirat intentio et voluntas, ut pauperes Fratres Ordinis Minorum de Observantia noncupatos, in vestra diocesi mendicitate et fidelium eleemosynus degentes, persecutionibus involvatis, eosque usque ad extremam verecundiam vestris tribulationibus fatigetis.” Wadding 1932, XII, 332.

⁶³ CEIC–H, 239 (n. 82). Aniceto Chiappini dated this letter as 30 October 1455, see Chiappini 1927, 246 (n. 437); however, upon examination of the original document, the information could not be corroborated.

⁶⁴ Wadding 1932, XII, 333, who refers to an unidentified letter predating Capestrano’s arrival in Hungary in which apparently Geszti was already complaining about the conduct of the Transylvanian bishop. His correspondence with Capestrano is attested by another damaged letter, dated 26 March 1456, CEIC–H, 287 (n. 116); see Chiappini 1927, 248 (n. 463) and Karácsonyi 1922–1924, I, 335; II, 198. The missionary activities of Geszti are known only from Wadding 1932, XII, 365 (n. 315–I).

⁶⁵ Andrić 1999, 108–114; Cevins 2008, 77–78.

⁶⁶ “Wann sein Besuch von Torda anzusetzen ist, bleibt unklar.” Hofer, Bonmann 1964–1965, II, 360; consequently, he did not attempt to incorporate this location into Capestrano’s synoptic itinerary, see Hofer, Bonmann 1964–1965, I, 527.

Capestrano, he came upon this information in an early modern printed book entitled *Vita et gesta beati Johannis de Capistrani* (Vienna: Singriener, 1523). It comprises the main early lives of Capestrano, accompanied by select biographical extracts from historical texts, produced as a compendium during the last significant canonization campaign of the medieval period (1514–1525).⁶⁷ It was the concluding text of this collection that attracted Bonmann's attention because of its detailed biographical information on Capestrano's extensive travels through Hungary and Transylvania: *Praeconisatio beati patris Johannis de Capistrano edita a fratre Petro de Sopronio eiusdem socio*, a text occupying just three pages (172–174).⁶⁸

As the title indicates, the text was written by Peter Soproni, probably the first of the Hungarian companions to join the entourage of the celebrated preacher (during the 1450 Jubilee, when the sanctification of Bernardino da Siena focused all attention on his successor). This information comes precisely from the *Praeconisatio*, its author adding that from then on, “day and night I was with him, and many lands and kingdoms I travelled with him, for more than five years and a half.”⁶⁹ Capestrano's epistolary confirms this statement: During his mission in Central Europe, Peter Soproni was often mentioned as a messenger and *socius fidelissimus*, charged with representing Capistrano to important personalities of the time, such as the leader of the anti-Hussite party in Bohemia, Ulrich II of Rosemberg,⁷⁰ King Ladislas V,⁷¹ and, probably, to John Hunyadi and the archbishop of Esztergom.⁷²

Judging from these commissions, from his correspondence with intellectual and Renaissance-minded Central European dignitaries such as Beneš Černohorský of Boskovice (who characterized him as *honorandissimus amicus*),⁷³ and from the rhetoric of the *Praeconisatio*, Soproni seems to have been one of the well-educated Hungarian Franciscans. This must have been one of the reasons why, in 1458, he was one of the confreres commissioned by Jacob of Marchia and Stephen Varsányi to record in a special register the miracles reported at the tomb of Capestrano in Ilok. What the 1523 edition reprints under the title *Praeconisatio* is nothing more than the introductory text to this collection, completed around 1460.⁷⁴ This is confirmed by a manuscript copy of this collection, which has been partially edited twice. However, both of these editions omit the crucial passage

⁶⁷ Andrić 1999, 159–163.

⁶⁸ See Vita 1523. Consulted copy: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, München, Rar. 1595 (<https://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/details:bsb00069854>, accessed 24 Sept. 2024). This is the same copy that was studied by Ottokar Bonmann. His archive contains a microfilm reproduction, an unpublished transcription and notes: St. Bonaventure University, NY, Capistrano Collection, cartons 5 and 14. Andrić 1999, 115 (footnote 81), basing his own conclusions on Banfi 1956, 318, and without the necessary cross-checking, unconvincingly argues that the publication date of this edition should be corrected to 1564, although Bonmann had shown in a detailed note that no edition of the work was published that year (Hofer, Bonmann 1964–1965, II, 445).

⁶⁹ “Ego siquidem frater Petrus de Sopronio eiusdem ordinis [...] pro deuotione iueram ad annum iubileum; ipse me per obedientia secum me retinuit, in civitate Paduana, qui die noctuque secum fui, et multas terras atque regna secum peragraui: vltra quinque annos cum dimidio.” Vita 1523, 172.

⁷⁰ As attested by three letters: Gál, Miskuly 1989–1992, 346 (n. 383 – Magdeburg, 15.10.1452 and n. 385 – Leipzig, 21.10.1452), 349 (n. 394 – Leipzig, 5.11.1452).

⁷¹ Capestrano's letter dated Magdeburg, 13.10.1452, is in CEIC–H, 103–106 (n. 6).

⁷² CEIC–H, 142–143 (n. 34) and 143–144 (n. 35), already discussed.

⁷³ CEIC–H, 289–291 (n. 119): 289.

⁷⁴ Banfi 1956, 317–320; Andrić 1999, 115–120.

for understanding Capestrano's Transylvanian itinerary.⁷⁵ This is found in a rhetorical section of the text in which Peter Soproni recalls the various cities, regions and kingdoms that could testify to Capestrano's virtues. He begins with Venice and Padua, where he had joined the preacher's company, and proceeds to describe their journey through Central Europe. Finally arriving in Hungary, the expected end of this tour, he states: [...] "and you, most serene Matthias, recently elected King of Hungary, you who were once his travelling companion, together with your exalted father and your mother, from Turda in Transylvania to Hunedoara, and from Hunedoara to Timișoara, bear witness!"⁷⁶ It seems probable that Peter Soproni anticipated that his collection of miracles, preceded by his introductory text, would be submitted to King Matthias for his approval before being dispatched to Rome to support the canonization process with evidence.⁷⁷ Recollecting a shared experience with the king was evidently an attempt by Soproni to elicit his sympathy and assistance. Consequently, it was in his best interest to ensure that the information he provided was as accurate as possible.

Nevertheless, even if these considerations were entirely accepted, the vague context in which Soproni's account has been transmitted means that, without corroborating information, his account can only be considered a hypothesis, even if it is a stimulating one. No other source corroborates, in fact, Capestrano's presence in Turda. In contrast, the circumstances surrounding Hunyadi's arrival in the city, and some details of his journey, can be substantiated through documented evidence. In his aforementioned missive dated 23 December 1455, the former governor informed the mayor of Brașov of his intention to preside over an assembly of the Transylvanian estates scheduled for 28 December in Turda, *locum in medium regni*. He specifically requested the mayor to dispatch delegates to this destination.⁷⁸ On 28 December, the Count of Bistrița was in Cluj, establishing an annual provision for the Dominicans of Cluj.⁷⁹ He probably went to Turda the same day (or the day after) and stayed to preside over the assembly. This indicates that, on 1 January 1456, he was in Teiuș.⁸⁰ The corroboration of these pieces of information with Soproni's testimony enables the reconstruction of a scenario in which, following the Christmas celebrations, Capestrano met Hunyadi in Turda, and together they attended the assembly of the estates.

If we accept Soproni's testimony as accurate, it can be surmised that they continued their journey together to Hunedoara and, subsequently, to Timișoara. There is, however, a notable dearth of documentary information about this journey, which the two leaders apparently made together. Haste must have been their imperative. Capestrano was promptly requested to proceed to Buda by the papal legate, Juan de Carvajal, who additionally stated that this was the "order and intention of the Pope." It seems plausible that his message,

⁷⁵ BM Cod. 246 cls. 12, f. 162v–166v; Mircse 1870, 14–24; Pratesi 1956, 374–377.

⁷⁶ "[...] et tu adeo electe Matthia, serenissime rex Hungariae, qui fuisti aliquando comes itineris sui cum genitore tuo illustrissimo et genitrice, de Thorda Transylvaniae usque ad Hunyad, et de Hunyad usque ad Themesvar, redite testimonium [...]" Vita 1523, 173.

⁷⁷ On the support of King Matthias to the canonization see Andrić 1999, 91–94.

⁷⁸ DRH–D, I, 449–450 (n. 329): "[...] Deo duce, die dominico proximo venturo, in opido Thorda, cum universis parcium Transiluanarum, convenire volumus."

⁷⁹ Ub, V, 514 (d. 2999).

⁸⁰ Ub, V, 514–515 (d. 3000).

dated Vienna, 7 December 1455, reached Capestrano towards the end of the year.⁸¹ An earlier letter from the cardinal with similar content did not reach him or was ignored. In any case, in a subsequent missive to Pope Callixtus III, Capestrano felt the need to justify his actions (as a potential response to the apostolic legate's criticism) by stating that he had promptly obeyed the command, "hastening through cold, snow, ice and winds" to reach Buda from his distant location.⁸²

The very scant documentary information available confirms that there is little exaggeration in these words. It is reasonable to assume that the two travellers reached Timișoara around mid-January 1456, which is confirmed by the memoirs. In his short hagiographical testimony (dated Vienna, 15 July 1457), one of Capestrano's companions, friar Jerome of Udine, records an important detail about the stay of the group of Franciscans there, still fresh in his memory: "As we all travelled from the remote regions of Transylvania to reach the city of Buda and the legate of the Holy See, a great cause stopped us on our way: at the Ides of January we had to interrupt our journey for three days in the city of Timișoara."⁸³ In words less clouded by the elegance of the author's classical style, on 13 January 1456, the joint journey of Capestrano, Hunyadi and their companions reached its destination, and for three days, for important reasons impossible to fathom, the Franciscans remained in Timișoara. On 18 January, John Hunyadi was still there, but his travel companion and confreres were already on their way for Buda, having left some days before. In his missive, Hunyadi was announcing the capture of the "schismatic" bishop John *Wladica* the previous day, and his intention to send him to the Franciscan (with some honors, given that he was permitted to retain his horses). Capestrano was, therefore, advised to proceed less hastily to allow his men to catch up with him. It seems reasonable to posit that a couple of days after, the Orthodox bishop joined the unusual Franciscan convoy, travelling together all the rest of the way to Buda.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, further documentary evidence must be reconciled with this reconstruction.

In Capestrano's epistolary, as it is known today, there is only a single documentary information that corroborates his return route from Turda to Timișoara: a circular letter dispatched on 6 January 1456 to the Transylvanian nobility.⁸⁵ It is a remarkably well-preserved letter that can be read without difficulties. However, the place of issue – *Azach* – is problematic. Some scholars suggested that it must refer to Arača (often spelled *Aracs*), in modern Serbia, near Novi Bečej, under the jurisdiction of the bishopric of Cenad.⁸⁶ There, in fact, the Friars Minor occupied around 1378 the thirteenth-century Romanic church. An alternative identification was also proposed, namely Hațeg, on the grounds that

⁸¹ CEIC–H, 243–244 (n. 85).

⁸² CEIC–H, 284–286 (n. 114): 285: "Pareo a remotis per frigora, nives, glacies et ventos festinans [...]."

⁸³ AASS, Oct. X, 488: "Proficiscentibus nobis a remotis partibus Transilvanis, Budam ad Apostolicae Sedis legatum, praecipua ratio quaequam obviavit: idibus Januarii sistere gradum in oppido Temeswar ad triduum necesse fuit."

⁸⁴ CEIC–H, 264–265 (n. 98). At the time, Hunyadi did not know where Capestrano was, but he assumed that he was not very far away, within a day or two's ride on horseback. On John *Wladica* "of Caffa" († ca 1469), see Damian 2009, 149–160 and Damian 2011, 128–140.

⁸⁵ CEIC–H, 259–260 (n. 95).

⁸⁶ Pettkó 1901, 187–188 (n. 34); Bölcskey 1923–1924, III, 465 (n. 469). In Arača the Minor Friars occupied around 1378 the thirteenth century Romanic church, see Romhányi 2000, 4–5.

the copyist had incorrectly transcribed the appellation of the local place.⁸⁷ This site, some forty kilometers south of Hunedoara, housed an Observant convent (erected probably shortly before 1382, depending on the Bosnian vicariate). Hațeg and its district belonged to proper Transylvania and were under the jurisdiction of the bishopric of Alba Iulia. So, it makes more sense that a letter addressed to the Transylvanian nobility could be sent from here after Capistrano's arrangements with Bishop Matthew during Christmas and his participation in the Turda assembly. It seems reasonable to conclude that the assembly of the Transylvanian states was still in session on 6 January. This is supported by the observation that some judicial charters of the Transylvanian vice-voivodes issued in Turda on 13 and 24 January 1456 appear to result from the deliberations of the assembly still in session at that date.⁸⁸

The identification of *Azach* as Hațeg (also proposed for the new edition of the document) is supported by the mention of similar spellings of this name (such as *Hatzak*, *Haczak* or *Hazach* in documentary sources) and by a paleographic analysis of the document. It was highly probable for a foreigner to misspell the name in *Azach*, especially for an Italian, who usually treated *h* as a mute consonant. Moreover, the friars responsible for Capistrano's correspondence were predominantly Italian. In this sense, paleography can provide quite a strong argument. The document's writing shows, in fact, a strong influence of the Humanistic scripts, at the time a feature quite characteristic to Italy, still very rare in Central Europe and completely absent in Transylvanian. In fact, the shape of the letters *d* (always straight), *s* (elongated, most of the time), *g*, *h*, *z*, *x*, *y*, and of the ligature *et* (in a double form), along with the abbreviation *Y^u Xⁱ* are characteristic. Even the dating is specific to the Italian usage.⁸⁹ It is reasonable to conclude that the scribe of this document (or better, of this copy, considering that the circular letter must have been copied several times and sent to multiple recipients) was one of the Italian secretaries of Capestrano's "mobile chancellery," at work in a remote corner of Transylvania.

The newly reconstructed framework of the itinerary and the much more certain allocation of the circular to Hațeg require further considerations. Firstly, the fact that Capestrano addressed the Transylvanian nobility directly lends credibility to the assumption that he participated in the assembly of the estates of Turda in the preceding days—it is less likely that he would have delivered this address extemporaneously, despite his reputation. If the location from which the circular was dispatched was indeed Hațeg and if the information provided by Soproni that Capestrano was in the company of Hunyadi during this part of the journey is to be believed, the mention of the former governor in the document as an example of action for the rest of the Transylvanian nobility acquires a greater relevance. As for the itinerary and its efficiency, choosing the route between Hunedoara and Timișoara, which traversed Hațeg, Caransebeș and Lugoj, instead of the more direct route through Deva, seems to align with Hunyadi's itineraries during his period as governor—a preferred route, that he frequently travelled.⁹⁰ In this particular instance, however, it is reasonable to conclude that Capestrano's conversion plans were pivotal in selecting it.

⁸⁷ Karácsonyi 1922–1924, II, 72–73.

⁸⁸ Ub, V, 515–518 (d. 3001 and 3002). See Bichicean 2008, 377.

⁸⁹ ACAP, Ep 243 (169 V 1), reproduction in MNL OL DF 293604.

⁹⁰ Engel 1984, 98.

The road to Belgrade

By 3 February 1456, Capestrano was already in Pest. He had managed to anticipate the entrance into the city of the king and Cardinal Carvajal by a few days (on 6 February). This must have been a goal he had set for himself to protect himself against possible criticism by the papal legate for having wasted considerable time on his conversion efforts in the eastern lands of the Hungarian crown instead of devoting all his energies to promoting the crusade. He was acutely aware that Pope Calixtus III was particularly sensitive about this matter. Thus, he instantly wrote that day to Carvajal, stressing his indisputable obedience towards the Holy See and his representative. He emphasized that he had immediately postponed all his actions after receiving the papal order and took at once the way of return—but “with much bitterness because of the left unfinished labor of saving souls.” He also added a directed reproach to the cardinal, stating that it was the third time he had experienced a similar situation, remembering an episode when he was trying to reach Prague and an attempt to confront the Hussites in Moravia.⁹¹

Despite his objections, Capestrano had succeeded to some extent in limiting the consequences of his hasty departure from Transylvania and Banat. He ensured the continuity of his missionary activities by delegating them to his confreres and collaborators. This gave the impression of a kind of diffused presence of the Franciscan in the region, extending even beyond its borders. Wadding, who had access to a more extensive array of letters and records, portrayed him as “a darting thunderbolt moving swiftly through towns and villages, provinces and kingdoms.” He further noted that, in addition to the regions of Hungary, he also “investigated Wallachia, Moldavia, Transylvania, and Serbia.”⁹² However, the figurative meaning of his words is revealed by the continuation of the passage, in which he refers to his proxies, and in particular to the two Transylvanian Franciscans John Geszti and Michael Székeli, who were left behind with specific inquisitorial tasks and powers. Particularly concerning Székeli’s activities, a consistent documentary corpus is still available.⁹³

In the context of the present study, however, the letters of John Hunyadi from Lipova included in Capestrano’s epistolary are of particular interest, as they demonstrate his direct involvement in the conversion campaign and his collaboration with Székeli. His directives to the castellans in Șoimoș, Hunedoara, and Deva (dated 7 February) indicate the measures’ geographical reach.⁹⁴ However, a copy of this order in Capestrano’s archive and Hunyadi’s brief missive, addressed to the Franciscan, suggests an attempt to justify a stalemate situation.⁹⁵ In his report to Capestrano from 10 February, Friar Michael stated that after ten days of preaching in Lipova, he encountered a resolute opposition from the local population, led by a certain Peter, who was identified as the “archdeacon of the Wallachian

⁹¹ CEIC–H, 266–268 (n. 100): 266.

⁹² Wadding 1932, XII, 365 (n. 315. I): “Joannes Capistranus [...] ad modum fulguris corruscantis per urbes et oppida, per provincias et regna discurrebat. Praeter praecipuas Hungariae partea, Valachiam, Moldaviam, Transilvaniam et Rusciam perlustravit.”

⁹³ A series of reports from Lipova, two of them dated 6 and 10 February 1456, the others impossible to read for their advanced state of deterioration, now in CEIC–H, 271–278 (n. 102, 105, 107, 108).

⁹⁴ CEIC–H, 272–273 (n. 103).

⁹⁵ CEIC–H, 273–274 (n. 104): “[...] in isto loco cum fratre Michaelae Zekel, prout melius potuimus et scivimus laboravimus, et nunc laboramus.”

priests.” By then, the captain-general had departed from Lipova, leaving the local castellan in charge of supporting missionary activities, which were curtailed shortly after.⁹⁶ Székeli’s final letters from Lipova address the subject of preparations for the crusade.⁹⁷

At that time, Hunyadi’s primary objective was reinforcing the kingdom’s southern border defenses. While precise documentary evidence about his whereabouts is lacking, chroniclers concur (even in their choice of words) on his presence in the southern parts of the kingdom, also alluding to the tense political situation that kept him away from Buda.⁹⁸ King Ladislaus’s arrival further exacerbated the former governor’s political isolation. He was compelled to relinquish control of several royal fortresses (including those in Buda, Trnava and Miskolc) and the administration of a portion of the royal revenues to the king. As the influence and authority of his rival, Ulrich II of Cilli, grew even more, the former governor became increasingly concerned for his personal safety.⁹⁹ Only after negotiating a safe-conduct to ensure his safety against the machinations of the Count, the former governor presented himself before the king, tough, well-protected by the armed guard of his most loyal commanders. His presence in Buda allowed the Hungarian diet, after numerous deferrals, to finally gather. A more recent reconstruction, based on the report of a Milanese envoy, demonstrates that the two chroniclers actually combine two brief visits made by Hunyadi to Buda that month.¹⁰⁰ The initial episode occurred likely in early March, when he symbolically transferred the keys of Buda to the monarch (who handed them over promptly to the Count). The second occurred a few weeks later, with Hunyadi leading his troops in battle formation in front of Pest Castle, thus defying the authority of the young king, who was for the moment devoid of military support and had to support quietly the affront. By means of this demonstration of strength, the former governor was able to obtain his reconfirmation as captain-general. Thuróczi seems to allude to this second moment, when he offers a more precise dating (21 March, though he confuses the year).¹⁰¹

However, Hunyadi’s time in Buda remains poorly documented. The only documentary information about his presence there is a message he sent from Buda to the local authorities in Braşov on 7 April 1456.¹⁰² The date is significant, however, as it was on this day that news reached the city that Sultan Mehmed II had set out on a campaign, likely targeting Hungary. The day before, King Ladislaus had made a solemn promise before the apostolic legate to engage in the defense campaign and to have his army ready for battle by 1 August.¹⁰³ The precise date on which Hunyadi departed Buda for the Southern Regions of the kingdom, and more specifically Timișoara, is uncertain. According to Bonfini, he did so after a brief period of consultation with the monarch to avoid arousing suspicion among the Ottomans

⁹⁶ CEIC–H, 274–276 (n. 105): 275: “Petrus, archidiaconus presbiterorum Valachorum de Hwnyad,” otherwise unknown. For the Lipova castellan Blasius Keszi, see Engel 1996, I, 361–362 and II, 128.

⁹⁷ CEIC–H, 278 (n. 107, 108).

⁹⁸ Bonfini 1936, 180 (dec. III, lib. VII): “Aberat tunc Corvinus et, ut comitis insidias ac invidiam declinaret, inferiores Ungarie oras lustrabat et recensebat exercitum;” Thurocz 1985–1988, I, 256: “Eisdem vero in diebus dominus comes Biztricensis partes regni inferiores lustrabat.”

⁹⁹ Engel 2001, 292–295.

¹⁰⁰ Pálosfalvi 2018, 174–175.

¹⁰¹ Thurocz 1985–1988, I, 265; II.2, 367–370.

¹⁰² Ub, V, 534–535 (d. 3025).

¹⁰³ Pálosfalvi 2018, 175.

regarding his military preparations.¹⁰⁴ It is evident that Bonfini's romanticized interpretation of events conceals the true circumstances surrounding the former governor's predicament, left by his rivals to face the Ottomans alone in a confrontation likely to prove fatal to him.¹⁰⁵

From the beginning of February until 16 April, there is a substantial body of evidence attesting Capestrano's presence in Pest and Buda.¹⁰⁶ On 14 February, in a public ceremony held after he had concluded his Sunday sermon, he was presented by the apostolic legate with the red cross of the crusaders and papal letters authorizing him to preach the crusade and enlist crusaders. His biographer, John of Tagliacozzo, asserts that, from that point on, he even more zealously "preached to the people of Hungary about receiving the cross, and solemnly attached it to their garments with his own hands."¹⁰⁷ The crusade must have been the major theme of the entire predication for *Quadragesima* of that year, but unfortunately, no sermons are preserved. Writing to the pope at the beginning of the Easter Triduum, Capestrano expressed satisfaction with the results. In addition to the multitude of lesser individuals, he reported that numerous others had received the crusader cross, including prelates and barons.¹⁰⁸ It seems reasonable to posit that he was counting the captain-general among them since they likely had contact during this period. Regrettably, there is no information available on this topic. It seems plausible to suggest that another baron, John Kórógyi, may have taken up the crusader's cross and even honored his vow by being present in Belgrade at the head of his troops.¹⁰⁹ The ban of Mačva was one of Capestrano's trusted correspondents, which attests to a strong personal relationship.¹¹⁰

In the second half of April, Capestrano left Buda and headed south as well. It seems probable that he visited Kalocsa, as evidenced by his regular correspondence with Archbishop Raphael Herceg Szekcsői, which will be examined in more detail further on. On 29 April 1456, Abbot Peter of Pécsvárad had learned from reliable sources that the Franciscan had crossed to the west bank of the Danube intending to preach in his region. He hastened to invite him not to bypass the abbey, for he had already prepared the pulpit.¹¹¹ On the same day, the cathedral chapter of Pécs sent a representative to him, presumably to organize the details of his visit.¹¹² Capestrano accepted the second invitation, as evidenced by the fact that the abbot travelled to Pécs to hear him and did not have the opportunity to consult with him in person regarding a series of dubious questions of canon law, which

¹⁰⁴ Bonfini 1936, 181 (dec. III, lib. VII): "cum Turcorum oborta suspicio revocaret, [...] ad inferiores Ungariae partes Themesvarum descendit."

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Pálósfalvi 2018, 175, who claims that, after Hunyadi's affront in March, the young king found himself in an unbearable situation, and was forced to return to Austria to defend his rights against Frederick III.

¹⁰⁶ Pest, 03.02.1456: CEIC-H, 266–268 (n. 100); Buda, 24.02: CEIC-H, 276–277 (n. 106); Buda, 20.03: CEIC-H, 281–282 (n. 112); Buda, 24.03: CEIC-H, 282–286 (n. 113 and 114); 28.03: CEIC-P, 302–303 (n. 44); Buda, 8.04: CEIC-H, 294–295 (n. 124); Buda, 15.04: CEIC-H, 297–298 (n. 128); Buda, 16.04: CEIC-H, 299–310 (n. 129).

¹⁰⁷ Wadding 1932, XII, 396 (n. 342).

¹⁰⁸ CEIC-H, 286.

¹⁰⁹ The decisive role of the ban of Mačva during the battle is attested by authoritative historical sources, such as Hunyadi's letter to King Ladislas. See Mixson 2022, 93–95 (n. 11). In his account of 1460, Tagliacozzo amply corroborates the information. See Mixson 2022, 172–173, 195 and 204.

¹¹⁰ CEIC-H, 286–287 (n. 115), 335–337 (n. 152).

¹¹¹ CEIC-H, 312–313 (n. 131).

¹¹² CEIC-H, 313–314 (n. 132).

caused him concern.¹¹³ The visit to Pécs is also confirmed by a letter from Bishop Nicholas Bánfalvi (Barius), who expressed his frustration at not being able to meet him there and invited him to return to offer guidance in the celebration of the diocesan synod scheduled for the following week.¹¹⁴

In that period, it seems likely that Capestrano spent some time at the nearby Franciscan Convent of Perecske, where Paul Herceg Szekcsői was expected to meet him in a couple of days.¹¹⁵ It is unclear how Paul's visit was connected with the repeated invitations extended by his relative, the archbishop of Kalocsa, to visit the church of Bač on his way south.¹¹⁶ The evidence from Capestrano's epistolary indicates that it occurred only after mid-June. On 14 June, the chancellor of the papal legate, Bishop Francis Oddi of Assisi, wrote from Petrovaradin that he had been informed by the archbishop of Kalocsa of his imminent arrival in Bač.¹¹⁷ Two days later, when Belgrade's Captain John Geszti asked the Franciscan to intervene with the archbishop, Capestrano had already arrived or was close to the city.¹¹⁸ He was probably in Bač when he received the message from John Hunyadi informing him of the imminent arrival of the Ottoman army. On 5 June, from Buda, Cardinal Carvajal delivered the ominous news to the Franciscan, enclosing a letter from the captain-general and a brief from the pope.¹¹⁹ Nine days later, however, the papal legate wrote to him again, stating that the messenger he had hired had been unable to find him and had returned to Buda. He sent his previous message and the included letters back to him, this time through a member of Hunyadi's household. It was the last of the messages from Carvajal to reach Capestrano before the battle. It contained a clear and direct plea to "please the aforementioned governor in all things" and, above all, to join him immediately.¹²⁰

Having received the message towards the end of the month, Capestrano gathered the few crusaders he had with him, led them to the Danube, where they embarked on five barges, and together with them reached Petrovaradin. Tagliacozzo notes that Capestrano stopped here, held a mass and experienced a vision.¹²¹ He then proceeded with the crusaders to Belgrade, where they arrived on 2 July.¹²² From the fortress, the next day, Capestrano dispatched a hastily-written letter (in Italian vernacular) to the bishop of Assisi, asking for immediate reinforcements.¹²³ By then, the Ottoman ships had already

¹¹³ Pécsvárad, 18.05.1456: CEIC-H, 332-333 (n. 149) and 21.05: CEIC-H, 333-334 (n. 150)

¹¹⁴ Pécs, 26.05.1456: CEIC-H, 344-345 (n. 157).

¹¹⁵ Váralja, 24.05: CEIC-H, 343-344 (n. 156). On the Franciscan presence in Perecske (Baranya County), see Karácsonyi 1922-1924, II, 136.

¹¹⁶ The archbishop sent twice missives with a similar text to Capestrano as a strategy to ensure the information was delivered successfully: Apatin, 3.05.1456: CEIC-H, 316-318 (n. 132 and n. 137); Bač, 15.05: CEIC-H, 326-328 (n. 144 and n. 145).

¹¹⁷ CEIC-H, 352-353 (n. 166). On Francesco Oddi, bishop of Assisi (1444-1456) and his role as chancellor of Juan Carvajal during his legation in Hungary, see Kalous 2017, 160.

¹¹⁸ CEIC-H, 353-354 (n. 167). It is imperative to distinguish between John Geszti and the homonymous Franciscan guardian of Teiuș. It seems reasonable to conclude that he is the individual referred to as *Iohannem Bastidam* by Tagliacozzo (Wadding 1931, XII, 758; see Bölcskey 1923-1924, II, 293 and Pálosfalvi 2018, 181; cf. Mixson 2022, 160) and as *Lord Sesch*, a corruption of *Gesth* (cf. Mixson 2022, 180).

¹¹⁹ CEIC-H, 349 (n. 163).

¹²⁰ CEIC-H, 351-352 (n. 165).

¹²¹ Wadding 1932, XII, 753-754.

¹²² Tagliacozzo's letter to an unknown Franciscan, 28.07.1456: Mixson 2022, 95-104: 97.

¹²³ CEIC-H, 358-359 (n. 170).

passed Hunyadi's forces in Kovin and were advancing upstream on the Danube, in sight of Belgrade. It is beyond doubt that the rapidity with which the Ottomans advanced came as a surprise to all.

The epistles of Capestrano contain numerous references to the chaotic way in which the preparations for the crusade were conducted, as well as to the enormous difficulties of communication that were encountered. The problems were arguably exacerbated by the fact that responsibility for coordinating the efforts had been delegated to individuals with limited local knowledge, namely the papal legate stationed in Buda, assisted by his chancellor Oddi, who had travelled as far as Petrovaradin. The secular clergy, particularly those belonging to the dioceses attached to the Archdiocese of Kalocsa, which were directly exposed to the attack, also played a significant role in preaching the crusade and collecting alms for it. The epistles of Capestrano provide evidence of the organizational structure that emerged during this period, as well as insights into the challenges encountered. For instance, the letter of the elected bishop of Pécs, Nicholas, indicates that due to the negligence of his episcopal vicar, the alms box for the crusade left unguarded outside the church had been stolen.¹²⁴ The local clergy collaborated closely with the Franciscans, often attempting to secure Capestrano's presence. In order to cover as much ground as possible, he delegated some of his confreres to preach the crusade in the region, enlist crusaders and raise funds. However, the same organizational difficulties also existed within the Franciscan network. Tagliacozzo, for example, was asking for guidance from Kolut, upstream from Bač, on the Danube. He stated that he was unaware of the intended destination for the ships and crusaders assembled there.¹²⁵

It is of particular significance to the present study to examine the relations between Capestrano and Hunyadi during this chaotic period of military preparations. While the crusading efforts were concentrated mainly in the southern area, along the Danube, the captain-general was organizing the training of his troops and gathering the necessary resources in the eastern territories under his control. In the absence of more precise information on where the sultan intended to attack, and to avoid further exacerbating the already challenging circumstances pertaining to the provision of rations, the assembled troops were still largely situated within their territories, awaiting more precise instructions. To illustrate, on 12 June, Hunyadi instructed the Transylvanian Saxons to proceed to the Caransebeș camp, where he expected to converge by 24 June.¹²⁶ On 22, he redirected them to the Danube port of Kovin.¹²⁷ It would appear that the troops did not set off due to concerns over an impending Ottoman attack. Indeed, on 3 July, the captain-general was still requesting their assistance, emphasizing that the new Wallachian Voivode, Vlad III, assured the defense of southern Transylvania.¹²⁸

In any case, this strategy, which was conceived with the dual objective of safeguarding the southern border in the immediate term while not jeopardizing the concentration of troops in the event of a major attack or an opportunity for an offensive, compelled the

¹²⁴ CEIC–H, 323–324 (n. 141): “cistam non usu positam in ecclesia nostra multum dolenter amisimus [...]”

¹²⁵ Kolut, 23.05: CEIC–H, 341–343 (n. 155).

¹²⁶ Ub, V, 534–535 (d. 3025): “[...] in campum Karansebes convenire.”

¹²⁷ Ub, V, 535 (d. 3026); now also in DICTM, 304–305 (n. 263).

¹²⁸ Ub, V, 536–537 (d. 3029).

captain-general to be perpetually in motion during this phase, between the various camps where his troops were being recruited. As a result, Hunyadi's itineraries, which were undoubtedly more complex during this period, can only be partially reconstructed. Beyond Timișoara, where Bonfini asserts that he proceeded from Buda, during April and May of 1456, Hunyadi spent considerable time in Szeged. At least two of Capestrano's correspondents reported to have encountered him here: Cardinal Carvajal (who returned to Buda by 14 May) and Paul Herceg Szekcsői (who, on 24 May, having reached Váralja, near Pécs, in a great hurry, wrote that he had met the captain-general there).¹²⁹ Other documentary evidence indicates that Hunyadi departed from the Szeged camp at the head of his troops around mid-June. Specifically, this occurred between 12 and 18 June, with the former date marking his presence in Szeged and the latter his arrival at Hollós, now an abandoned settlement situated in the proximity of Cenad.¹³⁰ On 22 June, he reached Timișoara.¹³¹ Two days later, he was at Kovin on the banks of the Danube, attempting to obstruct the Ottoman advance upstream.¹³² On 3 July, when Capestrano was already in Belgrade, the captain-general was still stationed there, engaged in the military operations.¹³³

It can be concluded that the two leaders had no direct contact during the relatively extensive period of military preparations, which spanned from April to June 1456. Their correspondence demonstrates their intention to coordinate their actions, although communication proved to be a significant challenge. In mid-June, when the situation had already reached a critical point, the captain-general was compelled to dispatch an envoy to ascertain the whereabouts of Capestrano, who could reach him only after he travelled to Buda. Hunyadi's military preparations and, on the other hand, the recruitment of men for the crusade appear to have operated in perfect parallelism, involving (with few exceptions) distinct territorial areas.¹³⁴ This observation is also pertinent to the never-ending debate on the dual interpretation of the Battle of Belgrade, which has consistently oscillated between attributing the victory to one or the other leader (and to his professional or crusader troops). Given the disparate backgrounds and consistently different experiences of the two groups of combatants involved, it was to be expected that divergent narratives would soon emerge.¹³⁵

The Battle of Belgrade has been the subject of considerable academic scrutiny, and it is, therefore, generally assumed that the paths of the two leaders examined here were irrevocably intertwined during this final phase of their lives. Nevertheless, a more detailed examination of the available evidence reveals that numerous elements of their itineraries remain unclear. Most sources focus on the final assault on the citadel, which

¹²⁹ CEIC-H, 324, 338, 340, 343.

¹³⁰ Szeged, 12.06: Ub, V, 534–535 (d. 3025); Hollós, 18.06: Mixson 2022, 65–66, (n. 3.9); CEIC-H, 360 (n. 170).

¹³¹ Ub, V, 535 (d. 3026).

¹³² He expected to be there by 24 June, according to the new edition by Ottó Gelscer, who convincingly argues that *Rommium* in the copy of Hunyadi's letter sent to Oddi must be the result of a wrong transcription of the word *Kowinum*. CEIC-H, 360.

¹³³ Ub, V, 536–537 (d. 3029).

¹³⁴ "Many thousands" crusaders from Transylvania, for instance, arrived to Belgrade on 25 July, according to the ambassador of the bishop of Šibenik. See Mixson 2022, 109–112 (n. 14): 110.

¹³⁵ See the recent studies examining the relationship between the crusading experience and eyewitness testimony, and especially Bull 2019.

commenced on the afternoon of 21 July and did not conclude until the following day. The most comprehensive sources of information on the events preceding the attack, the accounts of John of Tagliacozzo, represent a reworking of the same narrative core over five years (from 1456 to 1461) through applying a series of filters specific to hagiographical construction. The objective was to glorify Capestrano's heroic merits, counter the charges levied against him by his detractors and, finally, promote his canonization.¹³⁶ Furthermore, it is evident that errors and inaccuracies exist, particularly in rendering names of individuals and locations that were unfamiliar to the author, subsequent transcribers, and even early editors. Until critical editions of these invaluable historical sources become available, these issues can only be resolved through conjecture.

Conversely, there is no basis for questioning the veracity of Tagliacozzo's accounts regarding the sequence of events, especially when they coincide in the different stages of his narrative. The 1456 and 1460 accounts concur that on 2 July, the same day Capestrano reached Belgrade, he resolved to reach Hunyadi in Kovin by water, departing with a small escort.¹³⁷ They embarked on three small ships and commenced their descent, but an unforeseen tempest impeded their progress, miraculously preventing them from encountering the approaching Ottoman fleet. As a result, they were compelled to return to Belgrade during the night, having failed to reach their intended destination.¹³⁸ On 4 July, the Franciscan left the fortress again, heading upriver to Petrovaradin, to bring reinforcements. He eluded the Turkish vessels again and succeeded this time in reaching his destination.¹³⁹ From Petrovaradin, Capestrano established contact with Hunyadi, who managed to join him a few days later. No indication of time is provided, but it can be assumed that covering the 120 km from Kovin to Petrovaradin took a couple of days. Tagliacozzo asserts that during this period, the general-captain "had withdrawn from the town of Kovin" to a "certain secure plain," and soon after reached Capestrano.¹⁴⁰ According to Tagliacozzo's narrative, always careful to extol the merits of his hero, their encounter in Petrovaradin was decisive for the future course of the events. Capestrano persuaded Hunyadi to set aside his resentment towards the king and the rival barons, and take up the desperate cause of defending the fortress. Although it is difficult to give this narrative full credit, it cannot be completely excluded that the captain-general did indeed consider the possibility of withdrawing his forces from Belgrade to the east, thereby leaving the Danube open to the Turks. This would have forced his internal rivals to rally for the defense of the kingdom. During Capestrano's meeting with Hunyadi, it was also resolved that all crusaders and assembled vessels should proceed to Slankamen. According to this succession of the events, not confirmed by any other source, the Franciscan travelled further upriver to Bač to meet

¹³⁶ See Solvi 2017; Solvi 2018.

¹³⁷ In addition to Tagliacozzo, who has already been mentioned, Christopher of Varese, in his *Vita Capistrani*, describes the attempt to reach Kovin, emphasizing the miraculous nature of the storm, AASS Oct. X, 505.

¹³⁸ Mixson 2022, 97, 155–156.

¹³⁹ Tagliacozzo also records the names of the confreres who accompanied him on this occasion: the Hungarians George and Francis, Alexander of Ragusa and Ambrose of Aquila. Wadding 1932, XII, 757; Mixson 2022, 159.

¹⁴⁰ Mixson 2022, 160.

the Archbishop of Kalocsa, “seeking his aid and bearing word of the great danger.”¹⁴¹ After this encounter, it was decreed, under pain of excommunication, that all crusaders should gather at Slankamen. From there, on 14 July, Hunyadi and Capestrano, in coordination with the Belgrade castellans, initiated an assault on the Ottoman fleet. This resulted in the fleet’s dispersion and the partial liberation of the city from siege. Subsequent to this initial triumph, they led their troops by land and river, establishing their encampment close to the fortress, across the Sava. “And on the following day, the day after the victory of the ships and the galleys, the two Johns entered the citadel with more than three thousand soldiers, and one hundred Polish crossbowmen” – concludes Tagliacozzo in his colourful account of the first phase of the battle.¹⁴²

From that moment onward, the destinies of the “two Johns” became inextricably intertwined with those of the defenders of the besieged city. From 15 to 21 July, both leaders were constantly moving between the besieged fortress and the crusader camp beyond the Sava. They provided continuous support for the defense of the fortress, supplying personnel, resources and moral encouragement. A consistent number of sources attest that, in the final phase of the battle, both leaders moved inside the besieged citadel. Hunyadi’s letters from the battlefield provide irrefutable evidence to this effect.¹⁴³ Instead, Tagliacozzo’s account of 1460 makes the tendentious claim that the captain-general had decided not to enter the citadel the day before.¹⁴⁴ It reflects beyond doubt the controversy that arose in the immediate aftermath of the battle, when the crusaders displayed their radicalized attitude, ready to turn into social revolt. However, framing those divergent accounts goes far beyond the scope of this study.¹⁴⁵

The shared itinerary of the two heroes of Belgrade ended, as is well known, with the death of John Hunyadi in Zemun, on 11 August 1456. All the historical sources that recount this moment mention the presence of John of Capestrano by his companion’s side in the last days of his existence. Following his narrative strategies, Tagliacozzo provides only a brief account of this episode. Nevertheless, he offers a chronological reference, indicating that the captain-general was struck by the plague on 4 August and was relocated to a more sheltered location, in Zemun.¹⁴⁶ The Hungarian chroniclers devoted a considerably greater amount of space to this moment, transforming it into an opportunity for reflection not only on the character, virtues and unparalleled merits of the former governor, but also on his distinctive relationship with Capestrano. Furthermore, Bonfini posits that Capestrano would have felt cheated of his rightful triumph by Hunyadi’s “martyrdom.” He puts forth the argument that he was never again observed laughing and that he would have hastened

¹⁴¹ To Bač and not to Kalocsa, as in the English translation. See Mixson 2022, 161. Wadding 1932, XII, 758–759: “Ipse etiam personaliter contulit Bachiam, ad Reverendissimum dominum D. Raphaellem archiepiscopum [...]” The error is ultimately due to the Franciscan editors of Quaracchi, who referred to Bács–Kalocsa in a note.

¹⁴² Tagliacozzo’s 1456 account: Mixson 2022, 100. In his recount of 1460, the processes of hagiographic amplification are clearly evident. The narrative details the recruitment of 200 Polish crossbowmen, who were reportedly enlisted by Capestrano. Mixson 2022, 168.

¹⁴³ Belgrade, 23–24 July: “we were in the fortress, [...] at the time of the victory,” Mixson 2022, 91–93: 93.

¹⁴⁴ “John [Hunyadi] no longer came into the fortress, but a number of his followers remained behind to defend it.” Mixson 2022, 179.

¹⁴⁵ For the most recent survey, resuming the complexity of the issues, see Mixson 2022, 21–28.

¹⁴⁶ Mixson 2022, 213.

to die “a few days later” (actually, on 23 October), in order to partake in the heavenly triumph alongside his companion.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, Thuróczi mentions their end as being closely connected. He also records the words that Capestrano is said to have composed in honor of the former governor.¹⁴⁸ However, decades before Thuróczi, the salutations attributed to Capestrano were already in circulation, thus reinforcing the idea that the two men were destined to continue their common path in the afterlife. In the earliest known version of the eulogy, recorded by the Veszprém provost Paul Emódi prior to 1461, the Franciscan would have concluded it with the following words: “And now, having vanquished the adversary, you celebrate your triumph with God and the angels, oh you, good John!”¹⁴⁹

Final remarks

It is inherent to the process of historical inquiry that each stage of accumulation of historical information should be followed by analysis and interpretation. The recent editions of Capestrano’s epistolary, the new collections of documentary and narrative sources published over the past few years, and other similar studies have brought new information to light and transformed existing knowledge, making new interpretations imperative. It is, therefore, appropriate to begin with the fundamental aspects of historical investigation, such as the itineraries of the two exceptional historical figures addressed in this study.

The parallelism between their actions in 1455–1456 and their close collaboration has frequently been highlighted in scholarly literature. Nevertheless, no comprehensive comparative study has yet systematically addressed those aspects. The forthcoming reconstructions of their biographies and more specific future studies will thus be able to use a much more reliable and up-to-date tool. Overlapping their itineraries proves to be a successful research strategy. It yields notable insights and some significant discoveries. The Transylvanian itinerary of the Franciscan at the turn of the years 1455–1456 is now seen to gain coherence. The convocation and participation of both Hunyadi and Capestrano in an otherwise poorly known assembly of the Transylvanian estates in Turda around 28 December 1455 requires a reassessment of their collaboration in the context of projects of religious conversion. Furthermore, it raises questions about the apparent contradiction between this action and the necessity for political and social cohesion, which was crucial in the context of the imminent Ottoman attack.

The surviving correspondence between Hunyadi and the bishop of Transylvania, which has been largely overlooked in the past due to its survival only in early Franciscan collections of edited sources, can be corroborated with a more detailed analysis of the already-known information. This allows the reconstruction of a more articulated picture of his actions, the influence he continued to exert, and his relations with the power structures in the region. Finally, the almost completely parallel organization of the preparations for defense in the spring of 1456 provides new elements for consideration in the ongoing debate about the different experiences of the Belgrade combatants and their subsequent interpretation. The

¹⁴⁷ Bonfini 1936, 188–190 (dec. III, lib. VIII).

¹⁴⁸ Thurocz 1985–1988, I, 271–273: 272; Mixson 2022, 237–249 (n. 31): 248.

¹⁴⁹ Appendix to Capestrano’s letter of 23.07.1456, CEIC–H, 362–367 (n. 172): 366. In his *Chronicle of Austria* (ca 1463), Thomas Ebendorfer recorded the same words. Mixson 2022, 217–222 (n. 26): 222.

surprising mobility of the two leaders discussed here and the organization of their mobile “chancelleries” remain open to further analysis and interpretation. Nevertheless, above all, the relationship between these two significant figures of the fifteenth century remains to be fully elucidated.

From a methodological standpoint, the present study has been undertaken to reflect the potential offered by modern digital humanities tools for corroborating a significantly larger volume of historical data, thereby generating new insights and fascinating working hypotheses. The methodology employed in this study is, at its core, traditional. Still, it has consistently considered the potential of unrestricted access to document and source editions, textual encoding campaigns, systematic recourse to geolocation and spatiality, and the capacity to work with vast amounts of historical data. If corroborating data related to just two historical personalities can generate so much new historical information, it is reasonable to posit that extending such inquiries to dozens of historical actors would yield even greater insights. This issue is worthy of consideration in light of the opportunities emerging in the present era.

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BM Cod. 246 cls. 12	Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice, Cod. 246 cls. 12.
BNF Cod. NAL 1763	Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Nouvelles Acquisitions, Cod. NAL 1763, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10032145j , accessed 19 Dec. 2024.
MNL OL DF	Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Országos Levéltára, Budapest, Diplomatikai Fényképgyűjtemény.
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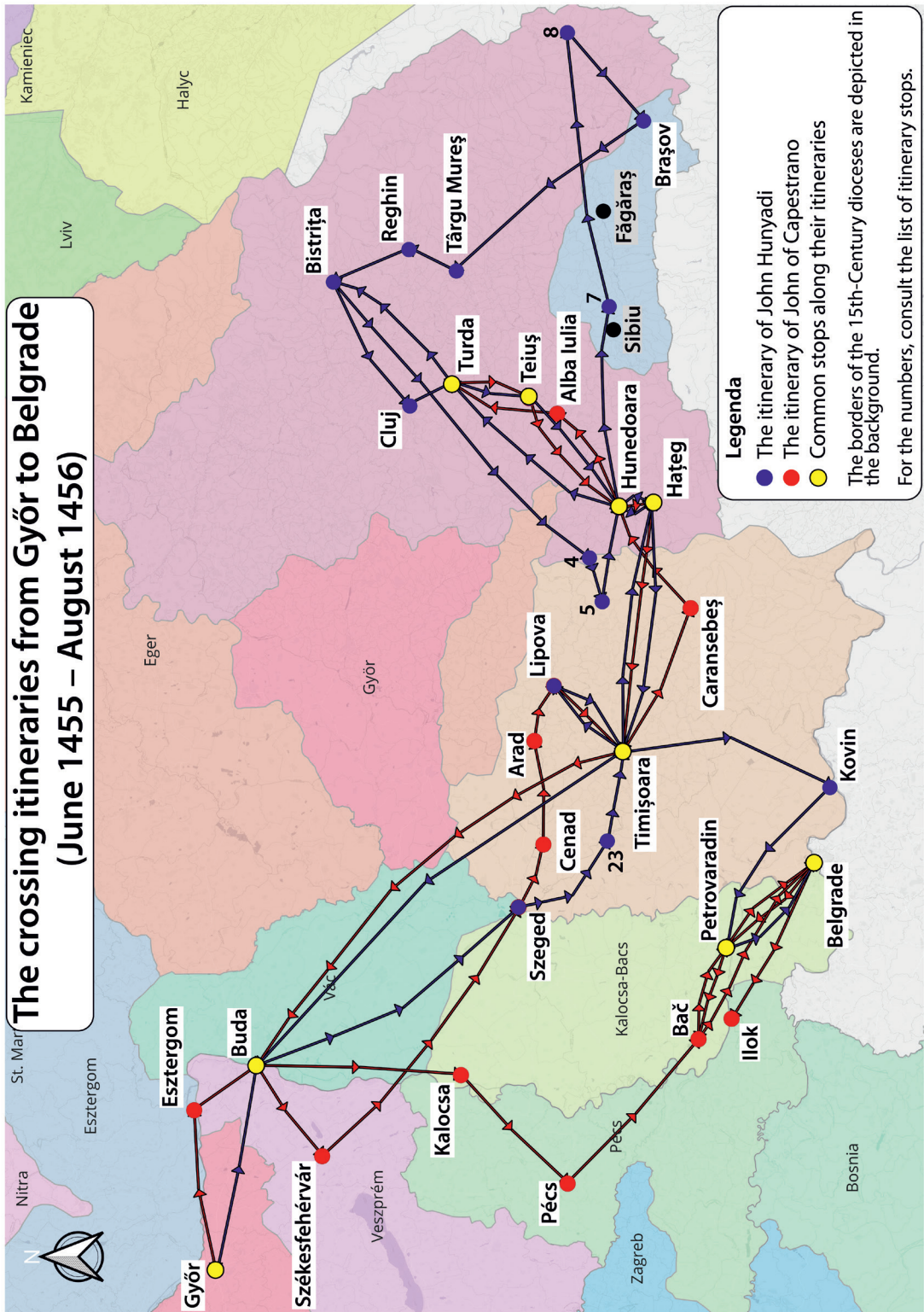
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JOHN HUNYADI	JOHN OF CAPESTRANO
1. Győr, 12–25.06.1455	I. Győr, 06.06–04.07.1455
	II. Esztergom, 19–22.07.1455
2. Buda, 20.06.1455	III. Buda, 22.07–11.08.1455
	IV. Székesfehérvár, 18.08–14.09.1455
3. Bistrița, 20.08.1455	V. Szeged
4. Dobra (Hunedoara), 08.09.1455	VI. Cenad, 17–22.09.1455
5. Margina (Hunedoara), 09.09.1455	VII. Arad
6. Hunedoara, 14.09.1455	VIII. Lipova
7. Roșia (Sibiu), 25.09.1455	IX. Timișoara
8. Lunga (Covasna), 15.10.1455	X. Caransebeș, 30.10.1455
9. Brașov, 08–22.11.1455	XI. Hunedoara, 08.12.1455
10. Târgu Mureș, 16.12.1455	
11. Reghin, 18.12.1455	XII. Alba Iulia, 25.12.1455
12. Bistrița, 21–23.12.1455	
13. Cluj, 28.12.1455	
14. Turda, 28.12.1455	XIII. Turda
15. Teiuș, 01.01.1456	XIV. Teiuș
16. Hunedoara	XV. Hunedoara
17. Hațeg	XVI. Hațeg, 06.01.1456
18. Timișoara, 13–18.01.1456	XVII. Timișoara, 13–15.01.1456
19. Lipova, 6–8.02.1456	
20. Timișoara	
21. Buda, 07.03–04.1456	XVIII. Buda and Pest, 03.02–16.04.1456
22. Szeged, 04–06.1456	XIX. Kalocsa
	XX. Pécs, ca 29.04–18.05.1456
23. Hollós, 18.06.1456	XXI. Bač, ca 15.05.1456
24. Timișoara 22.06.1456	XXII. Petrovaradin, 02.07.1456
25. Kovin, 24.06–03.07.1456	XXIII. Belgrade, 02–04.07.1456
26. Petrovaradin, 07.1456	XXIV. Petrovaradin, 04.07.1456
	XXV. Bač
27. Belgrade, Slankamen, Zemun, 10.07–11.08.1456	XXVI. Belgrade, Slankamen, Zemun, 10.07–11.08.1456
	XXVII. Ilok, 21–23.10.1456

Tab. 1. Overview of the itineraries.



“THEY WAGE WAR ON HORSEBACK.” STUDY OF A LATE MEDIEVAL SADDLE FROM THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF TRANSYLVANIAN HISTORY

ANDREI PRIAN*

Abstract: In the spring of 2023, while reviewing the arms and armor in the Medieval and Early Modern Collection of the National Museum of Transylvanian History and asking about equestrian equipment, I was lucky to find a very interesting yet unpublished saddle, with very little-known information about it. This article aims to argue, based on available period analogies and close analysis, that the artifact in question is an authentic, late medieval war saddle, dating back to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries, and an item of high value for the National History Museum of Transylvania as well as for the research field, as it is one of the few known extant pieces worldwide. Furthermore, another aim of this article is an attempt at the reconstruction of some of its hidden story in the context of the late medieval history of heavy cavalry in the Kingdom of Hungary, sources regarding the Transylvanian and central-European craft of saddlery, and the equestrian traditions of the time.

Keywords: war saddle, late medieval, equestrian equipment, heavy cavalry, Bravante

Rezumat: În primăvara anului 2023, consultând piesele de armament din Colecția Medievală și Premodernă a Muzeului Național de Istorie a Transilvaniei și interesându-mă despre piese de echipament ecvestru, am avut norocul de a mi se arăta o șa foarte interesantă, încă nepublicată, despre care se cunosc foarte puține informații. Scopul acestui prezentului articol este cel de a argumenta, pe baza analogiilor existente și a unei analize directe amănunțite, că este vorba despre o șa de război autentică, din Evul Mediu târziu, datând din ultimul sfert al secolului al XV-lea sau de la începutul secolului al XVI-lea, una dintre puținele astfel de piese cunoscute în colecțiile muzeale de pe mapamond, și un obiect de mare valoare, atât pentru Muzeul Național de Istorie a Transilvaniei, cât și pentru domeniul de studiu al echipamentului militar ecvestru din Evul Mediu, în general. Totodată, prezentul demers este o încercare de reconstituire a unor crâmpoie din povestea ei necunoscută, în contextul istoriei cavaleriei grele din Regatul Ungariei în Evul Mediu târziu, al informațiilor privind meșteșugul șelăriei din Transilvania și Europa Centrală, și al tradițiilor ecvestre ale vremii.

Cuvinte cheie: șa de război, medieval târziu, echipament ecvestru, cavalerie grea, Bravante

In the spring of 2023, while reviewing the arms and armor in the Medieval and Early Modern Collection of the National Museum of Transylvanian History (NMTH) and asking about equestrian equipment, I was shown, among other objects, a saddle,¹ from now on referred to as the “NMTH saddle,” about which little was known. The information from the old Hungarian registry (belonging to the Transylvanian National Museum/ Erdélyi Nemzeti

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¹ Colecția MNIT, no. F 30159.

Múzeum at the end of the nineteenth century²) is very limited and rather ambiguously refers to it as “armor pieces in a chest; helmets (2) and a saddle.”³ When the curators uncovered it, I was astonished to recognize a late medieval war saddle of a type commonly seen in the fifteenth century, especially after 1450, and, based on specific details, more likely to have been manufactured sometime between 1480 and 1520, as it will be discussed further on in this article. While there is an abundance of period imagery illustrating this saddle design, within a natural span of variations, the number of surviving pieces to be found in collections across the world is very modest, ranging from a few notorious examples to probably no more than twenty, including the ones that are still being discovered, from time to time.

Saddles for the armored warriors

Regarding the emergence of the couched-lance technique in medieval European cavalry warfare, which, in turn, had a significant part to play in the development of more specialized war saddles designed for knights and men-at-arms, valuable information has already been published.⁴ I will only mention the fact, relevant to understanding and identifying war saddle styles and chronology, that a high level of attention was paid to the support and protection of the rider in the optimal position⁵ while allowing the necessary legwork⁶ and to the saddle’s stability on the mount’s back, criteria that highly influenced the overall design features of several main styles observable throughout the Middle Ages. The first two of the said features worth mentioning are the height and shape of the bows,⁷ together with the different angles and depths of the seat,⁸ which aim to achieve the results best suited to the (heavy) cavalry fighting fashion of the time.⁹

It is worth mentioning that different terms have been used in modern convention, with the purpose of better classifying medieval saddles, ranging from the “riding” versus “war” denominations of their function, to “crib-saddles” (*Krippensätteln*) versus “trestle-saddles” (*Bocksätteln*) concerning their overall shape, or “Western” versus “Eastern,” as far as their similarity to fashions more common to some geographical regions goes. However, these conventional categories appear to be much looser and often overlap in medieval reality, as we can often find so-called “riding saddles” depicted in warring contexts, or “war saddles” employed in civilian circumstances, as shown by numerous iconographical sources.

² The saddle first appears in the inventory ledger of the Transylvanian Museum Society (Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület) in 1898, with the inventory number 9919 (ENM Register, unnumb., 225), so it must have been acquired by the museum sometime prior to that.

³ ENM Register, unnumb., 225, no. 99919: “Páncélok egy ládában/ sisak⁽²⁾ és egy nyereg.” There is no information available regarding the provenance of the saddle, nor its acquiry date. The aforementioned chest also contained several armor parts, dating from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

⁴ Nowakowski 2008; Gassmann 2019; Viallon 2022; Dawson 2024.

⁵ Viallon 2022, 135.

⁶ Koets 2014.

⁷ Gassmann 2019, 78.

⁸ Koets 2014.

⁹ Gassmann 2019, 78: “With the saddle, both *arçon* (pommel) and cantle rose; it is reasonable to assume that this feature was a response to the spread of the couched-lance technique and did not precede it.”

Nevertheless, it is beyond doubt that certain design features make some saddles more suited for use by heavy cavalry and help in outlining the “war saddle,” “crib-saddle,” and *Bravante* conventional categories, to which the NMTH saddle belongs, as shown by the end of this study.

Heavy cavalry in the Kingdom of Hungary

The bulk of the Hungarian military consisted of light cavalry throughout the medieval and early modern periods, preserving a tradition of warfare dating back to the early Magyars.¹⁰ However, starting with the adoption of Christianity by King Stephen I, the culture of Western knights and the use of heavily equipped men-at-arms gradually penetrated the landscape of Hungarian hosts.¹¹ In the second quarter of the fourteenth century, King Charles I created the so-called *militēs aulae regiae*, presumably armored knights of the royal retinue, and who, by the time of King Louis the Great, were expected to hire “lances,” consisting of one armored man-at-arms, equipped with a war lance as his primary weapon, and two or three horse archers.¹² The soldiers comprised within a *lancea* might have been either re-deployed on the battlefield, divided between separate contingents and fighting accordingly as shock cavalry, respectively mounted skirmishers, either in mixed formations, as depicted in mural paintings belonging to the cult of Saint Ladislaus,¹³ with heavy, mounted lancers charging the enemy, while supported by horse archers from the rear lines. In any case, it seems that this “lance” was the basic unit for recruiting and measuring the forces within a *banderium*. It is worth highlighting that, although outnumbered, the pivotal notion around which the entire concept of *lancea* revolves was the single, armored, mounted man-at-arms.

It has been suggested that, by the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries, King Sigismund of Luxembourg was able to muster as many as three thousand armored riders via his personal retinue and the *banderia* of his barons.¹⁴ In roughly the same timeframe, we should note the presence of a contingent belonging to the Teutonic Order in the Banate of Severin,¹⁵ of which we can presume that, at the very least, the knights would have been armed in the Western fashion of heavy cavalry.

According to Liviu Cîmpeanu, at the second battle of Kossovopolje, which took place between 18 and 20 October 1448, “the heavily armored men-at-arms made up at least half of the cavalry effective”¹⁶ and “the brunt of the war was borne by the lord governor’s men-at-arms (*armigeri*).”¹⁷ The nominal *armigeri* were also present in the notorious mercenary army of King Matthias Corvinus and summed up anywhere between a quarter and half of the king’s personal cavalry effectives.¹⁸

¹⁰ Szabó 2010, 220; Cîmpeanu 2024, 103.

¹¹ Cîmpeanu 2024, 103–104; Ardelean 2024, 164.

¹² Cîmpeanu 2024, 105.

¹³ Cîmpeanu 2024, 111.

¹⁴ Cîmpeanu 2024, 106–107.

¹⁵ Achim 2014, 42.

¹⁶ Cîmpeanu 2024, 113.

¹⁷ Cîmpeanu 2024, 113.

¹⁸ Cîmpeanu 2022, 15–16.

This situation persisted after the death of King Matthias, as in 1492, the Diet decreed that a *banderium* led by nobles of baronial status or by prelates should consist of heavy and light cavalry on a 1:1 ratio. In 1498, another Dietal Decree stated that barons should hire mounted men-at-arms in their *banderia*, in addition to the 1000 *equites armati* of the royal *banderium*.¹⁹

Essentially, it is worth noting that in order to be effective, a heavy cavalry contingent must number at least several hundred riders.²⁰

Finally, within the Hungarian army marching towards the fateful battle of Mohács in 1526, we find thousands of heavy riders,²¹ who are soon to make their last stand in a manner fit for chivalric romance, before being obliterated by the Ottomans, the ever-present foe that, to a notable extent, motivated and then witnessed the development and peak of the Kingdom's heavy cavalry. After this moment, a turning point for Hungarian history in general, and its military history in particular, the importance of knights swiftly diminished in the ongoing border skirmishes between the remnants of the Hungarian state and the Ottoman Empire, the latter significantly influencing the weaponry, attire, and horseback fighting tactics employed by the Hungarians, who adapted to their enemy to the extent of almost complete assimilation of Ottoman military customs.

Around 1538, the chronicler Antonius Wrancius wrote:

[They] wage war on horseback; in the old days they were all *cataphratti* [men-at-arms], now they are lightly armed *velites* [riders]. Without any doubt, they adopted this habit from the Turks. Because in the age of King Matthias, the use of cataphracts flourished with the greatest glory and victories; under Wladislas and Louis, his son, it was gradually neglected; after the bloody battle at Mohacs [the cataphracts] were disbanded and swept aside along with their military order, being replaced by the ones called in the everyday language *hussarones* [hussars], either to fight more easily, thanks to the swiftness of the Turkish horses, or rather, as it is customary among all mortals, according to the laws of war, for the vanquished to adopt the habits of the victors.²²

Thus, one may state that the third decade of the sixteenth century marked the end of a well-defined, late medieval Hungarian manifestation of military culture, after which the use of such Western-style war saddles for heavy cavalry is less likely as a widespread phenomenon, in the territories comprised within the Hungarian dominions and cultural sphere. We may also consider it conventionally as the step between medievalism and early modernism in Hungarian-mounted warfare. As Timothy G. Dawson stated, "The

¹⁹ Cîmpeanu 2024, 117.

²⁰ Gassmann 2024, 237.

²¹ Szabó 2021, 167–168.

²² Translation by Liviu Cîmpeanu, in Cîmpeanu 2024, 122. Original text, in Wrancius 1944, Lib III, 46: "Bella equestres obeunt; olim omnes cataphratti, nunc omnes velites leviter armati. Eam consuetudinem a Turcis illos accepisse nulli dubium est. Nam tempore Mattiae regis cataphrattorum usus maxime cum maxima laude ac victoriis eximiis florebat, sub Ladislao ac Ludovico huius filio paulatim caepere negligi, post vero cladem Mohachiensem etiam exauthorati sunt ac penitus una cum disciplina militari intermissi successereque, quos vernaculo sermone hussarones appellant, omnibus puto, facilitate militandi equorumque Turcalium agilitate illecti vel potius, quod ex bellorum licentia mortalibus usu venire solet, ut victi in victorum mores abiere."

periodization of the past is a vexed matter in historiography. It is a matter of constant debate about when period transitions can be deemed to have happened and what the pivotal developments that drive and identify any perceived transition are.”²³

We can assume that at least part of, if not most of, these mounted men-at-arms of Hungary may have relied on specialized saddles of war, similar in function and design features to those used by their western counterparts, according to the fashion and technological achievement level of the particular timeframe in which they rode and fought. Furthermore, the heterogenous ethnicity and place of origin of both the riders and the parties expected to equip and financially sustain them, together with the organic movement of material culture and its territorial distribution, may support the idea that many of these saddles were imported from Central, or as far as Western Europe. Some of them may have been produced locally. The standing question is: were they?

The craft of saddlery in late medieval Transylvania

Transylvanian workshops dedicated to saddlery emerged in written sources between the 1470s and 1519 in all the major urban centers of the territory.²⁴ In Cluj (Kolozsvár/Klausenburg, now Cluj-Napoca, Romania), in 1484, the statutes of the conjoined guild of bowyers, saddlers, sword grinders, girdlers, shieldmakers, and fletchers were confirmed by the city magistrate Johannes Markus, suggesting that an association of at least some of these trades previously existed. Four saddler masters are mentioned among the initiators of the statutes: *Iacobus, Mathias, Andreas et Paulus, sellatores*.²⁵

Unlike in Western Europe, we cannot find a clear delimitation between the trade of fusters, responsible for producing the wooden tree of the saddle, and that of the saddlers, who did the leatherwork, fittings, padding and cushioning of the product.²⁶ However, the *Holzsätn* departing from Braşov (Kronstadt/ Brassó) towards Wallachia at the beginning of the sixteenth century²⁷ may stand as a clue in the matter. The term, well noticed by Adrian Andrei Rusu as being somewhat ambiguous, may indeed not refer to sawbuck saddles (as a modern ethnographic translation suggests), designed mainly for baggage transport. These objects would have been much too menial to be ordered from workshops abroad, especially judging by the fact that this was a princely order.²⁸ My opinion is that the term was describing raw saddle trees, crafted by fusters (who may have worked jointly with saddlers) and delivered to be covered and fitted locally. Alternatively, perhaps, in Transylvania, the saddlery trade included that of western fusters.

Apart from the popularity of the so-called *Bocksättel* in late medieval Hungary, as opposed to the western *Krippensättel* type, or even a transitional form between the two styles,²⁹ as is indicated by written accounts,³⁰ some period Transylvanian imagery shows evidence of “war saddles” of Western fashion. Such is the one ridden by Saint George

²³ Dawson 2024, 29.

²⁴ Rusu 2019, 237.

²⁵ Ţiplic 2009, 115–116.

²⁶ Viallon 2022, 132.

²⁷ Rusu 2019, 237.

²⁸ Rusu 2019, 237.

²⁹ Somogyvári 2017, 5.

³⁰ Somogyvári 2017, 5, footnote 14.

depicted on the mural from Sighișoara (Schäßburg/ Segesvár), dated towards the end of the fifteenth century,³¹ or those that appear to be weighed by Saint Eligius in Hans Siebenbürger's painting hosted at the Museum of Fine Arts (Szépművészeti Múzeum), Budapest.³² The latter can be interpreted as belonging to the "transitional type," with high pommels and heart-shaped cantles, to which some scholars have also identified several of the famous bone-covered saddles.³³ Earlier murals of the Saint Ladislaus cycle, very common in border territories of Hungary, such as Székely Land in eastern Transylvania, depict both eastern and western types of saddles, as were in use at the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.³⁴ Relatively modest compared to the central-European luxury bone saddles, an engraved saddle plate made of bone was discovered archaeologically in Alba Iulia, in western Transylvania.³⁵ Some of the fifteenth-century stove tiles displaying jousting scenes, found in Moldavia (with intense commercial connections to Transylvania) and Hunedoara (Vajdahunyad/ Eisenmarkt, southwestern Transylvania) clearly depict the *Krippensattel* type, and more specifically, the design of the late fifteenth-century heavy cavalry war saddle shared by the object of this study.³⁶ Overall, while local written sources are ambiguous about the saddle typology produced by Transylvanian workshops, the iconographic, plastic, and archaeological ones suggest that the region's elites were, at least visually, familiar with several saddle aesthetics and functions. This does not prove, however, that Transylvanian craftsmen must have manufactured all of them.

In 1521, in Cluj, an interesting differentiation was made between *sella bohemicalis* and *sella walachalis*.³⁷ While the latter may refer to the eastern type, better suited for the mounted skirmish warfare so representative for late medieval and early modern Wallachians, could the "Bohemian saddle" be the type reflected by the NMTH saddle and presumably common throughout Central Europe? The issue is still very much debatable.

The NMTH saddle – a technical description

Before providing a thorough description of the object and opinions regarding its possible history, some limitations of this study must be stated. There is no information regarding its provenance or how the Transylvanian National Museum acquired it in the late nineteenth century. Also, while microscopical analysis of the wood and leather could be made on samples³⁸, other examinations, such as X-ray observation or radiocarbon dating, are not available at the moment. Therefore, besides identifying the wood and hide species, most of the description is based on direct visual examination and metric data, combined with comparison to the closest extant, iconographic, and documentary analogies.

³¹ Rusu 2019, 238.

³² "Saint Eligius"/ MFA.

³³ Somogyvári 2017, 6, footnote 19.

³⁴ Rusu 2019, 237.

³⁵ Rusu 2019, 238, footnote 194.

³⁶ Rădulescu 2000, 249, fig. 2 a–b.

³⁷ Rusu 2019, 237.

³⁸ The analyses were carried out by Ph.D. Andrea Beatrix Magó, NMTH collection conservator and museum investigator, using the optical microscopy method (OLYMPUS CX33 microscope). See Analysis Bulletin no. 39/ 24.07.2024, NMTH. I thank her for performing this investigation.

The conventional terms in use for the saddle parts are the **tree**, comprised of the **bars** and the **seat**, and the **bows**, or *arçons*, connecting them, namely the **pommel** in the front and the **cantle** at the back.

The saddle tree is constructed from two inverted U-shaped bars of sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*)³⁹ wood boards attached to the seat via joinery and nails. The elements were presumably glued together and then attached with small nails. On both bars, the lower extremities were added from separate pieces of board, of which the ones on the rear are preserved, while those from the front part of the saddle, corresponding to the pommel board, are now lost. Each bar features a rectangular cutout for the suspension of stirrup straps, placed almost symmetrically, at 12 cm on the right bar and 11.3 cm on the left, measured from the front edge of the bars. The cutout on the right is 7.3 cm long and 2.1 cm wide, while the one on the left is 8 cm long and 2.2 cm wide. The length of the bars is 46 cm on the right and 46.3 cm on the left, with the rear ends (best preserved) curving downwards to the horse's flanks, being 34 cm wide, with a maximum depth of the arch of 2 cm on the right and 1.5 cm on the left. Attachment points for two girth straps (or more probably a Y-shaped girth) can be seen placed close to the bows of the saddle.

The seat is 22 cm long, with a strong backward arched slope of around 45 degrees, from the pommel board towards the base of the cantle and joined to the pommel and sidebars (details visible due to tears in the leather). It is difficult to tell whether the seat is also joined to the cantle or carved from the same piece of wood because of the integrally preserved leather layers in that area.

The inside width measurements of the saddle tree are noted as follows: **P** for the area closest to the pommel; **S** for the middle section, corresponding to the seat; **C** for the back area, closest to the cantle. The **A** value is the medium distance between the bars, while the **B** value is the maximum width, measured from one lower extremity to the other. The thickness of the boards was not included in the following values.

	A	B
P	20 cm	35 cm
S	14 cm	25 cm
C	34 cm	53 cm

The pommel (Fig. 3) is connected to the bars 4 cm behind the front edge of the latter and is slightly arched frontward. The outer edges are significantly thinner (0.8 cm) than the middle section (4.7 cm), while the inner edges, connecting to the bars, are 4 cm wide and tapering towards the lower extremities. It has a total height of 50.5 cm, a 28 cm-wide straight top, and a maximum width of 66 cm, measured between the most distant points at the lower end. Above the top edges of the bars, we can observe a *bouche* in the shape of a half-circle, 9 cm in diameter, to accommodate the horse's withers. The whole outer surface of the pommel is covered with an iron sheet.

An additional pair of plates, measuring 21.5 cm in height on the outer side and 12 cm on the inner side, seems to have been added to the top of the pommel, perhaps

³⁹ See Analysis Bulletin no. 39/ 24.07.2024, NMTH.

due to pressing circumstances, as will be shown further on. They were pierced through by four massive screws of non-metric construction, and in all regards, appearing to be contemporary to the saddle, of which two screws still survive (Fig. 4).

Another circular orifice, similar in diameter to those on the top of the pommel, can be observed in its lower-right corner.

The cantle is 51 cm wide, measured from “ear to ear,” and curved to encompass the rider’s seat, forming an arch with a depth of 16 cm. It is slightly tilted backwards at an angle of around 60 degrees. It has an elliptical shape, with the extremities elevated 6 cm, compared to the middle section.

As some traces suggest, the entire surface of the wooden core was covered in glue and shredded sinew (Fig. 5); then, a layer of rawhide was glued and nailed to the inside and outside of the saddle. A second layer, consisting of tanned leather, covers the exterior, and, at least on the inner surface of the cantle, remnants of another layer of tanned leather can be observed (Fig. 6). Some areas, more exposed to wear and tear, such as the seat and the lower-inside areas of the pommel, the patina reveals a lighter, beige color, which may suggest that the leather was painted to another shade, now appearing as a very dark brown. On the inside of the saddle tree, a thin layer of birch bark was added on top of the rawhide for insulation purposes (Fig. 7), as analogies point out.⁴⁰ The rawhide and the tanned leather are made of horse skin belonging to the neck and croupe areas of the animal.⁴¹

The rear halves of the bars were covered with iron plates that curved around the edges, secured by iron rivets (11 on the left side and six on the right). The rivet heads display floral ornaments, are divided into seven registers, and have a diameter ranging between 1 and 2 cm. Both the front and rear extremities of the bars feature holes, around 0.5 cm in diameter, drilled all the way through the plates, wood and leather and placed near the upper and lower corners. These could serve as attachment points for the inner textile cushion of the saddle.

On both the front and rear ends of each bar, two buckles strapped the bard elements: the *crinet*⁴² and *peytral*⁴³ in front, and the *croupers*⁴⁴ at the rear (Fig. 8).

The cantle was also covered, on the outside, with three iron plates, held in place by the same type of rivets, and joined to the rear end of the bars by thick, cross-shaped iron supports, which were attached using iron rivets with a much larger head, 2.3 cm in diameter (Figs. 9–10).

The overall weight of the saddle is 10,325 g.

A story hidden within the object?

The first noticeable aspects that point towards later alterations made to the saddle are some modern replacements. The girth straps on both sides were cut down at some point, then replaced with visibly modern leather straps made of two thin layers, with seam lines on the margins. The remains of the original straps were added on top, then fixed to the

⁴⁰ Viallon 2022, 132–134.

⁴¹ See Analysis Bulletin no. 39/ 24.07.2024, NMTH.

⁴² Barding element designed to cover the neck of the horse.

⁴³ Barding element made of leather, plate, or textile, meant to protect the horse’s chest.

⁴⁴ Barding element made of leather, plate, or textile, covering the croupe of the horse.

saddle bars with forged nails, hammered down to curve on the inside. Similarly, four of the buckles meant to secure the barding were replaced with modern ones featuring rolling tubes on the front side. Four of the original forged buckles are still present on the saddle.

At a point in time, when parts of the rawhide covering the inside of the saddle were already missing, a six-pointed star shape was painted in red and blue, partly over the rawhide and partly over the bare wood (Fig. 11).

The specific time and purpose of these alterations are presently unknown.

However, the most interesting changes made to this saddle may have occurred while it was still in use and, more so, perhaps even in campaigning circumstances. A striking feature of the object is the rawness of the pommel plates, in comparison to all the other known extant pieces, to the extent that modern reconstructors of fifteenth-century saddles have stated that they would have to strive to achieve that level of inferior craftsmanship, on purpose, in order to recreate this particular piece accurately.⁴⁵ Regardless of the level of ornamentation present on the other notorious examples, some of them undoubtedly being luxury objects with intricate and exquisite decoration⁴⁶ and a few others of a somewhat simpler, soldierly fashion,⁴⁷ a general feature of the platework is the overall tidiness of the execution. This was a mark of proper mastery of the craft, important to the good renown of medieval workshops. However, the top plates of the NMTH saddle are noticeably uneven, slant, and wrapping very grossly around the edges of the pommel (Fig. 12), as if they had been made by an amateur with no knowledge of the trade. This aspect might even raise questions regarding the medieval authenticity of the piece, as vast numbers of modern reproductions, alterations of originals, or even fakes, dating from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, are known to the scholars of medieval armor and equestrian equipment, and given that the provenance of this saddle is presently unknown. Yet so many features point towards its authenticity, from the overall design, proportions, and production technology, so similar to extant, iconographic, and documentary analogies alike, all the way to the present state of conservation of the leather and iron parts. In this context, the top *arçon* plates can be identified as contemporary to the rest of the saddle in all aspects that concern patina and methods of production, together with the screws that pierce them, which cannot be mistaken for the modern, industrially made ones. In addition, the front-top plate bears two hit marks that can be objectively attributed to those left by strikes with narrow-pointed, hard objects, such as a spear or the tip of a lance, on the upper-left side, the area where such blows are most likely to land, in customary combat and jousting circumstances (Fig. 13).

On careful observation of the above-mentioned plate, a stripe of different, darker patina can be seen on the iron surface, on the line described by the four screws, suggesting the historical presence of another element, secured on top, via said screws (Fig. 14). Together with the orifice on the lower-right corner of the pommel, this could point towards a banner-holster, like the one featured by the saddle currently on display at the Museum in

⁴⁵ Acknowledgements to Mr Marcin Ruda of *Marcin Ruda Saddlery*, for sharing his professional expertise.

⁴⁶ Richardson 2013, 107, fig. 5 (a saddle belonging to the ensemble of Richard VI's "Lion Armor" and Henry VIII's Burgundian bard). The saddle belonging to the A21 equestrian armor from the Wallace Collection ("Equestrian Armour"/ Wallace Collection).

⁴⁷ Pyhrr, LaRocca, Breiding 2005, 12, fig. 7 (the saddle associated with the VI.379 armored bard, at the Royal Armouries, Leeds). See also: "Horse Armour"/ Royal Armouries.

Bistrița (Complexul Muzeal Bistrița-Năsăud), with similar contraptions also noticeable, in different forms, on the *Julius Caesar Tapestries* of Tournai, dated 1465–1470.

The catalyst for my interpretation of the exceptional grossness of these plates was provided by an illustration from an illuminated *Bellifortis* manuscript, the *Kriegstechnik* (1420–1440), hosted by the Zentralbibliothek in Zürich.⁴⁸ There, two armored soldiers work on modifying a war saddle by adding buckles to an untypically wide girth, possibly to stabilize it further. While this does not prove a point regarding the spread of this practice, nor is it relevant to the object of this study, it does remind us that alterations, and especially repairs, were often necessary mid-campaign, not always having the best craftsmen at hand. These repairs could have been made either by auxiliary personnel, if present on site, or by soldiers themselves.

I believe this saddle originally had its pommel covered by a single, polished plate of iron, and perhaps even its top of a slightly different, more protruding shape (although not necessarily true), as seen on numerous analogies. In my envisioned scenario, the top area of the pommel may have been severely damaged at some point during battle, then perhaps hastily repaired by someone who was not, by any means, a professional of the trade, maybe the rider himself or somebody from his entourage, by reinforcing it with replacement or additional plates. Later, in the same campaign, or sometime in the future, while the saddle was still in use, strikes from opponents landed on the new top-front plate, leaving the marks visible today. If this scenario is ever proven to be accurate, the NMTH saddle may stand as a tangible testimony regarding less notorious aspects of the everyday soldiering life in the late Middle Ages.

Analogies

Regarding the few known late medieval saddles surviving across the world, we may notice that changes in design and construction occurred as we advance into the fifteenth century.⁴⁹ While the funeral saddle of Henry V from Westminster Abbey shares more common features with earlier, fourteenth-century crib-saddles⁵⁰ than with our object of study, later examples display more pronounced characteristics of the *Bravante* style (with elliptical, “ear-shaped” cantles and large trapezoidal pommels, further explained in the next chapter of this article). Such is the bone-covered saddle of Museo del Bargello in Florence, or those hosted by the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna and Arundel Castle, which share some significant features with the NMTH saddle. Another example, from the *Schatzkammer* of the Armeemuseum of Ingolstadt, already features support bars at the back of the cantle, a recurrent element in late fifteenth-century Germanic imagery.⁵¹ The VI.379-saddle of the Royal Armouries should also be referred to as an analogy, dated 1480–1500.

⁴⁸ Zentralbibliothek Zürich, Ms. Rh. hist. 33b, f. 111v.

⁴⁹ See also Nowakowski 2008, 64, fig. 3.

⁵⁰ Viallon 2022, 129, fig. 6.1.

⁵¹ Although support bars sometimes appear in iconography as early as the first half of the fifteenth century, they are very rare. They become quite usual in the German imagery of the 1470s and later. All extant pieces featuring them are dated to the late fifteenth century, or the beginning of the subsequent one.

Two other war saddles of the *Bravante* style are known to exist in Romanian museums, and both can be roughly dated between the 1470s and the beginning of the sixteenth century. One of them is on display at the Museum in Bistrița and, to my knowledge, has not yet been published. The other is in the National Military Museum (Muzeul Militar Național „Regele Ferdinand I”) in Bucharest,⁵² together with the rear part of a bard, assembled from straps and fluted rondels, and is said to have Transylvanian provenance. Unfortunately, according to the museum personnel, it is currently under restoration and cannot be viewed for research. Judging by several stylistic similarities, it is possible that the same workshop had manufactured both pieces and may have originated in the Holy Roman Empire.

A war saddle with very similar pommel features to the one in the NMTH and cross-shaped supports, but with an oddly flat-profiled cantle, can be found at the Polish Army Museum (Muzeum Wojska Polskiego) in Warsaw.⁵³

Probably the structurally closest example, although a much more luxurious object, is the saddle belonging to the A21 composite equestrian armor from the Wallace Collection. Dated to around 1510, it shares many proportions and the cross-shaped support bars with the NMTH saddle. Another extant example of the late *Bravante* style, featuring cross-shaped support bars and a trapezoidal pommel, can be found in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg, dated 1510–1525.⁵⁴

In the following decades of the sixteenth century, while preserving some of the structural principles of the previous century, saddles generally shift to another overall shape, with a more horizontal seat and semi-circular cantles with a straight top edge, as characteristic of the Renaissance fashion.⁵⁵

On the other hand, period iconographic and plastic sources are abundant in analogies for the *Bravante* style in general and for the NMTH saddle in particular. I see no need to go through the hundreds of available examples, but I will instead highlight the most relevant ones known to me.

As soon as the first decades of the fifteenth century, incipient *Bravante*-like shapes can be seen in art, as in the 1420 version of the *Flos Duellatorum*, the *Florius de Arte Luctandi*,⁵⁶ with elliptical cantles, but the pommels perhaps sharing more features with the Henry V funerary saddle from Westminster. Other representations from the same manuscript may instead be connected to earlier crib-saddles or even the *Hochenzeug*.⁵⁷

In the following decades, more and more examples of such war saddles emerged especially in Italian and German artistic depictions. By the 1450s and 1460s, the overall shape of the type was well-defined, as can be observed on the fresco of *David killing the Philistines* from the Cantina dei Santi in Romagnano Sesia or the *Bronze Door* of Castel Nuovo in Naples (1462–1468), by Guglielmo Monaco.

⁵² “Atelaje și harnașamente”/ MMN.

⁵³ Nowakowski 2008, 72, fig. 13.

⁵⁴ Inv. no. W1297.

⁵⁵ Viallon 2019.

⁵⁶ BNF, MS Latin 11269, f. 2r–6r.

⁵⁷ Specialized jousting saddle, with a significantly raised seat and large pommel, used in the type of tournament known as *Hochenzeuggestech* (“jousting in the high saddle”).

Nevertheless, the closest analogies can be found in the German art of later decades. The German Saint George of a 1480 print⁵⁸ rides a saddle displaying cross-shaped support bars at the back of the cantle, and so does Albrecht Dürer's *Little Courier* (1496),⁵⁹ while his *Saint George on Horseback* (1505–1508)⁶⁰ saddle has simple supports, but a pommel highly similar in shape and profile to that of the NMTH saddle. Another trapezoidal, flat-profiled pommel is shown on a side panel of *The Martyrdom of Saint Crispin and Crispinian* altarpiece from the Musée de la Ville in Brussels, dated 1490.⁶¹

Similar saddles are depicted in *Le Chevalier délibéré* by Olivier de La Marche, from Gouda, Netherlands, dated to 1480–1490,⁶² and the south-German *Wolfhegg Housebook* (1480).⁶³

An exquisite sculpture depicting a *Bravante* war saddle with cross-shaped supports is the wooden equestrian statue of Saint George from Storkyrkan in Stockholm, made by Bernt Notke in 1487.⁶⁴

In Poland, saddles with similar construction can be seen in the late fifteenth-century depictions of Saint George, Saint Martin, and the Battle of Orsza.⁶⁵

In late fifteenth-century Italian art, such as Antonio Cicognara's *Saint George and the Princess* (1480–1490) from Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo in Brescia, or the fresco of Antoniazio Romano from *Sala dei Cesari* in the Orsini–Odescalchi Castle of Bracciano (1490), saddles bear well-defined shapes and proportions of the so-called *Bravante* style, but support bars are absent.

After the first quarter of the sixteenth century, art began to reflect the reality of extant pieces, gradually shifting towards the later design, as seen in Charles V's equestrian portrait by Titian (1548).

In addition, some interesting listings from guild statutes in Poznan, Poland, dating back to the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, refer to saddles with raised bows, saddles overlaid with iron, and a saddle with iron support bars.⁶⁶

Surviving, iconographic, plastic, and written sources suggest that the shape and construction closest to the NMTH saddle may have originated just before 1480 and stayed in fashion as late as the early 1520s. Thus, we can picture an approximate timeframe to which the studied saddle may date back and that the item most likely belonged to Germanic material culture.

Striving to understand the object: late medieval equestrianism and experimental approaches

While the following paragraphs are not, by any means, intended to claim a thorough understanding of the medieval and Renaissance art of riding and acknowledging that the

⁵⁸ Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België, Brussels, Belgium.

⁵⁹ "The Little Courier"/ MET.

⁶⁰ "St George on Horseback"/ WGA.

⁶¹ "Saints Crispin and Crispinian"/ Flickr.

⁶² "Le Chevalier délibéré"/ BNF – Gallica.

⁶³ Capwell 2018, 86–87.

⁶⁴ "St George and the Dragon"/ ARC.

⁶⁵ Nowakowski 2008, 66, fig. 5.

⁶⁶ Nowakowski 2008, 72.

matter should be left to much more educated scholars of equestrianism, I believe that some brief and generic additions to this study may contribute to understanding why the NMTH saddle was constructed in this manner, to which technological fashion it may have belonged, and perhaps shed more light on its possible dating.

Around the year 1434, King Eduarte of Portugal (1391–1438), commonly referred to as *Dom Duarte*, wrote, in the earliest surviving medieval horsemanship treatise:

First – There are the saddles which require the legs to stay extended, a little bit forward with the feet firm on the stirrups; all these things to be done in such a way that a good balance is obtained not paying more attention to the steadiness of the feet on the stirrups, than to the pressing of the legs on the beast or to the way you are seated on the saddle; equal attention should be given to each of the three to enable you to get the benefits you can take out of each one of them. The saddles used in our land that require this style of riding are currently known as “Bravante,” as well as others of similar types.⁶⁷

The *Bravante* type of saddle has been interpreted as referring to a later subtype of those otherwise known as *Krippensätteln*, or “crib-saddles,” with their well-defined bows, suited for securing the armoured rider in a balanced position, with the cantle yielding support to the seat of the rider, and allowing him to extend his legs forward, as often depicted in fifteenth-century iconographic and plastic sources. The large pommel usually protected the rider’s groin, belly, and thighs.⁶⁸ Given this, and compared to known analogies, the NMTH saddle can be considered to belong to the *Bravante* subtype. The term has also been associated with the *Brabant* (a.i. Western) riding style, as opposed to the *gineta* (or *jineta*), named after the javelin or throwing spear.⁶⁹ The latter was more characteristic of eastern mounted warfare and Mediterranean employment of light, skirmishing cavalry, which are far more likely to have relied on saddles referred to as *sellas gynetas* by Dom Duarte,⁷⁰ or the *Bocksätteln*, as we go towards Central and Eastern Europe.

A particular riding style associated with our type of saddle is the one usually referred to as *a la brida*, as it relies mainly on the use of the bridle for conveying cues, with the rider standing in the stirrups and hence losing the connection between the inner thighs and the horse.⁷¹

This style is also well described in Dom Duarte’s treatise:

Chapter IV – About those who ride firm and erect on the stirrups

Third – This style is based on riding firm on the stirrups with the legs extended and not being seated on the saddle, but having the body balance helped by the saddle-bows: the pommel and the cantle.

Those who use this riding style have learned it in the old times. And in tournaments and in jousts and in other similar situations, the correct style of riding is the following:

⁶⁷ Duarte 1843, 16; also see Preto 2005.

⁶⁸ Koets 2014.

⁶⁹ Bas 2019, 260.

⁷⁰ Duarte 1843, 18; also see Preto 2005.

⁷¹ Koets 2014.

to equip the horse in such a way that the stirrups stay fixed to the horse's body using an additional system of interlaced ropes (tying the stirrups together underneath the horse's belly) or by any other appropriate system. They – the stirrups – should be in such a position that the horseman's legs stay extended straight down and not even slightly forward. And the feet are to stay very firm on the stirrups and you are to never be seated on the saddle, as that would result in loss of elegance, loss of agility and loss of body quietness and would make you less strong.⁷²

An opinion shared by several scholars is that both aforementioned styles described by Dom Duarte can be considered different forms of riding *a la brida*, as both are defined by the extended position of the legs, as opposed to the *gineta*, where the knees are bent, but only the first form relying *sine qua non* on *Bravante* saddles, while the second one was of an older origin.⁷³ I believe the latter must have also employed crib-saddle variations since Dom Duarte mentions balancing the body between the (presumably raised) bows.

The *a la brida* technique (if we consider both its forms) may have originated in Northern Europe but became the most common riding fashion throughout late medieval Europe, as far as heavy cavalry and associated war saddles are concerned.⁷⁴ However, present-day experiments have also revealed other riding positions on *Bravante* saddles, as sometimes shown in medieval iconography.⁷⁵

Notable experimental efforts to understand the construction and employment of such *Bravante* saddles have been made by modern-day craftsmen, reenactors of the Middle Ages, practitioners of mounted medieval martial arts, jousters and renowned scholars, these categories most often overlapping. It is necessary to mention the revealing work of Joram van Essen, Wouter Nicolai, Arne Koets, or Tobias Capwell (formerly at the Wallace Collection), regarding different aspects of designing, crafting, and practically using such saddles, continuously shedding new light upon the principles of constructing them, the way certain features influence the way of riding them and testing them in real-life mounted combat situations and archaeological experiments.⁷⁶ Such practices constantly reduce the gap between historical sources and their modern empirical understanding. These valuable contributions reveal that however different from modern saddlery,⁷⁷ medieval craftsmen had a highly efficient and practical approach to designing the proportions and functions of these ever-present objects and, particularly, of war saddles, the relevant topic of this study.

Discussion

Whether the NMTH saddle was present in late medieval Transylvania (or the larger area of the Kingdom of Hungary) or if it travelled across centuries through private foreign collections is still very unclear since we do not know its provenance and prior ownership. Moreover, presuming that it had witnessed the Transylvanian Middle Ages, it is impossible to state, at the moment, whether it is a local product or not. While, as previously shown,

⁷² Duarte 1843, 17; also see Preto 2005.

⁷³ Tomassini 2014.

⁷⁴ Tomassini 2014.

⁷⁵ Koets 2014.

⁷⁶ Williams, Edge, Capwell 2016.

⁷⁷ Koets 2014.

saddler workshops are documented throughout the Transylvanian urban milieu in the exact timeframe our object of study is most likely to belong to, and while we may presume connections between terms from local written sources and the conventional types to which the NMTH saddle can be identified to, there is no conclusive proof to back up either theory (that of local production, or import), as no recognizable workshop mark can be seen on its surface, and given the fact that we know nothing of its history, prior to its presence in the museum's collection.

In many regards, the saddle shows notable similarities to numerous German and north-Italian extant and iconographic analogies, and there is a high probability that it was crafted in the Holy Roman Empire. However, this hypothesis is difficult to prove based on stylistic comparison alone. Or, perhaps this fashion may have transcended to the (mostly German) saddlers of Transylvanian towns, and we are looking at a rare surviving example of local craftsmanship? The matter is still a mystery that, hopefully, further studies will be able to untangle.

There might be a chance for more advanced surveys to reveal a saddler's mark hidden under the pommel plates that I believe had been added for repair purposes, but until then, this saddle's place of origin remains shrouded in uncertainty.

The saddle's medieval authenticity could provide another subject of debate. The atypical crudeness of the steelwork could possibly raise some questions. However, my opinion is that most of the arguments converge, on close analysis, towards the dismissal of these doubts unless it is proven that the author of the alleged modern fake respected, without transgression, all the regulated construction guidelines and materials that we find in late medieval sources (mostly still unpublished in the nineteenth century) and are mirrored by known originals.

Conclusions

In the end, we may draw a few relevant conclusions to the present study. First, I firmly believe that the NMTH saddle is a priorly known, but not yet accurately identified, authentic war saddle of the so-called *Bravante* subtype, dating to the late fifteenth century or the very beginning of the subsequent one. While its backstory and origin are limited to supposition, the undeniable fact is that if the object is not proven in the future to be a modern fake, it is a highly valuable piece for the NMTH collection and the scholarly field of medieval equestrian equipment, as such a small number of extant saddles belonging to the given type are currently known to academia worldwide. However, new such items may still emerge from museum storages in the future, as the field of study is constantly evolving, thanks to sustained research and communication between academics and medieval military equipment enthusiasts.

Furthermore, based on period sources, we can conclude that the overall construction of the saddle is best suited for employment in heavy cavalry tactics, as shown by most of the available iconography and plastic representations, but also by the written words of medieval and Renaissance theoreticians of military equestrianism, such as Dom Duarte or Pietro del Monte.

Finally, it is safe to state that such saddles were known to the local warrior elites of the late Middle Ages. Regardless of the origin of this particular item, as both import and local

production are highly plausible, it may very well have been in close connection with at least a specific segment of the Hungarian military society.

Acknowledgements

Since, in the present, much knowledge regarding the fields of equestrian history and medieval arms and armor is colloquially shared within international online communities between published scholars and enthusiasts alike, I was able to extract some valuable means of understanding the object of my study from informal discussions. In this regard, acknowledgements are due to Arne Koets, Wouter Nicolai, Augusto Boer Bront, Robert MacPherson, Timothy Dawson, Peter Spätling, and others, for taking their time to debate on features of original items and manners of recognizing later copies, as well as the chronological placement of some aspects of *Bravante* saddles.

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Fig. 1. Left side view of the saddle (photo by Victor Vätavu).



Fig. 2. Right side view of the saddle (photo by Victor Vätavu).



Fig. 3. Front view of the pommel (photo by Victor Vätavu).

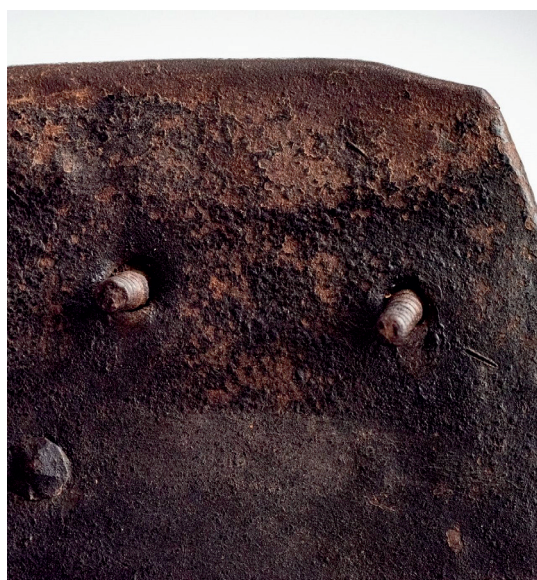


Fig. 4. Detail of the pommel screws (photo by Victor Vätavu)



Fig. 5. Remnants of shredded sinew, between the wooden core and the layer of rawhide (photo by Victor Vätavu).



Fig. 6. Remnants of an additional layer of tanned leather, visible on the inner side of the cantele (photo by Victor Vätavu).



Fig.7. Remnants of the birch bark layer added on top of the rawhide (photo by Victor Vätavu).



Fig. 8. Detail of the front-left pair of buckles (photo by Victor Vătavu).



Fig. 9. Rear view of the saddle. The cantle and the support bars (photo by Victor Vătavu).



Fig. 10. Inner view of the cantle (photo by Victor Vätavu).



Fig. 11. Star shape painted on the inside of the left-side bar (photo by Victor Vätavu).



Fig. 12. Rear view of the pommel (photo by Victor Vătavu).



Fig. 13. Trauma marks on the top-left side of the pommel (photo by Victor Vătavu).



Fig. 14. A darker shade of patina visible on the line of the screws (photo by Victor Vătavu).

NOTES ON THE ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY TRANSYLVANIA

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Abstract: The paper explores the role of administrative ordinances as both a source of law and a method of governance in 18th-century Transylvania. The study is based on printed regulations from the 18th century, focusing on their impact on the governance of Habsburg Transylvania. During the age of principality (mid-16th to late 17th century), laws adopted by the Diet were issued in the form of decrees bearing the seal of the prince. Upon taking control over Transylvania at the end of the 17th century, the Habsburgs recognized all previous legal arrangements but began to issue decrees with an unprecedented frequency and relied on them to bypass the Diet and impose their absolutist policies. The paper discusses the interesting situation where ordinances formally invoked and reiterated older legislation, whereas, in fact, they significantly amended it to suit the objectives of the Absolutist rule. For example, a regulation issued in 1772 regarding the wastage of ancestral property pretended to reiterate provisions of the *Decretum Tripartitum* from 1517. However, a close examination revealed that the regulation significantly departed from the *Decretum Tripartitum* and altered its provisions. The paper also suggests alternative ways of exploring administrative regulations.

Keywords: Transylvania, regulations, legal innovation, *Tripartitum*, absolutism

Rezumat: Lucrarea de față explorează rolul ordonanțelor administrative atât ca sursă de drept, cât și ca metodă de guvernare în Transilvania secolului al XVIII-lea. Studiul se bazează pe reglementările tipărite din secolul al XVIII-lea, concentrându-se pe impactul acestora asupra guvernării Transilvaniei habsburgice. În perioada principatului (de la mijlocul secolului al XVI-lea până la sfârșitul secolului al XVII-lea), legile adoptate de Dietă erau emise sub formă de decrete purtând sigiliul principelui. La preluarea controlului asupra Transilvaniei la sfârșitul secolului al XVII-lea, Habsburgii au recunoscut toate dispozițiile legale anterioare, dar au început să emită decrete cu o frecvență fără precedent și s-au bazat pe acestea pentru a ocoli Dieta și a-și impune politicile absolutiste. Lucrarea discută situația interesantă în care ordonanțele invocau și reiterau formal legislația mai veche, în timp ce, în realitate, o modificau semnificativ pentru a se potrivi obiectivelor domniei absolutiste. De exemplu, un regulament emis în 1772 privind risipa bunurilor strămoșești pretindea să reitereze dispoziții cuprinse în *Decretum Tripartitum* din 1517. Cu toate acestea, o examinare atentă a arătat că regulamentul se îndepărta de *Decretum Tripartitum* și îi modifica semnificativ prevederile. Lucrarea sugerează, de asemenea, modalități alternative de exploatare a reglementărilor administrative.

Cuvinte cheie: Transilvania, reglementări, inovație legală, *Tripartitum*, absolutism

This study attempts to open up a new research field in the wider domain of the legal history of Transylvania. It has as its object the administrative regulations – in a broad sense

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– issued by the Habsburg authorities in Transylvania in the 18th century viewed from the angle of legal innovation. To better understand this new form of governance and the legal innovation in 18th-century Transylvania, we need to know what laws were in force during the rule of the Habsburgs. The principality was characterized by a composite legal system, inherited from the medieval period. The royal decrees and the laws from the period of the principality (resulting from the collaboration of the principles with the Diet) did not cover the entire sphere of law and, in many areas, the common law remained valid. In addition, royal and princely privileges granted to certain individuals, corporations, or communities, and statutes and normative acts with local application existed. Many of these were gathered in collections of laws. István Werbőczy's *Tripartitum* from 1517 included norms of civil and criminal law, selected both from written law up to that time and from customary law. *Approbatae Constitutiones* (1653) and *Compilatae Constitutiones* (1669) included the dietary decisions adopted during the principality. Smaller collections of local statutes were added to these.¹

All these collections, privileges, and particular bylaws (municipal statutes) will be recognized by the *Diploma Leopoldinum* from 1691, except the right to resistance of the nobility to the emperor (*jus resistendi*), affirmed since 1222 in the Golden Bull of King Andrew II and taken over by the Werbőczy's *Tripartitum*. Even if the activity of the Diet continued and diet decisions were issued, the main source of law in the 18th century will become what legal historians generically call royal decrees,² which in the era were called patents, diplomas, decrees, edits, ordinances, rescripts, etc. Another term to which I will refer and which is used by specialized literature is that of regulations.³ In this study, I will try to outline possible lines of inquiry in the phenomenon of legal innovation manifested by the increasingly frequent issuance of ordinances aimed at regulating the life of society.

The formation of modern states involved significant legal innovation and a shift in the concept of law from the medieval to the modern era. Rulers in the pre-modern period exerted their authority over all subjects by issuing ordinances, regulations, and codes of laws applicable throughout the state. These regulations extended the rulers' authority in various fields, such as agriculture, finance, commerce, public health, and urban planning. As a result, competitors for political power, such as nobility and cities, either became subjects of the legislation or passive observers. The concept of law also underwent a transformation. Previously, a conservative view prevailed, considering the law as a relatively fixed framework established by customary laws and to be preserved. However, with the rise of absolutist power, the law became an intentionally formulated instrument of governance, adopted at the will of the sovereign power and amended as necessary.⁴ This marked a shift to a "voluntarist understanding of legal norms."⁵ Historians argue that pre-modern regulations

¹ Hanga 1980, 212–220. Most of the royal decrees were collected in a text published in 1696 by Marton Szentiványi and named *Corpus Iuris Hungarici*. Only the first part of this collection, the Werbőczy's *Tripartitum*, was used in Transylvania.

² Technically speaking, the notion of "royal decree" is inaccurate, as Transylvania was integrated in the Habsburg Monarchy as a principality and the Habsburg rulers assumed the title of "prince." Nevertheless, I use it here in a generic sense, as decree issued by the central authority.

³ Pop, Năgler, Magyari 2008, 15–18 (the relevant section was written by Anton E. Dörner).

⁴ Poggi 1978, 74–71.

⁵ Kotkas 2014, 184.

allowed absolutist states to drive social and economic modernization by facilitating changes in material infrastructure and fostering rational behaviour characteristic of a production-oriented society.⁶

Historians of pre-modern European law, absolutism, and the Enlightenment have debated several key issues. They have examined the extent to which the state's intervention in the economy and society was either progressive or an obstacle to modernization. They have also explored whether the regulations imposed by the state were rational compared to the perceived irrationality of pre-capitalist societies or if the latter had their own form of rationality. Additionally, there has been discussion about whether the administrative practices of absolutist states were perfectly rational or if they also contained elements of irrationality. Another significant criticism raised is the issue of implementing new legislation. Historians have questioned whether the regulations could have been effectively implemented without a sufficient administrative staff and an adequate transport and communication infrastructure. Furthermore, there has been examination of the challenges in the implementation of regulations, even in regions such as Prussia, which was often viewed as a model of efficient absolutism. It has been noted that rather than the social elites being assimilated by the absolutist state, they tended to accept only policies and measures that aligned with their own interests, while resisting those that posed a threat to their position.⁷

The issue of legal innovation in 18th-century Transylvania did not go unnoticed. Historians have noticed the legislative activity throughout the 18th century but focused more on the important reforms (judicial, agrarian, educational) and on the legal texts that decreed these reforms.⁸ It was particularly emphasized that the imperial authorities could bypass the traditional representative institution of the states, the Diet, and convert bills rejected by the Diet into decrees. It was also observed that in the middle of the 18th century, as a result of military defeats and the loss of Silesia, the Habsburg Monarchy imposed stricter control over Transylvania, and several measures were adopted. However, historians did not link this stricter control to a more sustained legislative activity and have paid little attention to governance by regulations.⁹

In the case of specialized works, the approach to this problem is slightly different, as expected. Historians of law tend to focus primarily on larger collections of laws, attempts at codification, and judicial organization.¹⁰ A notable exception from this trend is the research of the Hungarian legal historian Béla Szabó. In a synthesis of medieval and early-modern Hungarian law, he addresses, if briefly, the royal decrees among the sources of the law with the observation that:

⁶ Raeff 1983, 44.

⁷ Melton 1985, 383–398.

⁸ Cernovodeanu, Edroiu 2002, 540–551.

⁹ Köpeczi 1994, 430–445.

¹⁰ This preference is obvious in a volume that studies the public law in Transylvania and lists a series of laws adopted between 1669 and 1848 but omits the phenomenon of regulations discussed in this article, see Dósa 1861, 14–15; Ákos 1919, 302–309 (although he discusses the problem of the royal decrees, he does not extend his investigation beyond the beginning of the 18th century). See also Bichescu 2017.

Issuing such decrees was especially characteristic of the 18th century when royal decrees (patents, open ordinances) regulated – among other things – the constitution of Transylvania (*Diploma Leopoldina*), the religious affairs (*Explanatio Leopoldina, Carolina Resolutio*, then the edict of tolerance by Joseph II) as well as problems involved in sorage, the educational reform (*Ratio Educationis*) or just the judicature and the criminal procedure [italics in original].¹¹

In an earlier paper, Béla Szabó approached head-on the problem of the regulations in Hungary and Transylvania during the Habsburg rule. He maps the administrative and judicial architecture of Habsburg, Hungary, and Transylvania, setting the stage for a better understanding of the transformations brought by the imperial authorities. In addition, he notes the possibilities to explore the rich sources for the study of police ordinances, both thematically and territorially, and to address the reception of Austrian and German *Polizeirechtswissenschaft* and the comparison of this reception in various historical configurations.¹² Unfortunately, the paper offers an outline of a research project which, as far as I know, was not yet developed into a monograph.

The most important synthesis of the history of law in Romanian historiography acknowledges the revived importance of decrees with the establishment of Habsburg rule:

As a new source of law, imperial normative acts called either diplomas or patents emerge now. A formal source of law for Transylvania at the end of the 17th century and in the 18th century (then continuing into the 19th century), they were issued by the state's highest governing body without the participation of the Country Assembly (Diet), either in the absence (during the non-functioning interval) or by simply bypassing it. Through such normative acts (also called ordinances, decrees, edicts), Emperor Leopold I established in 1691, through the famous Leopoldine Diploma, constitutional and administrative norms regarding the integration and organization of Transylvania as part of the Habsburg Empire; then in 1692, 1699 and 1701 (...) he recognized and regulated the rights of the Uniate clergy and laity; finally (...) other emperors, especially Maria Theresa and Joseph II, introduced a series of reforms of the state administration and other legal situation of persons and goods (...).¹³

Both quoted passages share the acknowledgement of legislative activity through decrees issued by or on behalf of the sovereign. They focus on established aspects such as reforms and broader texts of laws, like the *Diploma Leopoldinum*. Surprisingly, studies on Hungarian legal thought and culture have not explored the phenomenon of regulations, apart from general considerations within the legal theory of enlightened absolutism.¹⁴

The collection of official Romanian documents published by Aurel Răduțiu and Ladislau Gyémánt stands out from this pattern. It includes a wide range of rescripts and circulars covering various fields in which central power intervened from the early 18th

¹¹ Szabó 2000, 141–142.

¹² Szabó 1996a, 377–406. For a similar approach to the problem of the reception of law in Hungary and Transylvania, see Szabó 1996b, 6–11.

¹³ Hanga 1980, 220–221.

¹⁴ Szabadfalvi 2010, 337–347; Szabadfalvi 2011, 1–13; Harmathy 2012, 391–392.

century until the eve of the 1848 revolution. Although a repertoire of sources, the volume offers a good orientation in the subject and a useful, albeit extremely brief, analysis in the introduction.¹⁵

Therefore, the historians of 18th-century Transylvania studied the reforms introduced by the Viennese Court, but they mostly overlooked the legal innovation that occurred in that period. The government's regulation of various aspects seemed to escape the attention of legal historians, possibly because these texts are difficult to categorize as legal documents. Apart from the reforms already studied, I believe that this legislative effort indicates a significant transformation in the nature of the state and the relationships between the state and its subjects. The material I am studying consists of a collection of regulations related to Transylvania. Based on what has been preserved at the Library of the Romanian Academy, we can only estimate its extent. A few examples suffice to illustrate the variety of regulated matters. There are texts in Latin, German, Hungarian, and Romanian, covering various topics such as public health¹⁶, taxation¹⁷, administrative and judicial procedures¹⁸, the organization of public transport¹⁹, conscription procedures following changes in taxation methods²⁰, as well as the quality of food for tax collectors²¹, the sustenance of tax-collectors²² and the maintenance of disabled soldiers²³.

The issuing and dissemination of such a large number of regulations cannot be understood in isolation from the Habsburg methods of statecraft and the attempt of the Viennese Court to bring large swathes of social life under its control. This was the main rationale for the reorganization of the administration of justice, especially by the reforms enacted by Empress Maria Theresa and her son, Emperor Joseph II. The legislating activity went hand in hand with the incipient separation of administration from justice and the attempt by the central state to wrest control of the judiciary from the hands of the estates.²⁴

These sources can be read and explored in several ways. A comparative approach would consider the regulations in Transylvania and those in the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia during the 18th century. The comparison could give more substance and qualify the statement that the Phanariot reforms were inspired by the measures adopted by the Habsburgs in Transylvania.²⁵ At the same time, it would shed light on the differences and similarities between the two administrations on the border of the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy, respectively. The regulations can also be explored from the point of view of political, legal, and administrative thought, as reflected in the texts. Here we can ask how the regulations were legitimized. Is the divinity still invoked in their preambles, or

¹⁵ Răduțiu, Gyémánt 1981.

¹⁶ BAR. FV 4, *Lustrationis ordo, infectarum aedium, habitationum et nosocomiorum*, 1713 (printed in 1739).

¹⁷ BAR FV 67, *Idea Repartitionis Taxae Capitis et Respective Officii ac Mercaturae Secundum Plagas Earundemque Emporia Concinnata*. 1754.

¹⁸ BAR FV 6, without title, 1721.

¹⁹ BAR FV 45, *Idea*, after 1748 (dating based on context).

²⁰ BAR FV 70, *Cynosura*, 1755.

²¹ BAR FV 162, without title, Vienna, 19 October 1771.

²² BAR FV 164, *Ordinationes*, 20 November 1771.

²³ BAR FV 170, *Regulae directivae super receptione et intertentione Militum invalidorum...*, 1772.

²⁴ Cernovodeanu, Edroiu 2002, 390–391. For an overview of the reforms adopted by Maria Theresa and Joseph II, their aims and limitations see Ingrao 1994, 150–209; Sutter Fichtner 2003, 67–88.

²⁵ Iorga 1927, 193; Papacostea 1998², 310.

is there a tendency to legitimize such texts in secular terms (such as “the common good” or different concrete meanings of it, such as economic interest, safety, health, etc.)? Another track of analysis of these historical documents would be the question of their meaning as laws. To what extent does the examination of regulations as legal and administrative instruments support the foreign researchers’ conclusion regarding the change in the conception of the law as mentioned above? Was the law regarded as an update of older customs or laws or as a new norm?

In what follows, we propose to explore, starting from an example, this last problem of the conception of law. Regulations often refer to older legislation, which they claim to confirm or supplement: István Werbőczy’s *Tripartitum*, *Approbatæ Constitutiones*, *Compilatae Constitutiones*. This relationship between the old laws and the new regulations from the 18th century is of interest, as it sheds light on how the new power understood to respect the commitments made upon taking over the principality. The question arises to what extent such references to the old laws, which the imperials undertook to recognize, usually play a strategic role in mitigating the shock of innovation. We will suggest an answer to this question by comparing a similar regulation from 1772 and some paragraphs from Werbőczy’s *Tripartitum*. The regulation invokes as if reiterating, titles 58, 59, and 60 of István Werbőczy’s *Tripartitum*.²⁶

Title 58 states that a father cannot sell inherited assets to the detriment of his sons, daughters, or relatives. Title 59 addresses situations where goods are sold, and this sale is recognized by the father or relative to whom the goods would normally have belonged. Such sales, or as the text puts it, assumption of a burden, could be made for three reasons or in three ways: due to negligence or avarice; reasonably, to improve the estate or make productive investments (e.g., a mill or a house); out of extreme necessity (e.g., to pay a ransom of the head on case of capital punishment or to escape captivity). Title 60 deals with the requirement that legal notification of the heirs or those entitled to inherit the estate must be given before a sale. If the seller, however, sells or pledges without giving notice, the affected party will have the right to buy back the property from the buyer at the estimated value, not the purchase price. Only in cases of extreme necessity (i.e., ransom), no legal notice is required. Neighbours can claim property rights at a price stated in the pledge letter, not at the estimated value. Therefore, their right, although important, is secondary to the rights of male or female relatives (if women have similar rights as male relatives).

As can be seen from the summary of the three legal paragraphs, the *Tripartitum* contains clear legal provisions regarding the right of pre-emption, originating from the customary law of the nobles.²⁷ These provisions regulate the problems and disputes of relatives and neighbours. Drawn up in 1514 by István Werbőczy, the collection of laws does not establish punishments, but it outlines methods for recovering patrimony that was alienated outside legal means. According to Martyn Rady’s introductory study to the edition of the *Tripartitum* that I am referring to, this legal text was utilized to support Hungarian claims to statehood within the Habsburg Monarchy.²⁸ However, I argue that the

²⁶ Bak 2019, 1238–1241. For the relevant text, see Annex 1.

²⁷ Szabó 2000, 133.

²⁸ Bak 2019, 1193.

Viennese court had previously used this legal text to consolidate its power in the territories of the Hungarian crown.

A regulation issued by the *Gubernium* on 14 July 1772 addresses the issue of property wastage.²⁹ The text begins by prohibiting the alienation of ancestral property and explicitly references the three articles from the *Tripartitum*. However, the regulation deems these articles inadequate due to the absence of specified punishments for offenders. This insufficiency serves as motivation for enacting the regulation, marking the first point of departure from the *Tripartitum*. There are also changes in terminology. In the *Tripartitum*, individuals who alienate a family's property are referred to as father (*pater*), seller (*vendor*), and mortgagor (*impignorator*), which are neutral terms from a moral standpoint. In the 18th century, a term carrying a negative connotation was used instead: spender (*dilapidator*, *prodigus*). Additionally, the regulation grants the state an increased role in denouncing the spendthrift. Not only are relatives and creditors obligated to report the alienation of ancestral property, but even the tax office, district governors, and local magistrates are required to report it, "considering the potential damage caused by the waste (*dilapidatio*) and the jurisdiction that the Holy Crown holds over the assets of those without heirs."³⁰ Thus, there is a focus on the assets of the treasury, which was absent in the *Tripartitum*.

In case of property deterioration, a seizure will be declared. The seizure will be overseen by the *Tabula Continua*³¹ or, if the spendthrift takes place in a town, the local magistrate. The seizure and the names of the judges to whom the creditors can appeal will be published throughout the principality. An administrator of the seizure will be appointed to settle the debts and reclaim the alienated assets. In a civil court trial, the state intervenes, imposes a penalty or an insurance sanction (seizure), is concerned with assets, asks the governors to report ex officio, extends the provisions of the regulation to city assets, and takes credit relations under protection. Surprisingly, this issue does not appear in a work dedicated to jurisprudence in Transylvania which deals extensively with the theme of inheritance.³²

The comparison between older legislation – here the *Tripartitum* of Werbóczy's and the decrees enacted by the Habsburg authorities – reveals an interesting and largely unexplored facet of the Habsburg rule in Transylvania. Upon imposing their rule over Transylvania at the end of the 17th century, the Habsburgs undertook to preserve the political and confessional system and the old composite legal system of the Principality. However, the Viennese Court introduced an absolutist policy and tried to bypass the collaboration of the Transylvanian estates. One facet of this policy was ruling through decrees adopted without convening the Diet. Legal historians have noted this policy but have paid insufficient attention to it beyond the issue of reforms. The regulations introduced by the Viennese Court constituted a true phenomenon of legal innovation, covering a great diversity of

²⁹ BAR FV 172, without title, 14 July 1772. For the relevant text, see Annex 2.

³⁰ BAR FV 172, without title, 14 July 1772.

³¹ The term refers most likely to the institution introduced by Maria Theresa in 1763, aiming at the strengthening of the state control over the justice administration at the county level. A *tabula continua* was introduced in each county and seat of justice (Lat. *sedis*) and took over the judicial responsibilities of the older justice courts at the county level. Just as the latter, they judged the legal disputes between nobles and legally free persons, Cernovodeanu, Edroiu 2002, 390.

³² Dósa 1861, II, 409–411, 423–424, 444–446.

problems, in line with a state that was trying to expand its control in society. In this study, I illustrate this variety with some examples and discuss in more detail a regulation from 1772 that deals with the problem of the waste of patrimonial assets. The regulation invokes three paragraphs from Werbóczy's *Tripartitum*. Although it claims to reiterate the provisions of the collection of laws from 1517, in reality, it introduces a series of substantial changes. If in the *Tripartitum* the loss of goods is called assumption of a burden by the father, seller, or pledger, in 1772 the same fact is called wasting (*dilapidatio*), and the perpetrator is called spender (*dilapidator, prodigus*). In the *Tripartitum*, the recovery of goods is incumbent on the relatives who exercise their right of preemption. Through the regulation of 1772, the public authorities assume control over cases spendthrift. Finally, whereas the *Tripartitum* affects only the nobles' property, the 1772 regulation extends the purview of the state over the goods of the townspeople. Therefore, the regulation signals the expansion of the state's authority. To what extent this regulation was put into practice will be possible to find out after additional research.

Annex 1

Tit. 58. Quod pater bona avita in preiudicium filiorum alienare non potest.

Quod pater bona avita in preiudicium filiorum alienare non potest. Tit. lviii. Verum tamen super bonis ac iuribus possessionariis avitis pater in præiudicium filiorum vel etiam filiarum, si ea ius quoque fæmineum sequuntur, & similiter frater in præiudicium fratris super bonis ac iuribus possessionariis paternis vel avitis sine consensu filiorum ac filiarum vel fratrum quantum ad alienationem vel venditionem eorundem bonorum simpliciter nullam penitus Fassionem facere potest. Quæ si etiam fieret nullius censetur esse vigoris neque firmitatis. [§1] SOLENT NAMque nonnulli bona & iura possessionaria paterna & avita sæpe necessitate cogente, interdum vero nulla rationabili causa adurgente sed gula dumtaxat & crapula commestationeque monente, interdum autem damnabili invidia contra fratrem concepta instigante pariter & diabolo cooperante, aliquando vero bene & recte, sæpius tamen maliciose quibus possunt impignorare aut perpetuo vendere, inscribere & diversis titulis exquisitisque coloribus obligare, & ut facta super eo Fassio maioris firmitatis existat & invalidari nequeat onera filiorum filiarumque & fratrum super se & hæreditates suas in serie Fassionis assummere atque levare.

Tit. 59. Quid sit onus assumere, et quot modis onera filiorum et fratrum assummantur. lix.

Quid sit onus assumere, et quot modis onera filiorum et fratrum assummantur. lix. ONera autem assummere est fideiussionem quandam super observatione paternæ vel fraternæ Fassionis emptori bonorum aliquorum facere. UNDE SCIENDUM quod onera filiorum vel fratrum tribus modis assumuntur. PRIMO modo simpliciter. SECUNDO vero rationabiliter. TERTIO autem & ultimo necessitate. [§1] PRIMO inquam simpliciter quando scilicet nulla evidenti necessitate, nulla etiam rationabili de causa (prout immediate præmissi), sed aut maliciose, aut gulose, aut etiam iniuriose onera ipsa assumuntur. Et sic nihil tenet in iudicio, sed de plano simpliciterque & assumptio huiusmodi revocatur, & Fassio quoque invalidatur. [§2] SECUNDO modo rationabiliter manifesta videlicet & rationabili causa

occurrente puta possessionem præ manibus alienis in pignore habitam ad se redimendo, vel dotem & res Paraffernales atque ius Quartalitiu[m] solvendo ut scilicet una portio aut particula venderetur, & residuitas omnium bonorum ab onere necessario eriperetur. [S3] Item piscinas, molendina domosque & curias ex necessitate construendo, vel portionem aliam & forsitan meliorem præcio possessionis aut portionis venditæ emendo, aut concambium possessionarium faciendo. [S4] Quæ quia filio vel fratri in lucrum hæreditatis succedunt ideo simpliciter onera præassumpta in tali casu revocari & retractari non possunt. Sed si filius in serie Fassionis & in assumptione oneris specificè nominatus ea revocare voluerit, extunc vivente patre cum Homagio & estimatione communi universorum iurium possessionariorum patris ubilibet adiacentium, mortuo vero patre solummodo cum communi estimatione ipsorum iurium paternorum retractandi & anichilandi habet potestatis facultatem. Et idem est etiam de fratrum Fassione sciendum atque tenendum. [S5] HIC tamen advertendum est quod si assumptio oneris generaliter facta fuerit, & nomina filiorum vel fratrum in Fassionis serie nominatim expressa denotataque non extiterint tunc eiusmodi oneris assumptio nil tenebit, sed simpliciter invalidari valebit. [S6] TERTIO vero & ultimo modo extrema necessitate urgente dum videlicet quis sententia capitali iuris ordine adversus alium convincetur & condemnabitur, & forsitan in persona quoque propria vigore ipsius latæ sententiæ detinebitur ac ad manus iudicarias ad infligendam sibi pœnam a iure statutam assignabitur vel licet non detineatur gratiam tamen regiam non consequetur, aut si gratia sibi dabitur cum conditione tamen concordandi cum adversa parte et non aliter præstabitur. Nam & alioquin regia maiestas gratiam non secus nisi ut concordet facere potest. Vel in Thurcorum, Saracenorum aut Thartarorum, seu aliorum quorumcunque hostium & inimicorum captivitate detinebitur & inde non secus nisi pactione quapiam eliberabitur. Et hoc ultimo modo præmissi oneris assumptio nunquam revocabitur. [S7] Nulla etiam via Fassio super ea re facta per filium vel fratrem retractabitur. Immo si pater portionem filii (quia propria portio ad caput suum redimendum non sufficeret) in casibus præmissis ante divisionem cum filio factam alienabit filius sufferere tollerareque debet. [S8] Nec eiusmodi Fassioni si etiam unica & singularis esset persona fatens. Nec regius nec fratrum condvisionalium consensus est necessarius, sed semper de se rata manebit atque firma. [S9] COROLLARIUM itaque ex præmissis infertur quod possessionaria venditio triplex est scilicet Simplex, Rationabilis & Necessaria. SIMPLEX venditio nihil valet. RATIONABILIS vero aliquando valet & aliquando retractatur. NECEssaria autem semper valet & semper tenet & nunquam invalidatur prout ex immediata prædeclaratione assumptionis & revocationis onerum filiorum ac fratrum clare liquet.

Tit. 60. De legitima admonitione in possessionaria venditione necessario premittenda. lx.

De legitima admonitione in possessionaria venditione necessario premittenda. lx. NOTandum ulterius quod quia in Fassionibus tam impignoratio, quam etiam perpetuitatis iure & titulo maxime in præiudicium fratrum per plerosque faciendis damnabilis quadam abusio succrevit quod scilicet quinquaginta florenos interdum a feneratoribus quis accepit & centum aut ducentos florenos coram capitulo vel conventu aut iudicibus ordinariis regni se accepisse studiose & quidem maliciose fatetur. Capitulum autem & conventus vel iudices regni ordinarii iuxta Fassionis factæ seriem & modum litteras Fassionales & Obligatorias dare tenentur. Sicque nonnulli propediem tanta pecuniarum summa bona sua obruunt & involvunt ut vix medietatem summæ eadem bona valere dinoscantur. Unde sæpe evenit ut huiusmodi

bona ab ipsa sua progenie perpetuo alienentur. [S1] Et ideo quaelibet possessionaria venditio immo & impignoratio legitimam semper requirit filiorum aut filiarum vel fratrum ad quos successio & devolutio huiusmodi iurium possessionariorum venditioni aut impignorationi expositorum spectare dinoscitur (ut illam vel illa ad se recipiant) admonitionem qui si legitime amoniti & requisiti possessionem seu iura huiusmodi possessionaria iuxta condignam & communem eorum estimationem ac valorem pro se habere & ad se recipere voluerint ante omnes alios emptores aut fœneratores liberam plenariamque habent pro se recipiendi & emendi facultatem. [S2] SI VERO venditor aut impignorator ipse admonitionem præmissam facere recusabit, & iura sua possessionaria præter scitum vel consensum dictorum filiorum aut filiarum vel fratrum cuiquam alienabit vel impignorabit & ipsorum filiorum aut filiarum vel fratrum aliquis aut aliqua emptorem huiusmodi bonorum seu iurium possessionariorum contra se in curiam regiam propterea evocabit tunc in uno dumtaxat termino iuridico scilicet Octavali causa ipsa finiri debebit, & actor ipse bona seu iura possessionaria prænotata sola ipsa communi estimatione eorundem pro se recuperabit non obstante pecuniarum summa quantumvis magna in litteris feneratoris seu emptoris super ea re Fassionibus specificata. [S3] Dempto tamen & excepto casu quo quis in capitali sententia convictus detineretur & manibus iudicialibus ad luendam pœnam traderetur. Nam hoc modo (quia præter trium dierum spacium indutias ad concordandum cum adversa parte non habet) admonitionem (modo antelato) facere non tenetur sed quibus & in quanta summa poterit liberam vendendi bonorum suorum auctoritatem ibidem semper habet. [S4] Et hoc idem est intelligendum etiam de eo qui apud hostes externos in captivitate tenetur, quod scilicet is quoque bona sua sine omni admonitione pro capitis sui redemptione vendere perpetuoque alienare potest. [S5] UBI AUTEM admonitio prædeclarata venditionem perennem bonorum & iurium possessionariorum legitime præcesserit & nemo filiorum aut filiarum vel fratrum bona ipsa & iura possessionaria venditioni exposita pro se habere seu emere voluerit, vel forsitan inopia præpediente comparare non poterit tunc iidem filii ac filię & fratres ipsi non aliter postea nisi pecuniæ summa in litteris Fassionibus specificata plenarie deposita & persoluta vel etiam perennali estimatione mediante & longo litis processu bona illa pro se vindicare valebunt. [S6] Nam & venditores bonorum suorum in casibus articulisque rationabilibus & admittendis non sunt adeo coercendi & astringendi ut iustis eorum iuribus & rebus uti aut frui debite nequeant. [S7] Attamen si quis filiorum aut filiarum vel fratrum bona ipsa ad se recipere velle tempore ipsius admonitionis responderit & allegaverit tunc ad deponendam summam ipsam condignam & concordandum cum venditore terminus brevis & competens coram iudice cuius auctoritate & litteris admonitio ipsa fit & exequitur ad comparandum sibi præfigi debebit. Terminum autem ipso adveniente si summam illam iuxta iudicis ipsius deliberationem & bonorum ipsorum communem estimationem deponere recusabit venditor ille liberam bonorum suorum alienandi facultatem habebit. [S8] DE IMPIGNORATICIIS autem bonis & iuribus possessionariis secus est sciendum. Nam iura aliqua possessionaria supra valorem dictæ communis estimationis eorundem sive præcedat admonitio legitima sive non in præiudicium ipsorum filiorum aut filiarum vel fratrum: aut etiam iuris regii impignorari nemini possunt. Verum tamen hæc estimatio & eius series non solum domos ac curias nobiles sessionesque Iobagionales populosas ac desertas vel Prædiales in faciebus opidorum, villarum aut possessionum adiacentes sed etiam terras, silvas ac prata, piscinas & molendina (prout in Quartaliorum solutione) per omnia includit & in quantum huiusmodi estimatio iuxta

limitationem iudicis se extendit in tantum etiam depositio atque restitutio pecuniarum pro iuribus impignoraticiis per filios aut filias vel fratres sed & eos qui forsitan cum iurisdictione regia (in casu quo impignoratio per unicam & singularem personam defectuique seminis proximam facta fuerit) procedere videbuntur fieri debent. [§9] Filias autem & mulieres in casibus præmissis illas intellige admovendas esse quas iura ipsa possessionaria vendenda vel impignoranda cum sexu masculino æquali iure concernunt. Nam aliter filia vel mulieres ipsæ pro extraneis in hac parte reputantur. Et non secus quam vicini aut commetanei agere permittuntur. Hoc excepto quod si voluerint ante omnes vicinos & commetaneos sese ad emptionem ac receptionem bonorum illorum ingerere & illa pro se habere possunt. [§10] Vicini vero & commetanei per admonitionem prædeclaratam & pro ipsorum parte factam iura possessionaria venditioni exposita pro se quidem ante omnes alios emptores extraneos & remotiores vindicare possunt. Non tamen estimatione communi prout fratres vel sorores sed capitalis semper pecuniæ summæ in litieris Fassionibus expressæ depositione & plenaria solutione, vel etiam ipsorum iurium possessionariorum perennali cum estimatione. Unico tamen termino Octavali si admonitio ex parte vendentium non præcesserit, & ipsi nihilominus vicini & commetanei pro parte ipsorum admonitionem super ea re solitam peregerint. Qui pro iuribus possessionariis impignoraticiis parimodo capitalem summam pro qua huiusmodi impignoratio facta fuerit persolvere tenentur. Nec de estimatione aliquali se in hac parte ingerere vel immittere possunt. Cum de proprietate & hereditate talium iurium possessionariorum nil ad eos pertinere dinoscatur.

Annex 2

Quandoquidem Sua Maiestas Sacratissima pro infinita Sua Benignitate et providentia non modo publicam Magni huius Principatus Salutem, sed in hoc, privatorum quoque Felicitatem et Incrementum, propriamque Uniuscuiusque sui Conservationem, tanquam Communis omnium, longeque Benignissima Mater, firmam esse, ac stabilem desideret, perspexisset autem, sicut omnia alia Sapientissime ex eo [sunt], quod per Leges Magni huius Principatus nulla de Dilapidatoribus, qua paena corrigendis? facta esset adaequata Provisio [est], etiamsi eadem Dilapidatio per Tit: 58 Partis 1. Juris Tripartiti, Avitica Bona alienari vetantem, interdicta haberetur, florentissimas etiam Familias, Virosque in quolibet Statu, Opibus, Majorum suorum Virtute et industria partis, alias pollentes, seu ob inertem Reifamiliaris administrationem, seu Dilapidationem Bonorum nimia prodigalitate arcessitam, præcipiti cursu ad interitum ferri, atque ad incitas redigi consuevisse; hinc pro antevertendis, qui sequuturis temporibus (quod tristis experientia saepe docuit) evenire possent, eiusmodi casibus et ne Lex quoque ipsa abalienationem Aviticorum prohibens, defectu statutae in contravenientes poenae, inutilis evadat, in animum induxit Benignissima Princeps, talismodi Decoctors, paena sequestri coercendos clementer decernere.

Hac itaque Materna Intentione tum alias quoque, usum imponendi Prodigis Sequestri in Magnum hunc Principatum introducendum benigne praecepit Sua Majestas Sacratissima, quod Dominationibus Vestris ex præcedentibus Ordinationibus abunde cognitum est, tum vero Benignissimi sui ad Nos Regium Gubernium die 8 Mensis Aprilis Anni Currentis exarati Rescripti tenore, tam modum, quam fundamenta etiam utilissimi de constituendo Prodigis sequestro instituti clementer praescribere, atque ut Illud, omniaque de illo contenta

ad Universorum notitiam in Magno hoc Principatu publicari facimus, eoque diligenter invigilemus, quo in casu emergente illa in effectum deducantur et accurate ab omnibus observentur, praecipere dignata est. Quod quidem sequestri constituendi Institutum, sequentia in se complectitur Puncta et quidem.

Primo: Ut Filiis Legitimae aetatis et sanae mentis, ex consilio Proximorum suorum, Cognatis item et Agnatis ac Creditoribus cujuscunque sortis, imo ex consideratione praejudicii, quod iurisdictioni Sacrae Coronae in Bona Deficientium habitae, ex Dilapidatione enasci potest et obligationis, qua Summae Principi tenentur, tum Fisco, cum etiam Officialibus Circulorum, Locorumque Magistratibus, non modo integrum sit, sed posteriores, Fiscus nempe et Circulorum Officiales, in casu quo Filii, Cognati item et Agnati, aliique Prodigorum Proximi, ut et Creditores id facere negligerent, sub responsionis onere vi Officii teneantur quoque Prodigum denunciare, sequestrique Constitutionem modo statim declarando expetere.

Secundo: Denunciates et sequestrum sollicitantes, si privati fuerint, denunciatum Prodigum in continuae illius Circuli Tabulae, cujus Bona dissipationis periculo exposita adjacent, vel si Bona Denunciandi in pluribus Circulis sita sint, ad illius Circuli Tabulam, in quo Prodigus ordinariam seu principalem Residentiam et Habitationem habuerit, quae quidem Continua Tabula, quoad Bona Nobilitaria pro iudice sequestri constituitur, si vero Denunciatus, seu Dilapidator Civis foret, aut Bona Civilia possideret, in Magistratus loci, qui pariter hoc in Casu sequestri iudex esse debebit, praesentiam ad 8. diem certificent, eadem vero Certificatione peracta et continuae tabulae, aut magistratui exhibita.

Tertio. Iudex sequestri, Continua nempe Tabula, vel magistratus expositionem et rationem Denunciantis, Documenta item, si quae in probam sui adserti produceret, non secus Denunciati etiam Justificationem, ac in hunc finem exhibenda fors Documenta summarissime et exceptionibus quibusvis sepositis meritorie revideat, compertaque Dilapidatione, aut bonorum, absque necessaria et rationabili Causa inoneratione illico de Sequestri impositione iudicium ferat, sequestrumque denominet, ac defacto constituat, ac Summam Prodigum pro intertentione pendendam ad bilancis usque confectionem modo Provisorio ad interim determinat et si Denunciatus Prodigus seu Dilapidator in pluribus Circulis Bona possederit, ferendum modo praemisso Iudicium, tabulis reliquorum Circulorum, in quibus Bona Prodigum adjacent, pro necessaria observantia transcribat.

Quarto. Si denunciatus, sive Dilapidator ipso Die 8-vo Certificationis non comparuerit, eidem terminus peremptorius pro ratione distantiae habitationis Denunciati constituatur, ac ne interea etiam Bona periculo abalienationis exponantur; Iudex Sequestri non modo ipse publicabit, verum Tabulas Continuas Circulorum, Magistratusque Locorum, in quibus illa sita sunt, requiret ut in sui gremio illico publicent, ne quispiam Denunciato seu Dilapidatori ad negotii usque revisionem pecuniam credere, aut Bona Denunciati quoquomodo apprehendere sub paena nullitatis et ammissionis Summae creditae aut inhoerentis ausit.

Quinto. Termino adveniente, si Denunciatus sive Dilapidator comparere iterato negligeret, Iudex Sequestri absque ulteriori protelatione contra Absentem pronunciet, Sequestrumque constituat.

Sexto. Si vero Dilapidatio manifesta quidem foret, vel fundata eius suspicio adesset, nihilominus tamen per eos, quorum praejudicium subversatur quibusque injuria sit, Filios nimirum legitimae aetatis, ac sanae mentis, Cognatus item et Agnatos, aliosque Proximos ut creditores nula pro remedio ponendo quaerimonia institueretur, tali in casu iisdem Iudiciis

Continuis Circulorum, aut Magistratibus Locorum incumbet absque mora, primo quidem seria ad Dilapidantem ex Nobili Officio praemittenda admonitione, mox eo non succedente, etiam Relatione ad Nos Regium Gubernium recipiendae ulterioris Dispositionis fine facienda, Dilapidationis periculo obviare, ac interea etiam publicationem modalitate puncto Quarto expressa instituire.

Septimo. Constitutione vero Sequestri adjudicata, haec Nomenque Sequestri Tabulis, in quarum Circulis Bona Sequestro subjicienda existunt, absque mora transcribentur eo fine, ut eadem tabulae sub onere responsabilitatis, in casu, quo negligentia, aut conniventia earum, executio, nullum prorsus juridicum remedium, quod eiusdem instantaneam consummationem quaqua ratione impedire quiret, admittens, differretur, illico Bona manibus sequestri erga fidedignam conscriptionem in eius cui Bonis interdicitur aut hominis eiusdem praesentia conficiendam transponi faciant administrationemque erga redendam rationem eidem committant. Siquidem vero

Octavo. Finis sequestri sit, ut bona ab onere fors inhaerente liberentur, inque hunc finem Statum activum Bonorum onusque iisdem inhaerens scire expediat, necessarium est, ut impositio sequestri per Universum Magnum Principatum publicetur, terminusque, Locus item et Judex in quo Creditores insinuare queant, notificetur, eoque fine Continuae Tabulae et Magistratus Locorum constitutum cuiuspiam Prodigio Sequestrum Regio etiam Gubernio eo non obstante quod ad Continuas Tabulas Circulorum quibus Bona Dilapidatoris adiacent transcriptio facta est, referre debebunt. Quibus praemissis Bilanceque Debitorum ac Proventuum eruta illa Judici Sequestri referatur, ut hic Summam Prodigio annuatim in eius intertentionem pendendam figere queat. Administrator autem seu sequester juxta determinationem iudicis sequestri salario potiturus, quotannis rationem Villicationis iudici sequestri exhibeat. Quae modalitas etiam coram Magistratibus juxta praemissa pro Iudicibus Sequestri constitutis observanda erit. Denique

Nono: Sequester sive Administrator praeferenter ex Condivisionalibus vel tali non existente vir quispiam probus honestusque et possessionatus erga congruum Salarium a Iudicio Continuo aut Magistratu Locali determinandum sub onere ponendarum ut superius indigitatum est Rationum constituendus erit. Quantum tandem

Decimo. Ad vindicationem Bonorum per Dilapidatorem abalienatorum: Huius intuitu Legibus inhaerendum [erit], Sequestroque per iudices eiusdem Sequestri committendum erit, ut per instituendam bonam aeconomiam ex Proventibus Bonorum Sequestro subjectorum tam Debita passiva successive depurare, quam abalienata ad praescriptum Legis revindicare studeat; qui quidem Sequester seu Administrator, ut suae obligationi has in parte exacte satisfaciat, Continua Tabula vel Magistratus, tanquam Sequestri Judex curam habeat, ut obstacula revindicationem impediencia in tempore removeat.

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HUNGARIAN IMAGES OF THE ROMANIANS IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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Abstract: This article analyzes the image of the Romanians, as it appears in several important Hungarian texts in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Revolution of 1848 gave the Hungarians an ambivalent lesson about the Romanians. On the one hand, the latter behaved like enemies. This generated a negative imagological reaction from the Hungarians. On the other hand, the failed struggle for the liberation of Hungary, defeated by the crushing combined force of Austria and Russia, opened up the possibility of collaborating with Romanians, as well as with the other oppressed peoples in eastern and Danubian Europe. But in the age of dualism, the image of the Romanians in Hungary, closely entwined with that of their conationals across the mountains, received a new political label, which had first been used during the revolution: *Daco-Romanianism*. Irredentism, which was coined by the Italians later, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, was an equivalent term. The Romanians were, therefore, seen to be characterized by “Daco-Romanian irredentism.” This phrase gained traction as Bucharest was becoming the capital of a more consolidated Romanian state and the Romanians in Transylvania were making ever more aggravating claims, which could be associated with this national dream. The Hungarians’ image of the Romanians during this period always stood between official nationalism and the utopia of fraternity.

Keywords: Hungarians, Romanians, the second half of the nineteenth century, Daco-Romanianism, historical imagology

Rezumat: Articolul de față analizează imaginea românilor, așa cum apare ea în câteva texte maghiare importante din a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea. Revoluția de la 1848 a oferit maghiarilor o lecție ambivalentă în ceea ce-i privește pe români. Pe de o parte, aceștia s-au manifestat ca inamici, o poziționare care va genera o reacție imagologică negativă din partea maghiară. Pe de altă parte, eșecul luptei pentru libertatea Ungariei, pecetluit de strivitoarea forță combinată austro-rusească, a pus pe tapet ideea de sens contrar a colaborării cu românii, ca și cu celelalte popoare oprimate din Europa răsăriteană și danubiană. Dar în perioada dualistă, imaginea românilor din Ungaria, în strânsă conexiune cu cea a conaționalilor lor de peste munți, va primi acum o nouă etichetă politică, apărută pentru prima oară tot în anii revoluției: *daco-românismul*. Irredentismul, brevetat de italieni mai târziu, spre sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea, furniza un termen echivalent, așa că în cazul românilor se putea vorbi despre un „iredentism daco-român”. Formula se consolidează pe măsură ce Bucureștiul se transforma în capitala unui stat românesc din ce în ce mai încheșat, iar românii de dincoace de munți formulau revendicări tot mai supărătoare, care puteau fi asociate cu un asemenea vis național. Imaginea maghiarilor despre români a fost cantonată mereu în această perioadă între naționalismul oficial și utopia fraternității.

Cuvinte cheie: maghiari, români, a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea, daco-românism, imagologie istorică

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The Hungarians' perception of the Romanians had undergone a series of changes following the Revolution of 1848 due to the fact that many Romanians, especially those in Transylvania, had fought on the side of the enemies of the Hungarian cause. In July 1848, before the civil war broke out, Kossuth voiced his warmest and most optimistic feelings towards the Romanians in the Hungarian Parliament:

I think it is my duty to express my belief that of all the nations in Hungary whose mother tongue is not Hungarian, it is the Romanian people that have, above all, under the present circumstances, developed the most sincere and natural affection towards the Hungarians [...]. I believe that one of our country's most grievous errors is that it has not paid, for such a long time, sufficient attention to the natural sympathy that the Hungarian-speaking people and the Romanian-speaking people have for one another, a sympathy that stems from their present state, circumstances, and their future.¹

Afterwards, however, because of the disappointment with the conduct of the "noble savages" targeted by the Hungarians' generous reformist intentions, their image acquired rather negative connotations. From now on, the perceived barbarity of the Romanians in 1848 and in 1784, similar to the way in which they saw the Hungarians, became solidly entrenched in the Hungarian imagological repertoire. The "savages" were no longer noble: they were just savages. In the midst of the revolution, Kossuth invoked the Romanians' outrageous acts of cruelty in this light:

The Romanian troops, furious, cowardly, and inhumane, are led by imperial military commanders. Cowardly in battle, they will have no qualms of conscience to slaughter unarmed Hungarians, with such unprecedented cruelty, screaming like savages and roaring with laughter [...]. And to think that the emperor calls this savage and cowardly horde his beloved loyal subjects! And these people, who burn fellow beings alive and butcher them, who nail children to their fathers' gates, these people are led by royal imperial generals!²

As the words of the Hungarian leader show, the main enemies he was railing against were the Austrian generals, who had no excuse for their behavior, since they were not "savage" like the Romanians. They were civilized and yet they condoned such massacres, which meant their sin was unpardonable. The Romanians themselves were now stigmatized with such harshness that it is clear Kossuth believed they had no extenuating circumstances for their deeds. How could anyone fail to blame such revolting crimes?

Such reasons suffice for endless recollections of the drama of past events. *The Black Book*, published by Baron Kemény István and *An Answer to the Black Book*, edited by Axente Sever twenty years later, are two examples of this massive effort to foreground the horrible crimes committed by the Romanians and, respectively, by the Hungarians.³ In both cases, "their" crimes outnumber "ours" and are more horrendous and entirely unjustified. Even

¹ Borsi-Kálmán 1999, 238.

² Kossuth 1848, 769.

³ Kemény 1876; Sever 1896.

today, the Internet is full of older traces or newer postings that perpetuate the memory of past conflicts, because this genre of memoirs continues to be read and *used*: they draw likes, inspire comments and increase traffic. The social need to hate someone in common so as to feel better afterwards and to vent our contemporary frustrations finds an easy target in the savages that once killed our own people.

Valer Rus is the author of a work that discusses in great detail the Hungarians' image of the Romanians after the Revolution of 1848.⁴ Focusing mostly on testimonies from Transylvania, the historian analyzes the way in which the revolution contributed to shaping a negative image of the Romanians. The Hungarians here, who suffered the consequences of the conflict with the rebellious Transylvanian Romanians, described them as vengeful, violent, savage, uncouth, perfidious, and uncultured drunks, thieves and even "communists," because they were willing to attack their properties and break the most elementary rules of social order. We could say that these sins are not necessarily correlated with the specific features of a particular people but can be used for any unruly mob engaging in acts of social violence. But for the Hungarians, just like in 1784, these were the characteristic traits of the Romanians, who had traumatized their historical memory.

On the other hand, this demoniacal portrayal of the Romanians did not cancel the fact that they were the population living together with the Hungarians in Transylvania. Even if they had arrived here after the Hungarians, this no longer mattered because they were defining for Transylvania's demographic profile. Because of this, the conflict with them was often referred to as a "civil war" or as an "interethnic civil war": "The Wallachians killed, set fires, and caused much damage. The war is a terrible thing, indeed; a civil war is even more terrible; and the most terrible of all is an interethnic civil war."⁵

A civil war is most terrible because it pits you against your neighbors. The "animals" are not foreigners, as in the case of classical fables, but people you have lived together with, people who are entitled to live off the same land as you. Under these circumstances, it is no wonder that in such accounts that are full of drama and horror, there may appear references to some "good Romanians" or at least to Romanians who have done "good deeds." What made a Romanian good? The very fact that he spared the Hungarians, that he saved their lives, that he took his distance from the violence committed by his fellow Romanians. Many a time, these Hungarians were his neighbors, living in the same village or town, the people who behaved humanely not just by virtue of some universally valid feelings and principles, but because they were close to him. At times, Romanian leaders like Avram Iancu disavowed the mobs that committed crimes because of their backwardness and ignorance. In stories about the horrors of the revolution, such cases were very few. Even so, however rare they were, they somewhat alleviated the harsh image of the Romanians. Yes, there were some decent Romanians who were willing to protect the Hungarians.

At other times, even when it came to the humane feelings of the Romanians' leader, the Hungarian account dramatically pivoted the temperance of the good Romanian against the cruelty of the malevolent Romanian, as seen in a tense conversation between Iancu and one of his prefects, the priest Simion Balint. This is rendered by Kemény István in a corrupted Romanian language that would be hilarious if we could ignore its content:

⁴ Rus 2008. Warm thanks to the author, who allowed me to consult his thesis in digital format.

⁵ Rus 2008, 81.

Iancu: "Let there be no more dead people, my blood curdles in my heart."

Balint: "Oh, you cow turd, too bad you're higher in rank than me."

Iancu: "Whether bad or not, I wish to put an end to these killings."

Balint: "Don't you know what we swore in Blaj, that we would let no Hungarians live even inside their mother's wombs?"⁶

Another prefect, Axente Sever, who questioned the authenticity of this account half a century later, candidly admitted that "It would not be surprising if they exchanged those words while drinking, given the overwhelming joy that the Romanian priests and leaders must have felt after destroying Hatvani's army for a second time."⁷

In the end, however, the memory of what the Romanians did in 1848 was preserved in the Hungarian history books. The new Hungary that was configured by the dualist pact, which reiterated, to some extent, the former revolutionary project, had plenty of reasons to leave such things behind. Even Kossuth, Hungary's great hero, lost his Hungarian citizenship in 1889, under the new laws in force in Transleithania.

But the image of the Romanians in Hungary, closely entwined with that of their conationals across the mountains, received a new political label, which had first been used during the revolution: *Daco-Romanianism*. Irredentism, which was coined by the Italians later, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, was an equivalent term. The Romanians were, therefore, seen to be characterized by "Daco-Romanian irredentism." This phrase gained traction as Bucharest was becoming the capital of a more consolidated Romanian state. The Romanians in Transylvania were making ever more aggravating claims, which could be associated with this national dream. In the 1840s, Baron Wesselényi Miklós had had the geopolitical vision of a Romanian bloc in which Romanian ethnicity overlapped the geographical outline of older Dacia, and Mihai Eminescu lamented the fate of the Romanians dispersed "from the Dniester to the Tisza" in one of the most popular lines of Romanian poetry.

But the ideological term "Daco-Romanianism" (just like that of "communism" in 1848) was always used as a pejorative label by the Hungarians and was rejected in the same spirit by the Romanians, because it contrasted with a set of fundamental local political values of the time: respect towards authority and loyalty to the sovereign, legalism, the rejection of the revolution and of any claims that would overturn the status quo. The Hungarians had waged a revolution under Kossuth, but historians would later refer to it as a "legal revolution." The Romanians in Wallachia had ousted Prince Bibescu at that time but continued to request protection from the Sultan. Meanwhile, endorsed by the "dear emperor," whom they would loyally serve even on the battlefield until the end of the First World War, the Romanians in Transylvania had risen against the Hungarians! How could the Romanians be both "irredentists" and "Daco-Romanians" under these circumstances? It was an unacceptable idea for those who claim to have always respected the rule of law.

On the other hand, Hungarian politicians and journalists used this term accusingly. "Daco-Romanianism" was a handy slur, like the epithets "fascist" or "new-Marxist" that are used in ideological disputes today. Their main aim was not to correctly identify but

⁶ Rus 2008, 72–73.

⁷ Rus 2008, 73.

to discredit opponents. The Hungarians could therefore accuse the Romanians of Daco-Romanianism whenever something was not to their liking, while the Romanians persistently replied, each and every time, that such allegations had no foundations whatsoever.

In time, however, Daco-Romanianism ceased to be just a disparaging label used by the Hungarians in parliamentary diatribes and gained a more consistent contour. If the Romanians in Transylvania refused to acknowledge the Hungarian constitution and the Hungarian state, if they strengthened their economic and cultural foundations, and if their brothers across the Carpathians provided them with moral and material support, under such circumstances, that is, would Daco-Romanianism not represent a real threat? Two things that led to changing the Hungarians' perspective on the Romanians were, on the one hand, the fact that the Hungarian elite was well aware of the Romanians' national aspirations, and, on the other hand, the dissemination of news about the Romanian unrest in the countries of Western Europe, as it had also been the case after the Memorandum Trial (1894).

This also gave rise to an effort to explore and analyze the Other. One of the authors who did so was Jancsó Benedek. As early as the eighteenth century, various Hungarian authors had concentrated on writing exclusively about Romanians or about Romanian-Hungarian relations—usually simple articles or pamphlets. But Jancsó was the first in a prestigious line of Hungarian intellectuals with a deep knowledge of the Romanian issue. These authors did not limit themselves to writing a book or two on this topic but sometimes dedicated their entire life to exploring it. The Hungarian *expert* on Romanian matters would henceforth become a prototypical figure in the entangled history of the two nations.

Born in Transylvania, Jancsó was not a prominent scholar, but he read Romanian historical literature and journals extensively, undertook lengthy documentary journeys in Romania and made an effort to understand what the people he studied truly believed in and aspired to. He worked for a while as a civil servant on matters pertaining to the nationalities, but the numerous books he published were not just the result of official assignments. On the contrary, Jancsó harshly criticized the Hungarian politicians who approached the national matter without empathy or sufficient knowledge.

His ample works approach the history of the Romanians in Transylvania and the Kingdom. Their explicit goal is to understand how the Romanians had in time evolved to nourish such aspirations. Obviously, Jancsó was convinced that the national Hungarian project was legitimate and refuted any claims advanced by the Romanian historians who, he believed, had shaped a distorted version of history in order to support their national demands. But what drove him in his effort to understand the current state of affairs was his desire to find out why the Romanians thought differently from the Hungarians and why the two nations' interpretations of history were so incongruous:

The history of the two races has been entwined for about six hundred years. We have shared interests, we also have mutual aspirations that sometimes drive us into irreconcilable positions. Not only do we live in the same state, but sometimes also in the same place and in the same house. Life, everyday relations create a certain sense of reciprocity and shared customs, but we are forced to see that our ideals are different from theirs, that our desires are different, that our way of thinking and our entire

spiritual life are different. We know that we have been living together for centuries, that the land we live on is our shared country, that our bones will be covered by the same dust, that the fruit of the earth is distributed equally among us, that our true friends and our enemies are the same, and yet we feel a gaping abyss widening between us, separating and alienating us. We learn in the same schools, and we study the history of the same country and yet our heroes are not theirs as well, our glory causes them envy, and our disasters offer reason of joy to them. Those they respect as heroes are wrongdoers to us and what they consider a great deed is a shameful betrayal to us.⁸

This emphasis on a shared destiny that connected the two peoples in the Hungarian homeland was an idea that was also espoused by intellectuals in 1848. But the awareness that an abyss of such magnitude had opened up between the two nations, fueled by the different interpretations of historians writing in the service of the national interest, was a ground-shaking idea that few authors would later phrase so cogently. Without a doubt, Jancsó's assumed goal in his books was to show how this mechanism worked in the Romanians' case. In his view, the Romanians were the ones laying unfounded claims and they had distorted history, creating that predicament. Still, as seen above, the principles by which nationalism's irreconcilable dream-making machine worked were shared by the two peoples.

Jancsó did not urge his readers to jump to hysterical conclusions but to calmly analyze the roots of Daco-Romanianism. What he wanted to highlight was that Romanians hated Hungarians and saw them as barbarian invaders, who were descended from the Huns and the Kalmyks,⁹ and whom they would like to throw out of the country! As Jancsó put it, in the Romanians' view, Transylvania was not a shared country but Romanian land. This is seen in the faux folk poetry Romanian intellectuals pretended to have collected from an irredentist shepherd:

Hey, Hungarian, in my land
 Don't you know that you are banned?
 This is my Romanian country,
 You get out, I tell you bluntly,
 And if you refuse to leave,
 I'll kick you out, you'd better believe.¹⁰

In 1896, these lines could sound outrageous but not necessarily threatening. Just like Kossuth had warned about the dangers inherent in tying Hungary's destiny to Austria's in the "Cassandra letter," Jancsó drew attention to the similar dangers arising from the nationalities' aspirations.

Other Hungarians embarked on this effort to document the Romanians' status and goals. In 1908, Barna Endre extensively analyzed the situation of the minorities in the

⁸ Jancsó 1895, VIII–IX.

⁹ Jancsó 1896–1899, I, 152.

¹⁰ Jancsó 1896–1899.

Kingdom of Romania and reached the conclusion that the Romanian authorities did not respect the rights of the nationalities, in particular those of the Hungarians (he mentioned the *csángók*, for instance) on their territory. By contrast, he said, the Romanians in Hungary enjoyed much wider recognition despite their self-victimizing discourse. Less than one hundred years later, the Romanians resumed in reverse the arguments of the Hungarian author: how is it possible for the Hungarians in Romania to claim that they are being discriminated against when it is clear that they are enjoying every possible right, while the Romanians in Hungary are suffering a process of denationalization? Barna's volume included a beautiful map of the kingdom across the mountains which followed the outline of Greater Romania, from the Dniester to the Tisza, and had been edited by the Ministry of Public Instruction in Bucharest in 1899.¹¹

One of the most elaborate works on the Transylvanian Romanians was a confidential report commissioned by the Hungarian Ministry of Interior Affairs. Authored by Huszár Antal, it had nearly one thousand pages and only twenty-five copies of it were printed in 1907.¹² It meticulously recorded the demographic situation, schools, churches, cultural societies, credit institutions, periodicals, and political organizations of the Romanians in Hungary, with explicit references to their structure and activity.

Huszár's work indicated that the Hungarian state took the Romanians' development very seriously and marked the beginning of an important new stage in the history of imagological relations between the two peoples. In the context in which the Other was perceived as a threat to national security, official efforts to investigate this issue began to be made. In the twentieth century, particularly after the First World War, different official agencies in both countries, including their secret services, were committed not just to collecting information about the neighboring country or to propaganda operations, but even to activities like the writing of history and constructing some images of the enemy.

During the period of dualism, a particular set of opinion leaders who helped shape perceptions about Romanians included self-proclaimed Romanians writing from within Hungarian culture for a Hungarian readership.¹³ The best-known example of an individual speaking from this in-between position was Moldován Gergely, who became Chair of Romanian Language at the University of Cluj in 1886. As a Romanian-speaking Hungarian citizen, he tried to promote the principles of the dualist state among his fellow Romanians, constantly pleading for the good understanding between the two peoples, for loyalty to the Hungarian motherland, but also for the improvement of his conationals' status within the existing political framework. Moldován was committed to the idea of maintaining Romanian ethnic and linguistic identity in dualist Hungary by publishing Romanian folklore and literature and familiarizing Hungarian readers with these works.

Like Jancsó, Moldován showed that Romanians and Hungarians were strongly biased against one another but believed that education could offset prejudices as long as Hungarian officials guaranteed the Romanians' equitable treatment. On the other hand, every state was entitled to defend its constitutional order and suppress those who violated

¹¹ Barna 1908.

¹² Huszár 1907. An edition targeted at a wider readership was published the following year, Veritas 1908.

¹³ Rus 2008, 281–283.

it.¹⁴ He went on to argue that many more Romanians ought to hold public office and that the electoral law ought to be amended in their favor. In addition to this, he pushed for improving the livelihood of Transylvanian Romanians because, he said, “as Romanian intellectuals see it, the national issue is a matter of meat and bread.” If those problems were properly addressed, even the disgruntlement of radical Romanian politicians could be abated. But were Hungarian officials willing to make these concessions?¹⁵

Moldován was skeptical about it, fearing that the tendencies underway might jeopardize the future of the two nations. It is difficult to ascertain, from a historical standpoint, whether this future was overshadowed or bright. As for the former rector of the royal university, he lost his chair in 1919 and later died in the city built on the sunny banks of the River Someș (where everything was red-white-green, as the most popular refrain in the operetta *Countess Maritza* had it)—as a member of the Hungarian community here, now under Romanian rule.

Most Romanian intellectuals regarded Grigore Moldován as a renegade who had betrayed the national cause. Still, objectively speaking and judging the meaning of those terms, this assessment was inaccurate. Moldován was a Romanian intellectual who acknowledged and overtly displayed his nationality,¹⁶ but the way he understood the relations between his countrymen and the Hungarian state differed from the dominant Romanian narrative.

While Moldován was a Romanian titmouse¹⁷ lost among the Hungarians, the politician Mocsáry Lajos (Ludovic Mocsáriulű, for Hungarians who mocked his outrageous political option), chairman and founder of the Independence Party, was known in dualist Hungary as a Hungarian “white raven,” as well as a friend, defender and eventually MP representing Romanians.¹⁸ As a loyal follower of Kossuth’s ideals, Mocsáry had learned the lesson of the revolution and believed that Hungary’s survival depended on a reconciliation with the nationalities. It was impossible to fight against both the dynasty and the nations that had supported the Habsburgs in 1848. His tactical stance was legitimized by a frank and convincing ideological attachment. Mocsáry thought this was the good and proper way to do things because “Freedom can [only] be reached by not subjugating or limiting others. Moreover, the guarantee for the freedom of one nation is the freedom of all other nations, general freedom. Civilization is the very opposite of conquest and genocide.”¹⁹

Mocsáry pleaded for the rigorous enforcement of the Nationalities Law of 1868, for supporting mother tongue education and for using native languages in the local administration and the justice system, even though Hungarian remained the sole official language. But in order to persuade the nationalities to side with the Hungarians it was not enough to grant them (“persons belonging to the national minorities,” in today’s EU legal parlance) individual political and economic rights. If you wanted Romanians, Serbs, and Slovaks to support you, you needed to respect their national individuality and allow them to develop as national communities.

¹⁴ Moldován 1894, 101–102, 124.

¹⁵ Moldován 1894.

¹⁶ See Berki 2011.

¹⁷ See Moldován 1894, 102.

¹⁸ Csucsujá 1994.

¹⁹ Cited by Popa 2024.

Topmost among his priorities was vigorously counteracting the Magyarization policy. His speeches on this topic caused outrage in parliament because Magyarization was deemed to be a key element of nationalist rhetoric. By emphatically upholding these policies, MPs foregrounded their usefulness as defenders of the Hungarian homeland. It was only natural that irredentist enemies from the nationalities camp should be against this. But it was inconceivable for a Hungarian politician to do something like that!

Then again, while these statements led his opponents to vilify him as a traitor to the Hungarian homeland and his own party to reject him, they assured his popularity among the Romanians. He was able to achieve a small triumph when he was unanimously elected member of the Hungarian Parliament by the five thousand Romanian voters in a constituency from the Highland Banat. Even though his Kossuth-style political orientation had left unpleasant traces in the Romanians' memory, he was accepted even by the most nationalist Romanians in the monarchy because he was a Hungarian unlike all others! Let us imagine, for the sake of comparison, a contemporary Social Democratic Party politician from Buzău or Giurgiu running on the lists of an autonomist party from Szeklerland and being elected with great enthusiasm by voters trusting that he will compassionately embrace the national aspirations of the Hungarian brothers! This is basically what happened in Caransebeș in 1888!

No wonder Mocsáry later became a symbol of Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation and was promoted as such by Hungarian historiographers during the first decades of the communist regime. Over the past few years, the Cluj-based association *White Ravens*, whose name is derived from the nickname the *Transylvanian Gazette* journalists once attributed to Mocsáry, has tried to build cultural bridges between the Romanians and the Hungarians in Romania.

In any case, Mocsáry was not a lonesome raven. Although radical pro-Romanian attitudes were not frequently expressed in Hungarian circles, they helped those who voiced them to distance themselves from the official nationalist discourse. Solymosi Elek, a Transylvanian-born actor with various cultural preoccupations, wrote an article on the Romanian problem in 1905:

As for myself, all I've done is love the Romanians. I've loved them honestly: every word I've written, every deed I've done, every thought I've nourished was filled with love. That was the only way. In 1848, Székely István, a Hungarian peasant who lived opposite us, wanted to murder my father even though my father had always treated him well; a Romanian hostler called Ciungan Todor saved his life then even though my father had never done him any good [...]. The history of Hungarian national struggles teaches us that a kind word, a warm handshake, and the honest expression of brotherly love will find their way to the heart more swiftly than a whole library of academic truths. What this means is that Hungarian society should love worthy Romanians just as much as any human can love another.²⁰

After 1900, Romanians acquired a good reputation in socialist publications or in modernist, cosmopolitan artistic circles, where they were seen as class struggle comrades

²⁰ Köllő 1993, 175.

or leading artists with whom alliances that crossed the barriers between nations could be forged. The brotherhood of nations, cultivated one generation before by the emigrating revolutionaries of 1848, remained a quintessentially progressive topic. By and large, Hungarians with a progressive and democratic mindset had to be on the nationalities' side and not against them, for that position was occupied by dualist Hungary's reactionary establishment.

In 1910, the sociologist Jászi Oszkár, a left-wing critic of the political regime in Austria-Hungary who championed the nationalities' cause, lamented the imprisonment of poet and journalist Octavian Goga for press-related offences. He ironically commented that "This wretched traitor of the motherland translated Madách's *The Tragedy of Man* into Romanian with unparalleled success."²¹ The fact that a Romanian nationalist poet like Goga showed an interest in Hungarian literature and cultivated a close friendship with Ady Endre, the most illustrious Hungarian poet of his time, helped to forge a mythology around the amicable relations between the two nations. Even though both writers were devoted to their national creed, general human values, art and mutual admiration helped them to overcome nationalist squabbles. The friendship between a Romanian writer and a Hungarian one and literary translations between the two languages were prized above those involving other foreign partners because they were valued as elevated modes of working through the historical conflict between the two peoples. Dualist Hungary clearly provided a cultural and linguistic setting for such contacts, and Transylvanian Romanian writers such as Coşbuc, Goga and Emil Isac translated Hungarian literary masterpieces into Romanian, while others, like Rebreanu, made their debut with original works in Hungarian.

Human ideals, according to which all nations in the world—Romanians included—are equally wonderful and deserve to love one another, were contradicted by constructs of *race* during the same years. These claimed that humanity was naturally divided into several races with specific features which competed with one another for survival and domination, much like animal species in the jungle of the biological world. The talent of Romanian poets was extolled in the bohemian atmosphere of smoke-filled cafés in Oradea or Budapest, but the treatises the most distinguished scholars of the time carried in their briefcases along the hallways of the Academy had something different to say.

As Marius Turda, a leading researcher on these topics,²² has shown, the theory of the Hungarians' national superiority was initially grounded in cultural and historical arguments, derived from the tradition of Hungarian liberalism. The political project of the Hungarian national state relied on the idea that throughout history the achievements of the Hungarian nation surpassed by far those of the nations around them and that its culture was much more advanced. The ethnographer Hunfalvi Pál, the author of extensive works on the Romanians' origins and history that were vehemently challenged in Iaşi and Bucharest, contended that unlike Hungarians, who had created a modern civilization in Hungary, Romanians were "exotic" and "primitive."²³

It was not difficult to bring arguments that the Hungarians—who were thriving under the shiny dome of dualism and pompously celebrated in 1896 their millennial

²¹ Popa 1998, 121.

²² Turda 2004; Turda 2007; Turda 2014.

²³ Turda 2016, 101.

history in their splendid capital, now reconstructed on both sides of the Danube—were far superior in political, economic, social or cultural terms to the Romanians, Serbs or Slovaks relegated to the villages from the outskirts of the Carpathian Basin. But this superiority could be seen as conjunctural, the result of favorable—some said, questionable—historical circumstances. Romanians, for instance, had always insisted they were by no means inferior to the Hungarians. On the contrary, they professed that their indisputable superiority was the result of their Latin origins and moral prerogative since they were innocent victims of feudal tyranny.

Under those circumstances, identifying infallible criteria allowing one to state that national superiority was an essential and unalterable feature became an appealing task even for the Hungarian intellectuals. In the age of positivism, hard sciences, based on direct observation, measurements, and experiments, were enlisted to settle this controversial matter, which had not been satisfactorily adjudicated through historical or philological arguments. Because humans were at stake, mathematics, physics and chemistry would not have been relevant, so biology was the only discipline that could reach a conclusion on this matter. The English philosopher Herbert Spencer had applied its evolutionist principles to the field of social life. Race theories, which were based on the irrefutable authority of science and would later prepare the ground for the Holocaust, were used by Hungarian scholars walking in the footsteps of British and German scientists to justify the supremacy of the Hungarian nation (now turned into a “race”) within the boundaries of dualist Hungary.

In his writings, Beksics Gusztáv shifted the focus of debates from the relations between the Hungarians and the Romanians onto the field of racial identities. Romanians were deemed to be an “inferior race” because they were in a less advanced stage of historical evolution. Consequently, since Hungarians had already reached that higher stage of development in which a nation is aware that it must preserve its racial stock, they were entitled to and would inevitably assimilate the Romanians.²⁴ Race conflict, conceptualized within the framework of liberal theories of cultural superiority, was nonetheless waged in civilized terms. The methods were going to be benign even though the outcome was predictable: “The struggle between the two races will continue and Hungarians will not use violent and oppressive weapons. They will resort to the most pacifist and beneficent arsenal of civilization.”²⁵

Beksics was not Himmler, and the velvet racism of the Hungarian bourgeoisie in *La Belle Époque* had nothing of the violence perpetrated by the SS or the Arrow Cross. They did have something in common, however: the belief that their opinions were supported by science. Beksics made some interesting comments on the role of women in the race competition, stating that their reproductive behavior was a decisive factor in a biological conflict. The Romantic visions of yore about the natural beauty of Romanian women were incorporated in a “racial” analysis, which purported to be detached and objective. The excerpt below shows the same semblance of scientific neutrality that Ioan Slavici adopted in his studies about Hungarians, whose rhetorical gravitas was supposed to give weight to these arguments:

²⁴ Turda 2016, 122–123.

²⁵ Turda 2016, 125.

The Romanian woman is as worthy as the Hungarian woman. Both deserve praise for their beauty and love of their race [...]; taking into account her agile temperament which reveals her South Roman and Slavic origins, the Romanian woman's love of her race surpasses that of the Hungarian woman. This temperamental vivacity is both an advantage and a drawback for the Romanian woman. She is capable of passionate love but also of deep hatred, which gives her considerable force in the battle of the races.²⁶

Leaving aside the blatant gender clichés (the excessive passion associated with women, coupled with stereotypes about the southern nations), it appears that the Hungarian theorist is not very clear “whose side he is on” until he shifts the focus from conjugal matters to larger considerations of civilization and the “European horizon,” steering his demonstration towards an inevitable conclusion regarding the superiority of the Hungarian race: “Love of race prevents the Romanian woman from following the path of culture and civilization. Her worship of her race is in fact a major obstacle to her intellectual development. By contrast, the Hungarian woman loves her race and homeland, living in a European atmosphere and aspiring to European values.”²⁷

Although race theories appeared to be “scientific” at first sight, the truth is that you could say almost anything based on such ideas or make senseless and illogical speculations. Romanian authors also made full use of race-based arguments in an attempt to prove that the Hungarians were wrong. The best-known author who resorted to race theories to reinforce the Romanian position was Aurel C. Popovici. Writing in close proximity to Hungarian and German milieus, Popovici gave the following reply to the Hungarian writers: “Hungarians are a Mongoloid race. They often mate with Jews, that is, with Semites. On top of that, they imagine they can absorb huge masses of Indo-Germans! Even if the difference between races were not that great, such crossbreeding will evidently lead, in such a context, to the degeneration of these races.”²⁸

In addition to the stereotype of the Hungarians' Mongolian origins, Popovici now brought the precise arguments of German science: the shape of skulls, the color of eyes and hair, in addition to spiritual purity (a stereotype of Romantic extraction). All these allegedly attested to the Romanians' outstanding racial stock:

Many Romanians have at least one physical trait of the “Nordic European race,” as it is known in modern anthropology: they tend to be as tall as fir trees and broad shouldered, with long heads or wide foreheads, with fair or flaxen hair (or beard), with blue (or green) eyes and milky white skin, and, most significantly, with honest souls. [...] As for the Germanic race [...], it is important for the entire Latin race today; hence, also for the Romanians. For however strong the Romance stock of these peoples might be, each of them has always had some Germanic blood running through their veins. If only they had more of that!²⁹

²⁶ Turda 2016, 127.

²⁷ Turda 2016, 127–128.

²⁸ Turda 2016, 151.

²⁹ Turda 2016, 154–155.

A racial examination of the two peoples highlighted the Hungarians' Semite degeneracy and the Romanians' Arian superiority. *Mein Kampf* was yet to be written, but Popovici had already placed the Romanians on the good side of racial geography. And yet again, Hitler was to prove the Hungarians right in 1940! That was further proof that racial theories legitimized power relations, as illustrated by the ways in which Hungarians had used them to reinforce the image of their national superiority.

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THE SOCIETY OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY OF ORADEA. TYPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE INVENTORY LEDGER FROM 1873

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Abstract: The Țării Crișurilor Museum has had a long and interesting past going back more than 150 years. Its roots center around the former Society of Archaeology and History of Oradea and Bihor County. Since 1872, the institution has been continuously gathering artifacts to preserve, guard, and present this area's unique and particular history, from prehistory until the present. Many objects have been stored in our institution since the nineteenth century, many of them losing their initial descriptions and unique data. Luckily, our history department still keeps the old original inventory ledgers of the first years. The main purpose of this article is to present a precise statistical analysis of the artifacts donated by various individuals in the year 1873 between January and June. In doing so, we can better understand the initial contents of the collections, the specific trends of the age, the methodology, and the overall evolution of each category of objects. Each segment has its particular data regarding chronology, type, quantity, and value, so each must be treated separately and together.

Keywords: museum, collections, artifacts, donations, modern period, Oradea, statistics

Rezumat: Muzeul Țării Crișurilor se bucură de o moștenire culturală veche de peste 150 de ani. Rădăcinile sale se regăsesc în vechea Societate de Arheologie și Istorie a comitatului Bihor și a orașului Oradea. Din 1872, instituția a adunat în permanență artefacte cu scopul de a le proteja și valorifica, prezentând într-un mod original istoria particulară și unică a zonei începând din epoca preistorică, continuând până în prezent. Sunt păstrate astfel în cadrul depozitelor noastre, numeroase exemplare introduse chiar în secolul al XIX-lea, dar care din cauza trecerii timpului și a reinventarierilor succesive, și-au pierdut descrierile și datele inițiale. Din fericire, secția de istorie încă mai deține vechile registre din primii ani. Scopul principal al acestui articol este de a prezenta o analiză statistică precisă a artefactelor donate de către diverse persoane în anul 1873, între lunile ianuarie și iunie. Astfel, am putea înțelege mult mai bine colecția inițială, metodologia specifică epocii și evoluția generală a categoriilor de obiecte. Fiecare segment conține date și informații particulare privind cronologia, tipul, cantitatea și, desigur, valoarea individuală a obiectelor, toate fiind tratate atât separat, cât și împreună.

Cuvinte cheie: muzeu, colecții, artefacte, donații, perioada modernă, Oradea, statistici

Introduction

The 1872 debut of the Society of Archaeology and History of Bihor County represented a significant moment in the cultural evolution of the land and, at the same time, an important advance from the perspective of museography as a science. Today, the Țării Crișurilor Museum – Museum Complex, the direct spiritual successor of the old

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institution, continues the tradition of scientific research and, simultaneously, manages to substantially enrich the collections thanks to the many generations working here. With a tradition spanning over 150 years, the internal management of objects and especially the methodology have each changed gradually. Thus, in the current collections, artifacts came into the museum's possession long ago but have a less known origin nowadays. Within the registers, a fairly high number of pieces were reorganized into the so-called Old Collection, the title emphasizing that they came from the Society's original fond. Other important data regarding their provenance have not been passed, which makes their historical understanding difficult. Fortunately, the old registers of the Society have been preserved; thus, there are still ways to rectify the situation.¹ The main aim of this scientific pursuit is to thoroughly analyze the contents of the preliminary collections to see what kind of methodology early specialists used and what kind of objects they endeavored to recover and store. Through the years, trends have played an interesting role in shaping the thematic composition of collections, and it is crucial to see how they influenced the work of early archaeologists and historians. The statistical data may reveal certain fluctuations regarding preferences. Furthermore, one key aspect that needs to be addressed is provenance. As a simple investigative exercise, by studying the lists and comparing them to the new ones, maybe a few objects can be identified, and their entries can be improved. Even if the results may be rather fruitless, this can be a starting point for future attempts. Also, answering salient questions like who the donors were, what kind of objects they donated, and what these artifacts say about them might paint a clearer picture of what the local cultural landscape of Oradea was like back then. Finally, the central question that requires answering is: what do the early collections say about the Society? One of the museum's unique collections, that of its history, contains various documents and artifacts from the first few decades, and by exploring the old ledgers, we can better understand that particular period and how the general inventory was maintained.

I have chosen the 1873 ledger for many reasons. First of all, compared to documents from other years, it is more precise and well-structured, and the text itself, written in nineteenth-century Hungarian, is fairly legible and easily translated. Secondly, the list of artifacts is not that long, and therefore the results can be arranged in the form of a concise article such as this one so that, at least from a short-term perspective, the data can be introduced in the field of research more rapidly so other historians can use it in their projects.² Above all else, it is the first full year of clear activity for the Society and thus represents a basic starting point for analyzing its early years and evolution throughout time.

History, a tool and mechanism for social and cultural change

The nineteenth century brought about a range of social, economic, and cultural shifts for Oradea that radically altered its destiny and how people engaged on a day-to-day basis. It was a period of massive industrialization and the emergence of a far stronger and more present merchant class. In 1849, the city unified with all the surrounding smaller villages

¹ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882–1889.

² Other instances are far more complex and would require a more elaborate form, like a study or even a monograph if more years are to be examined.

and districts to form one compact administration centered on the banks of the Criș River. The local demographic started to change drastically, increasing rapidly year after year due to the arrival of various ethnic communities. Hungarians living alongside Romanians, Jews, and other minorities formed a diverse environment that helped the township evolve in different ways. Naturally, a growing need for a unique identity started to emerge especially for the majority of Catholic Hungarians. By the end of the Age of Enlightenment, new philosophies surrounding the ideas of nationality and nation began to take center stage, and particularly during the second half of the nineteenth century, they established the foundation of mainstream mentalities and mindsets.

In the case of Bihor and *Partium* (“The Hungarian Parts”), the history of the land was tied politically and even spiritually to the former Kingdom of Hungary. The old citadel was considered an important legacy of King Ladislau I (1077–1095), who built a monastery here in the eleventh century and created the Roman Catholic Bishopric of Oradea. Ever since the late medieval times, the local bishops have had an important ecclesiastic and political role, enjoying both religious and secular titles as perpetual counts of Bihor. The diocese was one of the wealthiest in the kingdom, the Church being the largest landowner in the county.

In their struggle to assert themselves and protect their rights within the empire, the Hungarians sought out different ways to strengthen their social and political position. One very important tool was history itself. Throughout time, this discipline was considered a cornerstone of knowledge, but its use was very much constricted within the limits of scholastic research. Artifacts themselves were seen as nothing more than luxury items of the rich, being kept in the collections of the nobility or the very wealthy families. Of course, there were instances and exceptions where particular historical objects like statues or paintings were used in public spaces, but very few and far in between. The Catholic Church was one of the first institutions to try this approach when, in 1471, Pope Sixtus IV revealed several bronze statues to the citizens of Rome and placed them on the Capitoline Hill,³ or in 1506, when Pope Julius II opened a public building, which would later become the Vatican Museums, filled with art from his collections. As for private ventures, in Italy during the sixteenth century, the Uffizi Gallery was first organized due to the patronage of the influential Medici family.⁴ In France, Jean-Baptiste Boisot (1639–1694) gave his collections to the Benedictine Order, primarily books and old manuscripts, which in turn created the Besançon Municipal Library.⁵ English scientist Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753) donated his artifacts, objects that later formed the basis for the now famous British Museum, opening the institution to the public in 1759.⁶ As for our lands, after the death of the Habsburg governor of Transylvania Samuel von Brukenthal (1721–1803), his palace located in the center of Sibiu opened to the public in 1817, granting ordinary citizens access to his family’s heirlooms.⁷

³ “Foundation and first acquisitions”/ Musei Capitolini. The statues were previously kept inside the Lateran palace.

⁴ “Uffizi Gallery”/ Encyclopaedia Britannica.

⁵ “Jean-Baptiste Boisot”/ Mémoire vivre.

⁶ “Hans Sloane”/ BM.

⁷ “Istoric muzeu”/ MNB.

Examples such as these help to illustrate key important features regarding how people viewed history and how old artifacts were perceived throughout the centuries up until modern times. Whether it was the Church or private individuals, all of them pursued their self-interest, wanting to improve their social status and image as patrons of the arts and culture. Ancient artifacts were not considered part of any common heritage, mainly because the cultural identity of various communities was still not fully formed. During the nineteenth century, with the rise of the concept of nation and the importance of the individual, the status quo was steadily reversed. The patriotic sentiment and the need to serve one's people started to dictate the general discourse, and so, history slowly became the primary instrument for generating public unity and coherence. For the Hungarians, the fervor and ideas that came immediately after the Revolution of 1848 and the Compromise of 1867 sparked a general interest in protecting and promoting their shared heritage in a bid to uphold their newfound political position.⁸ Under these auspices, the Society of Archaeology and History of Oradea came to contribute in its noteworthy way.

The local authorities of the time decided to focus their attention towards creating an organization with the central role of promoting the city's rich past. In the summer of 1871, the problem was raised within the county administration, and an official decision was made in November of the same year.⁹ In 1872, the Society was formed with the help of local figures such as Lajos Gyalokay Sr (freedom fighter, politician, lawyer) or József Dóry (county commissioner).¹⁰ Even the local newspaper *Nagyvárad* dedicated an entire first page to promote the Society in one of its issues.¹¹ The original plan was to establish a special association that would function within the administration itself. However, due to the legal framework that was in force at the time, it was not allowed for such an institution to be publicly funded;¹² therefore, in terms of financial support, other methods needed to be employed. The Society managed to acquire most of its funds through a subscription-based system. Private individuals would pay a membership fee, divided into several brackets based on the sums they each contributed. The higher the sums, the more benefits and roles they received. The so-called founding members, who participated in the main decision-making forums, were at the top of the lists. Such a tax would reach somewhere around 50 forints or more annually, and that was the amount given by Ioan Olteanu, the Greek Catholic Bishop of Oradea, in 1874.¹³ Next came the regular members and the associates. As far as internal structure was concerned, there was a central committee and a general assembly. Meetings were held each year to discuss important topics regarding financial issues, new members, publishing, and potential exhibitions. The main administrative positions were president (József Dóry), vice-president (Lajos Gyalokay Senior), secretary (Adorján Barlanghy), custodian (Péter Cséplő), treasurer (Gergely Szarukán), and lawyer (Zsigmond Ritoók).¹⁴ According to Section VI (articles 19–23) of the original statutes of the Society, the general assembly was held once a year in Oradea during May, where only the founding and regular

⁸ Lakatos-Balla 2009, 203–204.

⁹ Lakatos-Balla 2009, 203–204.

¹⁰ Chiriac 2010, 102.

¹¹ Tóth I. 1972, 79.

¹² Lakatos-Balla 2009, 203.

¹³ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 741, f. 19.

¹⁴ Lakatos-Balla 2009, 211–213.

members had the right to vote on specific topics such as electing new honorary members, appointing new offices or amending the statutes.¹⁵

One of the very first exhibitions organized in Oradea was held between December 1872 and January of the following year in the halls of the prefecture building.¹⁶ By that point, they already had a few hundred items in their possession, thanks to the many donations of several members and citizens. According to the minutes of the meeting held by the council on 31 January 1873, in only ten days, more than 300 people visited, and from the entrance fee they managed to collect a total of 98.80 forints, including overpayments.¹⁷ From this, they deducted the cost of transport and advertisement of about 10 forints and an additional 10 for the night watchmen, the latter sum being covered by Mr Károly Des Echerolles out of pocket.¹⁸ He also donated all the cupboards used in the exhibition to store the objects.

From the beginning, the statutes of the Society outlined a clear and concise purpose: gathering artifacts relating to the county's history and using them for the good of the people.¹⁹ In stark contrast with the other examples stated above, this cultural project was explicitly designed to serve the public, and it was backed primarily by municipal authorities and not necessarily by private interests. Although, it is important to mention that the financial aspects, which were not covered, posed a very serious problem down the line. Subscriptions did not always cover the necessary expenses for storage and record keeping. In later years, their activity halted almost completely due to a lack of interest from the public and other participants. This issue was steadily resolved thanks to future endorsements from various institutions. The main problem they faced in these early years was the absence of headquarters. For decades, they were simple tenants moving around from one place to another, at one point being forced to relocate to the city's outskirts.²⁰ The situation greatly affected the productivity of the Society and slowed down the general efforts to improve its internal structure. Only by the end of the nineteenth century did they manage to gather enough resources through various means and open the very first public museum, a building that still stands today.

Structural and methodological aspects of the 1873 ledger

After the official opening in 1896, having an adequate space and proper storage facilities,²¹ a possible investigation of the collections²² was carried out by the new custodian, Gyula Középesy (1845–1917).²² The original writing from 1873, more likely belonging to the first curator, Cséplő Péter (black ink), was later altered in red ink or pencil. Most of the changes were made to the inventory numbers and an additional column with a different numbering was introduced. Checking each entry, some ambiguities were discovered, which were signaled by Mr Középesy, signing next to each line, specifying how many

¹⁵ SJBh AN, SAIO, file no. 2, ff. 3–4.

¹⁶ Chiriac 2010, 104.

¹⁷ Lakatos-Balla Attila 2009, 221.

¹⁸ Lakatos-Balla Attila 2009, 221.

¹⁹ SJBh AN, SAIO, file no. 2, ff. 2–7.

²⁰ Tóth S. 1972, 69.

²¹ Roşu 1972, 83–87.

²² "Középesy G." / Genealogy Directory.

pieces were found and in what condition they were in.²³ At the same time, he also added some information regarding the dating, indicating at least the century.²⁴

By comparison with today's standards, the table structure used in this period can be considered quite basic, having a total of only six columns: the inventory number, the date the artifact was donated, the name of the donor, the description, its provenance (place of discovery, if any) and final observations. Unlike modern methodology, the original lists were grouped by year, with the inventory count starting over at the beginning of each year. Every artifact was registered separately and given its inventory number. In some cases multiple artifacts were included under a single heading (if they were identical), specifying, nonetheless, how many duplicates there were.²⁵ This technique most likely was standard practice at the time. Sándor Bölöni Jr (1854–1896)²⁶, a key member of the organization and one of the few local researchers, mentioned in one of his articles detailing important information regarding the collections that the table and methodology were the same ones used by the Hungarian National Museum.²⁷

It is noteworthy to mention that the data in the table was modified much later by Középesy, sometime around 1899.²⁸ Looking closely at the columns, it seems that mistakes or changes occurred even in 1873, when the ledger was first written. A total of four cases were identified where inventory numbers were placed for the artifacts (the donors were also noted – the widow of Mr Békeffy, the Középesy siblings, and Sándor Kolozsvári), but the description of the pieces is missing.²⁹ Even so, the count continued with these omissions, also causing a statistical discrepancy between the official entries and the actual number of pieces. Four pages refer to 1873, with 123 entries totaling approximately 125 objects.³⁰

Subcategories of artifacts donated in 1873

To better understand the impact and historical significance of the objects donated in 1873, dividing them first into thematic categories would offer us a much clearer picture of the general contents. Unfortunately, the museography of that time did not pursue a direct distinction within the lists, and each artifact was only described. Thus, it is a little more challenging to guess the exact group the pieces belonged to, as they were most likely all considered antiques. A clear main distinction compared to the previous year's situation is that the vast majority of examples were no longer simple coins but more diverse, some of which are still kept in the museum to this day. We cannot say whether it was a coincidence or a strategy put in place. The only certainty we have is that the collections progressively changed and subsequently enriched the cultural character of the Society.³¹

²³ This analysis will be based mostly on the original count from 1873, emphasizing throughout the text the small changes or more special situations.

²⁴ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, f. 16.

²⁵ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, ff. 14–15: it relates to Etruscan vessels, bronze bracelets, and porcelain tableware, all the same type.

²⁶ "Bölöny"/ Genealogy Directory.

²⁷ Bölöni 1875a, 50.

²⁸ "Középesy G."/ Genealogy Directory.

²⁹ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, ff. 15–16: the problems are found at the following inventory entries: 77, 85, 90, 110.

³⁰ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, ff. 13–16.

³¹ In creating the categories, I practically combined provenance with typology to illustrate the thematic

Coins

Inv. no.	Date of entry	Donor	Description	Observations
3	5 Jan.	Widow of Vinczé Bogdándy	French coin. Twenty francs, gold. Napoleon III, 1867.	–
4	5 Jan.	Widow of Vinczé Bogdándy	French coin. One franc. Napoleon III, 1868.	–
5	5 Jan.	Widow of Vinczé Bogdándy	French coin. Twenty cents. Napoleon III, 1866.	–
6	5 Jan.	Widow of Vinczé Bogdándy	Imitation of a Jewish coin with Hebrew inscriptions.	–
7	5 Jan.	Jozefa Széher	Hungarian coin. Three Kreuzer, 1849.	–
8	5 Jan.	Jozefa Széher	Austrian coin. Three Kreuzer, 1851.	–
9	5 Jan.	Jozefa Széher	Silver coin. Twenty, 1767.	<i>Ad normam conventionis franco</i>
10	5 Jan.	Jozefa Széher	Hungarian coin. Copper poltura, Maria Tereza, 1763.	–
11	5 Jan.	Jozefa Széher	German-Austrian coin. Silver forint, Francisc II, 1797.	–
12	5 Jan.	Jozefa Széher	Saxon coin. Silver Thaler, Frederic August, 1770.	–
13	5 Jan.	Jozefa Széher	Hungarian coin. Thaler, Maria Tereza, 1743.	–
14	5 Jan.	Jozefa Széher	Braunschweig coin. Groschen (sixteen), 1787.	–
15	5 Jan.	Jozefa Széher	German-Austrian coin. Used copper, 1800?	Recent.
16	5 Jan.	Jozefa Széher	German-Hungarian coin. Silver of twenty, Joseph II, 1782.	–
17	5 Jan.	Jozefa Széher	Silver coin. Value of ten, indecipherable due to wear.	Recent. Eighteenth century imperial origin.
18	5 Jan.	Jozefa Széher	Austrian coin. Silver of ten, Ferdinand V, 1836.	–

Tab. 1. List of coins that entered the collections 1873.

A relatively small number of pieces – about 16 – were listed in the register, all entered on the same day. They did not come from some random find, or at least nothing was mentioned in the observations, and they were quite recent (eight from the eighteenth century, seven from the nineteenth century, and one undated). Most likely, they were part

differences. Not having any other additional information for each piece, many of them cannot be accurately ranked. For this reason, I decided to mix the two methods to give a unified form.

of the private collections of the two ladies who decided to donate them. There are a few that, for some reason, have been written down with a pencil, and for which there are also some brief observations regarding their state of preservation and other data. A more interesting one was a Jewish coin determined to be an imitation with various Semitic inscriptions on the obverse, given by the widow of Mr Vinczé Bogdány.³² She also offered several examples of French coins, all from the period of Emperor Napoleon III (1852–1870). The rest, belonging to Ms Széher, came from the German, Austrian, or Hungarian geographical areas. Throughout the descriptions of each coin, the author first insisted on emphasizing the provenance, the type of metal (gold, silver or copper), the name of the issue, the year in which it was minted, and sometimes even its state of preservation. Of all twelve, only three remain more or less unidentified, all others being fully described. There was a silver coin (value of ten) which, due to wear, could not be deciphered (the observations mention that it would probably be from the eighteenth century of Austrian origin), another one, similarly made from copper, and a third one, described as being made of silver, minted in the year 1767.³³ Fortunately, for the last example, more information was added later on, especially regarding the description of the reverse, which had the expression *ad normam conventionis franco*. It is quite a significant clue because it allows us to clearly identify the author and the provenance. According to online databases, such a coin was issued by the Prince Elector of Bavaria, Karl Theodor IV (1724–1799).³⁴ Minted between 1761 and 1772 in Mannheim, it would have been a silver Thaler worth 20 Kreuzer.³⁵

Weapons

Inv. no.	Date of entry	Donor	Description	Observations
1	3 Jan.	József Dudek	Chainmail made of iron links.	Oradea. It was found in a corner near the east gate of the castle while digging a well.
2	4 Jan.	Wife of Péter Mészáros	Mace, yellow copper.	Mace with horns (corners). The handle is also made of yellow copper.
68	5 Jan.	Károly Des Echerolles	Fragment of a chain link.	Discovered at Cisnădioara, Sibiu.
69	5 Jan.	Károly Des Echerolles	Iron mace.	–
114	10 March	Wife of Mr Andor Beöthy	Old dagger.	–

Tab. 2. List of weapons that entered the collections in 1873.

The list of weapons is not as impressive as other categories, but it is important to note that of the pieces located, several were the result of local discoveries. In the case of

³² Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, f. 13.

³³ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, f. 13.

³⁴ “Theodore”/ Numista.

³⁵ “Theodore 20K”/ Numista.

the chainmail, one seems to have come from the Oradea fortress, being found during the excavation of a well near the east gate, and the other fragment was brought from Cisnădioara. The original text mentions the castle/citadel of Michelsberg near Sibiu, referring here to the fortified Church of Saint Michael. The fortification was built sometime at the end of the thirteenth century, its dating being possible thanks to the information from a coin minted in 1325.³⁶ According to historian Adrian Andrei Rusu, other significant discoveries at the Cisnădioara citadel have not been reported over the years, except coins,³⁷ so the old fragment (if it can be identified in the new collections) would enrich the scientific understanding of the archaeological context of Sibiu. The rest of the weapons, two maces and an “old dagger,” came from private collections of wealthy citizens. One of the maces, the one donated by Mr Péter Mészáros’s wife, was detailed in depth: it was made of yellow copper with corners, and the handle had a similar design.³⁸ From the general description, the object would resemble some examples used in the main exhibition on the first floor (History Department, room 19).³⁹ Only the “dagger” (actually a yatagan) donated by Andor Beöthy’s wife, Stefánia,⁴⁰ has been positively identified; it has been reassigned to a different number, 6055.⁴¹

Etruscan Artifacts

Inv. no.	Date of entry	Donor	Description
19	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan vessel. Black base color with red-brown decorations. Two female figures can be found on either side. It has two handles and a lid.
20	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan vessel. In the shape of a plate with two handles. Black in color, inside there is a white leaf painted in the form of a garland.
21	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan candlestick. The slim neck with side gussets. A human figure is in the middle. Colored black.
22	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan vessel. In the shape of a plate. Black with white and red decorations. A seated female figure can be seen in the middle of the plate.
23	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan vessel. Shaped like a jar with a handle. Black with red decorations and figures. The image shows on one side a winged figure holding a garland and a seated woman on the opposite side also holding a garland.
24	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan candlestick. Thin neck with handles. In the upper part, there is a figure of a man. The main color is black.

³⁶ Rusu 2005, 512.

³⁷ Rusu 2005, 512.

³⁸ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, f. 13.

³⁹ The one on display is yellow with an identical handle, but it cannot be said with certainty if it is the same.

⁴⁰ “Beöthy S.”/ Genealogy Directory: also born in the Beöthy family, she was related to Andor being second cousins, their grandfathers László and János were brothers.

⁴¹ Colecția MȚCO, COT, vol. 4: data from the newer register indicates that the weapon is from the sixteenth century, having been reviewed in 1973 immediately after the museum moved its headquarters to the Roman Catholic palace.

Inv. no.	Date of entry	Donor	Description
25	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan vessel. In the shape of a plate. Black in color with fine decorations. A flying bird is painted in the middle.
28	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan vessel. Yellow-white in color with brown and reddish-brown decorations. The base is spherical with a handle.
29	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan candlestick. Main color, black. With a narrow mouth. A man's face can be seen in the middle.
30	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan vessel. Cup-shaped. With a raised stem, decorated with brown and reddish-brown lines on the sides.
32	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan vessel. In the shape of a cup with two sides. Black with red decorations. Two owls are painted on both sides.
33	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan vessel. Decorated on the edges with red and black floral arrangements.
35	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan vessel. Yellow-white in color decorated with brown and reddish-brown lines. The base is spherical with a handle.
37	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan candlestick. Thin neck with a male figure in the middle. Main color, black.
38	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan vessel of faded red/blue color, decorated with brown lines with small dots between them that grow proportionally towards the rim. Small handles.
40-41	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan tableware. Two handles on either side. Main color, black with two female faces painted on both sides.
42	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan vessel. Two handles and a lid. Main color red with black accents.
43	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan vessel. Cylindrical, black in color with red decorations.
48	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan bowl in the shape of a cup with two black handles.
50	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Red Etruscan lid.
51	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Etruscan candlestick.
54	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Black Etruscan vessel with red shapes and motifs. Two handles.

Tab. 3. List of Etruscan artifacts that entered the collections in 1873.

The most important contribution made in 1873 certainly belonged to Tivadar Lónyai, a wealthy local landowner,⁴² who donated 23 Etruscan objects to the Society. From a typological point of view, the donation consisted of five candlesticks, a clay cover, and 17 different types of bowls. Nothing was written about the location of the discovery or

⁴² Doby 1895, 92.

the overall provenance, indicating that they came from his private collection. They were all given to the institution on 5 January 1873.⁴³ In the description of each artifact, the emphasis was placed especially on the typology, the cultural influence, and last but not least, the individual artistic features (namely color, decoration, and shape). Most appear to have contained anthropomorphic male or female figures on the same piece, sometimes holding various objects. In the case of two vessels, the image of a flying bird, such as an owl, was specified.⁴⁴ As far as ceramic art is concerned, this symbol originally came from the Greek islands, being associated with the goddess Athena. Over the centuries, the Etruscans borrowed many trends, simultaneously importing numerous pieces from the Mediterranean area. Styles changed, the owl itself started to be associated with another deity or, in some cases, with death.⁴⁵ Other bowls had floral motifs or simple stylized geometric shapes. The main colors used in the background of most of the examples were brown, red, and black. The final data refers to the number of handles each piece had, some with two, others with only one. Despite consulting the registers that the History Department is currently using, these artifacts have not been properly identified yet, and, most likely, some of them have disappeared, or the general description and affiliation were rewritten.

Roman Artifacts

Inv. no.	Date of entry	Donor	Description
26	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Roman glass perfume container.
27	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Roman glass perfume container.
31	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Roman oil lamp with two holes.
34	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Roman oil lamp with a figure of Sol (the sun?) in the middle.
36	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Roman perfume glass bottle.
39	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Roman oil lamp. Two holes. In the center, an image of the rising sun with a crown of rays around its head.
44	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Roman bronze statuette representing a nude male figure.
46	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Roman oil lamp with three holes.
47	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Roman bronze statuette. Male figure holding in one hand a patera and in the other a handkerchief.
49	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Roman oil lamp with two holes.
52	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Piece of a decorated wall from Pompeii.
53	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Piece of a burned rope from Pompeii.

Tab. 4. List of Roman artifacts that entered the collections in 1873.

Again, the same Tivadar Lónyai made a major contribution by offering 12 distinct pieces to the Society, all belonging to the ancient Roman culture. Of these, two stand out

⁴³ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, ff. 13–14.

⁴⁴ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, f. 14.

⁴⁵ Watson 2014.

for their uniqueness and deserve to be mentioned: a piece of decorated wall (possibly a fragment of a fresco) and a burnt rope from Pompeii,⁴⁶ the city that disappeared after the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D. We have no way of knowing how and via which channel these fragments came into his possession. His high social status probably allowed him to acquire them over the years (and others like them), forming a small comprehensive collection of antiquities. It is likely that out of a sincere desire to help the newly formed association, he decided to part with many of them to support the initial efforts of the Society. These examples are lost today, as they cannot be identified in the new registers. On the other hand, the three samples of Roman glass used for storing perfume can be found under new identification numbers 6715–6717.⁴⁷ Moreover, some were also used in the creation of the main exhibition, which was displayed in room 16 on the first floor and was dedicated to the local communities living during the Roman era. Experts theorized that the objects would have come from Roman Dacia (second and third centuries A.D.). At the same time, the oil lamps are also found here, even if one cannot say which came from the local noble.⁴⁸

Egyptian Artifacts

The same nobleman also donated A single Egyptian piece in 1873 on 5 January.⁴⁹ According to the ledger, it was a bronze statuette depicting an anthropomorphic figure with a cat's head. Unfortunately, other more significant details were not specified, therefore, it could not be identified so far among the remaining examples. However, the brief description would suggest that it represented the goddess Bastet. As stated by other sources, she was a symbol of protection, health, and pleasure, Bastet being the daughter of Ra and the sister of Sekhmet.⁵⁰

Neolithic Artifacts

Inv. no.	Date of entry	Donor	Description	Observations
107	7 Jan.	Sándor Tárczy	Stone chisel.	–
116	7 May	Sándor Bölöni Jr	Flint core.	Oradea. Salca district (Csillagváros).
117	7 May	Sándor Bölöni Jr	Stone chisel.	Oradea. Salca district (Csillagváros).
118	7 May	Sándor Bölöni Jr	Fragment of a stone tool.	Oradea. Salca district (Csillagváros).
120	7 May	Lajos Gyalokay Jr	Flint fragment.	Oradea. Salca district (Csillagváros).

⁴⁶ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, f. 14.

⁴⁷ Colecția MȚCO, COT, vol. 4.

⁴⁸ In the first inventory register there are several copies, most likely some coming from Tivadar Lónyai.

⁴⁹ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, f. 14.

⁵⁰ “Bastet”/ Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum.

Inv. no.	Date of entry	Donor	Description	Observations
121	7 May	Lajos Gyalokay Jr	Bone tool perforated at one end.	Oradea. Salca district (Csillagváros).
122	7 May	Lajos Gyalokay Jr	Flint fragment.	Oradea. Salca district (Csillagváros).
123	21 June	Lajos Nagy	Stone sickle.	Beșermenii

Tab. 5. List of Neolithic artifacts that entered the collections in 1873.

No concrete dating was specified for the objects, but due to the typology, we speculate that they might be of prehistoric origin. The eight fragments and artifacts were the result of local finds, most of them coming from around the city of Oradea, more specifically the Csillagváros district, identified by some authors with the southern area from the old citadel between the present-day Cantemir and Salca districts.⁵¹ This old neighborhood (in Romanian „Orașul Stelelor”) was made up of three parallel streets: Beiușului, Anatole France, and Cantemir.⁵² A stone sickle brought on 21 June by Lajos Nagy was found in Hajdúböszörmény (Beșermenii), and a stone chisel from Mr Sándor Tártsy remained unlocated.⁵³ The other examples donated by Sándor Bölöni Jr and Lajos Gyalokay Jr (fragments of stone, bone, and flint tools) may have resulted from active excavations and not just random finds. They were both active members and had quite a rich activity, especially in the first years, a fact also mentioned in the minutes of the official meetings.⁵⁴ They used to make excursions through different county areas and gradually collect archaeological material. They started their activity within the Society from a very young age, from their teen years, thus being able to spend more time in the field looking for potential finds.⁵⁵ Coming from wealthy families, they had access to large amounts of private resources to support their cultural interests. For example, Sándor Bölöni Jr seems to have belonged to an important family originally from the Szekler region, coming from Belin or Nagybölöni village (Trei Scaune County).⁵⁶ On the paternal line, his ancestors could be identified even in the fifteenth century, the oldest being a certain Illés.⁵⁷ His seventeenth-century successor, Gáspár, was chancellor to the Transylvanian prince Gabriel Báthory (1608–1613).⁵⁸ They

⁵¹ Hochhauser 2010, 141.

⁵² Pașca 2008, 85.

⁵³ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, f. 16.

⁵⁴ Lakatos-Balla 2009, 221.

⁵⁵ If the dates are to be believed, Bölöni Sándor would have been born in 1854 and Lajos Gyalokay Jr in 1855. We managed to identify more information about Bölöni: in the minutes of the Society's meeting on April 30, 1896, at point number 21, his unfortunate death was recorded, a fact also confirmed by the scientific journal *Archaeologiai Értesítő* from the same year. He did not manage to live that long, passing away on April 15 at the age of 41–42; Halaváts 1896, 446; Lakatos-Balla 2009, 298.

⁵⁶ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 852: there is still a copy of the obituary notice that belonged to his father, who died on 13 June 13 1892. His body was transported to the town of Ugra after the religious services (the family being Protestant) to be buried there.

⁵⁷ Reiszig 1901, 623.

⁵⁸ Pálmay 1901, 90.

emigrated over the years, some of their genetic branches reaching the areas of Sălaj and Bihor. The family coat of arms represented an armed folded hand with a sword and a figure of a beheaded Turk or Mongol on top, the entire shield stamped with a knight's helmet surmounted by a golden star.⁵⁹

Bronze Artifacts

Inv. no.	Date of entry	Donor	Description	Observations
62	5 Jan.	Károly Des Echerolles	Bronze axe.	Discovered in Sătmar county, Idoba village. Four other similar pieces were found in the same area.
63	5 Jan.	Károly Des Echerolles	Bronze brooch.	The clasp was broken.
64	5 Jan.	Károly Des Echerolles	Fragment of a bronze brooch.	–
65	5 Jan.	Károly Des Echerolles	Bronze needle.	–
70	5 Jan.	Lajos Gyalokay Jr	Bronze sickle	Gyapoly
74–75	5 Jan.	Lajos Gyalokay Jr	Bronze bracelet.	Two pieces.
99	7 Jan.	Sándor Bölöni Jr	Bronze sickle.	Szentspéterszeg
100	7 Jan.	Sándor Bölöni Jr	Bronze bracelet.	Ugra
101	7 Jan.	Sándor Bölöni Jr	Bronze sickle.	Ugra
102	7 Jan.	Sándor Bölöni Jr	Bronze bracelet.	Ugra
103	7 Jan.	Sándor Bölöni Jr	Bronze ring/bracelet.	Szentspéterszeg

Tab. 6. List of bronze artifacts that entered the collection in 1873.

As in the case of the Neolithic objects, the two young members of the Society made the largest contribution. Out of twelve, eight donations came from them, the only exceptions coming from the nobleman Károly Des Echerolles (1818–1904) in the form of clothing accessories and an axe.⁶⁰ Born in Agen and belonging to a noble family that emigrated from France, following the violent events created by the revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, they first moved to Vienna and then settled in Oradea.⁶¹ Marrying one of the heiresses of the Kruspér family, the emperor granted him the official approval to use the noble title Des Echerolles-Kruspér of Bihor on 21 July 1876.⁶² This family had a fundamental role in supporting the Society of Archaeology throughout its first decades by donating several pieces of furniture and objects from their private collections and contributing with sums of money.⁶³ Reviewing the information regarding their provenance, it seems that

⁵⁹ Reiszig 1901, 622.

⁶⁰ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, f. 15.

⁶¹ Virág 2017.

⁶² Kempelen 1912.

⁶³ Sarca 2004–2006, 354, 358.

most of the artifacts were found in villages within the county. The only exception was the bronze axe from Sătmar, similar to other pieces discovered there.

Porcelain Artifacts

Inv. no.	Date of entry	Donor	Description	Observations
80	6 Jan.	Etelka Középesy	Porcelain soup bowl with lid.	–
81	6 Jan.	Etelka Középesy	Porcelain fruit bowl.	–
82	6 Jan.	Etelka Középesy	Porcelain jug with a lid which has a rose drawn in the middle.	–
83–84	6 Jan.	Etelka Középesy	Porcelain plates	Two.
86–87	6 Jan.	Etelka Középesy	Porcelain containers.	... Középesy Gyu 1899.

Tab. 7. List of porcelain objects that entered the collection in 1873.

The future custodian's sister, Etelka Középesy, donated several pieces to the Society, most likely used in her home. Considering that each served a specific culinary purpose (fruit bowl, jug, plates, containers), it can be suggested that they were part of a set or, at least, they were similar. Because no further stylistic details have been provided, they cannot be identified easily, forcing us to simply speculate as to their provenance. Within the collections of the History Department, several objects would fit at least typologically or quantitatively, but we cannot say for sure that they would have come from Ms Etelka.

Clay Artifacts

Inv. no.	Date of entry	Donor	Description	Observations
72	5 Jan.	Lajos Gyalokay Jr	Clay pot with a brown handle.	Sz. János
96	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Clay pot.	–
98	5 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Clay pot.	–
104	5 Jan.	Sándor Bölöni Jr	Clay pot.	Ugra
105	5 Jan.	Sándor Bölöni Jr	Clay pot.	Ugra
106	5 Jan.	Sándor Bölöni Jr	Clay pot.	Diószeg
119	5 May	Sándor Bölöni Jr	Clay pot.	Oradea. Salca district (Csillagváros).

Tab. 8. List of clay artifacts that entered the collection in 1873.

Much cannot be said about this category because relevant information regarding cultural influences or chronological location does not exist. Except for some geographical clarifications about the place of discovery, the name, and the date, all seven examples were simply added to the list. They were likely identified and recognized by the specialists of the time; unfortunately, they did not bother to provide a detailed description of the artifacts.

However, some simple archaeological speculations can be made: those brought by Sándor Bölöni Jr and Lajos Gyalokay Jr may have come from a more distant era (prehistoric or ancient), considering that other bronze or stone pieces were brought from the same places, whereas the two pots from Tivadar Lónyai came from his collection.

Miscellaneous Artifacts

Inv. no.	Date of entry	Donor	Description	Observations
55	5 Jan.	Károly Des Echerolles	Mold for gingerbread. Image of a man and a woman.	–
56	5 Jan.	Károly Des Echerolles	Gingerbread mold that resembles a heart.	–
57	5 Jan.	Károly Des Echerolles	Gingerbread mold, on one side a shape of a boot, on the other a knight on a hoarse.	–
58	5 Jan.	Károly Des Echerolles	Gingerbread mold, one side a trumpet and on the other a pair of scissors.	–
59	5 Jan.	Károly Des Echerolles	Gingerbread mold in the shape of a little baby.	–
60	5 Jan.	Károly Des Echerolles	Gingerbread mold.	–
61	5 Jan.	Károly Des Echerolles	Gingerbread mold.	–
66	5 Jan.	Károly Des Echerolles	Gingerbread mold with the image of a woman holding a broom.	–
67	5 Jan.	Károly Des Echerolles	Gingerbread mold, on one side swaddling clothes with three pins, and on the other scissors.	–
71	5 Jan.	Lajos Gyalokay Jr	Hammer	Gyapoly
73	5 Jan.	Lajos Gyalokay Jr	Riding instrument (harness) ornated with yellow copper in a crescent shape.	Csatár
76	6 Jan.	Wife of Mr Békeffy	Waffle mold from 1764.	–
78	6 Jan.	Widow of Mr Ignác Beliczay (Lila)	Purple scarf with floral decorations.	–
79	6 Jan.	Widow of Mr Ignác Beliczay (Lila)	Purple apron decorated with flowers	–
88	6 Jan.	Etelka Középesy	Straw hat with a wide brim.	–
89	6 Jan.	Gyula Középesy	Iron key.	Five pieces.
91	6 Jan.	Gyula Középesy	Iron key.	–
92	6 Jan.	Gyula Középesy	Iron key.	–
93	6 Jan.	Gyula Középesy	Iron key.	–
94	6 Jan.	Gyula Középesy	Iron key.	–
95	6 Jan.	Gyula Középesy	Iron key.	–
97	7 Jan.	Tivadar Lónyai	Iron spur.	–
108	7 Jan.	-	Corset.	–

Inv. no.	Date of entry	Donor	Description	Observations
109	7 Jan.	-	Silver pin decorated with pearls and blue/red stones.	-
111	10 March	Wife of Mr Rác	Hungarian officer's military waistcoat, 1848.	-
112	10 March	Wife of Mr Rác	19 th century comb.	-
113	10 March	Wife of Mr Rác	19 th century comb.	-
115	15 April	Stefán Bertalan	Iron ring.	It was discovered in Oradea near the large cemetery in Newtown district (Ujváros).
100	-	Gyula Középesy	Iron key.	Different shapes.
101	-	Gyula Középesy	Iron key.	Different shapes.
102	-	Gyula Középesy	Iron key.	Different shapes.
103	-	Gyula Középesy	Iron key.	Different shapes.

Tab. 9. List of miscellaneous objects that entered the collection in 1873.

A final group, more like a conglomerate than a distinct thematic category, is represented by random objects. Throughout 1873, the Society's representatives accepted various artifacts that did not belong to a precise historical stage or a well-defined cultural and artistic space. Most of them were old heirlooms from various private citizens who decided to part with them to give specialists a chance to study and use them most productively. Since not much significant data about their provenance and age was indicated in their case, they could not be included in the other categories outlined above. The patrimonial importance of the approximately 32 objects is based on their diversity and the donors who contributed individually. Thus, a first subcategory would be that of kitchenware or cutlery: the same Károly Des Echerolles mentioned earlier brought a total of nine gingerbread molds, each with a unique appearance, and Mr Békeffy's wife brought in a waffle maker from 1764, the date being written on the artifact.⁶⁴ Based on the description of the shapes on the instruments, some can even be found in the current inventory.⁶⁵ There are also several examples of clothing accessories, including some textiles from the nineteenth century: a woman's corset, a purple handkerchief and apron with floral ornaments, a straw hat and a Hungarian officer's military waistcoat from the 1848 revolution donated by

⁶⁴ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, f. 15.

⁶⁵ Several were used in the main exhibition in room 20 on the first floor including some stylistically similar patterns to what was described in the donations (55–56) from Echerolles. We cannot say for sure, that future research will clarify the situation.

Mr Rácz's wife.⁶⁶ A set of about five iron keys specified as being of various shapes was brought in by Gyula Középesy.⁶⁷ Last but not least, a few isolated archaeological discoveries were also reported: an iron ring brought by Mr Bertalan Stefán found near the large cemetery of Oradea in the Ujváros district,⁶⁸ a hammer and a piece of harness decorated with yellow copper brought from the villages of Gyapoli and Csátár and an unspecified iron spur having belonged to Tivadar Lónyai.⁶⁹

Donor profiles, provenance aspects, and comparative statistical characteristics

Donor	Date	No. of entries	Original inv. no.
József Dudek	3 Jan.	1	1
Wife of Péter Mészáros	4 Jan.	1	2
Widow of Vinczé Bogdándy	5 Jan.	4	3, 4, 5, 6
Jozefa Széher	5 Jan.	12	7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18
Tivadar Lónyai	5 Jan.	36	19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40–41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54
	7 Jan.	3	96, 97, 98
Károly Des Echerolles	5 Jan.	15	55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69
Lajos Gyalokay Jr	5 Jan.	5	70, 71, 72, 73, 74–75
	7 May	3	120, 121, 122
Wife of Mr Békeffy	6 Jan.	2 (one annulled, one empty)	76, 77
Widow of Mr Ignác Beliczay (Lila)	6 Jan.	2	78, 79
Etelka Középesy	6 Jan.	7	80, 81, 82, 83–84, 85, 86–87, 88
Gyula Középesy	6 Jan.	7 (one annulled, one empty)	89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95
	unspecified	4	(renamed 100, 101, 102, 103)
Sándor Bölöni Jr	7 Jan.	8	99, 100, 1001, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106
	7 May	4	116, 117, 118, 119

⁶⁶ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, f. 15: also from her, two combs were mentioned which were described as being *contemporary*, meaning from the nineteenth century.

⁶⁷ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, f. 16: concerning this donation, it seems that somewhere at the end of the century, the donor intervened in the register, reorganizing his goods giving them other completely new identification numbers. They are repeated again at the end of the list written in red.

⁶⁸ It is most likely the current Rulikovski cemetery, but the term, “Big Cemetery” or *Nagy Temető* was also used for the old Olosig cemetery which does not exist anymore: Culiciu 2022.

⁶⁹ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, ff. 15–16.

Donor	Date	No. of entries	Original inv. no.
Sándor Tárczy	7 Jan.	1	107
Unknown	7 Jan.	2	108, 109
Sándor Kolozsvári	8 Jan.	0	110
Wife of Mr Rácz	10 March	3	111, 112, 113
Wife of Mr Andor Beöthy	10 March	1	114
Bertalan Stefán	15 April	1	115
Lajos Nagy	21 June	1	123

Tab. 10. Statistical analysis of artifacts that entered the collection by donors, 1873.

About 18 separate donors have been identified. However, there is one exception: a women's corset and a pearl-decorated silver pin entered the collection on 7 January, but the original owner was not specified.⁷⁰ Consulting one of the oldest original lists of members from 1875, only six of them were part of the Society: Tivadar Lónyai was a founding member, Sándor Tárczy, Károly Des Echerolles, Lajos Gyalokay Jr and Bölöni Sándor Jr were all regular members and last but not least, Gyula Középesy was an associate.⁷¹ The rest seem to have been ordinary citizens or private individuals who most likely wanted to participate with their small contributions. The same pattern can be identified a year prior, in 1872, when many more donors were present in the ledger. Out of 48, only 15 were members (founding, regular or associate), the majority not having any ties with the Society.⁷² Public interest seemed to have visibly impacted the flow of items that entered the collections, at least in the first two years. Therefore, it cannot be said that the Society relied solely on the help of its members to fill in the cupboards and cabinets; on the contrary, the local community was prepared to offer its support in this endeavor. That being said, the statistics demonstrate the opposite in terms of quantity and the number of artifacts donated by each person. Those who were very much involved within the organization were the ones who provided the lion's share of the help. The same nobleman Tivadar Lónyai (1838–1877) gave the most to the Society in 1873, approximately 39 pieces, a lot of them originating from the Italian peninsula; he was a grandson of Johann Maria de Frimont,⁷³ count of Palota and seems to have inclined to Roman history and for antiquities in general, with many of his artifacts originating from that part of Europe. He donated similar pieces during the previous year, namely eight – probably ancient – clay pots and a Roman bronze oil lamp.⁷⁴ The trend of the time was heavily inclined towards exotic pieces; therefore, nobles would try to acquire objects from distant places, like Egypt or Greece. Then came Des Echerolles with his fifteen objects and Sándor Bölöni Jr with his twelve. The rest of

⁷⁰ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, f. 16.

⁷¹ SJBh AN, SAIO, file no. 2, f. 8.

⁷² Ciorba 2023, 258–259.

⁷³ Dukrét 2005, 128.

⁷⁴ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, f. 6.

the donors usually donated between one and five objects.⁷⁵ Although they may seem like minute endowments, together, they illustrate the common interest of the people.

It is interesting to note that, in 1873, eight donors were women but not necessarily members of the organization. Three of them were directly mentioned: Etelka Középesy,⁷⁶ Ignácz Beliczay's widow Lila, and Jozefa Széher, who donated several coins.⁷⁷ Unfortunately for the rest, their first names were not written down, for in the case of the Hungarian language, women were mostly identified by their men's names with a specific terminology at the end of the word like "né," mentioning the personal name only if they were unmarried. The objects offered by the ladies ranged from coins, clothing, weapons and crockery. A more interesting and quite old one was a waffle maker from 1764 given by Mr Békkefy's wife.⁷⁸ Most can be considered household items, but at least some have historical value. The presence of so many women quite clearly suggests that the cultural circles of Oradea were open to both sexes. Furthermore, the importance of national heritage and preserving objects from the past was equally understood and accepted by some individuals' wives and widows; needless to say, they were very present and active within the movement. Moreover, there is a sharp increase in the number of women participating in the trend, at least nominally, compared with 1872, when only two women were identified.⁷⁹

As was the case in the previous year, all donations from a single person were registered on the same day, the only exceptions being those of Tivadar Lónyai, who donated on 5 and 7 January, and in the case of Sándor Bölöni Jr, where the entries were reported on 7 January and 7 May.

Additional information regarding the object's provenance was not written down, and each was only briefly described. Even if it was a simple donation from a private person, the manner and place of the discovery were sometimes provided. This was the case of the iron armor donated by Józef Dudek, a piece discovered in Oradea somewhere around the eastern gate of the castle during the digging of a well. The same was for a piece of iron chainmail from Cisnădioara given by Károly Des Echerolles or a bronze axe from Doba village in Sătmar county.⁸⁰ In the latter case, four similar pieces discovered in the same area were mentioned, probably part of a larger deposit. For most of the artifacts brought by Sándor Bölöni Jr (bronze objects or clay pots), the place of discovery was underlined, mentioning the villages of Sânpetru, Ugra, Diosig, Sântion, Csátár, Gyapoly and even Oradea. Of course, the list did not specify any large-scale scientific activity in the area or an uncovered complex, but the typological and chronological similarities of the artifacts would indicate some connection between them. Nonetheless, the scientific contributions of Mr Bölöni in the field of historical research are well known, having numerous articles on the subject.⁸¹ Many of them shed some light on the local finds, such as the prehistoric pieces

⁷⁵ The only exception was Jozefa Széher who gave a total of 12, but they were all coins.

⁷⁶ "Középesy E.," Genealogy Directory. She was the sister of Mr Gyula Középesy (who was later a custodian at the museum) and lived between 1847 and 1937.

⁷⁷ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, ff. 13, 15–16.

⁷⁸ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, f. 15.

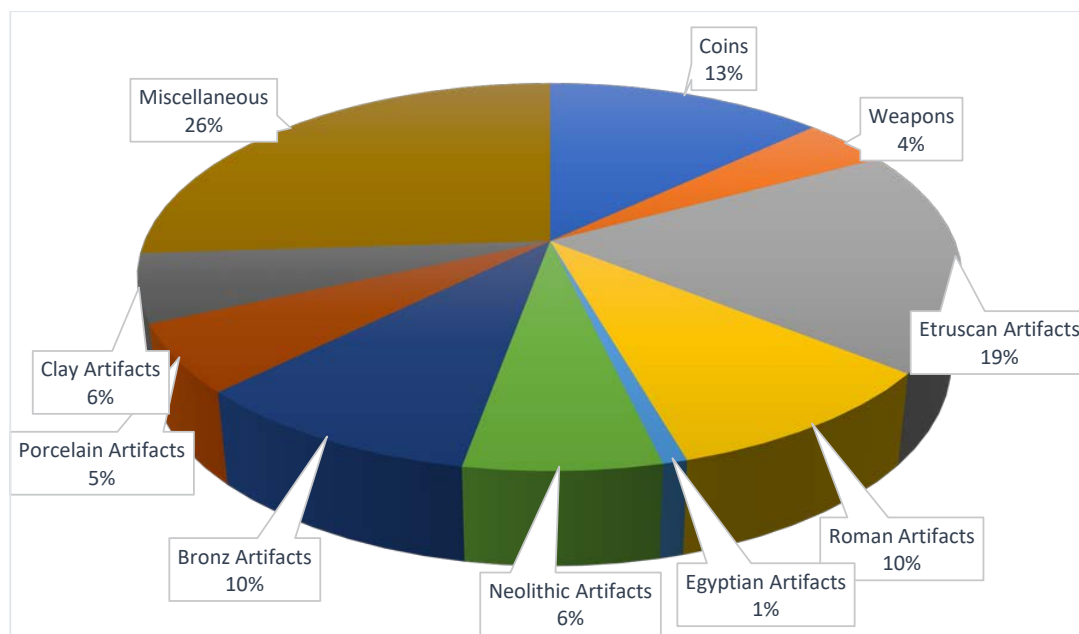
⁷⁹ Ciorba 2023, 259.

⁸⁰ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, ff. 13, 15.

⁸¹ Lakatos-Balla 2009, 212.

uncovered from Salca.⁸² In his studies, Mr Bölöni details the excavations and findings to better disseminate the information within the scientific community of the time.

Collection structure, composition, and statistics



Graph. 1. Typological analysis of the artifacts from the collection of 1873.

Statistically, a significant decrease can be spotted in the number of artifacts that entered the ledger in our year of question and the previous year. In a span of just five months, between August and December, around 490 artifacts initially entered the ledgers.⁸³ Meanwhile, in 1873 between January and June, only 125 were brought in, proving quite clearly that donations were a volatile method of acquiring artifacts. Naturally, people did not always step forward to give away their belongings, creating these blank spaces of time for the Society when it did not do much in terms of activity. In 1873, no new pieces were identified after 21 June, when the list suddenly stopped.⁸⁴ As stated earlier, the association's primary purpose was to represent the area's unique past through specific local artifacts. The thematic composition of the collection paints a different picture, more complex and open to a broader definition of what type of history was represented. In 1872, for example, over eighty percent of the objects were medals and coins.⁸⁵ In terms of their provenance, they came from all around the world, not just Hungary and the empire. Naturally, some were found accidentally by different people, but most were part of private collections. The numbers grew so rapidly and reached such a large scale that, by 1873, the council decided to start

⁸² Bölöni 1875b, 8–9.

⁸³ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, ff. 1–12.

⁸⁴ Colecția MȚCO, CDII, inv. 1882, f. 16.

⁸⁵ Ciorba 2023, 261.

publishing the findings in specialized journals, some of them in the field of numismatics.⁸⁶ A mere ten percent of artifacts can be attributed vaguely to the local landscape (bronze, iron, and clay pottery), part of several excavations or dig sites.⁸⁷ Things somewhat changed the following year, when we see a sharp decrease in coins and medals, only twelve were mentioned, and a significant increase in other types of items. Though thirty percent of them have no direct connection to the people or the land, especially the Etruscan, Egyptian, and Roman artifacts, they were all accepted nonetheless. The archaeological findings improved in 1873, representing about twenty-two percent thanks to the work of both Lajos Gyalokay Jr and Sándor Bölöni Jr. Archeology as a science was still relatively new, and so most of the excavations were done promptly so that the objects could be unearthed and stored. Rich places full of artifacts dating back to the prehistoric age were located both in and around Oradea, with the two young members, fondly nicknamed by the other senior colleagues as “Apostoles of the Society,”⁸⁸ traveling across the county in search of these invaluable items

These statistics indicate that the organization was still in its infancy in 1873, and its primary objective was to create an initial collection indistinguishable in terms of provenance or thematic categories. They were in no position to refuse anything from the donors, particularly if the pieces were freely given. That is why the ledger can be considered rather rudimentary, not having a clear distinction between the artifacts and all of them just being jotted down into one continuous list. Furthermore, for all intended purposes, the first few months were an experiment to see the public’s reaction to such a project and if they manifested any visible interest.⁸⁹ Fortunately, the results were somewhat positive, and they emboldened the members to pursue different research directions. As a general strategy, rather than just focusing on Hungarian history, they chose to have a much broader understanding of history and the past, at least for the first few years.

Conclusions

The data acquired through the analysis of the ledger from 1873 reveals several key aspects of the Society, its goals, and its overall management strategy. The desired result of representing the unique history of the county and city in a public effort to boost civic cohesion was gradually accomplished but with moderate success. Thanks to the specific social situation the Hungarians found themselves in during the second half of the nineteenth century, there was general interest in history and archaeological research. Senior members participated actively both in the field and through consistent individual donations. This was done not out of a desire for personal benefit or publicity but to help lay the foundation of an institution representing an entire group of people. These actions can be interpreted as local patriotism or civic duty. Moreover, the presence of women donors illustrates that cultural circles were open to everyone, and the relationship between the institution and the local population was dynamic and somewhat inclusive. Women were just as interested in showing their support as men were. Although a sharp decrease in quantity was registered compared to the previous year, the general collection was enhanced with a very diverse

⁸⁶ Lakatos-Balla 2009, 222.

⁸⁷ Ciorba 2023, 263–264.

⁸⁸ Lakatos-Balla 2009, 221.

⁸⁹ Lakatos-Balla 2009, 221.

plethora of objects. The type of artifacts that entered the collection demonstrates that the institution was still developing but showed great promise for future endeavors. Compared to 1872, when most items were just coins, in 1873, the focus shifted to more specific ones like garments, weapons, household objects, and pottery. In terms of quality, there was an improvement and an expansion into different areas of interest. The provenance of the artifacts underlines two important details regarding both the donors and the recipient. Firstly, the list proves that, by that time, many archaeological sites were starting to appear not only in Oradea but all across the county, and they were even sought after by the experts, prehistory being a popular new subject. The fact that the Society brought and studied the items suggests the intent to include the whole region. Secondly, even if they were considered foreign or exotic, coming from various local noblemen who most certainly acquired them elsewhere, they were also accepted so that the collection could be enriched, albeit in a disorganized way. All of this points to a straightforward project designed by its makers to improve over time and adapt to subsequent necessities, but which had a long way to go regarding methodology and expertise. Later records would become much more complex and arranged in a more well-defined manner. For its time, the 1873 ledger proves that the Society of Archaeology and History was not just a failed attempt by the authorities to profit from vague antiques but a stepping stone towards a future museum that would guard the heritage of an entire community.

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Fig. 1. Sándor Bölöni (1854–1896), one of the first museum custodians and an important donor in the first years (SJBh AN, SAIO, 105; photo by Attila Lakatos-Balla).



Fig. 2. Sándor Kolozsvári (1840–1922), lawyer and university professor in Cluj-Napoca, corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and possibly one of the first donors of the Society (https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kolozsvári_Sándor).



Fig. 3. Possible photograph of Gyula Középesy – one of the two gentlemen in the center; taken in 1911 by Venzel Suchi during an excavation in the Oradea citadel coordinated by Jenő Gyalokay (Colecția MȚCO, CF, no. 243/3; photo by Doina Gabriela Ananie).

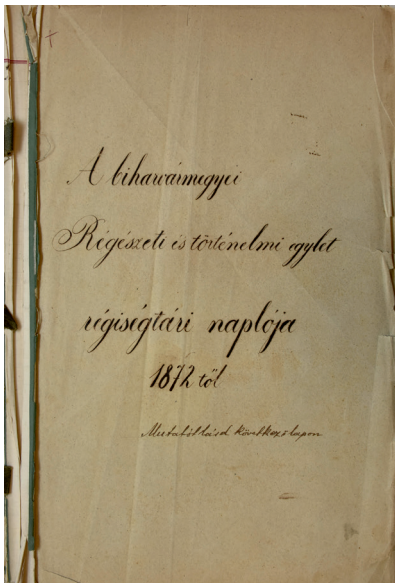


Fig. 4. Title page of the oldest inventory ledger used by the Society between 1872 and 1885 (Colecția MȚCO, CDII, no. 1882; photo by Alexandru Szabó).

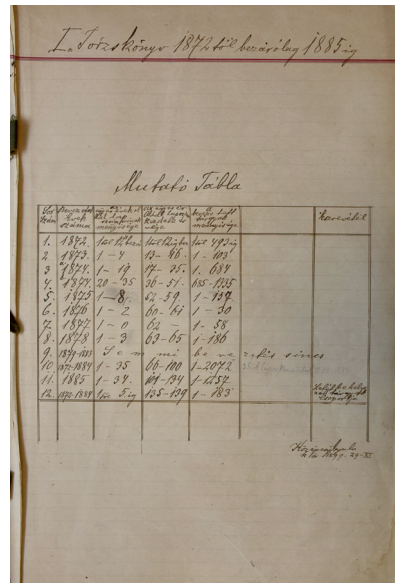


Fig. 5. Table of contents made years later by Gyula Középesy after reviewing the collections. Pages 13 to 16 refer to the year 1873 (Colecția MȚCO, CDII, no. 1882; photo by Alexandru Szabó).

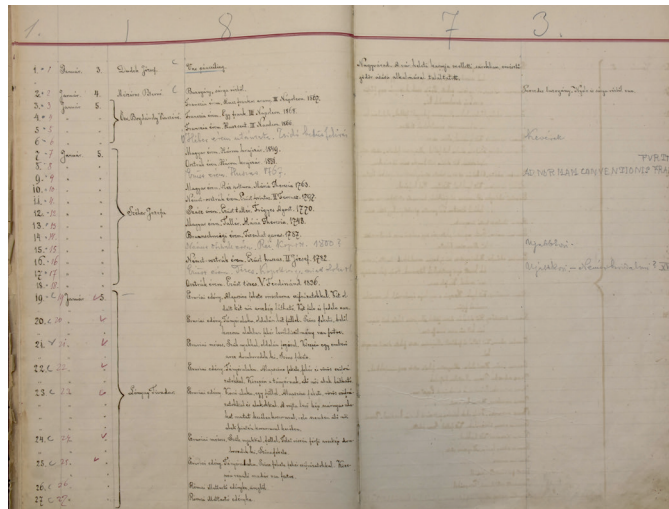


Fig. 6. First page of the 1873 inventory of the Society of Archaeology and History of Oradea (Colecția MȚCO, CDII, no. 1882, fol. 12; photo by Alexandru Szabó).

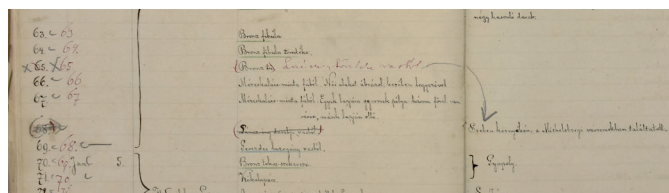


Fig. 7. Example of later changes made to the original text by Gyula Középesy after reviewing the inventory. The writing in pencil and red color belongs to him; objects that were missing or not found were marked and struck out (Colecția MȚCO, CDII, no. 1882, fol. 15; photo by Alexandru Szabó).



Fig. 8. Possible “dagger” donated by Stefánia Beöthy from the family’s private collection. (Colecția MȚCO, CV, no. 6055; photo by Lucian Mărcușiu).



Fig. 9. Heart-shaped wooden gingerbread mold from 1769 representing a couple; possible donation by Károly Des Echerolles (Colecția MȚCO, CV, inv. 1357; photo by Lucian Mărcușiu).



Fig. 10. Eighteenth-century iron waffle mold; a possible donation made by Károly Des Echerolles (Colecția MȚCO, CV, inv. 8273; photo by Lucian Mărcușiu).



Fig. 11. Roman glass perfume container donated by Tivadar Lónyai on 5 January, 1873 (Colecția MȚCO, CV, no. 6715; photo by Lucian Mărcușiu).



Fig. 12. Bronze bracelet discovered in Ugra by Sándor Bölöni and donated to the Society on 7 January (Colecția MȚCO, CV, no. 7946; photo by Lucian Mărcușiu).

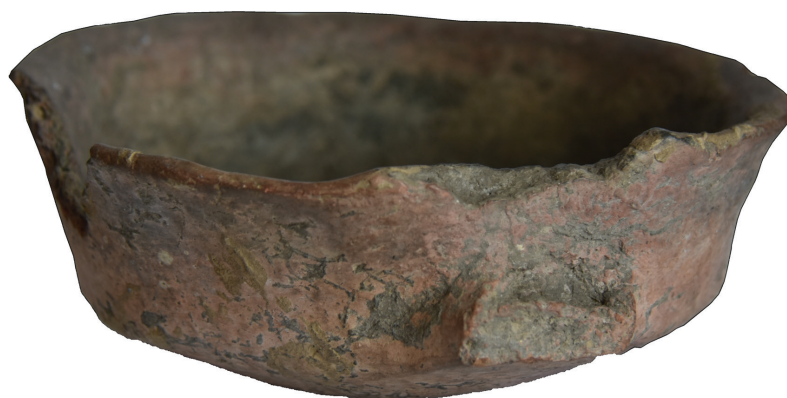


Fig. 13. Clay pot discovered in Ugra by Sándor Bölöni and donated to the Society on 7 January (Colecția MȚCO, CV, no. 8397; photo by Lucian Mărcușiu).

THE UNSEEN FACE OF A NATIONAL HOLIDAY FROM THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GREATER ROMANIA

LUCIAN TURCU*

Abstract: The present study sheds light on the preparations for the anniversary of the first centenary of Avram Iancu's birth, which occurred 100 years prior. The projects announced on that occasion, the key individuals involved, and how the government authorities at that time handled the preparations for the event were all taken into account. New information from archival sources was presented and analyzed for the first time, leading to the formulation of a series of key ideas and the measures that were ultimately implemented. The cultural and ideological stakes of the national holiday were not overlooked: the aim was to foster unity and solidity in the Romanian nation, which had, in fact, been reunited relatively recently within the borders of a single national state.

Keywords: ASTRA, national holiday, public monuments, Alexandru Lapedatu, the royal family

Rezumat: Prezentul studiu pune în lumină pregătirile pentru aniversarea primului centenar de la nașterea lui Avram Iancu în urmă cu 100 de ani. S-au avut în vedere proiectele formulate cu acea ocazie de principalele persoane implicate, dar și modul în care autoritățile guvernamentale de la acea vreme au gestionat pregătirea evenimentului. Au fost prezentate și analizate pentru prima dată informații din surse arhivistice, rezultând planurile inițiale care au fost formulate, dar și măsurile care au fost în final implementate. Nu a fost trecută cu vederea miza culturală și ideologică a sărbătorii naționale: aceea de a conferi unitate și soliditate națiunii române reunite nu de mult în hotarele unui singur stat național.

Cuvinte cheie: ASTRA, sărbătoare națională, monumente publice, Alexandru Lapedatu, familia regală

One day before Christmas Eve in 1923, a letter from the Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People (ASTRA) arrived at the address of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Arts in Bucharest. The respective letter informed the high government institution of ASTRA's intention to "commemorate one hundred years since the birth of our national hero, Avram IANCU."¹ It was by no means a spur-of-the-moment decision, as the document in question indicates. The anniversary had actually been planned since 1921, the year in which the Association had reached 6 decades of existence and, moreover, its legal personality had been recognized, thus becoming an official part of the cultural infrastructure of Greater Romania.² Two locations were considered by the leadership of the Association at that time to be transformed into

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¹ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 1r.

² MO, no. 92/1921, 3576; Moga 2021, 38.

landmarks for the great centennial celebration: the house in Vidra that had belonged to the 1848 hero and his eternal resting place. In the case of the first location, a museum complex was to be set up within the former house of Avram Iancu, which was to remain “untouched as a historical monument and as the most precious museum object.”³ On either side of the house, a museum of the 1848–1849 period was to be built (destined to preserve all objects that “refer to the person of Avram Iancu and the era of 1848–9”⁴), in addition to a library and a “national house for the people of Vidra.” Regarding the second place of memory envisaged by the Association, the desire was for a “simple, lasting and dignified” monument to be erected “in the place of today’s cross.”⁵ In order to achieve these objectives, the Association had called on construction specialists, who had succeeded in establishing the outlines of the respective buildings. However, as expected, the funds available to the cultural organization were insufficient, with a shortage of 650,000 lei. This amount was requested by the leadership of ASTRA at that time, headed by Vasile Goldiș, from Alexandru Lapedatu, who was then the Minister of Religious Affairs and Arts and the President of the Historical Monuments Commission, Transylvania section.⁶ Considering the late date at which they were addressing the high dignitary and “wanting to begin their work as soon as possible,” the petitioners requested that the money be made available to them “as quickly as possible.”⁷

The phrase “we want to start working as soon as possible” raises several questions and doubts regarding the slowness or even the delay with which the ASTRA projects related to marking the centenary of Avram Iancu’s birth were put into practice. What is beyond any doubt today is the publicity made by the same Association for the future museum of the 1848 revolution, which was to be organized at Iancu’s residence in Vidra. The initial opportunity was provided by the semi-centenary of Avram Iancu’s death, planned for the fall of 1922. The appeal sent “to all Romanians” noted that the moment was fast approaching when 50 years would have passed since the death of the “King of the Apuseni Mountains and the leader of the Romanians during the turbulent years of 1848–1849,”⁸ and that in 1924, 100 years would have passed since his birth. The document issued at the time strongly emphasized that “These are precisely the opportunities for us to think ahead of time so as to organize a more dignified celebration.” Considering that Avram Iancu’s house in Vidra was owned by the Association, its management announced the intention to organize a museum there. This museum would collect, out of a sense of “primordial national duty,” “all the historical mementoes (...) that are still hidden in the houses of our worthy Romanians from all around, especially those of our brave *moți*; otherwise, God only knows whether or not these items would continue to be preserved.”⁹ This argument was meant to support the request and it did not hesitate to indicate the categories of artefacts that the donors had to consider. The items in question were “paintings, drawings, photographs,

³ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 1r.

⁴ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 1r.

⁵ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 1r.

⁶ Lapedatu 1998, 64, 201–202.

⁷ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 7r.

⁸ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 2r.

⁹ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 2r.

prints, engravings, etc.” depicting Avram Iancu and his main collaborators,¹⁰ “postcards” of the most important places of revolutionary events,¹¹ weapons,¹² costumes (including military uniforms), “miniature figurines representing groups of soldiers, scenes from camp life, skirmishes etc., made from plaster, wood, wax or other materials,” in addition to documents, such as: appeals, proclamations, newspapers, memos, notes, letters, “possibly even correspondence” or books, studies, maps “that referenced the historical past of the Apuseni Mountains, particularly the 1848–1849 movement.”¹³ Beyond these material testimonies, the creations of popular culture such as legends, stories, anecdotes, poems or various “versions about the great people of that time” were not overlooked.

The authors of the initiative were convinced that all these goods would acquire an added value if they were taken out of the shadows of oblivion and degradation and were “brought together, as a great common good, a true national treasure.”

The interest in highlighting these testimonies should be rather unsurprising. Certainly, the tribute to the personality of Avram Iancu in the context of his birth anniversary gave an impetus to the whole endeavor. However, the events of 1848–1849 were the central focus of the festivity of Transylvanian Romanians until 1918 and even in the period that followed. Seen as a starting point of a modern and coherent political program, which had at its center the Romanian nation,¹⁴ the rights and freedoms to which it aspired, the revolutionary events of the mid-nineteenth century became the source of inspiration for the Romanian political movement in the years that followed.¹⁵ Honoring the ideas and deeds of that time represented not only a duty of conscience for the descendants but also the reservoir that fueled Romanians’ resilience in the face of the attacks on their identity to which they were exposed in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the century that followed. Moreover, the protagonists of that time, led by Avram Iancu, had become true moral role models in their determination to restore the dignity of the Romanian nation and to grant it the place and role it rightfully deserved.

Given that Avram Iancu was such a remarkable figure in the pantheon of Transylvanian Romanians until the Great Union, and considering the vast array of myths and legends that accompanied his life, he could not be overlooked even after that date. Quite the contrary, actually. The anniversary of the centenary of his birth through a great national holiday could serve certain political and ideological purposes. In other words, marking the public space through celebratory festivities could contribute not only to the de-tensioning of the Romanian society after a period of calamities and privations that had been felt during the First World War, but it was also a chance for establishing solidarity among Romanians around certain national symbols, which could add substance to the political union of

¹⁰ Archpriest Simion Balint, tribunes Andreica, Clemente Aiudeanul, Buteanul, Dragos, Corcheș, Vlăduț, Simionuț, Ecaterina Varga, Pelagia Roșu and prefects Axente Sever, V. Moldovan are explicitly nominated; SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 2r.

¹¹ The localities of Abrud, Mărișel, Fântânele, Buceș, Aiud, Mihalț are expressly listed; SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 2r.

¹² Such as rifles, pistols, lances, cherry cannons, but also clubs, horns, trumpets, dobses, iron forks, scythes, daggers; SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 2r–v.

¹³ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 2v.

¹⁴ Bocșan 1994, 433–451.

¹⁵ Maior 1992, 31–64.

1918. Rightfully so, the declarations of union from Kishinev, Chernivtsi and Alba Iulia – though confirmed, with some territorial adjustments, at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919–1920 – were merely the starting point of an arduous and lengthy but absolutely necessary process: the unification.¹⁶ This involved employing certain strategies to make political institutions compatible and to improve governance techniques, given the plurality of existing traditions at the level of each province that came to make up the body of the young Romanian state.¹⁷ In other words, *unification* meant the transposition of the union into institutions and laws capable of giving coherence to and internally consolidating the new state construct. It is understood that the success of this political project – i.e., the “unitary national state” – directly depended on the success of this approach. As expected, different or even opposing visions were formulated by the Romanian leadership. Simply put, there were two main directions of action that were pursued: the first could be the consolidation around a centralizing pole and the expansion of the legislation, the customs of the exercise of governance from the “mother state” towards the “new arrivals.” This political paradigm was also encouraged by the fact that the unions proclaimed with the Kingdom of Romania from the spring to the winter of 1918 were made without the imposition of special conditions (with the exception of the Bessarabians, who renounced theirs as soon as the Transylvanians declared union without such special clauses).¹⁸ Moreover, the Romanians from those regions had rather limited experience in matters of governing.¹⁹ Thus, unification was synonymous with integration through absorption, with assimilation.²⁰ The second perspective focused more on regional nuances, individualizing local traditions, and proposed a staged approach to the parts that had come to compose the whole.²¹

If the year 1922 had been ennobled from the perspective of national festivity by the solemnity of the coronation of the sovereigns of Greater Romania in Alba Iulia,²² the centenary anniversary of the birth of Avram Iancu offered the chance to unite all Romanians around one of the most important historical figures in the service of the emancipation of Transylvanian Romanians in the nineteenth century. Moreover, it also responded to the need to complete the gallery of the heroes of Old Romania with the bright figures of the Romanians who, until then, had lived in the multinational empires. Regarding Avram Iancu, the path had been paved by the inclusion of the Romanian revolution in Transylvania as a subject in history textbooks in the Old Kingdom as early as the end of the nineteenth century.²³ But now, less than a decade after the Great Union, the hero of 1848 played, even from beyond the grave, a role at least as significant as the one assumed in the midst of the revolutionary events he lived through. It is about inspiring Romanians with strength and determination to defend what they had won, not without effort: national unity. Therefore, the political union of Romanians achieved not long before had to be cemented through their

¹⁶ Alexandrescu 1998, 59.

¹⁷ Niessen 2002, 231.

¹⁸ Lasch 2013, 223–227.

¹⁹ Vaida-Voevod 1995, 15, 24.

²⁰ Alexandrescu 1998, 67.

²¹ Radu 1998–1999, 15–27.

²² Turcu 2021, 151–177.

²³ Bolovan, Bolovan 2024, 29–31.

symbolic union, which was equally necessary in order to ensure the feeling of belonging to the same community of national destiny. In addition to these valences and ideological meanings of the celebratory manifestations of that period immediately following the Great Union, there was also the disappointment felt by a segment of the Transylvanian political elite in relation to the governance methods practiced by some politicians from the south of the Carpathians, or due to the late access of the Romanian National Party to the leadership positions of Greater Romania.²⁴ Thus, the celebration of the centenary of Avram Iancu's birth takes on new connotations. It is about the compensatory strategy of the political group then at the helm of the country (National Liberal Party) to reduce the feeling of frustration felt among the Transylvanian political elite and the Romanian electorate there. Honoring the memory of the most important hero for the Transylvanian Romanians from the last century, through cultural initiatives and events organized by the central political authorities, could foster a sense of integrating the past and the values of the provinces united in 1918 into the historical heritage and common identity of all Romanians. Additionally, this would enhance the image capital for the National Liberal Party. Therefore, it is rather unsurprising that the success of Avram Iancu's centenary celebration was given significant attention at the highest levels of political decision-making. Moreover, the energy and governmental resources invested in this regard are also notable. This was especially true given that the head of the Ministry was a refined intellectual, Transylvanian by origin, but deeply integrated into the network of cultural and educational institutions of the Old Kingdom: Alexandru Lapedatu, who, as we have seen, held the portfolio of the Religious Affairs and Arts at that time.

Assigned, according to his own confession, "in the summer of 1924" by the government of which he was a part, to deal with the organization of the celebrations for the centenary of the birth of Avram Iancu, Alexandru Lapedatu complied with the mission he received. He submitted the plans for ASTRA's proposed museum and the national house in Vidra to the architect of the Commission of Historical Monuments, Rudolf Wagner, for review.²⁵ Wagner, together with the Association's delegate, Ioan Banciu, inspected the land on which the desired edifices were to be built. "After studying the land on the spot, we found that the projects were suitable for the intended purpose from all points of view" was the assurance given by the architect Wagner, who drew up an estimate in the amount of 700,977 lei, an amount with which "the entire project could be built in a dignified and conscientious manner."²⁶ In mid-June 1924, the same Rudolf Wagner and Ioan Banciu were again in the area that would become the epicenter of the celebratory events, more precisely on Mount Găina and at Țebea, where the "necessary measurements of the *troița* (Găina) and the pergola from around the grave [of] Avram Iancu" were taken.²⁷ This time, the mission of the two was to ensure that the projected constructions were in harmony "both with the Renaissance style church and with the position of the place and the edifices that would be built later, the national house and the communal school."

²⁴ Scurtu, Buzatu 1999, 93–94.

²⁵ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 8r.

²⁶ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 9r–v.

²⁷ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 11r.

From the periodic reports that the architecture office submitted to the Ministry led by Alexandru Lapedatu, it appears that in the last decade of June, the construction site in Vidra was fully equipped with all the necessary materials (wood, gravel, sand, cement, boards, shingles etc.), given that the excavation phase of the works had been finished.²⁸ In those conditions, the person responsible for the smooth running of the construction site could optimistically declare that “the building of the house will go very quickly, so it will be ready in the first days of August.” For this reason, Rudolf Wagner asked Minister Lapedatu to take the necessary measures for the pieces of furniture and decorative objects to be prepared in time “so that at the end of August it will be ready to open.” By the time the report was drawn up, half of the initially estimated amount had been spent. The remaining 409,000 lei were needed for the building in Vidra. The *troița* on Mount Găina required 50,000 lei, if it was to be built of stone. If it was desired to use reinforced concrete, then the amount could reach up to 80,000 lei. Ultimately, the costs for the monumental ensemble from Țebea were to be approximately 340,000 lei.

The attention given to the success of the celebration was manifested at the highest level, namely that of the Romanian Crown. We should not be surprised by this, given that, on the occasion of the first visit of the royal couple in Transylvania in 1919, the area of Țara Moșilor was not forgotten by the high-ranking guests. The journey made on that occasion offered the residents of that area the chance to see King Ferdinand and Queen Maria face to face for the first time as sovereigns of Greater Romania. Moreover, the august visitors felt obliged to bring a tribute of honor to the one to whom popular tradition conferred the title of *crai*. It happened on 29 May, when the royal procession visited the church in Țebea, Avram Iancu's grave, during which Queen Maria laid a bouquet of flowers on the hero's resting place:

we went to a church where their great hero Avram Iancu is buried. I went to his grave where a memorial service was held. Peasants, peasants everywhere, thousands and thousands. In the churchyard, there is a huge oak that they call “Horia's oak.” They planted another oak tree there in order to mark our visit. Everywhere we are proclaimed as victors and liberators, our road really is a triumphal road. I really love this people. Next to their beloved Avram Iancu, a young officer who fell these days in the battles against the Bolsheviks is buried. And he died for the same cause, but this time it was a victorious cause,

the sovereign would note under the strong impression of what happened then.²⁹ Therefore, the presence of the sovereigns in the area convinced them of the veneration that the residents there had for their brave predecessor, which made honoring his memory on the centenary of his birth of great interest to the royal family. This is why the sovereign of the country requested the presence at the Royal Palace, on 1 July 1924, of the committee in charge of preparing the holiday.³⁰ The cabinet staff of Minister Lapedatu immediately sent the telegrams summoning the members of the respective committee. Some of those

²⁸ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 12r-v.

²⁹ See Maria, Regină a României 1996, 195–196.

³⁰ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 18r.

invited motivated their absence. This was the case of Bishop Nicolae Ivan from Cluj, who gave assurances that he would “submit to all the decisions that the committee would make and would participate with all my heart in the celebrations with the clergy and the people of the diocese whose son was the hero of the nation [namely, Avram Iancu].”³¹ The Metropolitan of Transylvania, Nicolae Bălan, also declined to attend the meeting, given that, at that time, he was on a canonical visit in the Geoagiu area.³² The list of absentees also included: General Alexandru Averescu,³³ Archbishop Gurie Grosu of Kishinev,³⁴ General Nicolae Petala,³⁵ the Greek-Catholic Metropolitan Vasile Suciuc from Blaj, who was at that time undergoing treatment at Băile Herculane³⁶ or Remus Pașca, deputy of the Câmpeni circle.³⁷ Under these conditions, the following figures attended the meeting called by King Ferdinand: Ion I. C. Brătianu, the prime minister of that time, General Constantin Coandă, Primate Miron Cristea, Metropolitan of Moldova Pimen Georgescu, Alexandru Constantinescu, Minister of Domains, General Gheorghe Mărdărăscu, Minister of War, Alexandru Lapedatu, Minister of Religious Affairs and Arts, Vasile Goldiș, President of ASTRA and Gheorghe Țițeica, Vice President of the Romanian Academy.³⁸

After assuring those present that he himself gave “full attention” to the commemorative celebrations of a national character, the sovereign was made aware of the plan devised by the decision-makers at the top of the Romanian state (Ion I. C. Brătianu, Alexandru Lapedatu) and by the president of ASTRA for the big holiday. On that date, the festivities were to take place in one of the following localities: (1) Vidra, where Avram Iancu’s parental home was to be restored, and a museum, a national house and a house for pilgrims were to be built, the responsibility for the smooth running of the works returning, as we have seen, to Rudolf Wagner and Ioan Banciu, the allocation of the sums necessary for the completion of these projects (in August, as expected then) falling under the responsibility of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Arts; (2) Țebea, where the grave of the national hero would be arranged and a commemorative plaque would be mounted, the place of worship in the immediate vicinity would also be restored, while the burial sites of those around the great deceased were to be “systematically organized;” (3) on Mount Găina, where a granite *troița* was to be placed, which was to be inaugurated on the occasion of the traditional popular celebration that was organized there annually. As a date for the celebrations, those present at the working meeting convened by the monarch agreed on the second half of August, more precisely “immediately after *Sfântă Mărie Mare*.”

The fact that the festivities dedicated to honoring the memory of Avram Iancu were scheduled immediately after the great feast dedicated to the Mother of God was not at all accidental. August 15/28 had become a highly meaningful date for the achievement of national unity. Avram Iancu lived and sacrificed himself for the national aspirations of the Romanians, and linking the anniversary of his birth to the most recent event in

³¹ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 19r.

³² SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 21r.

³³ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 22r.

³⁴ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 23r.

³⁵ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 25r.

³⁶ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 33r.

³⁷ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 35r.

³⁸ SJCj AN, file no. 1/1924, f. 37r-v.

Romanian history that fulfilled the national ideal legitimized a continuity between the spirit of sacrifice of the ancestors and the determination to struggle for the fulfilment of the highest goals of the contemporaries. Therefore, in the absence of the exact date of birth of the 1848 hero, the organizers of the event 100 years ago considered it appropriate to accompany the tribute to the personality of Avram Iancu with the still-fresh memories of the war for national unification. The fact that this symbolic transfusion was purposely taken into account is demonstrated by the fact that the redevelopment of the cemetery in Țebea was based on the decision to exhume the existing graves and to deposit the bones of 90 fallen soldiers in the First World War around Iancu's grave. This number was not a random one either, since out of the 90 graves transferred around Avram Iancu's, 18 were placed to his right and 72 to his left, thus forming the year of the honorable man's death (1872).

Moreover, the idea of refurbishing the tomb of Avram Iancu and the cemetery in Tebea had become a topic of interest since the beginning of the third decade of the last century, when ASTRA had taken the lead on the preparations for the commemoration, in 1922, of half a century since the death of the brave revolutionary. More precisely, in the summer of 1921, the local Orthodox priest, Pompiliu Piso, asked his superior, Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan, to take the necessary measures to prohibit burials "in the perimeter of Iancu's tomb in order to build a mausoleum for the great Romanian hero."³⁹ With the agreement of the high prelate from Sibiu, the burials near Iancu's grave were stopped, and the local church and civil authorities were asked to look for solutions for the displacement of the already existing graves. Despite the amount of energy invested in the preparation for the commemoration of the 50 years since the death of the Romanian hero, the celebration did not meet the expectations. The cause seems to have been the slow implementation of the plans around Iancu's birthplace and grave.⁴⁰ Regarding the latter, one of the careful observers of the era bitterly noted: "In the Țebea Mountains there is a mound with a forgotten cross. A modest cross, more modest than those of many mortals, whose names are not associated with any great deeds."⁴¹ Therefore, we should not be surprised by ASTRA's determination to rectify this state of affairs, by erecting a funeral monument worthy of the name of the eternalized one.

The establishment, during the same meeting convened by the sovereign, of the other two locations for the grand celebration at the end of August and the beginning of September was not a coincidence either. These are Cămpeni and Cluj. The first locality had been chosen due to the fact that it had been the place of Avram Iancu's education and had served him as a base for many of his revolutionary actions. Cluj was, however, taken into account for completely different reasons. Concretely, we must consider the strong cultural-ideological phenomenon after 1918, the purpose of which was to *romanize* (*româniza*) urban localities and symbolically mark the presence of the Romanian element in this type of habitat through a series of buildings/ representative monuments, such as places of worship, statues etc.⁴² Initiated by the Transylvanian provincial authorities (the Governing

³⁹ Lazăr 2005, 280.

⁴⁰ Lazăr 2005, 280–281.

⁴¹ Lazăr 2005, 283.

⁴² Livezeanu 1998, 19–29; Iuga 2010, 22–27.

Council) immediately after taking over the exercise of power, encouraged and then continued with even greater determination by the central authorities in Bucharest,⁴³ the effort to attract Romanians into the administrative-bureaucratic and educational apparatus of Transylvania, to encourage their establishment in urban localities or in regions where they were a minority (from a demographic point of view) represented the strategy for increasing the relevance of Romanians in relation to the other cohabiting ethnic groups.⁴⁴ Cluj had already been placed on such a trajectory through the role that had been conferred to the University of Cluj, with its “rebranding” as the *Universitatea Daciei Superioare*. Therefore, the attraction of young people to the city on the banks of the Someșul Mic River served both the purpose of increasing the Romanian presence in the city and the formation of an elite that could serve the institutions of the Romanian state with professionals in all fields. The decision made during the working meeting at the Cotroceni Palace was to erect an obelisk in the place where (in the near future, it was hoped) a statue of Avram Iancu would be placed. Such an initiative should not surprise us, considering that as early as 1921 the “Executive Committee for the statue of Avram Iancu” had been set up in Cluj under the presidency of General Nicolae Petala, the commander of the local VI Armed Corps, seconded by Professor Ioan Lupaș, a colleague of Minister Lapedatu at the University of Cluj.⁴⁵ Despite the sovereign’s support, the appeals to raise funds for the construction of the statue of Iancu in Cluj did not lead to the expected result. The project competition for the desired monument to be placed on the plateau in front of the Orthodox cathedral under construction did not satisfy the demands of the specially constituted jury for this aim, so it was necessary to repeat it and, implicitly, to postpone the inauguration of the statue of Avram Iancu in the most important urban center, in the heart of Transylvania.⁴⁶ This is how the compromise solution that we will discuss on another occasion was reached during the festivities of a century ago.

Another decision made (at the proposal of Vasile Goldiș) on the occasion of the working session at the Cotroceni Palace was to publish the monograph by Professor Silviu Dragomir concerning Avram Iancu at the expense of the Ministry.⁴⁷ It was decided that “a popular writing about him, featuring the most characteristic legends, would be printed in tens of thousands of copies, and the best and most accurate portrait of the Hero would be printed in 100,000 copies.”⁴⁸ The fact that more efficiency was needed in the organization of the event results from another proposal (also approved) by the same Vasile Goldiș to set up a smaller group to deal with the implementation of all the decided measures. The commission would include himself, as president of ASTRA, and the Minister of Religious Affairs and Arts, a delegate each from the Royal House, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of War (VII Army Corps), as well as “certain leaders from the Apuseni Mountains.” Ultimately, the final decision made on that occasion was that the two main organizers of the entire event (the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Arts and ASTRA, respectively) were

⁴³ Sora 2011, 351.

⁴⁴ Biró 1992, 480–490.

⁴⁵ Lazăr 2005, 219; Teodorescu 1998, 258.

⁴⁶ Teodorescu 1998, 259.

⁴⁷ Dragomir 1924, 135 p.

⁴⁸ The work of Ion Clopoșel, *Revoluția din 1918 și unirea Ardealului cu România*, Cluj, 1926, 175 pp. was published, therefore, after the celebration of the centenary.

to draw up a budget for the expenses necessary to implement all the projects circumscribed to the celebration of the centenary of the birth of Avram Iancu. The respective budget was to be brought to the attention of the Minister of Domains, Alexandru Constantinescu.

It goes without saying that this last decision, regarding the expenditure budget, became a priority for those in charge of carrying out the plans. The management of ASTRA was the one that made the expenditure proposals as follows:⁴⁹ 340,000 lei for the endowment of the museum and the other edifices to be built at Vidra de sus; 80,000 lei for the printing of Ion Clopoșel's work; 150,000 lei for printing the portrait of Avram Iancu; 80,000 lei for the *troița* on Mount Găina; the renovation works of the church in Țebea and the redevelopment of the cemetery near the place of worship would cost – according to the estimations – 100,000 lei; another 300,000 lei would be spent on setting up the pavilions (celebration halls) in Țebea, Vidra and Câmpeni, and Vasile Goldiș and those around him estimated that ASTRA would need 150,000 lei to “cover the expenses together with the organization of the celebrations.” In addition to the resulting total of 1,200,000 lei, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Arts was warned that “the sums needed for the royal and official meals in Țebea, Vidra, Câmpeni, Mount Găina and Cluj would be affected, as well as the sums necessary for feeding the folk guests from Țebea and Vidra.” Moreover, they would need to add the expenses generated by the excursions on Mount Găina and the celebration in Cluj. Therefore, another 800,000 lei would be needed for the smooth running of these events.

As expected, the amount of these expenses proposed by the Association's management was examined and rectified by the decision-makers from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Arts.⁵⁰ They were obviously reduced, considering that the sums needed for the folk meals in Țebea (100,000 lei) and in Vidra (170,000 lei) were overestimated. The amount of the first was cut by half, and the second was reduced to 70,000 lei. Moreover, the expenses for the transportation of the members of the ASTRA sections from Țebea to Câmpeni and Vidra were, in turn, reduced by 50,000 lei, on the grounds that “apart from the official persons, the Association cannot pay for the transport of those who will merely participate in the celebrations.” The amount thus saved (200,000 lei) was to be used for unforeseen expenses. When he was notified about these monetary corrections, Vasile Goldiș was urged to go to the *Banca Albina* in Sibiu to collect the sum of 1,000,000 lei on behalf of the organization he represented, which he had to spend according to the work plan, all expenses to be made in accordance with the state accounting law.

Challenging, yet loaded with multiple stakes. This is how the efforts to prepare, in the laboratories of the government bureaucracy, the anniversary of the first centenary of the birth of Avram Iancu can be characterized. Various ideas and initiatives, personal ambitions and interests, cultural strategies and ideological elements – all converged in the months preceding the great national holiday, reflecting the significance of the hero of 1848 in the context of the national unity achieved seven decades after the revolution he led. His legacy inspired strength and vivacity to the sense of unity of the Romanians who got to live the ideal that the brave fighter and those of his time could only dream of. However, behind the central figure of the celebration 100 years ago were, as we have seen, the decision-makers of

⁴⁹ SJCj AN, file no. 2/1924, f. 1r.

⁵⁰ SJCj AN, file no. 2/1924, f. 11r.

that time, who meticulously planned every detail of the grand national show. Other ideas and facts on this subject will be discussed in a future study.

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HUNGARIAN PRISONERS IN THE ROMANIAN GATEWAY TO THE SOVIET CAMP EMPIRE. ADDITIONS TO THE HISTORY OF PRISON CAMP NO. 176 IN FOCȘANI IN THE LIGHT OF ARCHIVAL AND ORAL HISTORY SOURCES

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Abstract: The prison camp No. 176, in Focșani was one of the largest Soviet camps in Eastern Europe, from 1944 to 1948. From the fall of 1944 until the summer of 1946 this camp functioned as a sorting and transit camp for Hungarian, German and even Romanian prisoners, both military and civilian, who were brought in freight trains from Romania and Hungary, occupied by Red Army troops, and after sorting were loaded into cattle railway cars and transported to labor camps in the USSR. In the period after the summer of 1946, the camp also functioned for the sorting and repatriation of prisoners returned from the USSR. In this study, using Romanian and Soviet archival sources, translated into Romanian and published in Romania, as well as interviews with survivors, the authors deal with some aspects related to this camp, such as the location of the camp, the approximate number of prisoners, in the order of hundreds of thousands, the conditions of accommodation, hygiene and food, the use of prisoners by the Soviet authorities for various labor, liberation and escape attempts of some prisoners, relations between the local Romanian and Soviet authorities, on the functioning of the camp. In this study, the authors present previously unknown details and publish, for the first time, a sketch of the camp.

Keywords: World War II, prisoners, Soviet, camp, Focșani

Rezumat: Lagărul de prizonieri nr. 176, din Focșani, a fost unul dintre cele mai mari lagăre sovietice din Europa de Est, din perioada 1944–1948. Din toamna anului 1944 până în vara anului 1946 acest lagăr a funcționat ca lagăr de triere și tranzit pentru prizonierii maghiari, germani, chiar și români, militari și civili deopotrivă, care erau aduși în trenuri marfare de pe teritoriul României și Ungariei, ocupate de trupale Armatei Roșii, și care după triere erau imbarcați în vagoane de vite, fiind transportați în lagărele de muncă din URSS. În perioada de după vara anului 1946 lagărul a funcționat inclusiv pentru trierea și repatrierea prizonierilor întorși din URSS. În studiul de față, apelând la surse de arhivă românești și sovietice (traduse în limba română și publicate în România), precum și la interviuri realizate cu unii supraviețuitori, autorii tratează unele aspecte legate de acest lagăr, precum: locația lagărului, numărul aproximativ – de ordinul sutelor de mii – al prizonierilor, condițiile de cazare, de igienă și de alimentație, folosirea prizonierilor, de către autoritățile sovietice, la diverse munci, încercări de eliberare și de evadare ale unor prizonieri, relațiile dintre autoritățile române, sovietice, și locale privind funcționarea lagărului. În studiul de față autorii prezintă unele detalii necunoscute până acum, publicând, în premieră, și o schiță a lagărului.

Cuvinte cheie: al Doilea Război Mondial, prizonieri, lagăr, sovietic, Focșani

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One of the most notorious yet lesser-known sites of the final phase of the Second World War and the years that followed was the Soviet temporary prison camp in Focșani, Romania (Foksány in Hungarian, Fokschan in German), fully operational from the autumn of 1944. The town, inhabited by 25,000 locals on the border of Moldavia and Wallachia, was one of the last stops in Romania for hundreds of thousands of prisoners, soldiers and civilian internees/deportees alike, sent to various camps of the Soviet Union, the vast majority of whom were Hungarian and German, and some Romanian. More precisely, the NKVD¹ set up detention camp No. 176 in the southern part of the town, and this neighborhood was the one to also serve as a distribution centre for prisoners returning from the Soviet Union in 1947–1948.

In Romania, the fate and the issue of Hungarian prisoners of war and civilian deportees/ internees from World War II only became a matter of public debate after the change of regime in December 1989. This was first made possible by the press, since at that time Romanian archival sources on the subject were not generally available to anyone, and there were no Transylvanian experts researching the subject, and in the early days there were only some individual cross-border Hungarian-Hungarian research attempts. The latter include, for example, the works of Gábor Vincze,² Mihály Fülöp and Gábor Vincze,³ and Zoltán Mihály Nagy and Gábor Vincze.⁴

In the early 1990s, it was mainly some members of the press who started collecting memories. One of the pioneers in Transylvania was the daily newspaper *Szabadság* in Kolozsvár/ Cluj-Napoca, which published a memoir by Sándor Vincze.⁵ In December 1991, the national daily newspaper *Romániai Magyar Szó* in Bucharest published a serialized memoir of László Bitay, who was deported from Kolozsvár/ Cluj-Napoca in October 1944 with 5,000 Hungarian civilians.⁶ In October 1992, the daily *Hargita Népe*, published in Csíkszereda/ Miercurea Ciuc, announced a competition for memoirs under the title *Fogságom története* [The Story of My Captivity], which resulted in the publication of *Történetek a fogságból. Hatvan székel hadifogoly* [Stories from Captivity. Sixty Szekler prisoners of war], edited by poet and journalist Imre Ferencz.⁷ In the spring of 1993, the *Háromszék* daily newspaper in Sepsiszentgyörgy/ Sfântu Gheorghe published the memoirs of Dr. László Keresztes, agricultural engineer,⁸ and Ferenc Daróczi's documentary series on the Barcafdölvár/ Feldioara prison camp.⁹

From 1995, the newspaper *Szabadság* published reminiscences and documentary photos from the collection of journalist Annamária Papp, while Ernő Boros, a journalist from Nagyvárad/ Carei, published interviews with deported Szatmár/ Satu Mare Swabians

¹ The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (in Russian: НКВД, Народный комиссариат внутренних дел), abbreviated as NKVD. The main body of the internal affairs branch of the state administration in the Soviet Union from 1934 to 1946.

² Vincze 1999.

³ Fülöp, Vincze 1998.

⁴ Nagy, Vincze 2004.

⁵ Vincze 1991.

⁶ Bitay 1991.

⁷ Ferencz 1996.

⁸ Keresztes 1993.

⁹ Daróczi 1993.

in the daily newspaper *Szatmári Friss Újság*. Annamária Papp's collection entitled *Szögesdrót* was published in 2001,¹⁰ and Ernő Boros's collections were published in several volumes between 2002 and 2022.¹¹ Levente Benkő's collections, which he started collecting in the mid-1990s, were published in three oral history volumes between 1999 and 2003.¹² In 2007, Levente Benkő and Annamária Papp published a scholarly work entitled *Magyar fogolyors a második világháborúban I–II* [Hungarian Prisoner Fate in the Second World War I–II], which, in addition to oral history testimonies, contains a comprehensive study of the issue of imprisonment, reminiscences and a selected collection of sources using Hungarian and Romanian archival sources.¹³ Also in 2007, István Iochom, a journalist from Kézdivásárhely/Târgu Secuiesc, published an oral history book from his collection.¹⁴ At the same time, the memoirs of former Hungarian prisoners of war and internees who were deported have also appeared in separate memoirs, such as the works of Jenő Kiss,¹⁵ György Szabó,¹⁶ Ferenc Zsigmond,¹⁷ Zsigmond Vita,¹⁸ Gyula Ercsey,¹⁹ Sándor Fülöp,²⁰ István Kolozsi Gergely,²¹ József Gazda,²² etc. Among the works resulting from local research, the books of Mária Gál, historian,²³ Magdolna Szabóné Hajdu, teacher,²⁴ and Barna Préda, ethnographer,²⁵ should be mentioned. Among more recent works, the work of János Kristóf Murádin is worth mentioning.²⁶ Amid the Hungarian researchers, the comprehensive work of Zsolt Bognár²⁷ and the sourcebook of Tamás Stark²⁸ should be considered.

Only a few of the works listed here touch partially on the issue of the Soviet prison camp in Focșani. In the book cited by Tamás Stark, we find some Hungarian archival sources that mention the Focșani prison camp, while János Kristóf Murádin summarises some details of the Focșani camp based on printed memoirs, interviews he has collected and those conducted by the authors of this study.²⁹

In the summer of 2016, we conducted archival and field research in Focșani. This involved identifying the site of the former prison camp and studying the documents of the Comisia Română pentru Aplicarea Armistițiului [The Romanian Armistice Commission] in Putna County at the Arhivele Naționale Române, Serviciul Județean Vrancea [The

¹⁰ Papp 2001.

¹¹ Boros 2002 (2009², 2022³); Boros 2005 (2011², 2021³).

¹² Benkő 1999; Benkő 2001; Benkő 2003.

¹³ Benkő, Papp 2007.

¹⁴ Iochom 2007.

¹⁵ Kiss 1992.

¹⁶ Szabó 1994.

¹⁷ Zsigmond 1995.

¹⁸ Vita 1998.

¹⁹ Ercsey 2006.

²⁰ Fülöp 2010.

²¹ Kolozsi Gergely 2016.

²² Gazda 2017.

²³ Gál 2018.

²⁴ Szabóné Hajdu 2018.

²⁵ Préda 2022.

²⁶ Murádin 2023.

²⁷ Bognár 2018.

²⁸ Stark 2017.

²⁹ Murádin 2023, 58–63.

National Historical Archives, Vrancea County Archives]. Based on these little-known sources, as well as on our own interviews and memoirs, we publish previously unexplored details that will certainly contribute to a better understanding of the history of the Focșani prison camp No 176. This study was compiled using archival and field research, Hungarian, Romanian and Russian archival sources (translated into Romanian and published in Romania) and interviews with survivors. It is important to note that the source material of the Putna County³⁰ Armistice Committee³¹ does not include documents from 1944, as these bodies under the county prefectures were only established under Law No. 61 of 1 February 1945³² and, therefore, could not have produced or left behind documents in 1944. It should also be noted that the highest body coordinating the county armistice committees, the Armistice Committee based in Bucharest, was established on 22 December 1944 under Decree No. 654. Its tasks included interpreting and implementing the Soviet-Romanian armistice agreement based on the guidelines laid down by the Council of Ministers, giving instructions on the implementation of the ceasefire and supervising the implementation of the agreement.³³

The establishment and location of the camp system in the autumn of 1946

The Soviet prison camp in Focșani was located in the southern part of the town. Considered the largest camp in Romania, it covered the entire south part from the city's southern border, along the road to Brăila and Bucharest, to the military barracks that still exist today.

The prisoners were housed in a part of the town still known in Focșani as “the Barracks” – *Barăci* in local Romanian – a fully built-in area since then converted into a residential neighborhood. The area had previously been used by German troops for the transport, storage and unloading of war material, and the detainees were placed in the warehouses of the military base, which had its wing railway, in brick buildings and plank shacks next to the former military airfield.³⁴ The brick buildings of the military base used by the Germans until the 23 August 1944, when Romania switched sides, are clearly visible on a German Air Force photograph taken in July 1944, just as the rail tracks extended inside the base, which, similar to the warehouses, are no longer there today. Yet the location and the approximate size of the future Soviet prison camp, which included the former German base – or part of it – can be clearly identified in the photograph.³⁵ The camp in Focșani was designated as a post office box, just like in the Soviet Union: it was officially

³⁰ The former name of Vrancea County, established during the administrative reorganization of Romania in February 1968, when the new counties were created. Focșani after the war was the city of residence of Putna County after the administrative reorganization from 1950 to 1952, it was part of Putna Region, between 1952 and 1956 it belonged to Bârlad Region, and from 1956 to 1968 it belonged to Galați Region. Since 1968, Focșani has been the county seat of Vrancea.

³¹ In full: Comisia Română pentru Aplicarea Armistițiului – commonly used abbreviation: CRPAA, in the archives of the Central National Historical Archives in Bucharest: CRAA – Delegation of Putna County.

³² SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 12/1945, f. 32.

³³ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 1/1945, f. 13.

³⁴ Interview with Ion Constantinescu July 2016.

³⁵ <https://wikimapia.org/15911861/ro/Fostul-aerodrom>, accessed on 03 Sept. 2024.

identified as Post-Office Box No. 92460–176, while in official documents, it was called Prison Camp No. 176.³⁶

The date of the establishment of the prison camp is revealed in a secret report sent by the head of the administration of the facility, NKVD Captain Seryogin, to his superiors on 18 January 1945. The report covers “the first months after the establishment of the camp,” i.e. the period between 5 November 1944 and 19 January 1945, and it appears that the Soviets counted the existence of the Focșani detention camp from 5 November 1944.³⁷

In contrast, Romanian sources state that the Soviets set up a camp in Focșani as soon as they entered the area. According to a report by Lieutenant Colonel Alexandru Botez, Putna county proxy/representative of the central (Bucharest) Armistice Committee (Comisia Română pentru Aplicarea Armistițiului) to his superiors sent on 5 July 1945, in Focșani “all schools and barracks were occupied by Soviet war hospitals and prison camps as early as September [1944].”³⁸ According to another report by Lieutenant Colonel Botez, all barracks and barrack blocks of the Romanian army, all buildings of schools and many private properties were seized for the Soviet troops, war hospitals and prison camp(s), not only in Focșani but also in the neighboring municipalities of Odobești³⁹ and Mărășești⁴⁰ and the seizure of new facilities (premises and apartments) was in progress.⁴¹ In all, the Romanian authorities were forced to put 15 military barracks and a total of 5,800 private prisoners at the disposal of the Soviets, according to the lieutenant colonel.⁴² In a report dated 9 June 1945 by the local commander of the Romanian military installations, Technical Captain Eugen Cărășel, to the Romanian garrison in Focșani, “on 25 August 1944, Romanian troops left the garrison installations, but by the time they returned, Soviet troops had established military hospitals and prison camps in the barracks.”⁴³

Sources also testify that the Soviet military authorities exercised absolute control over the prison camp. This is referred to in the report by Captain Eugen Cărășel dated 6 February 1945 to the Romanian Ministry of War.⁴⁴ The Romanian officer reported that the primary school premises of the town had been converted by the Soviets into a “prison camp to guard thousands of Hungarian and German prisoners, and were surrounded by several strands of barbed wire, and that the undersigned was not allowed to enter its premises.”⁴⁵ Under these circumstances, Captain Cărășel went to the commander of the Soviet garrison in Focșani, who kept him waiting for three hours, but he was still not allowed to enter the school building, converted into an internment camp.

This school was just one of the educational institutions that the Soviets turned into a prison camp in Focșani. We learn about that from a transcript of the Romanian Ministry

³⁶ SJVn AN, PJP, file no. 117/1945, f. 1.

³⁷ Văratîc et alii 2013, 492. The Soviet archival sources used in the cited book appeared in Romania, translated into Romanian.

³⁸ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 12/1945, f. 131.

³⁹ Odobești is a town in Vrancea County, 13 kilometers northwest from Focșani.

⁴⁰ Mărășești is a town in Vrancea County, 23 kilometers north from Focșani.

⁴¹ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 5/1945, f. 3.

⁴² SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 5/1945, f. 9.

⁴³ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 5/1945, f. 20.

⁴⁴ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 3/1945, f. 4.

⁴⁵ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 3/1945, f. 4.

of Education dated 13 June 1945, according to which the Ministry asked the (central) Armistice Committee, and its delegate to Putna County, Lieutenant Colonel Alexandru Botez, to take the necessary measures in order to have the Princess Elizabeth orphanage freed, as it had also been seized by the Soviets in Focșani and turned into a prison camp, while it was intended to host underprivileged deaf children.⁴⁶

At the same time, the Soviets seized military installations, too, for the construction of prison camps. According to a report dated 31 March 1945 by Colonel Nicolae Făgărășanu, chairman of the Putna County Armistice Committee, the Soviets had set up internment camps in the barracks of the Focșani 5th Heavy Artillery Regiment, the 3rd Mechanized Artillery Regiment, the 11th Artillery Regiment⁴⁷ and the so-called barracks camp, in addition to the local primary school building.⁴⁸

About the number of prisoners in the camp

We do not have exact data on the total number of prisoners (prisoners of war, civilian deportees and internees) transported to Focșani and from there to the Soviet Union, and the Romanian sources examined so far are only partial and probably incomplete. Therefore, for the time being, the partial figures available only allow us to speak of approximate figures. According to Romanian sources, no information on the number of prisoners held in Soviet camp No. 176 was provided to the local Romanian military or civilian authorities. In his report dated 1 March 1945, Colonel Făgărășanu stated that “the number of prisoners in the camp in Focșani is unknown.”⁴⁹ In his report from 21 July, Lieutenant Colonel Botez, in connection with the search and release of Romanian prisoners taken by the Soviets to the camp in Focșani, reported that “no prisoner registers are kept in the camps, and the camp commanders are indifferent to the issue,”⁵⁰ as to the fate and eventual release of the Romanian prisoners they were holding.

Surviving prisoner of war Géza Németh (farmer, Magyarhermány/ Herculian, Covasna County), who was in Focșani throughout October–November 1944, recalled during our interview that: “in Focșani (...) they didn’t even write our names down, they didn’t keep any records (...) but there were at least 30,000 prisoners, that’s for sure. In addition to soldiers, there were civilians, Hungarians, Germans, even Romanians who had been taken as prisoners by the Russians before Romania switched sides.”⁵¹ Géza Németh’s statement about 30,000 prisoners being held in the camp during his stay is the permanent number of prisoners in the camp at the time. Similarly, other survivors – completely independently of each other – mentioned roughly or exactly the same number of prisoners in their interviews. István Ívás, a civilian deportee and survivor (farmer, Magyaró/ Aluniș, Mureș County; Csíkszereda, Harghita County), reported that “the Soviet prisoners of war camp in Focșani was a temporary internment place for about 30,000 prisoners.”⁵² Albert Kósa (farmer,

⁴⁶ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 12/1945, ff. 122, 123.

⁴⁷ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 4/1945, f. 68.

⁴⁸ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 4/1945, f. 69.

⁴⁹ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 4/1945, f. 32.

⁵⁰ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 12/1945, f. 160.

⁵¹ Interview with Géza Németh 17 June 2000. Also see Benkő, Papp 2007, 165.

⁵² Memoirs by István Ívás May 1999. Fragment quoted in Benkő, Papp 2007, 171. István Ívás’ memoirs were published in his book entitled *Az utolsó székely határőrök. Katonaságom története 1943–1944* (Ívás 2004).

Középaĵta/ Aita Medie, Covasna County), prisoner of war, who was in Focşani during the deportation in February–March 1945, survivor, reported about 50,000,⁵³ Károly Molnár (barber, Kovászna/ Covasna, Covasna County), who was also prisoner of war, estimated the number of prisoners held in Focşani in the summer of 1945 to 15,000–20,000.⁵⁴ Apart from the two extreme figures mentioned by the survivors – 15,000 and 50,000 – the figures given by the memorialists are almost identical to those of the Romanian archives, which state that the permanent prison population in Focşani in the spring and summer of 1945 ranged between 30,000 and 40,000.⁵⁵

Let us now examine how the (total) number of prisoners arriving at the camp in Focşani in 1944–1945 and from there to the Soviet Union changed. As far as Romanian sources are concerned, we can get an approximate picture from the lists of prisoner trains arriving at the local railway station and departing from there to the Soviet Union. This is only an approximation, since the railway records found in the Putna County Armistice Committee files are incomplete, and no records exist for 1944. According to Soviet sources – the previously quoted NKVD report by Captain Seryogin – a total of 76,294 prisoners arrived in Focşani between 5 November 1944 and 19 January 1945, and 62,115 were transported during the same period, 58,586 of whom were sent on 21 trains.⁵⁶ The vague wording of the report does not make it clear how and where the 58,586 to 62,115 prisoners – 3,529 people – were taken from Focşani, although they were taken away. This, however, suggests that prisoners were/may have been transferred from the Focşani camp by rail and other means of transport, so the railway station data is only one source.

As mentioned above, no record of the period between 23 August and 31 December 1944 was found in the documents sent by the Focşani railway station to Lieutenant Colonel Botez. Since we have Romanian data only for the first five and a half months of 1945, it is only on these data and for this period alone that we can make any estimates of the prison population (Tabs. 1, 2, and 3). According to these, between 1 January and 12 June 1945, a total number of 12,546 railway wagons arrived at Focşani under the Soviet–Romanian armistice agreement,⁵⁷ and 8,400 departed from there to the Soviet Union with various cargoes.⁵⁸ In the railway stations' records, each train was marked with the cargo/load: troops, wounded, prisoners, munitions, etc., and based on these, we selected and summarized the data of the prisoner shipments. Accordingly, the number of trains carrying only prisoners to and from Focşani to the Soviet Union in the brief half-year period between 1 January and 12 June 1945 appeared as follows:⁵⁹

⁵³ Interview with Albert Kósa 4 Jan. 2006. Also see Benkő, Papp 2007, 164.

⁵⁴ Interview with Károly Molnár 4 Jan. 2000. Edited and shortened version published by Gocz 2001, 159–173. Fragment quoted in Benkő, Papp 2007, 165.

⁵⁵ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 12/1945, f. 40; SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 5/1945, f. 3.

⁵⁶ Văratice et alii 2013, 492.

⁵⁷ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 5/1945, ff. 7, 26.

⁵⁸ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 5/1945, ff. 7, 31.

⁵⁹ The list of trains arriving at Focşani railway station can be found at: SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 4/1945, ff. 76–81, 176–178; SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 5/1945, ff. 23–26. The list of trains from Focşani going to the Soviet Union can be found at: SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 4/1945, ff. 82–94, 173–175; SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 5/1945, ff. 27–31.

No.	Period	Number of railway wagons	Estimated number of prisoners (40–50 pers./wagon)
1.	1 January–1 April 1945	1,003	40,120–50,150
2.	1 April–26 April 1945	465	18,600–23,250
3.	26–12 June 1945	2,301	92,040–105,050
4.	Total	3,769	150,760–188,450

Tab. 1. The trainloads of prisoners arriving at Focșani between 1 January–12 June 1945.

No.	Departure station	Number of railway wagons	Estimated number of prisoners (40–50 pers./wagon)
1.	Biharpüspöki/ Episcopia Bihor	192	7,680–9,600
2.	Brassó/ Braşov	232	9,280–11,600
3.	Budeşti	6	240–300
4.	Bucharest	38	1520–1900
5.	Buzău	6	240–300
6.	Caracal	2	80–100
6.	Craiova	18	720–900
7.	Debrecen	149	5960–7450
8.	Érmihályfalva/ Valea lui Mihai	175	7000–8750
9.	Kürtös/ Curtici	1,528	61,120–76,400
10.	Lugos/ Lugoj	14	560–700
11.	Râmnicu Sărat	27	1080–1350
12.	Temesvár/ Timișoara	112	4480–5600
13.	Turnu Măgurele	7	280–350
14.	Zsombolya/ Jimbolia	1,263	50,520–63,150
15.	Total	3,769	150,760–188,450

Tab. 2. The trainloads of prisoners arriving at Focșani, according to the departure stations between 1 January and 12 June 1945.

No.	Period	Number of railway wagons	Estimated number of prisoners (70–90 pers./wagon)
1.	1 January–31 March 1945	0	0
2.	1 April–26 April 1945	67	4,690–6,030
3.	26 April–12 June 1945	466	32,620–41,940
4.	Total	533	37,310–47,970

Tab. 3. The trainloads of prisoners from Focșani to the Soviet Union between 1 January and 12 June 1945.

As can be seen, a total of 3,769 railway wagons with prisoners (prisoners of war and deported/interned civilians) arrived at Focşani between 1 January 1945 and 12 June 1945. Consequently, based on the above data, it can be conservatively estimated that even if we count 40–50 prisoners per railway car, the number of prisoners transported to Focşani by rail alone in the first half of 1945 ranged between 150,760 and 188,450 (Tabs. 1 and 2), to which must of course be added the German soldiers, or possibly retreating Hungarian soldiers captured during the operations in the area after Romania's switchover. Their numbers are not known. During the same period, according to the data of the railway station in Focşani, 533 railway wagons were used to transport prisoners from here to the Soviet Union. Several survivors reported that in Focşani they were crammed into large-capacity, wide-gauge Soviet railway wagons and transported to the Soviet Union,⁶⁰ which, again, would mean between 37,310 and 47,970 prisoners per wagon, also counting 70–90 prisoners (Tab. 3).

No.	Source (period)	Estimated number of incoming prisoners	Estimated number of prisoners sent/deported to the Soviet Union (70–90 pers/wagon)	Ratio of the deported
1.	Focşani railway station (1 January–12 June 1945)	150,760–188,450	37,310–47,970	24.7–25.5%
2.	Seryogin's report (5 November 1944–19 January 1945)	76,294	62,115	81.4%
3.	Total	227,054–264,774	99,425–110,085	41.6–43.8%

Tab. 4. The estimated evolution of the prison population in Focşani between 5 November 1944 and 12 June 1945.

If we add the number of prisoners mentioned in the above-quoted Seryogin report to the total number of prisoners that can be approximated from the Romanian sources – even if there is a 19-day overlap between the two sources in January 1945 – it is likely that the total number of prisoners in the period from the beginning of November 1944 to mid-June 1945 was at least 227,054–264,774, incoming prisoners and at least 83,435–88,765, left for the Soviet Union during the same period (Table 4). However, the number of the deported prisoners is highly questionable. If we consider that, according to the Seryogin's report, 81% of the prisoners arriving in Focşani between 5 November 1944 and 19 January 1945 were deported to the Soviet Union (Table 4), and if we extrapolate this percentage to the rest of 1945, it is not excluded that in the whole period under discussion, for which we have fragmentary data (i.e. the period between 5 November 1944 and 12 June 1945) at least 183,900–215,700 of the 227,000–265,000 prisoners (rounded) arriving to town were taken on to the Soviet Union. We emphasize that these are only estimated figures because, as we have seen, the Romanian railway reports do not indicate the number of prisoners, but the number of incoming railway wagons!

⁶⁰ Bitay 1991, 8; Benkő 1999, 182, 273; Gocz 2001, 207; Papp 2001, 136; Benkő, Papp 2007, 165, 173; Memoirs by Mihály Marton, ms.

In any case, what brings us closer to the truth is the top-secret report by Colonel Melnik, Deputy Director of Department No. 1 of the Directorate in charge of prisoners of war and civilian internees, sent to General S.N. Kruglov, Soviet People's Commissar for Internal Affairs, dated on 4 March 1946.⁶¹ According to it, "between 1 November 1944 and 31 December 1945, the [Focșani] camp interned 557,210 prisoners of war and civilian internees from the Red Army and the prison camps behind the front in the Soviet Union. In the same period, 480,820 people were sent to the prison camps behind the Soviet front."⁶² We are not familiar with the original Russian text, only with the Romanian translation. We believe that the phrase "behind the front in the Soviet Union" refers to the territories occupied by the Red Army during the period under examination i.e. Transylvania, Transcarpathia, Hungary, and Austria.

Living conditions in the camp

The camp survivors reported inhumane living conditions in our interviews. Former prisoner János Tikusán (farmer, Aldoboly/ Dobolii de Jos, Covasna County), a civilian detainee held in Focșani for nearly four months in the autumn of 1944, said: "They herded us into a large plank barrack. There were about six of these big plank barracks.... In the barracks, there were no bunks, we were lying on the floor. There was no bed, no bunk, no pillow, no blanket. We would lie down on the floor and that was it."⁶³ Jenő Égető (worker, Köpec/ Căpeni, Covasna County), a civilian who successfully escaped from the camp at the end of November 1944 with two other companions, said that: "I was accommodated in huge, large tank garages, but there were no beds, neither bunk beds nor simple ones. In those tank garages, they used to keep sheep and cattle, and their dried dung was our bedding. Everybody would lie on the manure as they could."⁶⁴

The same was reported by his fellow fugitive, Mózes Sebestyén (farmer, Köpec), who was also deported as a civilian, and who said that they were "in a kind of a sheepfold,"⁶⁵ where sheep used to be kept.⁶⁶ According to civilian deportee István Ivás (farmer, Magyaró; Csíkszereda), in the three-part camp, "the prisoners were herded into a hangar-like building resembling huge plank bunkers," where they were "forced to lie on the bare ground."⁶⁷ Albert Kósa, a prisoner of war and survivor (farmer, Középpajta), who arrived in Focșani in February 1945 with a prisoner transport and was deported to the Soviet Union in the second half of March, said they were housed in one of the barracks, surrounded by "at least two strands of barbed wire," and in horse stables in double storey beds. However, the overcrowding meant that prisoners would also sleep on the floor.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Văratîc et alii 2013, 578–580.

⁶² Văratîc et alii 2013, 578.

⁶³ Interview with János Tikusán 7 June 2000. Quoted fragment in Benkő, Papp 2007, 167–168.

⁶⁴ Interview with Jenő Égető 1 June 1999. Edited version published in Benkő 2001, 52–96. Quoted fragment in Benkő, Papp 2007, 168–169.

⁶⁵ *Szajvánszerűség* (original Hungarian) – *Saivan* (in Romanian) and "sheepfold" (in English).

⁶⁶ Interview with Mózes Sebestyén 7 Feb. 1998. Edited version published in Benkő 1998, 65–70. Quoted fragment in Benkő, Papp 2007, 168.

⁶⁷ Memoirs by István Ivás May 1999, ms. Quoted fragment: Benkő, Papp 2007, 171.

⁶⁸ Interview with Albert Kósa 4 Jan. 2006. Quoted fragment: Benkő, Papp 2007, 164.

Márton Varga, one of the 5,000 Hungarian civilians deported from Kolozsvár/ Cluj-Napoca in October 1944, also reported that they were housed in a garage-like room in Focșani where they would sleep on the wet, muddy ground and water would drip all night long. “They were here for about a week, the conditions were disastrous. I managed to find a paper bag to cover myself, which protected me very well from the rain, the cold and the wind,” recalled Márton Varga.⁶⁹ József Mile, who was also deported from Kolozsvár in October 1944, said that Focșani was a “huge collection camp:” “the odor was fetidious because everyone defecated where they could.”⁷⁰ According to István Kelemen, who was also taken prisoner as a civilian from Kolozsvár in October 1944 together with his father, they were placed in a warehouse in the Focșani camp where they could not even lie down because of the wet ground.⁷¹ But some fared even worse, such as Lajos Farkas, a deportee from Kolozsvár in October 1944 who recalled the conditions in Focșani: “We slept outside in the mud because there were so many of us that there was no place for us in the barracks. Those who didn’t hurry enough were stuck outside. I was huddled in the mud behind the barracks.”⁷² Deportee Árpád Tordai from Kolozsvár in October 1944 recalled: “We arrived at Focșani, our new station, in pouring rain. Here, we were herded into a huge barn-like building filled with all kinds of weeds. Fortunately, we only stayed there for a few hours because our train was sent on to Russia.”⁷³ In the context of the living conditions in the camps, we must also mention the poor food available for the prisoners. Albert Kósa (farmer, Középagta), survivor, reported that: “We were fed twice a day, if you could call it food. In the morning and in the evening, they would give us cornmeal, ground peameal, that sort of thing. There were hardly any toilet facilities, barely any.”⁷⁴ Prisoner of war survivor Károly Molnár (barber, Kovászna) said that “there was a case when they gave out some kind of salty swill. Well, some people could stand it and some people couldn’t.”⁷⁵ Prisoner of war survivor Géza Németh (farmer, Magyarhermány) said that: “The food was very poor.... The bread was also so poor... God forbid, but it was like mud, like real black mud.... If I had to eat it now, it would kill me.”⁷⁶ Prisoner of war survivor János Tikusán (farmer, Aldoboly) said: “The food? Oh, my goodness... There was an occasional small fish in the soup, sometimes a piece of lettuce, carrot or cabbage, but only so much... They gave two people a day a loaf of black Russian bread, as hard as brick.”⁷⁷

The very poor board for the prisoners was, of course, related to the supply capacity of Focșani, and of Putna County as a whole, at the time. In his report of 1 March 1945, Colonel Făgărășanu reported to his superiors that the catering of Soviet troops stationed in the area and those passing through between 18 October 1944 and 28 February 1945 had completely

⁶⁹ Memoirs by Márton Varga 2006, ms. Quoted fragment: Benkő, Papp 2007, 173.

⁷⁰ Interview with József Mile Oct. 2006. Edited version published in: Papp 2006, 5.

⁷¹ Interview with István Kelemen 1997. Edited version published in Papp 2001, 134–149.

⁷² Interview with Lajos Farkas 2016.

⁷³ Interview with Árpád Tordai 1996. Edited version published in: Papp 2001, 149–156.

⁷⁴ Interview with Albert Kósa 4 Jan. 2006. Quoted fragment in Benkő, Papp 2007, 164.

⁷⁵ Interview with Károly Molnár 4 Jan. 2000. Edited and condensed version published in Gocz 2001, 159–173. Quoted fragment in: Benkő, Papp 2007, 165.

⁷⁶ Interview with Géza Németh 7 June 2000. Quoted fragment in Benkő, Papp 2007, 166.

⁷⁷ Interview with János Tikusán 7 June 2000. Quoted fragment in Benkő, Papp 2007, 167.

exhausted the county's food supplies.⁷⁸ The same conditions were reported by Lieutenant Colonel Botez in his report summarizing the period from 1 July to 1 August 1945, adding that even the animals had run out of fodder.⁷⁹ Under the circumstances, the authorities attempted to obtain food from other regions, including the transport from Tulcea, in which two railway wagons with 122 crates containing 19,927 kilograms of salted fish were sent to prison camp 176 in Focșani.⁸⁰

There is no further information on the feeding of prisoners in the Romanian sources discovered so far, but there is in the cited Seryogin report. It states that between 5 November 1944 and 19 January 1945, the camp received 70.5 tons of cereals, 12 tons of meat, 17 tons of salt, 230 kilograms of sugar, 50 tons of vegetables, 28 tons of tinned meat, 163 tons of wheat, 142 tons of maize and 60 tons of flour.⁸¹ For 86 days of that period, counting the 15,200 prisoners mentioned in the cited report, the daily ration of this stock was, for example, 9 grams of meat, 21 grams of canned meat, 38 grams of vegetables, and nearly 54 grams of cereals, which seems to support the survivors' statements on the extremely poor board.

Captain Seryogin's report also gives an insight into other aspects of life in the detention camps. According to the report, between 5 November 1944–19 January 1945, two rooms with a capacity for disinfecting 350 people per hour, a laundry and two kitchens were built, 11,410 m³ of firewood was produced, and 2,200 railway wagons were loaded with various goods for the Soviet Union, also thanks to the working prisoners.⁸² At the same time, the NKVD captain also reported that they had improved the equipment of the railway trains carrying "prisoners of war and civilian internees" to the Soviet Union, after each car had been provided with a bundle of firewood and at least two or three crates of iron a day, and the stove of the kitchen car had been reinforced because in the past, bricks had fallen out of the stove due to the shaky journey.⁸³

All in all, the prisoners' supplies were most probably far from satisfactory and we learn about this also from the Seryogin report. The NKVD captain mentioned, for example, that there were not enough clothes and footwear for the prisoners to be transported to the Soviet Union. He reported that the camp's warehouses held 14,465 pairs of gloves, 718 fur hats, 5,243 quilted jackets, 158 pairs of old shoes, 200 pairs of new wooden-sole shoes, 2,367 Romanian military caps and 289 pairs of fur boots/ felt boots, so-called *valenki*, but they were short of 3,570 pairs of footwear, 2,055 jackets, 2,890 trousers, 4,021 warm overcoats and 930 caps.⁸⁴

Forced labor in Focșani

The report by NKVD Captain Seryogin shows that the prisoners in the camp were used for various activities. This is confirmed by survivors and Romanian sources as well. According to a report by Colonel Făgărășanu, on 3 March 1945, he dismantled the Focșani

⁷⁸ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 4/1945, f. 28.

⁷⁹ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 5/1945, f. 211.

⁸⁰ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 13/1945, f. 61.

⁸¹ Văratîc et alii 2013, 493.

⁸² Văratîc et alii 2013, 492.

⁸³ Văratîc et alii 2013, 492.

⁸⁴ Văratîc et alii 2013, 493.

machine-gun shooting facility, which was run by nearly 200 prisoners, three Soviet officers and 15 privates.⁸⁵ In another report, dated 10 March 1945, Captain Eugen Cărășel reported to the authorized representative of the Putna County Armistice Committee that, as he had no independent specialists available, the camp commander had ordered the camps to be repaired and maintained by craftsmen selected from among the prisoners.⁸⁶ In his report of 27 March, Ștefan Teodorescu, captain of the Focșani garrison, informed Colonel Făgărășanu in a very urgent report that “under the supervision of Soviet guards, prisoners had dismantled 500 meters of the barbed wire fence of the local ammunition depot on the Focșani–Bucharest highway and transported all the material to the prison camp.”⁸⁷ According to Lieutenant Colonel Botez’s report of 10 September 1945, also on Soviet orders, the prisoners started cutting down the planted acacia forest surrounding the military facility, using the branches to make brooms for cleaning the prisoner trains bound for the Soviet Union, and the wood was used as firewood.⁸⁸

Prisoner of war survivor Albert Kósa (farmer, Kőzépajta) said that “100–200 people a day were taken to the station in Focșani to be loaded, one shift in the morning, another in the evening... we put everything the Russians had looted into the wide-gauge wagons.”⁸⁹

Death in the camp

Given the difficult living and working conditions, one cannot help but wonder how many prisoners might have died in Focșani. We have not found any information or reference to it in the documents of the Putna County Armistice Committee. According to the cited Seryogin report, between 5 November 1944 and 19 January 1945, a total of 33 prisoners died as a result of accidents, suicide and shooting during escape attempts.⁹⁰ In contrast, the Melnik report quoted above states that 57 prisoners died in the camp by October 1945, but since 20–40% of the prisoners returning from the Soviet Union and temporarily housed in Focșani had to be hospitalized by the date of the report, “10–15 people died every day” in the first period; furthermore between 1 November 1945 and the 15 January 1946, 228 prisoners of war (17.1%) who arrived to the camp by rail and were hospitalized, and 105 civilian internees (24.5%) died.⁹¹

It is, therefore, quite certain that the number of those dying in the camp was in the thousands. This, and the survivors’ claims, seem to be confirmed by the three registers of the Hungarian Ministry of Defense’s Military History Institute and Museum, Military Memory and War Graves Directorate. Letter No. 107–44/2017, signed by Lajos Horváth, Director of the Institute, addressed to the authors on 5 May 2017, identifies the names of a total of 686 Hungarian prisoners who had died in Focșani.⁹² The names are being compared, and possible overlaps are being checked.

⁸⁵ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 4/1945, f. 163.

⁸⁶ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 3/1945, f. 2.

⁸⁷ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 14/1945, f. 85.

⁸⁸ SJVn AN, CRPAA, file no. 13/1945, f. 63.

⁸⁹ Interview with Albert Kósa 4 Jan. 2006. Quoted fragment in Benkő, Papp 2007, 164.

⁹⁰ Văratîc et alii 2013, 493.

⁹¹ Văratîc et alii 2013, 579.

⁹² Letter No. 103–44/2017.

Albert Kósa, a survivor (farmer, Közéapajta), said that “many prisoners died in Focșani, too. The dead were taken out of the camp, but I’m not aware of what they did with them, where they buried them.”⁹³ Survivor János Tikusán (farmer, Aldoboly) said:

We carried the dead out and threw them into the lime pit. There was a huge long pit in one corner of the camp, the prisoners used it to answer the call of nature, we threw the dead in there, too... If someone got sick or couldn’t endure it: out the gate, into the lime pit. Because there weren’t any doctors. There was dysentery, typhus, all kinds of diseases, so I don’t know how many people died there. A lot, I’m sure because there were epidemics and people were dropping like flies.⁹⁴

Prisoner rescue attempts

As in other camps throughout Romania, many attempts were made to locate and, if possible, free the prisoners in the Focșani prison camp. Parents were, of course, the first to try to find their prisoner family members. Here are some examples: In March 1945, Péterffy Józsefné, a mother from Kolozsvár, “on behalf of all the Hungarian mothers in Kolozsvár” wrote a letter to János Vásárhelyi, the Transylvanian Reformed Bishop, asking him to “take some steps and have those unfortunate deported Hungarian men who are suffering in the camps in Focșani and elsewhere be taken home.”⁹⁵ Also in March 1945, Szakáts Józsefné, a widowed mother in Nagyvárad/ Oradea, wrote a letter to the Reformed bishop, asking him to help free the Reformed pastors of South Transylvania who were interned in the Târgu Jiu prison camp in August 1944.⁹⁶ In his reply, the bishop indicated that he had spoken out on the prisoners’ issue at the investiture of the Groza government in Cluj on 13 March 1945, and that Prime Minister Groza had promised to release the prisoners in the camps, but, as he wrote: “Unfortunately, I can do no more, but what I can do, I will from now on as well.”⁹⁷ Bishop Vásárhelyi’s means are evident as he sent on 22 June 1945 a personal letter to Hungarian Prime Minister Béla Miklós de Dálnok,⁹⁸ then and on 2 July of the same year to Rev. Zoltán Tildy, Reformed pastor in Budapest,⁹⁹ to help free his son-in-law, Tibor Vladár, a prisoner of war in the Brașov camp in February 1945 and in the Focșani camp from June 1945, but to no avail, as Colonel Vladár was still a prisoner in the spring of 1947.¹⁰⁰

Late János Máthé¹⁰¹ a self-taught local historian in Magyarhermány and his wife set out to Focșani on 14 August 1945 to find their son, Sándor. János Máthé wrote about their attempt:

⁹³ Interview with Albert Kósa 4 Jan. 2006. Quoted fragment in Benkő, Papp 2007, 165.

⁹⁴ Interview with János Tikusán 7 June 2000. Quoted fragment in Benkő, Papp 2007, 167–168.

⁹⁵ EREL, A21, PüspLvt, 1945, no. 147. For more details on this topic, see also: Benkő 2020, 13–32.

⁹⁶ EREL, A21, PüspLvt, 1945, no. 187.

⁹⁷ EREL, A21, PüspLvt, 1945, no. 187.

⁹⁸ EREL, A21, PüspLvt, 1945, no. 428.

⁹⁹ EREL, A21, PüspLvt, 1945, no. 466. Reformed pastor Tildy Zoltan was elected deputy in the parliamentary elections of 4 November 1945, as member of the Little Agrarians Party.

¹⁰⁰ EREL, A21, PüspLvt, 1947, no. 281. More details: Benkő 2020, 13–32.

¹⁰¹ See more about János Máthé (1898–1986), farmer, public figure, self-taught local historian and writer of a village monograph: Máthé 2008.

On the 18th, 19th and 20th we were in Focșani... but the Russian guards would not let anyone go near, we could only ask some of the Hungarian prisoners furtively... As we could not find my son, having run out of money and food, we set out on the evening of the 20th for home through the Gyimes Strait. We got home on the 21st in the evening.¹⁰²

However, not only Hungarians, but also German and Romanian family members from Transylvania/ Romania looked for their loved ones in the prison camp in Focșani. During 1945, Romanian parents, oft en accompanied by administrative documents proving their Romanian nationality, petitioned the Romanian authorities to intervene for the release of their sons and husbands who had served in the Hungarian army, had been called up for labour service and/or had been taken prisoner by the retreating Hungarian and German troops, but had been captured by the Soviets and held in the camps in Focșani, Brașov and Timișoara.¹⁰³ The Timișoara camp, with a capacity of 5–6,000 people, was set up by the German army to hold Yugoslav prisoners of war during Hitler's German campaign against Yugoslavia in the spring of 1941. After Romania entered the war against the Soviet Union (22 June 1941), the camp passed under Romanian administration and Soviet prisoners of war were held here. After the occupation of the city by the Red Army, Camp No. 17 in Timișoara came under Soviet administration, holding 30–35,000 Hungarian, German and even Romanian prisoners sent to Focșani. The camp was dismantled in 1946.¹⁰⁴ The Saxon parents in Transylvania certainly acted in a similar way, asking for the release of their relatives who had been captured as soldiers or civilians by the Soviets.¹⁰⁵

There have also been cases where state institutions have asked the military authorities to release their staff members who were held prisoners. Such was the case, which also frequently occurred elsewhere, when, on 7 December 1944, five local railwaymen on duty at the railway station in Roman were thrown among the prisoners on a train carrying German prisoners from Focșani to the Soviet Union. The petition proved effective – albeit only six months later – after the Romanian Allied Control Commission (Comisia Aliată de Control) informed the Romanian side on 3 July 1945 that four of the five railwaymen had been released and “sent home to Romania.”¹⁰⁶ From this wording, we can infer that the five railwaymen were indeed transported to the Soviet Union.

Escape attempts, escapes

There were unsuccessful and successful escape attempts in Focșani, as well as with other prison camps or along the way to the camp. These were mentioned in the repeatedly cited Seryogin report, but Romanian archival sources also contain additions in this regard. The commander of the Putna County gendarmerie legion, according to an undated report of Lieutenant Colonel V. Angheluță, between 1 November 1944 and 10 March 1945, during

¹⁰² Máthé 2008, 260.

¹⁰³ SANIC, CRAA, file no. 255/1944, ff. 26–160; SANIC, CRAA, file no. 888/1945, ff. 23, 154–158, 191, 192, 205–216, 233, 234, 265, 278, 284–287; SANIC, CRAA, file no. 889/1945, ff. 71–73, 118, 137, 138, 169, 170; Stark 2017, 111, 193, 279, 322, 362, 364.

¹⁰⁴ Corduneanu 2020; Both 2015; Mandics 1999–2000.

¹⁰⁵ SANIC, CRAA, file no. 888/1945, ff. 16, 19, 27–31, 42.

¹⁰⁶ SANIC, CRAA, file no. 888/1945, ff. 10–13.

4–5 raids per month to “capture and arrest German and Hungarian prisoners hiding in the villages,” a total of 67 Germans and 87 Hungarians were arrested and escorted to the camps in Focșani and Buzău County; three Romanian civilians who had given temporary shelter to the hiding prisoners were tried by the Military Court in Brăila.¹⁰⁷ According to another notification dated 9 April 1946, two other “German prisoners” were arrested by the gendarmes in Putna County, one of whom was found to have a gun.¹⁰⁸

The phrases used in these sources – “hiding German and Hungarian prisoners,” etc. – must be treated carefully in relation to the escapes. Since none of the sources literally states that the captured persons escaped from the camp – which is not excluded – these formulations could be interpreted as meaning that the reporting authorities/lawmen regarded those people as prisoners from the moment of their capture, and were not considered stranded, stuck or hiding soldiers.

There are, however, sources that literally recorded that the prisoners had escaped from the camp in Focșani. One such case was when the commander of the Putna County Gendarmerie Legion sent a circular on 13 August 1946, giving a detailed description of the prisoners, requesting the assistance of the Buzău and Brașov Gendarmerie Legions in apprehending three escaped German prisoners.¹⁰⁹ Successful escapees included Mózes Sebestyén and Jenő Égető (both from Köpec), who described their escape from Focșani and their week-long adventurous journey home over the Carpathian ridge to their home village in interviews conducted with them, giving ample details (especially Jenő Égető) such as names, places and settlements, the date of the escape, duration, route and time of their arrival home.¹¹⁰

The prison camp for returnees

In the spring of 1946, the conditions in the prison camp at Focșani were considerably better. According to Colonel Melnik’s report of 4 March 1946, quoted earlier, the prison camp had accommodation with bunk beds, was heated by stoves, a kitchen was fitted with boilers with a total capacity of 28,350 liters of water, two bakeries making 40 tons of bread a day, a treatment centre for 7,500 people, a total of 1,000 in-patient rooms and military hospital No. 2984 with 2,500 beds.¹¹¹ The capacity of the treatment centre, the infirmary and the war hospital was justified by the fact that most of the returnees from the Soviet Union were “extremely exhausted, ill, badly dressed and lousy.”¹¹² According to the same report, by 4 March 1946, 71,619 persons had been released and repatriated from Focșani, including 11,122 Germans, 35,200 Hungarians, and 5,411 Romanians. All the prisoners released from the camp were medically examined and provided with clothing, footwear and food.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ SJVn AN, LJP, file no. 17/1945, ff. 179–181.

¹⁰⁸ SJVn AN, LJP, file no. 31/1946, ff. 75.

¹⁰⁹ SJVn AN, LJP, file no. 31/1946, ff. 110, 126.

¹¹⁰ Interviews with Mózes Sebestyén 7 Feb. 1998 and Jenő Égető 1 June 1999. The interview conducted with Mózes Sebestyén was edited and published in Benkő 1998, 65–70. Published fragments in Benkő, Papp 2007, 286–287. The interview conducted with Jenő Égető was edited and published in Benkő 2001, 52–96. Published fragments in Benkő, Papp 2007, 287–299.

¹¹¹ Váratic et alii 2013, 578.

¹¹² Váratic et alii 2013, 579.

¹¹³ Váratic et alii 2013, 579.

In May 1946, Soviet detention camps No. 176 in Focșani and No. 36 in Măramarossziget/ Sighetu Marmăției were converted from camps to receive and distribute returnees into transit camps.¹¹⁴ According to a secret report of 12 January 1947 by Major A. N. Bronnikov, head of the Department for Prisoner of War Issues of the Soviet Southern Army Group's Service Directorate,¹¹⁵ 39,492 prisoners arrived in Focșani from the Soviet Union between June and December 1946¹¹⁶ from where 15,116 were handed over to the Romanian authorities and 25,196 were transferred to other destinations; a total of 40,312 prisoners were released, including 840 who had not returned from the Soviet Union but had already been prisoners in the Focșani camp.¹¹⁷ During this period, the prisoners were kept in wooden barracks that could be used in winter and summer, each equipped with three-storey bunks, tables, benches, a brick stove and a washing facility. The barracks were disinfected daily with a chlorine solution and cleaned weekly.¹¹⁸ The camp was equipped with open-air, covered toilets, hand washing facilities, garbage bins, kitchens with 10,000-liter boilers, a food store, 400-person shower baths, clothes dryers and a laundry.¹¹⁹ In addition, a healthcare facility was also set up, with medicines, medical and patient rooms, a dental room, a barrack turned into a surgery and a dressing room. The kitchen was used for cooking three times a day.¹²⁰ At that time, the camp consisted of two sections: unit 1, with a capacity of 5,000 interns, was used to guard the German prisoners who had already been in Focșani, while unit 2, with the same capacity, was used to house the returnees, with tents available for another 5,000. Both units had their kitchen, medical room, and club room.¹²¹

György Pál, a civilian survivor (farmer, Bikfalva/ Bicfalău, Kőkös/ Chichiș, Covasna County), returned from the Soviet Union to Focșani at the end of October 1946, and from there to his home on 1 January 1947. According to him, he was assigned to the camp bakery, and he did not have a raw deal as bread was baked in six ovens and “the food was better.”¹²² Like him, György Kerekes (Kolozsvár), a civilian deported in October 1944, reported better conditions in Focșani on his return home. As he said, “we went to help in the kitchen. Sometimes, we would peel potatoes until morning. They took us to the bath, gave us new underwear, we watched the [club] shows.”¹²³

Survivor József Mile (Kolozsvár) recalled that on his way home, they were also checked in Focșani whether they had an SS sign under their arms, as there were Germans among the returnees. “You can imagine the horror when they came all the way here and were sent back,” said József Mile, released a day later.¹²⁴ József Mile's deported companion from Kolozsvár, István Kocsis, said that they arrived back from the Soviet Union in Focșani

¹¹⁴ Văratîc et alii 2013, 617.

¹¹⁵ Văratîc et alii 2013, 617–631.

¹¹⁶ Văratîc et alii 2013, 618.

¹¹⁷ Văratîc et alii 2013, 619.

¹¹⁸ Văratîc et alii 2013, 622.

¹¹⁹ Văratîc et alii 2013, 623.

¹²⁰ Văratîc et alii 2013, 624.

¹²¹ Văratîc et alii 2013, 627.

¹²² Interview with György Pál 1 May 2000. Quoted fragment in Benkő, Papp 2007, 326–327.

¹²³ Memoirs by György Kerekes 22 Jan. 2001 ms. Quoted fragment in Benkő, Papp 2007, 331.

¹²⁴ Interview with József Mile Oct. 2006. Edited version of the interview in: Papp 2006, 5.

on 15 July 1948, and two or three days later, “everyone was given a release note, they were sent off without a single penny.”¹²⁵

Last but not least, let us mention that there were returnee prisoners who were remanded in Focșani because of their knowledge. Widow Zippel Lászlóné (Sepsiszentgyörgy) said that her husband, who returned from Dombas, had to stay in Focșani for three more months because he could speak seven languages and the Soviets needed an interpreter. During that time, Zippelné visited her husband twice. This is how she remembered it:

Then, it was not so strict because we were let in through the gate without further ado. My husband was called down, there was a bench in the courtyard, we sat there and talked for an hour, and then we left. The camp was very large, at least thirty barracks, surrounded by several strands of barbed wire. Unfortunately, there were still many prisoners, and I learned that many had died, and even in 1947 prisoners were buried almost every day. ... My eldest daughter, Anikó was three years old when her father first saw her. It was sometime in late summer, maybe early fall, when the little girl and I visited him. She ran up to her father and asked, “Are you my father?”¹²⁶

Conclusions

We deem it necessary to point out that the sources by the Romanian side present only the Romanian perspective on the issue of Soviet camp No.176 in Focșani, but we have tried to complete the picture with some Russian and Hungarian written sources and details told or described by survivors. It is also important to emphasize that, based on the archival sources examined so far, we are far from being able to provide a complete and detailed picture of the former Soviet prison camp in Focșani, nor can we – for the time being – venture to cover all aspects of the existence and operation of the former prison camp. After all, it is highly likely that the Soviet military and political authorities leaving Romania in 1958 took all their documents about the internal life of the camp under Soviet control. The Romanian archival sources examined so far only provide insight into the extent to which the Romanian military and civilian authorities of the time had the right and the power to overlook the internal life of the camp and to the extent that the occupying Soviet military authorities allowed them to do so. This picture is complemented by the Russian/Soviet sources used. We believe that the information provided herein is novel and useful for further research into the matter. We will, of course, continue our research to find out and provide further details about the Focsani detention camp.

¹²⁵ Memoirs by István Kocsis 2001, ms. Quoted fragment in Benkő, Papp 2007, 330.

¹²⁶ Interview with widow Zippel Lászlóné 7 Feb. 2000. Quoted fragment in Benkő, Papp 2007, 327–328.

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Fig. 1. German aerial view of southern Focșani, July 1944
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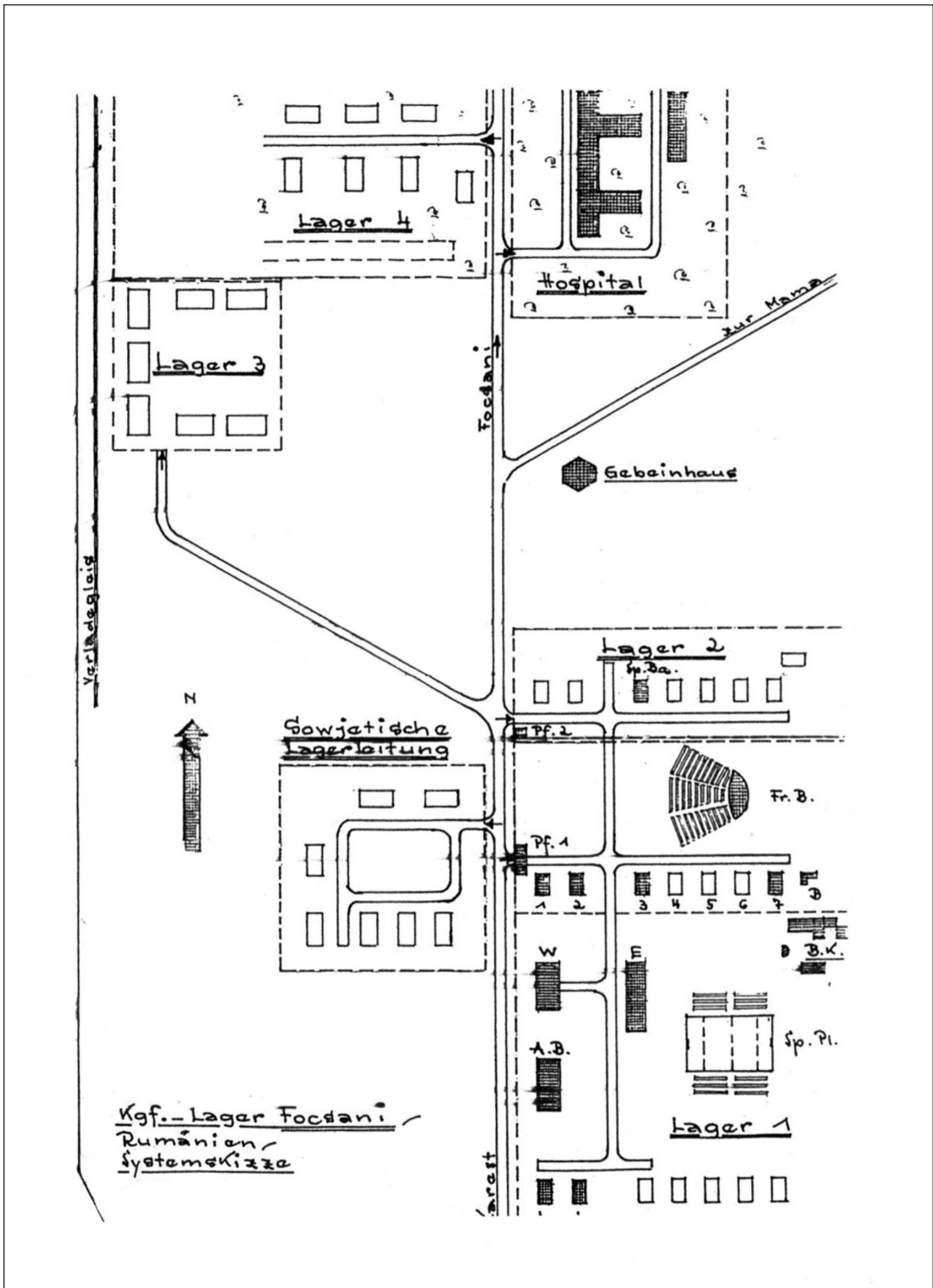


Fig. 2. Sketch of the prison camp No. 176 in Focșani. Warm thanks to Mrs Marianne Saile (Germany), for making this sketch available for publication on 3 August 2018. As she related, her grandfather, Benedikt Saile (b. 18 March 1909, Hirrlingen) “disappeared in Focșani on 28 October 1944.”



Fig. 3. World War I Mausoleum in Focșani. Prisoner camp No. 176 was located south and north of the sanctuary – see Fig. 2 (photo by Levente Benkő).



Fig. 4. Memorial plaque in the Military Cemetery in Focșani, with the inscription: “Here rest 1719 German soldiers with known names and 1237 unknown, who died in or as a result of World War II (photo by Levente Benkő).

REPUBLICA POPULARA ROMANA
CENTRUL DE PRIMIRE

Nr. 1541
Data: 19 Iulie 1948

Focșani

ORDIN

DE PLASARE LA DOMICILIU

Numit Simon A. József, născut la data de 14-VII-1904
 în comuna Fita-Mare județul Focșani țara R.P.R. repatriat din
U.R.S.S. călătorește cu orice mijloc de locomoție de la Focșani
 până în comuna Fita-Mare județul Focșani unde se va prezenta organelor
 polițienești la orașe și autorităților comunale la sate pentru înscriere la biroul de populație.

Bărbații între 18—55 ani sunt obligați a se prezenta în prealabil cercurilor teritoriale pe raza cărora
 domiciliază, pentru clarificarea situației militare.

La eliberarea buletinului de populație, prezentul ordin va fi reținut de autoritatea respectivă ca act
 justificativ.

Acest ordin este valabil timp de 15 zile și s'a emis în baza certificatului de repatriere
 Nr. din eliberat de Misiunea Română de repatriere
 din

COMANDANTUL CENTRULUI DE PRIMIRE.

J. I. I. I.




Fig 5. Order of placement at home (certificate of release) of prisoner Simon A. József (Nagyajta, Covasna County), from camp No. 176 in Focșani, dated 19 July 1948 (property of the authors).



Fig 6. Residential area on the land of the former prisoner camp No. 176 in Focșani, on the side of the E85 road (Bacău-București) (photo by Levente Benkő).



“Miklós Bánffy” exhibition in Bonțida Castle, photo by Hunor Bako

**STUDIES AND ARTICLES.
MUSEUM EXHIBITION
DESIGN**

THREE EXHIBITIONS FOR THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF TRANSYLVANIAN HISTORY. THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ARCHITECT

XÉNIA FURU*

Ars longa, vita brevis (Hippocrates)

Abstract: Designing exhibitions in historic spaces generates challenges in balancing aesthetic requirements and modern conservation standards. This text explores three exhibition designs for the National Museum of Transylvanian History. Each project addressed architectural constraints, historical context, and conservation needs while enhancing public engagement through innovative layouts, thematic designs, and interactive elements. These exhibitions reflect a renewed interest in local history and the successful revitalization of museum collections.

Keywords: exhibition design, museum renovation, historic space, Ptolemaic Egypt, Roman archaeology, pharmacy collection, Mauksch-Hintz House

Rezumat: Amenajarea expozițiilor în spații istorice generează provocări în armonizarea cerințelor esteticii și standardelor moderne de conservare. Acest text explorează trei expoziții proiectate pentru Muzeul Național de Istorie a Transilvaniei. Fiecare proiect a abordat constrângerile arhitecturale, contextul istoric și necesitățile de conservare, îmbunătățind în același timp implicarea publicului prin dispuneri inovatoare, design-uri tematice și elemente interactive. Aceste expoziții reflectă un interes reînnoit pentru istoria locală și revitalizarea de succes a colecțiilor muzeale.

Cuvinte cheie: design expozițional, renovare muzeu, spațiu istoric, Egiptul ptolemaic, arheologie romană, colecție farmaceutică, Casa Mauksch-Hintz

Designing an exhibition in a historic space is always challenging for an architect. Many questions arise when tackling the task. What is the history of the collection? What is the site's history, and how does it relate to the collection? What is the size of the collection? How can the objects be arranged, and in which galleries? How big is the frame? And so on. The contemporary exhibition environment must already meet strict conservation requirements: a balanced climate in the exhibition galleries, prohibited and recommended materials for the design of the showcases, the incorporation of new technologies, the installation of UV filters where appropriate, the adjustment of light levels and the optimal design of information-mediating technologies. However, the physical provision of all these requirements should remain invisible, and only the exhibited object and its explanation should prevail.¹

When planning an exhibition, we look for answers to the above questions. Thus, in the designs, we see not only the object on display but also, by definition, its

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¹ Vasáros 2010.

subjective presentation, the interpretation of the curator, the researchers and the entire design/execution team. By way of introduction, before presenting the pharmaceutical exhibition, I would like to present two examples, also for the National Museum of Transylvanian History.²

From the Gepidic treasure exhibition to the *Limes* exhibition

The theme of the first exhibition, planned for 2019, was the fifth-century treasure discovered in August 1797 and April 1889³ on the outskirts of Șimleu Silvaniei (Szilágysomlyó). Together with architect Péter Wagner⁴ and lighting designer Zsigmond Sütő,⁵ I was asked to design a temporary exhibition curated by Ph.D. Ágnes Găzdac-Alföldy, which the National Museum of Transylvanian History planned to present together with the Museum of Art History (Kunsthistorisches Museum) in Vienna and the Hungarian National Museum (Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum) in Budapest.

The artifacts purchased by the Vienna Museum consist of a gold chain, Roman medallions and gold rings, while the artifacts transported to the Budapest Museum include a large onyx fibula, ten pairs of brooches, three gold bowls and a gold ring.⁶ The exhibition was planned for the first floor, undergoing renovation at the time. The display was based on the story of how the artifacts were found: the first group of artifacts was placed in a darkened octagonal room, a “treasure chamber,” while the second group of artifacts, mostly fibulae, were to be displayed in a green-painted room against a backdrop of forest detail, on model dummies and in glass cases (Fig. 1). To highlight the gold objects on display, they were placed against a dark background. The room lighting was also reduced, with only the illumination of the objects and text to guide the visitor. A guest wall was designed to help interpret the exhibition as a vehicle for conveying information. With this solution, the historic building was not damaged, and we proposed a surface that could be easily dismantled and converted.

Due to a lack of funding, the objects to be borrowed could not be brought in when provisioned. However, the plan was implemented in 2021 on the second floor for another exhibition, on which occasion the exhibition space was extended over the entire floor.

² Vincze 2002. In 1859, the Transylvanian Museum Society was founded primarily to collect and manage museum material, including the very adventurous fate of its Numismatic and Antiquities Collection. Despite repeated promises, the institution did not receive a building suitable for museum exhibitions, storage or modern research for a long time (Béla Pósta, 1906). The collection is currently housed in the house built for the family of Dániel Petrichevich-Horváth in the early nineteenth century in the former Bastia Street (now Constantin Daicoviciu Street no. 2) in Cluj-Napoca. The family sold the property, and the new owner left it to the Reformed Church in his will. From 1911, the “Franz Joseph” University of Sciences rented the building for the Numismatic and Antiquities Library (Gaal 2021), and the Romanian State bought the property in 1925. In the 1930s, the building was extended to the site’s boundary, and the Roman Lapidarium was built on the basement level of the new building, with storage and offices on the upper floors. In the Interwar period, part of the collection was transferred to the university and returned during World War II. Between 2009 and 2019, the building was renovated and structurally strengthened. The Roman Lapidarium and the Medieval and Early Modern Lapidarium have recently been renovated as part of the museum’s restoration process.

³ Pulszky 1889.

⁴ Péter Wagner, DLA, Architect, Budapest.

⁵ Zsigmond Sütő, Oradea-based lighting designer.

⁶ Hajnal 2021.

Thus, the first long-term exhibition in the renovated museum building was *LIMES*,⁷ which presented objects from archaeological sites along the Roman frontier (*limes*) in Romania (Fig. 2). In the previously mentioned room, the octagonal “treasury” housed a display of governors from the Roman frontier, a section of a bronze statue of Emperor Caracalla, Roman gold coins, helmet ornaments, adornments, and coins (Fig. 3). The next room was dedicated to Roman military techniques, followed by a larger room where the line of the *limes*, projected on the wall, was marked by identified and excavated sites in present-day Romania. Scale models, including a wooden soldiers’ barrack, were made. The last two rooms showcased artifacts excavated in the Roman province that illustrated civilian habitation and spiritual life. The visitor’s route led through interconnecting rooms, each with a different theme, emphasized by the different colors of the walls.⁸

The Egyptian collection

The next exhibition, which is still on display at the time of publishing, was opened in 2022 in the same building, on the first floor, near the side staircase. It was curated by Ph.D. Eugenia Beu-Dachin, and the collection consists of more than 100 objects, of which approximately 60 are exhibited. Most date back to the Ptolemaic Period, but some belong to the Dynastic Period. The collection consists of human and animal mummies, statuettes of different divinities, amulets, and objects of daily use. The exhibition was designed with architect Péter Wagner, DLA, and lighting designer Zsigmond Sütő.

The collection is based on a donation made by Balázs Orbán, writer and antique collector, to the Transylvanian Museum Society in 1860. The donation consisted of some dozens of pieces: bronze, wooden and ceramic statuettes of Egyptian deities, Ushabti statuettes for the cult of the dead, whose value is enhanced by the hieroglyphic signs on them. Also donated by Balázs Orbán are the mummified ibis and the small crocodile. Gergely Bethlen donated the statuette of Horus, while Géza Kuun donated statuettes representing Apis, Isis, and Osiris. The human mummy, a donation of Fülöp Back, was found in the Ptolemaic necropolis of Gamhud during an archaeological excavation financed by him and led by the archaeologist Thaddäus Smolenski.⁹ Fülöp Back met archaeologist Béla Pósta, director of the Transylvanian Museum Society, at a conference in Egypt in 1909, and it was through Pósta’s intervention that the human mummy and sarcophagus were brought to Cluj.¹⁰

The exhibition *Gods and Mortals in Ancient Egypt* was financially supported by the SEE Grants (Norway, Iceland, Lichtenstein). The layout concept shows a tight spatiality strung on a geometric axis, similar to Egyptian art. The color of the rooms reflects the titular dichotomy. The dominant color in the first room is sky-blue – symbolizing the home of the gods, where Egyptian culture and small statuettes of gods are displayed (Fig. 5). In contrast, the second one is light-brown, evoking the sand color of the burial sites, where mummified human organs and animals belonging to the cult of the dead are exhibited

⁷ *LIMES. Frontierele Imperiului Roman în România*, on-line exhibition at <https://www.mnit.ro/turlimes/>, accessed 5 Nov. 2024.

⁸ *Buletin LIMES – Frontierele Imperiului Roman din România* national programme, publications from 2016.

⁹ Kothay 2020.

¹⁰ Beu-Dachin et alii 2022.

(Fig. 6). It is here that the human mummy is to be found in a prominent position, relative to the entrance, on the central axis of the two rooms. A special feature of the exhibition is that the objects have undergone extensive research, restoration, and conservation before their presentation. The mummified organic material has been examined using non-destructive methods. This in-depth research process is also illustrated by a series of films playing in the third and final room, which also hosts museum education activities. The exhibition's envisaged wall decoration included a frieze running in the upper third of the space with reproductions of the Egyptian representations associated with the space, which were, regrettably, not shown. The informative elements of the exhibition were also placed on a guest wall (Fig. 4).

The two temporary exhibitions proved to be useful preludes, preparing the theme of the next, richer exhibition. While these temporary exhibitions focused on limited parts of the museum's collection, easy to adapt to various locations and to reuse for the next theme,¹¹ the permanent exhibition presented in the following showcases a broader selection of artifacts, linked organically and permanently to its location.

The museum in the Mauksch-Hintz House

The third exhibition, in the recently renovated¹² Mauksch-Hintz House in Cluj-Napoca, presents two significant collections related to the history of pharmacy and medicine.

Based on a donation of nearly 1000 items by the pharmacist Gyula Orient, the pharmacy collection was first presented to the public in 1917 in the two ground-floor rooms of the current building currently hosting the National Museum of Transylvanian History.¹³ In 1919, after the First World War, the assemblages of the Transylvanian Museum Society's Numismatic and Antiquities Collection were taken over by the state and the "Franz Joseph" University of Science. In 1921, French medical historian Jules Guiart was invited to teach at the Faculty of Medicine¹⁴ and founded a Collection of Medical History in the university building.¹⁵ After 1930, Valeriu Bologna, a pupil of Guiart, took over the professor's classes and the collection management. After World War II, Bologna was tasked to list and collect objects from nationalized pharmacies. The earliest museum showcasing the collected objects was opened in Sibiu. Two years later, in Cluj, an exhibition of the expanded Gyula Orient collection and the Hintz pharmacy objects was opened in the nationalized Mauksch-Hintz House, in the former spaces of the street shop and the two *officinae*.¹⁶ This exhibition was placed and presented by Izsák Sámuel, who viewed this museum "as the greatest achievement of my life because I enriched the cultural life of Kolozsvár."¹⁷ The museum was closed between 1959 and 1964 when the pedestrian

¹¹ In November 2024, a new exhibition was inaugurated at this location.

¹² Principal designer: Planwerk Arhitectură Urbanism, architect Benjamin Kohl; structural designer: Progir Structural, engineer Georgiana Tirt; mechanical engineering: Progir Proiectare Construcții; interior design: Klara Veér – BIA; contractor: Weberbau, engineer Tibor Weber.

¹³ Orient 1918.

¹⁴ Gruia 2023.

¹⁵ Kelemen 2017.

¹⁶ Izsák 1958.

¹⁷ Gido 2003.

passage was built on the southeast corner of the building. In 1964, the museum reopened under the direction of Bologa's pupil, museographer Eva Crişan, who ran it until 1997 and part-time until 2001. In 1997, the large room overlooking Bridge (currently Ferdinand) Street, then owned by the Mayor's Office, was converted into a space housing a medical history collection of approximately 200 items donated by the TEMCO Company. Most of the medical equipment came from hospitals in Cluj-Napoca or was donated by private practices.¹⁸ The museum was closed for renovation work in 2018 and reopened in its current form in January 2024.

The building history of the Mauksch-Hintz House was published in 2022, described by architect Endre Ványolós, Ph.D.¹⁹ The periodization was established by art historian Zsolt Kovács, Ph.D. The present building had several construction phases. The first two buildings, erected at the end of the fifteenth century, still have the two medieval cellars, which were joined by a single room in the sixteenth century at the latest. The Baroque alterations to the building are the largest in scale and at the same time the most spectacular. In 1727, the pharmacy became the property of Samuel Schwartz, who ran it jointly with Tobias Mauksch, then a pharmacist in Târgu Mureş. After the former's death in 1752, Mauksch obtained the apothecary's license in Cluj-Napoca and rebuilt the ground and first floors. The *officina*, still visible today, was created on the ground floor, and its spectacular vault painting was completed in 1766. The vaulted ceiling is decorated with the serpent of Asclepius, the crane, symbolizing vigilance, and two medallions with horns of plenty. The history of the pharmacy and the names of its owners were inscribed in a leaf-ornamented frame as part of the mural. The largest ground floor room, also vaulted, is decorated with stucco (not part of the present-day museum). The pharmacy was run by the Mauksch family for three generations, and was taken over by Johann Martin Mauksch's grandson, Georg (György) Hintz, in 1851. Over the next century and a half, the building underwent minor construction, reinforcements, and façade alterations, but its basic form and function remained the same until 1949: a pharmacy – *officina*, laboratory, and storeroom on the ground floor, an apartment on the first floor, a *herbarium* – herb drying room – in the attic, and a storeroom for other materials in the cellar.

The exhibition, which opened in January 2024, is curated by Ana-Maria Gruia, Ph.D., who led the research and re-cataloguing of the pharmaceutical collection as part of the Pharmatrans research project. Seven volumes on the pharmaceutical collection and the inventoried objects were published in 2023.²⁰

The aim of the exhibition is to present the history of pharmacy collection, with artifacts from Cluj and the rest of Transylvania, as well as the collection of historical medical instruments that was previously connected to it, but which is different in content. Naturally, the diversity of the objects made it impossible to present a fully equipped, working pharmacy (a concept that the recently renovated museum in Oradea, the Pomegranate Pharmacy, is trying to follow).²¹

¹⁸ The artifacts were collected by Pompiliu Manea, owner of the TEMCO Company (Gruia 2023, vol. 1, 43).

¹⁹ Ványolós 2022.

²⁰ Gruia 2023.

²¹ See Ana-Maria Gruia's article on the debate over the reconstruction of the historical pharmacy in the present volume.

The newly renovated Mauksch-Hintz house and the professionally restored frescoes²² provide a suitable setting for the exhibits. The approach was to restore the unique character of the previous exhibition, which was given by the displayed objects and the architecture of the building, the presence of old furniture, and the use of traditional doors and windows altogether. During construction, an exceptionally good relationship was established between the museum specialists, the building renovation planners, contractors, and the owner. For example, at the request of the museum, among the doors and windows replaced due to structural interventions, a hidden compartment door was successfully rebuilt.

The Museum of Pharmacy and Medical History is housed in rented rooms on two building levels. The visitor approaches the museum through the entrance at the corner of the building on the ground floor (Fig. 9). The window next to the entrance, highlighting a few objects, draws the visitor's attention (Fig. 10). Its content can be periodically changed. Similar to the 1964 layout, the pharmaceutical collection is housed on the ground floor (Fig. 11) and in two rooms in the basement. In the *Officina* and the *Camera Materialis*, the historical furniture has been displayed: the furniture from the Orient exhibition of 1917 (Fig. 12), two Baroque painted cabinets,²³ the drawer cabinet from the Black Eagle pharmacy in Sibiu, the baroque table from the Nits pharmacy in Gherla, the surviving baroque decorated cabinet from the Hintz pharmacy, on which the recent restoration has revealed the previous paint layers. In the entrance area, two doorplates of the Štítník pharmacy, donated by Gyula Orient, with the image of Hippocrates and Minerva, and the sign of the Golden Lion pharmacy in Recașul de Timiș were placed. The pharmacist's office is also on the ground floor, with two thematic walls: one showing the history of the Mauksch family and the other the Hintz family (Fig. 7). The glass cabinets, with variable contents, display the laboratory equipment used to prepare medicines, and a complete display of books and guides on pharmacy. The new furniture, similar in form to the previous furniture, is easier to place in the historic space, and is, at the same time, supplemented with interactive equipment. The unique feature of the furniture is the cross-patterned or plain copper plate that appears repeatedly on the new exhibition furniture and is used as a decorative element on the building. The use of copper elements continues on the lower level, visually connecting and guiding the visitor.

In the basement, the first room is a chamber with storage vessels, while the second room houses the larger tools and vessels used for preparing medicines²⁴ (Fig. 8). From here you can enter the museum's educational room, where small group activities can be organized. In the corner room of the cellar, a movie about the history of the house can be watched, and in the glass case, against a background of historical photographs, visitors can see the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century coins found through archaeological excavations during the renovation work. On the adjacent wall, photographs by Ella Hintz show the family's life in the early twentieth century. A collection of medical instruments is displayed in the second medieval cellar and the intermediate cellar. The objects are grouped by medical specialities: gynecology, dentistry, radiology, ophthalmology. The

²² The restoration work was carried out by Lóránd Kiss and his team between 2021 and 2023.

²³ Pop 1979.

²⁴ The seventeenth-century inventory of the princely pharmacy in Alba Iulia is a good example of a pharmacy's equipment (Kovács 2018).

instruments used in medical operations are placed in the last room, similar to the design of medical amphitheatres: an oval podium with the operating table on it, auxiliary machines, and instruments nearby. The information system, which is easy to use for the twenty-first-century visitor, helps to interpret the exhibition. There is, for example, a telephone application with a guide in four languages.²⁵ A repository of data on the two families of pharmacists is under construction and will be accessible via touch screens.

When designing the exhibition, we considered the need to ensure that the built-in showcases do not damage or obscure the renovated surfaces. Therefore, the furniture elements in the basement are fitted with glass walls that reflect the texture of the medieval masonry (Figs. 13 and 14), and the plinth has a perforated base that allows the warm air from the underfloor heating to circulate. Unfortunately, the restored cellar vaults (that have not been part of the previous museum) have become so saturated with moisture over the centuries that the drying process is very slow, resulting in stone dust deposited on the display cases and even on the exhibits. This is one of the reasons why it is advised that a more suitable room should be created in the future for the medical history objects.

Conclusions

When completing the three projects for the National Museum of Transylvanian History, the designers were definitely influenced by the spirituality and enthusiasm of the nineteenth-century forefathers, who initiated the establishment, scientific research, and later the enrichment of museum collections in Transylvania. The opening of the first two exhibitions gave a new impetus to redefining the museum's mission; the adopted innovative visual interpretation greatly improved communication between the museum and the public. Visitor numbers have increased, and museum education group activities have become more successful.

The renovation and opening of the Mauksch-Hintz House were also much anticipated by the community of Cluj-Napoca. The success of the reopening of two collections housed here is greatly enhanced by the effect of the combination and contrast of old and new fabric, traditional and innovative solutions. The large number of visitors and the buzz after the opening are a clear signal to museographers and planners that it is worth continuing along this path and regularly presenting and reopening the rich collections of the National Museum of Transylvanian History.

²⁵ Romanian, English, German, and Hungarian, soon to be completed with Romanian sign language.

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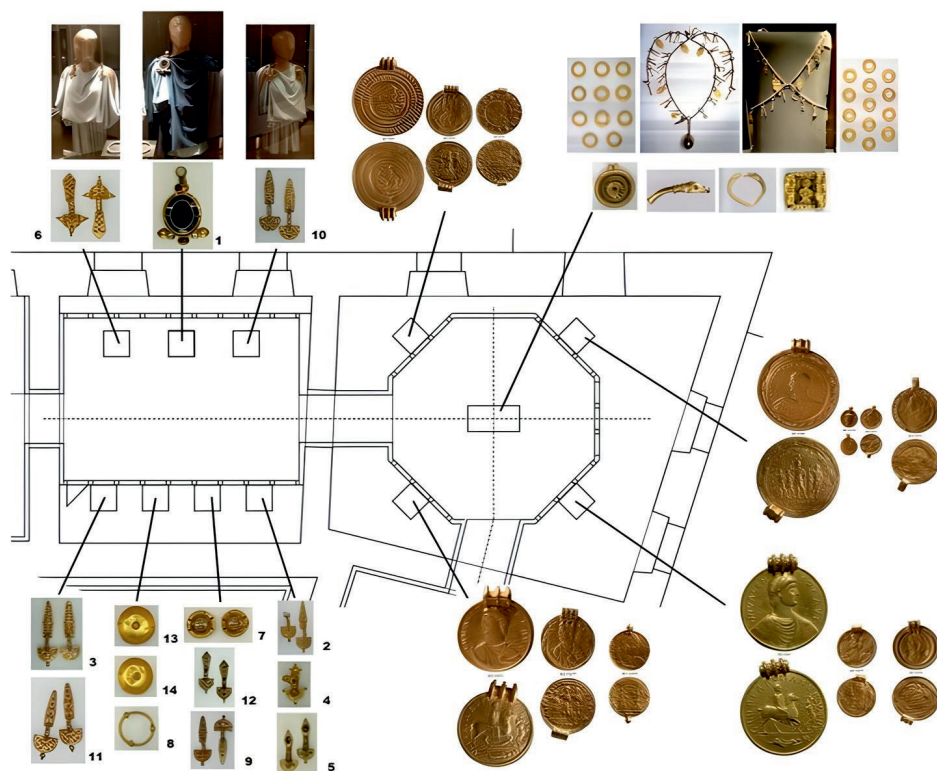


Fig.1. Suggestion for the grouping of artefacts. Conceptual plan – the Gepidic treasure exhibition (projection by Xénia Furu, Péter Wagner).



Fig. 2. Entrance corridor in the *Limes* exhibition (image from the MNIT archive).



Fig. 3. Room dedicated to the governors from the Roman frontier in the *Limes* exhibition (image from the MNIT archive).



Fig. 4. Planned wall decorations for the *Gods and Mortals* exhibition (projection by Xénia Furu, Péter Wagner).



Fig. 5. First room of the *Gods and Mortals* exhibition, view towards the second room (photo by Xénia Furu).



Fig. 6. Second room of the *Gods and Mortals* exhibition, interior detail of one of the showcases (photo by Xénia Furu).



Fig. 7. Wall views in the Pharmacist's Office room, with panels detailing the history of the owner families, the Mauksch and the Hintz families (projection by Xénia Furu).

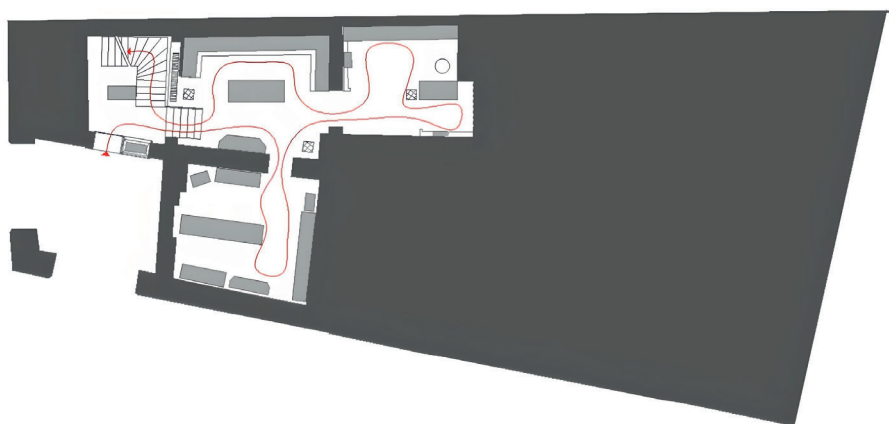


Fig. 8. Ground floor plan of the Mauksch-Hintz House and visiting circuit through the second part of the Pharmacy Museum (projection by Xénia Furu).

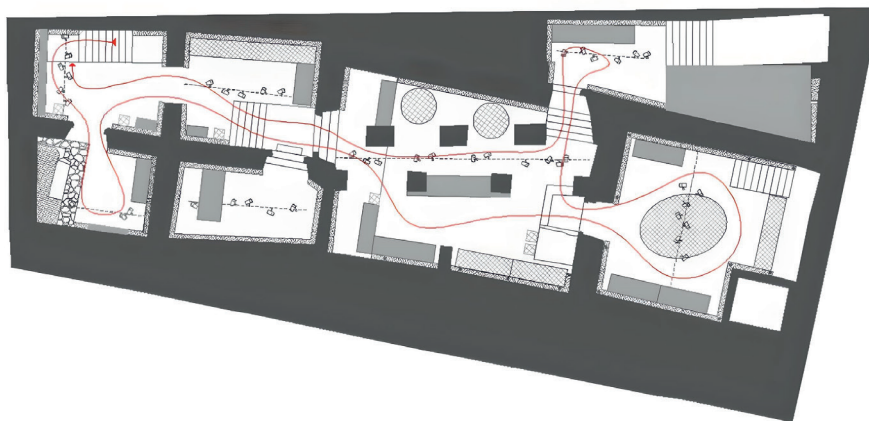


Fig. 9. Basement floor plan of the Mauksch-Hintz House in Cluj-Napoca and visiting circuit through the first part of the Pharmacy Museum (projection by Xénia Furu).



Fig. 10. Detail of the entrance (photo by Xénia Furu).



Fig. 11. View from the entrance through the inside of the exhibition (photo by Xénia Furu).



Fig. 12. The old *officina*, showcases from the original Orient exhibition (photo by Xénia Furu).



Fig.13. Views through the showcases: the transparency of the glass permits visual contact with the historic structure behind (photo by Xénia Furu).



Fig. 14. Views through the showcases (photo by Xénia Furu).

TO RECONSTRUCT OR NOT TO RECONSTRUCT: THAT WAS THE QUESTION IN CURATING THE NEW DISPLAY INSIDE THE PHARMACY MUSEUM IN CLUJ-NAPOCA

ANA-MARIA GRUIA*

Abstract: Pharmacy museums are very specialized institutions, often located in the former rooms of old apothecary shops. One of the easiest ways of structuring the display is to recreate the interiors, with several variants: using original artifacts from that location (rarely preserved complete), using original artifacts from other locations, and using physical or virtual reconstructions (or various combinations). Though such atmospheric reconstructions are suggestive and create an immersive experience for visitors, they have the drawback of never reaching true historical accuracy. The History of Pharmacy Collection in Cluj-Napoca has been on display in the old Mauksch-Hintz pharmacy since 1954, with the addition of a recreated laboratory in the basement in 1972 and a complementary collection of medical equipment in 1997. A new display was designed in 2018–2024 following a major renovation of the monument. The present study discusses the choices and curating decisions behind the current Museum of Pharmacy exhibition in Cluj-Napoca, part of the National Museum of Transylvanian History.

Keywords: museum studies, curating, pharmacy museum, museum reconstructions, museum exhibition

Rezumat: Muzeele de farmacie sunt instituții foarte specializate, adesea situate în fostele încăperi ale vechilor farmacii. Una dintre cele mai simple modalități de structurare a expozițiilor de acest tip este recrearea interioarelor, cu mai multe variante: utilizarea artefactelor originale din locația respectivă (rareori păstrate complet), utilizarea unor artefacte originale din alte locații și utilizarea reconstrucțiilor fizice sau virtuale (sau diverse combinații de metode). Deși astfel de reconstituiri atmosferice sunt sugestive și creează o experiență imersivă pentru vizitatori, ele au dezavantajul de a nu atinge niciodată adevărata acuratețe istorică. Colecția de Istorie a Farmaciei din Cluj-Napoca a fost expusă în vechea farmacie Mauksch-Hintz din 1954, cu adăugarea unui laborator reconstituit în subsol în 1972 și a unei colecții suplimentare de aparatură medicală în 1997. O nouă expunere a fost proiectată în perioada 2018–2024 în urma unei renovări majore a monumentului. Studiul de față discută alegerile și deciziile curatoriale din spatele actualei expoziții a Muzeului Farmaciei din Cluj-Napoca, parte a Muzeului Național de Istorie a Transilvaniei.

Cuvinte cheie: studii muzeale, curatoriat, muzeul farmaciei, reconstituiri muzeale, expoziție muzeală

Museum architecture

Specialists have extensively discussed the development and trends of museum architecture worldwide and the topic is still very relevant as new museums are built

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and older museums are renewed at an increasing pace over the past decades, due to an extraordinary rise in cultural tourism.¹ Some authors have identified several main periods in museum architecture, starting from the opening of former royal collections to the public in the 18th-century, when museum buildings were monuments in themselves, through a transformation of paradigm at the end of the 19th century to museums as instruments, that implied a degree of flexibility and adaptability, even of impermanence, including the ideal “white cube” as both flexible and neutral background for exhibits, to a plurality of concepts during modernism and postmodernism after the middle of the 20th century. Museum space was sometimes reconceptualized as sculpture and universality was replaced by individuality, with initiatives striving to create signature buildings, or architects attempting to re-use existing structures in urban regeneration projects.² Such overviews mostly discuss new buildings for art and national history museums. The options available to smaller and especially niche museums such as pharmacy museums are in fact much narrower and largely depend on existing architecture. They are very specialized institutions, largely located in the former rooms of historical apothecary shops, thus in fact at the intersection between museum and heritage site, often declared actual architectural monuments. One of the easiest ways of structuring the display in such museums is to recreate the interiors of the former pharmacies and this brings one to the discussion of historical accuracy and means of recreation. There are several possible ways of reconstructing pharmacy museums: using original artifacts from that location (rarely preserved complete) in the original architectural settings; using original artifacts from other locations; and using physical replicas or virtual reconstructions (or various combinations). Though such atmospheric reconstructions are suggestive and create an immersive experience for visitors, they have the drawback of (almost) never reaching true historical accuracy. At the opposite end one might discuss the idea of heritage-themed amusement parks in the United States, labeled as complete fakes and facing strong opposition from various quarters of society.³

Museum reconstructions as conservation and education tools

The value of reconstructions for understanding the past is naturally very high, as they create both an immediate understanding of an entire context for visitors and allow specialists to gain deeper knowledge into how artifacts were produced and used, how certain structures were built and accessed, etc. The first museum-like collections, the Cabinets of Curiosities, did not turn to reconstructions, but employed functional storage and display furniture. The first museums per se, the royal collections opened to the public in the 18th century, displayed artifacts against the backdrop of royal palaces without attempting to reconstruct their interiors. Actual museum reconstructions date from the early 20th century, with the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York opening its Cloisters, a newly erected architectural complex that was not a copy of any specific medieval structure but rather an ensemble informed by a selection of historical precedents, with a deliberate combination of ecclesiastical and secular spaces arranged in chronological order. It contained elements

¹ UNESCO estimates there are more than 100.000 museums worldwide: “Museums”/ UNESCO.

² Giebelhausen 2011.

³ The example of a failed Walter Disney Company park in Virginia that has met general public criticism in 1994 is discussed in Hoelscher 2011, 209.

from actual medieval cloisters and from other sites in Europe that have been incorporated into the fabric of the building and displayed original artifacts from the Old World.⁴

A late 20th-century success example of museum reconstruction is the Archaeological Park Carnuntum, in Austria. It opened in 1988 and since 1996 it is run by a public-private partnership. The park includes a museum building for original artifacts, the ruins of the Roman city and the spectacular reconstruction of several structures, rebuilt in minute details based on both archaeological excavations and non-invasive investigations. The reconstructed *villae, termae* and other civilian buildings are reversible, fully functional, and made with traditional techniques on top of the ancient ruins, with adjacent gardens with plants selected through analyses of archaeologically recovered pollen. In 2013, Carnuntum has been awarded the prestigious European Heritage Label Award.⁵ The park also hosts an annual reenactment festival of late Antiquity and includes several interesting visual and virtual reconstructions and tools.⁶

Possibly the best example of good reconstruction practices from the US is Colonial Williamsburg, in Virginia, that places great emphasis on both living history and the preservation and accurate inner refurbishing of historical buildings. It includes 33 constructions dated to the 18th century and the characters reenacted are both founding figures of the American nation and craftsmen hosting practical workshops.⁷

Virtual reconstructions have become increasingly varied and powerful in recent decades, opening new possibilities for museum reconstructions. Building Information Modelling (BIM) and Virtual Reality (VR) techniques are especially in fashion, resulting not in simple reproductions of historical artifacts and sites but in digital objects that both communicate with a wider audience and facilitate the design and the comparison between alternative solutions, promoting the e-conservation paradigm.⁸

Pharmacy museums and reconstructions

Pharmacy museums are specialized institutions, most often located in old pharmacies. This was mainly the trend in present-day Romania as well, with the pharmacy museum in Cluj-Napoca on display since 1954 in the rooms of the Hintz pharmacy, the museum in Sibiu⁹ opened in 1952 inside the Black Bear pharmacy in town, and even the recently opened Rodia Pharmacy¹⁰ in Oradea that was remade in the rooms of the Misericordian apothecary shop of the hospital there. The same is true for both pharmacy displays in Kőszeg, Hungary, one of which even recreates the herb garden,¹¹ or the preserved Baroque apothecary shop “At the White Unicorn” that is one of the main attractions of Klatovy, in the Czech Republic.¹² Even relocated pharmacies are usually displayed as recreated rooms,

⁴ “History of the Museum”/ MET.

⁵ Găzdac, Humer 2020.

⁶ See more in “Carnuntum app”/ Roman City of Carnuntum.

⁷ Colonial Williamsburg/ CW Foundation.

⁸ Marra, Trizio, Savini 2023.

⁹ “The Pharmacy Museum in Sibiu”/ Pharmatrans.

¹⁰ “Visiting the Rodia Pharmacy”/ Pharmatrans.

¹¹ “The Two Pharmacy Museums in Kőszeg”/ Pharmatrans.

¹² “At the White Unicorn in Klatovy”/ Pharmatrans.

like in Nuremberg¹³ and Venice¹⁴. National pharmacy museums tend to display multiple pharmacy interiors, mostly entire *officinae*, like in Heidelberg,¹⁵ Krakow,¹⁶ and Kuks (the Czech Republic).¹⁷

One of the easiest ways of structuring the display is to recreate the interiors, as previously mentioned, with several variants: using original artifacts from that location, using original artifacts from other locations (most often the case, as the patrimony of such museums starts from personal or institutional collections of apothecary goods from a certain region), and using physical and/or virtual reconstructions. One example of a reconstructed pharmaceutical display with artifacts obtained from different, dispersed sources, is to be found in the Museo Nazionale della Scienza e della Tecnologia Leonardo da Vinci in Milan.¹⁸

Though atmospheric reconstructions are suggestive and create an immersive experience for visitors, they often pose accuracy issues as very rarely both the architecture and the artifacts have remained intact at the creation of the museums in question. In fact, pharmacy museums are at the intersection between museums and heritage sites, on display inside architectural monuments that are either historical pharmacies, in which case a higher degree of reconstruction is usually attempted, or castles, hospitals, and buildings with other non-pharmaceutical functions.

The Pharmacy Museum in the Hintz House, Cluj-Napoca

The Pharmacy Museum in Cluj-Napoca opened in 1954 in the old Mauksch-Hintz pharmacy that functioned on that location between about 1750 and 1949. The house is a registered historical monument, located in the center of the city. It was originally selected because of preserved features, such as room structure, especially a beautiful Baroque vault painting, and a large storage cupboard left in situ. The first exhibition was curated by members of the Institute for the History of Medicine, Pharmacy, and Medical Folklore, Professor Valeriu Bologna, Ph.D., and his assistant at the time, Samuel Izsák, Ph.D. They used the old collection of apothecary goods that Gyula Orient, Ph.D., had donated and helped display in 1917–1918 at the Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum (National Transylvanian Museum), as well as artifacts from the collection of their institute, especially folk medicines, and artifacts from the old pharmacies nationalized by the Communist Regime in 1949.¹⁹ The museum was entitled *Colecția Muzeală de Istorie a Farmaciei a Institutului Medico-Farmaceutic Cluj* and functioned under the authority of the Ministry of Health. The museum opened to the main square, preserving the entrance of the old pharmacy. The 1954 display reflected the era's principles, with artifacts in display cases, hung on

¹³ "Handwerk und Medicin. Die Ausstellung"/ Germanisches Nationalmuseum.

¹⁴ The "Ai Do San Marchi" Pharmacy is entirely preserved inside the "Ca Rezzonico" Museum, with three complete rooms (the *officina*, the small laboratory, and the back room). "Ai Do San Marchi Pharmacy"/ Pharmatrans.

¹⁵ "The German Pharmacy Museum located in the Castle of Heidelberg"/ Deutches Apotheken Museum.

¹⁶ "The Pharmacy Museum in Krakow"/ Pharmatrans.

¹⁷ Inside the monumental building of the Hospital in Kuks, Czech Republic. "The Czech Pharmaceutical Museum"/ Pharmatrans.

¹⁸ "The Pharmacy Collection of the Science Museum in Milan"/ Pharmatrans.

¹⁹ Izsák 1956. I thank Oana Habor, Ph.D., for indicating and facilitating access to this publication.

the walls, or on special platforms (Fig. 1). Preserved photographs only show two of the museum rooms, the late 19th–first half of the 20th-century *officina* or sales room and the old 18th-century *officina*. The museum remains undocumented in its entirety but taking into consideration the ground plan sketched in 1950–1954 by Prof. Bologna²⁰ and comparing it with preserved photographs of the rooms while still in use around 1900, the museum did not aim at reconstructing the old pharmacy itself (Fig. 2). Only the old *officina* was labeled on the ground plan as “the old pharmacy.” The museum display was rather didactic, with the new *officina* grouping artifacts typologically (the mortars in one corner, jars in vertical display cases, likely documents in the central, lower display cases with tilted tops – Fig. 1).

Between 1959 and 1964 the museum was closed, as the corner of the building was demolished and opened for pedestrian circulation due to traffic restrictions in the area. During this time, the museum was transferred to the History Museum and reopened with about the same display, albeit half a room smaller (the half reproduced in Figs. 1 and 2). In 1972 museographer Eva Crișan, Ph.D., obtained the extension of the museum in three rooms in the basement of the Hintz house, where she curated a highly successful pharmaceutical laboratory reconstruction. Believing in the educative value of such reconstructions and general atmosphere renderings in pharmacy museums, she had the basement made accessible through a new flight of asymmetrical steps from the laboratory of the Hintz pharmacy and organized the reconstruction with both original items and a consistent number of replicas and fictional elements (Fig. 3).²¹ The stove, the wooden shelves and the chairs, stands, and desk were newly made, as well as dozens of glass retorts placed on the rack above the stove. Eva Crișan has kindly shared the history of the reconstruction with us, remembering how she had the retorts remade at the glass factory in Turda, near Cluj-Napoca. Her intention was to recreate an alchemical/pharmaceutical laboratory that visitors could easily relate to and it was indeed highly appreciated by the public.²² The display in the ground floor rooms was also adapted, with certain elements moved between the old *officina* and the *camera materialis* and the main entrance now set in the pedestrian passage on the corner.

The museum extended once more in 1997, with the new room displaying a newly donated collection of medical equipment. This room, parallel to King Ferdinand Street, currently hosting the Cărturești Bookstore, was not part of the historical pharmacy, but the Hintz family traditionally rented it to various businesses. The medical equipment was donated by Pompiliu Manea, Ph.D., professor at the University of Medicine in Cluj and owner of the TEMCO Company that specializes in selling such items. Prof. Manea had collected around 500 old pieces of medical equipment, mostly from hospitals in Cluj that gave up their antiquated pieces of technology. He donated to the museum 200 of them, the oldest and most valuable ones,²³ and even paid for the display furniture. This was not

²⁰ Gruia 2023a, 49, fig. 4.

²¹ Especially the museum in Heidelberg, the reconstructed stove imitating one still on display there (“Visitor experience”/ Schloss Heidelberg, fig. 3. The lab). Details on the matter and an interesting glimpse of the *zeitgeist* (the ideology of the Communist Regime reflected in historiography), in Crișan 1977.

²² Still, the inventory ledger of the museum misleadingly included 151 replicas and reproductions (representing 4% of the collection) without explicit mention of them not being originals, like the rest of the inventoried artifacts. Gruia 2023b, 60, 71, graph. I.

²³ Manea 2004.

a reconstruction either, but a crammed display of the equipment according to medical specialties (Fig. 4).

The entire Hintz House was given back to its rightful owners in 2013 and, at the end of a lengthy and complicated legal process, Dr. Georg Hintz has become the sole owner and decided to invest in the renovation of the building that lasted between 2018 and 2024.²⁴

Remaking the Pharmacy Museum in Cluj-Napoca

The collection was evacuated in 2018 and remained in temporary storage at the headquarters of the National Museum of Transylvanian History (henceforth MNIT) until 2024. It was a fruitful period, allowing for the extensive research and publication of the pharmacy collection,²⁵ as well as for the elaboration of the new curatorial concept. The team in charge of the new display included me as curator, external collaborator architect Xenia Furu as interior designer, Ioana Cova as collection conservator, Cristina Țopan for the technical part and several other colleagues from the MNIT and external collaborators for design (including the rebranding of the Pharmacy Museum by Sorin Tirt), acquisitions, and implementation between 2020 and 2024.

Curating the new exhibition was a lengthy and rather difficult process, due both to the Covid-19 pandemic that slowed everything down and the collaboration with the owner and the architects in charge of the overall project, as the museum was just one of the future tenants of the Hintz House. The collection currently occupies four rooms on the ground floor and the entire basement, thus losing the larger room on the ground floor (Fig. 4) and acquiring in return new rooms in the cellar for the display of the medical collection, museum education activities, and a multimedia room presenting the evolution of the house and of the old pharmacy. The extensive renovation has revealed new, precious data on the history of the historical monument, and has led to significant changes in terms of diving walls and openings, the floor level in the basement, access ways, and circuit. Due to these changes, curating the new pharmaceutical and medical exhibition required a new approach, opened new possibilities, but also posed difficult choices. As the premises were those of an old pharmacy, with preserved features, the first choice focused on whether to reconstruct the historical apothecary shop, and if so, which period to reconstruct, with what means, and how accurately.

The first step was to identify and evaluate the preserved elements of the old pharmacy and the available historical sources at our disposal. The first category of sources were the **architectural** ones. As previously mentioned, the main reasons behind selecting the Hintz House for the Pharmacy Museum were the preserved features, foremost the Baroque painting of the old *officina*. Much more original elements were nevertheless identified or better researched during the extensive renovation, such as another 18th-century vault painting in the storage room (*camera materialis*), medieval window and door frames in the basement, medieval and Roman walls and foundations, a possible icehouse in the courtyard, below ground level, and details of the attic – the historical timber frame,

²⁴ See the entire history of the collection and of the museum in Gruia 2023a. The renovation was carried out by specialists of two Cluj-based companies, Planwerk Arhitectura & Urbanism SRL and Weberbau SRL.

²⁵ Through the project entitled *PHARMATRANS. All Things Apothecary in 16th–20th-century Transylvania. The History of Pharmacy Collection in Cluj-Napoca* (“PHARMATRANS project”/ Pharmatrans).

inner features, and even the roof pulley for medicinal plants that were dried there. Still, the renovation has also introduced new elements, such as a flight of stairs connecting the ground floor and the basement (in the entrance room that was once the new *officina*), the partial demolition of the division wall between the new *officina* and the *camera materialis*, floor heating etc. As the owner, Dr. Georg Hintz, mentions in a recorded interview,²⁶ the renovation attempted to reveal the old elements, but also to show the new ones, without forcing everything to seem old and historical. Finding a middle line between the different construction stages and interventions proved to be a difficult task. As for the exterior, the corner of the Hintz House was cut in the late 1950s, as mentioned above, removing half of the new *officina*. Except for this transformation, that took place after the nationalization of the historical pharmacy, the new look of the exterior (Fig. 5) resembles the 1930s exterior of the monument, with rectangular openings and a clean façade (Fig. 6). Some of the architectural data has been obtained through archaeology (investigations performed by specialists of the National History Museum of Transylvania in 2018–2023) and wall-face research (performed by Zsolt Kovács, Ph.D.). The discovered features (Roman and medieval walls) predate the historical pharmacy and are thus not relevant to the present discussion, the recovered artifacts will be discussed below under the material culture related to the Hintz apothecary shop, while the results of Zsolt Kovács seem very interesting for the history of the house and the iconography of the frescoes, as far as I have discovered from personal communications, but remain unpublished.

Another type of sources available on the Hintz pharmacy are the **visual** ones. Several photographs of the exterior are available starting with the second half of the 19th century.²⁷ A few precious photographs with the interior of the pharmacy (such as Fig. 2) were taken by Ella Hintz, are preserved in the family's archive, and have been recently published.²⁸ These photos are the most valuable for reconstruction purposes, though they only reveal the new *officina*, one of the walls of the old *officina*, used as an office at the time, and details of the shop front (Fig. 7).

As for the façade, only the left opening has been preserved after the corner cut in 1959 and today is not part of the museum but of the shoes shop next door. The entrance to the museum is thus completely different from the entrance to the historical pharmacy.

Several **written sources** have also come to light, foremost the inventory of the 1949 nationalization, but many others remain unidentified or not yet researched.²⁹ Such is a lot of financial documents from the 1930s and 1940s that is still under conservation at the National Museum of Transylvanian History and additional financial and economic documents that have not yet been identified. The nationalization inventory, preserved by the heirs of the Hintz pharmacists, has been recently published in brief,³⁰ but is not very useful in the reconstruction of the interior, as it mostly mentions lots of objects in bulk (a certain number of paintings, books, lots of apothecary jars and tools, packaging, ledgers

²⁶ Hintz 2024.

²⁷ Some reproduced in Gruia 2023c, photos 4, 5, 6, 8, 11–16.

²⁸ Blos-Jáni 2022.

²⁹ Two manuscripts, signed by Johann Martin Mauksch and Daniel Slaby, running the pharmacy in the first part of the 19th century, have just been identified in the State Archives, Cluj Branch. Personal communication with Ágnes Flóra, Ph.D.

³⁰ Gruia 2023c, appendix 2, 194–195.

and others), but no description is provided and thus the items cannot be identified in the museum collection or reconstructed.

Oral history is another venue of investigation for the reconstruction of the Hintz pharmacy and house in general. Several members of the family have kindly shared their memories on the topic with us: the current owner, Dr. Georg Hintz, his mother, Mrs. Edit Hintz, who was still a child when the pharmacy was nationalized, as well as Dr. Gábor Csaba Hintz, son of pharmacist Gábor Hintz, who initiated the recovery of the house from the Romanian state. The oral testimonies thus obtained³¹ provide information limited by the nature of memoirs – selective, partial, and subjective. They only contribute with data regarding the 1940s, such as the presence of a money safe in the new *officina*, one of the first private telephones in the city in the *camera materialis*, the existence of two desks in the old *officina*, used as an office for business meetings and daily management, one for the pharmacist and the other for his sons, as well as a wall clock (just recently returned to its original location, on loan from Dr. Georg Hintz).

This leads us to the final category of available sources, namely the **patrimony goods** associated with the old pharmacy. As mentioned above, the archaeological research has led to the recovery of interesting artifacts from the basement (especially an 18th–19th-century coin hoard hidden in two mineral water bottles)³² and the presumed icehouse in the courtyard (filled with more than 100 glass containers, pottery measuring cups, mortars and pestles, spoons and other items from the early 20th century). There are also almost 400 goods in the History of Pharmacy Collection that can be traced back to different stages in the history of the Mauksch-Hintz pharmacy. These are mostly 19th–20th-century jars, some with preserved printed labels³³ (Fig. 8), as well as exceptional pieces such as a large wooden cabinet in the *camera materialis* that has been painstakingly restored in 2022 for the new museum display³⁴ (Fig. 9). The latter preserves a couple of 18th-century inscriptions on drawers, but only the 19th and 20th-century painting layers have been preserved on the rest of the surfaces. It is a large storage cabinet that has been in use for about two centuries, thus several components have been replaced or added over time.

Available sources are thus rich in details but incomplete and dating from various periods in the two-centuries-old history of the Mauksch-Hintz pharmacy. The two main impediments in an ample reconstruction of the apothecary shop are the renovated structure of the house (with a new stair access between ground floor and basement and new dividing walls) and the structure of the collection, with few larger artifacts from the original location, but many more from other nationalized pharmacies in Transylvania that had to be fitted in the new museum. I should also mention the constraints of conservation that prevented us, for example, from displaying fresh medicinal herbs (as their volatile oils might harm the patrimony goods and attract pests).

It thus became apparent that a full reconstruction of the Hintz pharmacy was in fact impossible. There was also the issue of the laboratory reconstruction that had been part

³¹ Unpublished unstructured interviews taken in 2023 by me and Agnes Alföldi Găzdac, Ph.D.

³² Găzdac-Alföldy, Csók 2023.

³³ Especially interesting is a lot of porcelain jars with labels that include the circular logo of the pharmacy used at the time (Gruia 2023d, 79–89).

³⁴ Gruia 2023e, 80–82.

of the museum between 1972 and 2018. We decided not to have it in the new display, as it was misleading (with the dozens of replicas of glass tubes and mock stove and furniture) and would be the only reconstructed part of the new exhibition. The new laboratory area (Fig. 10) no longer suggests that the preparation of medicines took place in the basement, as this would have been highly impractical due to the absence of heating and natural lighting. The artifacts employed in drug preparation are now grouped typologically.

The curatorial principle was thus to display only original artifacts and no replicas or props, to use modern display cases, but to suggest the atmosphere and explain the structure of historical pharmacies in Transylvania through design and complementary means such as texts, photos, video and audio materials in the exhibition. This translated to the use of very few room texts (three panels on the ground floor and three in the basement), nondescript labels, and a complement of printed brochures, visual material, and a rich multilingual audio guide. These explain the original function of the rooms, stressing the preserved features (wall paintings) and artifacts (the restored storage closet, the wall clock, the containers and tools from the Hintz pharmacy). The interactive areas are also designed to create an immersion into the smells, textures and images of the pharmaceutical past. Accessing a specially designed small piece of furniture located in the *camera materialis*, visitors can try to guess, based on smell and texture, some of the ingredients employed by the pharmacists of old (spices, herbs, ponce stone etc.) (Fig. 11).

The multimedia room in the basement tells the story of the Hintz house, pharmacy, and family, and of the collection through a series of video interviews, while a peep-in board shows some of the historical photographs taken by Mr. Ella Hintz of her family and house (mentioned above within the discussion of preserved visual sources). For this board, Melinda Blos-Jáni's idea was to have two rows of peep holes, the upper one with general photos of the house and family, and the lower one, allowing children good visibility, with photos of the Hintz children and domestic festivities (Fig. 12). The photographs were curated by Melinda Blos-Jáni, Ph.D., as she discovered and processed them for the Transylvanian Audio-Visual Association.³⁵

In the education room, also in the basement, visitors can experience pharmaceutical activities, such as crushing, weighing, and labeling ingredients starting from reconstructed prescriptions, but also artisanal soap and perfume making and other activities (Fig. 13). The room does not aim at remaking a historical laboratory, but contains modern, practical furniture, against the background of the historical medieval walls of the basement.

A final historically inspired exhibition room design should be noted in the last room of the basement, in the area displaying the medical equipment collection. Starting from a preserved feature that looks like a tall side dais, we decided to suggest an operating theater by placing seating elements on the dais and in the center of the room, on a platform, a radiology basculation table (in the absence of an operating table in the collection) surrounded by surgery room lamps, anesthetic apparatuses, resuscitation kits and other medical instruments (Fig. 14).

³⁵ More about the project at "Asociația Audiovizuală Transilvană"/ Sapiientia.

The new Pharmacy Museum

The final exhibition design comprises three sections: the ground floor rooms that suggest the atmosphere of the old Hintz pharmacy, without actually reconstructing its interiors; the first half of the basement that focuses on the history of the Hintz house and family, the newly discovered artifacts, but also includes the laboratory tools and museum education room; and the second part of the basement that exhibits the medical equipment collection which is not related to the Hintz house or family.³⁶ As mentioned before, interactive and multimedia features are placed in all three sections, to provide a balanced and more interesting visitor experience. One can also mention the fact that the experience extends even beyond the museum itself. In the pedestrian passage in front of the main entrance we placed a panel explaining passersby that they are already in the former *officina* that was lost when the corner of the house was cut, illustrating the interior of that room as recorded by a historical photograph (Fig. 15). The panel also invites visitors to enter the museum to discover more about the history of pharmacy and/or to access the audio guide via scanning a QR code, as the guide is accessible free on charge from anywhere, not only during the visit (Fig. 15).

Conclusions

The Pharmacy Museum in Cluj-Napoca, reopened in January 2024, is a hybrid museum, incorporating original artifacts and architectural features from the 15th century to the 20th century and interactive techniques in order to discuss the Hintz pharmacy and family, a bit of the history of Cluj-Napoca, as well as the history of pharmacy and medicine in Transylvania. The specific combination of design, artifacts and various museum-related means of conveying information and creating a complex experience is what makes the new display so modern and unique.

Further layers of immersion can be added in the future by digital reconstructions, as I believe this is the most fitting way of obtaining accurate glimpses into the historical Hintz pharmacy, during different periods and from different perspectives. Deeper research into the archives of the Pharmacy Museum and the Hintz family, the complete processing of the sources mentioned in this article, future research into local newspapers and commercial documents from the pharmacy might allow for the reconstruction of the Mauksch-Hintz pharmacy into more detail, with emphasis on architectural development and room function, art historical changes in time, economic and social history in Cluj-Napoca and Transylvania, marketing strategies, the scientific evolution reflected in the pharmaceutical activity, even the study of gender roles and the role of different ethnic groups in the local history of pharmacy.

The 2024 exhibition inside the Pharmacy Museum might have lost some of the previous reconstructed charm, but I believe it better reflects the multifaceted history of the Hintz apothecary shop, as well as it reveals and builds upon the new elements of the recent renovation. The new display also talks about the Hintz family and the city of Napoca and subsequently Cluj, connecting the local history of pharmacy to the history of medicine and thus discussing the changing attitudes towards the body, sickness, and healing. The lack of an actual reconstruction allows more freedom in the discussion of connected topics

³⁶ For more details, see Xenia Furu's article in the present volume.

that pertain to the history of science, economy, marketing, art history, and several others. The design thus matches the spirit of the reconstruction, clearly marking the distinction between the old (architecture, decoration, patrimony goods) and the new (architecture, museum furniture, facilities) and completing the information with multimedia.

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Fig. 1. 1954–1959 photograph showing the interior of *Colecția Muzeală de Istorie a Farmaciei a Institutului Medico Farmaceutic Cluj*, the 20th-century *officina* of the Hintz pharmacy (image from the MNIT Archive).



Fig. 2. The *officina* of the Hintz pharmacy in 1903 (image from the Hintz family archive, published in Blos-Jáni 2022, 222).



Fig. 3. Laboratory reconstruction in the basement of the Pharmacy Museum in Cluj, opened in 1972 (image from the MNIT Archive).



Fig. 4. The medical collection of the Pharmacy Museum in 2016 (image from the MNIT Archive).



Fig. 5. Digital simulation of the renovated Hintz House (image courtesy of Planwerk Arhitectură și Urbanism).



Fig. 6. The Hintz House during the 1930s (photo by Ella Hintz, published in Gruia 2023c, 204, fig.16).



Fig. 7. Detail of a 1905 photograph of the Hintz pharmacy (published in Gruia 2023c, 199, fig. 8).



Fig. 8. 19th-century porcelain jar with paper label of the Hintz pharmacy on top of an older inscription. (photo by Alexandru Rădulescu).



Fig. 9. 18th-century cabinet from the Mauksch-Hintz pharmacy, restored to reveal five layers of paint visible on the bottom right drawer (photo by Lorena Luca).



Fig. 10. Part of the laboratory room in the basement of the Pharmacy Museum (photo by Cristina Rădulescu).



Fig. 11. The interactive corner in the *camera materialis* (photo by Lorena Luca).



Fig. 12. Detail of the peep-in board with historical photos (photo by Lorena Luca).



Fig. 13. The education activities room of the Pharmacy Museum (photo by Lorena Luca).



Fig. 14. The anatomical theater room of the Pharmacy Museum (photo by Lorena Luca).




MUZEUL
NAȚIONAL
DE ISTORIE A
TRANSILVANIEI



muzeul
farmaciei

CASA HINTZHÁZ

Deși nu pare, te afli deja în spațiul fostei farmacii Dr. Hintz. În acest pasaj era officina, sala în care se vindeau medicamentele, iar după naționalizarea din 1949 vechiul Muzeu al Farmaciei. Colțul clădirii a fost demolat în 1959, pentru fluidizarea traficului.

Scanează codul QR pentru a afla toată povestea, iar când ai timp te invităm să intri în muzeu.

Unlikely as it seems, you are already standing inside the former Dr. Hintz pharmacy. The officina, where medicines were sold, once occupied the current passage. After the pharmacy was nationalized in 1949, here was the old Pharmacy Museum. The corner of the building was demolished in 1959, for traffic fluidity.





Fig. 15. Panel on display in front of the entrance to the Pharmacy Museum (design by Anca Bâlc).

TRANSFORMING MUSEUM EXPERIENCES. SPATIAL NARRATIVES IN THE “MIKLÓS BÁNFFY” MUSEUM EXHIBITION DESIGN

CAMELIA SISAK*

Abstract: This article explores how narrative curation creates immersive and engaging experiences using technology and emotional engagement to guide visitors through structured, impactful stories. The design project is the medium that translates the narrative into physical space. The case study focuses on the “Miklos Bánffy” Museum in Bonțida, where employing the story into the space is crucial in creating a captivating and educational museum experience. The exhibition at the “Miklós Bánffy” Museum exemplifies how storytelling elements can be effectively employed to convey complex narratives. The fragmented narrative structure and multimedia integration create a multidimensional experience that encourages visitors to engage with Bánffy’s life in a thematic, non-linear manner. Analyzing the exhibition design process, the article investigates how a well-structured story can add value to the displayed objects. The paper discusses design techniques and technologies used to integrate storytelling into the museum presentation without diluting the historical essence of the artifacts.

Keywords: narrative curation, museum design, exhibition layout, storytelling

Rezumat: Acest articol explorează modul în care curatoriatul narativ creează experiențe imersive și captivante, utilizând tehnologia și implicarea emoțională pentru a ghida vizitatorii prin povești structurate și de impact. Proiectul de amenajare a expoziției servește ca mediu prin care narațiunea este transpusă în spațiul fizic. Studiul de caz se concentrează pe Muzeul „Miklós Bánffy” din Bonțida, unde integrarea poveștii în spațiu este esențială pentru crearea unei experiențe muzeale captivante și educative. Expoziția de la Muzeul „Miklós Bánffy” exemplifică modul în care elementele narrative pot fi utilizate eficient pentru a transmite narațiuni complexe. Structura narativă fragmentată și integrarea multimedia creează o experiență multidimensională care încurajează vizitatorii să interacționeze cu viața lui Bánffy într-un mod tematic și neliniar. Prin analiza procesului de design al expoziției, articolul investighează modul în care o poveste bine structurată poate adăuga valoare obiectelor expuse. Lucrarea discută tehnicile de design și tehnologiile utilizate pentru a integra povestirea în prezentarea muzeală fără a dilua esența istorică a artefactelor.

Cuvinte cheie: curatoriat narativ, design muzeal, concept expozițional, storytelling

Introduction

The purpose of a museum is to preserve, educate, and inspire. Museums conserve artifacts and artworks for future generations, provide educational resources and programs to enhance public knowledge, and conduct research to advance their fields. In essence, museums aim to balance the preservation of valuable collections with the dynamic needs of education, research, and public engagement. However, they need to remain relevant

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in a rapidly changing cultural landscape. Engaging diverse audiences, especially younger generations, requires innovative programming and the use of technology. Adapting to digital trends and technologies involves significant investment in digital infrastructure, online content, and interactive exhibits. Balancing digital innovation with traditional displays poses a challenge.

Several scholars have explored the application of narratives in museum settings. Allen¹ defined museum narratives as taking a personal perspective, emphasizing the subjective experience of visitors as they engage with exhibits. Meanwhile, Bedford² highlighted the powerful role of narratives in cultural and social history museums, stressing how storytelling can effectively captivate and involve visitors in the material being presented. Together, these scholars underscore the importance of narrative in shaping meaningful, emotionally engaging museum experiences.

While analyzing the use of technology at the museum, Decarolis³ states that the modern interactive displays, tactile exhibits, and audio-visual aids in museums create a dynamic blend of tradition and innovation, sparking new interest among visitors. While technology enhances engagement, it must complement, not replace, imaginative curation. Although digital presentations offer alternatives, they cannot replicate the direct connection with original objects, which is crucial for an authentic museum experience. Visual communication plays a vital role in shaping intellectual and emotional responses, but the authenticity of real objects remains the core of the museum's mission and its relationship with reality.⁴

“Expography” is a term invented by French museologist André Desvallées. He introduced it in 1998 in his contribution to the *Manuel de Muséographie: petit guide à l'usage des responsables de musée*⁵ (Manual of Museography: A Practical Guide for Museum Managers). Expography specifically refers to the techniques used in designing and executing a museum exhibition, focusing on the “writing” or conceptualization of the exhibition. It emphasizes the exhibition's content and form, distinguishing it from “scenography,” which primarily concerns the visual and spatial aspects. Expography, therefore, plays a crucial role in communicating a message and establishing a connection with the audience within the broader scope of museography.⁶ Modern museum exhibitions increasingly embrace an integrated design approach, combining traditional elements with interactive and multimedia components. This approach aligns with Desvallées' concept of *expography* by emphasizing the interplay between form and content to efficiently communicate a message.

In contemporary museology, a central challenge is achieving a delicate balance between maintaining the authenticity of artifacts and effectively using storytelling to engage and educate the audience. This dilemma involves navigating the tension between presenting genuine historical objects and crafting a compelling narrative that enhances visitor understanding and emotional connection. Maroevic⁷ suggests that a museum exhibition

¹ Allen 2004.

² Bedford 2001, 30.

³ Decarolis 2007, 49.

⁴ Decarolis 2007.

⁵ Desvallées 1998.

⁶ Desvallées 1998.

⁷ Maroevic 1994, 113–120.

functions as a distinctive communication medium, where the museum object plays a central role in conveying the exhibition’s message. It functions not merely as an isolated artifact but as a conduit for ideas and meanings. However, how an object is presented – whether through its historical context, explanatory labels, or spatial arrangement – significantly shapes how visitors perceive and interpret it. In this sense, the contemporary museum exhibition is far more than a mere collection of objects; it is a communicative medium that conveys cultural, historical, artistic, or scientific narratives. Without this context and the story, the object loses a crucial part of its significance.

Design plays a crucial role in developing museum exhibitions, extending beyond theoretical frameworks to influence various exhibit aspects. Its functions include materializing the narrative concept, showcasing objects, planning visitor experiences, and adapting the exhibition for success. To examine the exhibition’s narrative, this paper investigates the design frameworks and methodologies used in exhibition planning, looking at how these frameworks integrate storytelling and maintain the authenticity of artifacts. As Preziosi says, “we inhabit a world where virtually anything can be contained in a museum, and where virtually anything can convincingly (or not) serve *as a museum*”⁸.

Returning a castle to its owner

The “Miklos Bánffy” Museum is located within the Bánffy Castle in Bonțida, a historic estate in Transylvania, Romania. The castle, often referred to as the “Versailles of Transylvania,” stands as a testament to the region’s rich cultural heritage and architectural grandeur. Originally built in the seventeenth century and expanded in the eighteenth century, Bánffy Castle was the residence of the influential Bánffy family, one of Transylvania’s most prominent noble lineages. Despite its grandeur, the castle suffered significant damage during World War II and subsequent decades of neglect under communist rule, leaving it in disrepair. The castle has a unique story about its extensive historical past or its present connection to the Electric Castle festival. A new chapter was added in 2023 when, through the involvement of the Transylvania Trust Foundation in collaboration with the National Museum of Transylvanian History and the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest, the museum dedicated to Miklós Bánffy, the last owner of the castle, was opened.⁹ For over 20 years, the castle has been undergoing a slow restoration process, with the interior rehabilitation of the south wing with its neo-Gothic facade, now housing the museum, completed two years ago.

Miklós Bánffy was a fascinating and complex figure – an avant-garde intellectual who was a writer, musician, playwright, opera director, book illustrator, set designer, director, foreign minister, editor, caricaturist, deputy, and art collector.¹⁰ The entire exhibition revolves around the multifaceted personality of Miklós Bánffy and the various “roles” he assumed throughout his life. The concept is marked by the idea of fragmentation, with Bánffy’s versatility being explored through facets that reveal different aspects of his life. These roles, in turn, intertwine in various contexts and scenarios of Miklós Bánffy’s life. The main narrative is the reconstruction of a portrait exposed through fragments of text,

⁸ Preziosi 2006, 69–78.

⁹ Sisak 2022.

¹⁰ Lukács 2024.

images and footage.¹¹ The exhibition is organized in four rooms, (Fig. 1) the first being the space where the subject is introduced; the second one is the main exhibition space where the portrait is divided into four topics – the writer, the scenographer, the graphic artist and the father; the third room is the multimedia space that reflects a multidimensional universe, through the films made about the castle and the Bánffy family; and the fourth one is the loggia that exposes the changes in the castle and of the family, looking towards the descendants. Each of the museum's four rooms has a central compositional element around which the exhibition unfolds.

The interior space of the castle, with its vaulted rooms, has been preserved as authentically as possible to be perceived by visitors on equal terms with the exhibition itself. The exhibits are minimalist, and the story is revealed using augmented reality with the help of a phone or tablet. An essential aspect in the perception of space is the use of mirrors, which sometimes serve as a medium through which visitors can see completely distorted things. In the initial gallery space, visitors encounter a series of black objects suspended from the ceiling, which may initially appear enigmatic. However, from a specific observation point, viewers can discern the artist's signature reflected in a mirror positioned below the objects. (Fig. 2) By incorporating this reflective technique, the exhibition not only reveals the artist's signature but also transforms it into a central thematic element, thereby enhancing the conceptual depth and engagement of the exhibit.

The main exhibition space is divided into four parts, allowing for a focus on a single aspect of Bánffy's life. Thus, visitors discover him as the author of the great novel of Transylvanian aristocracy, the man of the theatre who wrote plays and created sets and costumes for the Budapest Opera, and the graphic artist who illustrated books. This portrait is complemented by his role as a family man, which is part of the history of an influential family in Transylvania. (Fig. 3)

An important surface material used is the mirror, which becomes a transitional space between the reflective and non-reflective surfaces (fade-out transition), such as in the pedestal of the loggia or the platform in the multimedia room. The loggia is the most interesting space in form and is visually connected very well with the former Baroque park. The central theme of this space is oriented towards the present day and what Miklós Bánffy left behind. One important thing is the castle's and the park's fate – their destruction, survival, and connection with the family's descendants. The existing ogive offered the perfect frame to introduce a reproduction of the creation of Nicolette Bánffy-Jelen, visual artist and granddaughter of Miklós Bánffy. (Fig. 4)

Mapping the narrative

Compelling storytelling can transform an exhibition from a static display into an engaging experience. By weaving artifacts into a coherent narrative, curators can provide context, illustrate connections, and evoke emotions, making the historical content more accessible and memorable for visitors. Storytelling can create a deeper connection between visitors and the exhibition. A well-crafted story helps visitors relate personally to the artifacts and understand their significance beyond mere historical facts. It also facilitates a more immersive and impactful learning experience.

¹¹ Sisak 2022.

Imaginative curation often pushes the boundaries of traditional museum experiences by experimenting with how stories are told and how objects are framed, making the experience more dynamic and accessible to a diverse audience. This approach often involves weaving narratives that connect objects in thematic, poetic, or symbolic ways rather than focusing solely on their historical or factual context. It incorporates multisensory experiences, using visual, auditory, tactile, or even olfactory stimuli to create immersive environments that transport visitors into the story or setting of the exhibit. Additionally, interactive elements such as digital media, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), or hands-on activities allow visitors to engage directly with the exhibition in a participatory manner. Curators also seek to elicit emotional responses by framing objects in ways that personally resonate with viewers, challenging their perceptions or encouraging reflection on contemporary issues.

A comprehensive diagram of exhibition design elements (Fig. 5) integrates several interconnected components that guide the creating of a cohesive and engaging museum experience. Starting with *Conceptualization*, the foundation is laid by defining the exhibition theme, target audience, and core message, ensuring the educational and narrative objectives are clear. *Object Selection* follows, focusing on the careful curation of artifacts that hold cultural and historical significance, maintaining their authenticity. The *Spatial Design* element addresses the physical layout of the exhibition, optimizing visitor flow, zoning, and interactivity while ensuring accessibility. *Scenographic elements* are crucial for setting the atmosphere, incorporating lighting, color, texture, and display aesthetics to create an immersive environment. In the modern context, *Technology and Multimedia* play a vital role, bringing in digital displays, audio-visual effects, and even virtual/augmented reality to enhance storytelling.

The elements involved in storytelling exhibition design (Fig. 6) can vary significantly depending on the narrative goals, the type of exhibition, and the intended audience, as each exhibition requires a tailored approach to convey its message effectively. Narrative goals are at the heart of the exhibition design, guiding the selection of themes, objects, and interpretive techniques. A thematic exhibition might require a more abstract or conceptual design, using metaphorical displays and multimedia elements to explore complex ideas. The intended audience further shapes the design process. For a general audience, the exhibition might employ straightforward storytelling techniques, clear labeling, and accessible language, ensuring the narrative is easily understood. For a more specialized audience, such as scholars or enthusiasts, the exhibition might delve deeper into the subject matter, providing detailed explanations, rare artifacts, and opportunities for in-depth exploration.

The “Miklós Bánffy” Museum exhibition at the Bánffy Castle in Transylvania is a rich example of how various elements of storytelling exhibition design can effectively convey a complex narrative. The exhibition uses a fragmented narrative structure to explore the multifaceted personality of Miklós Bánffy. Rather than linearly presenting his life story, the exhibition divides his life into different elements, allowing visitors to engage with different aspects of his life in a non-linear, thematic manner. The exhibition design leverages the unique architectural features of the castle, such as vaulted rooms and historic loggias, to create an immersive environment. The preservation of the authentic interior space allows visitors to experience the history and atmosphere of the castle while engaging with the

exhibition. The displayed objects are minimalist to emphasize the narrative rather than overwhelming visitors with too many artifacts.

The exhibition focuses on the conceptual and thematic representation of Bánffy's life, with objects supporting and enhancing the story being told. The third room employs multimedia to create a multidimensional experience. Films about the castle and the Bánffy family immerse visitors in the historical and cultural context, reinforcing the narrative through audio-visual means. Mirrors and AR invite visitors to engage actively with the exhibition. While there are interactive components, much of the storytelling is delivered passively through spatial arrangement, text, and multimedia, allowing visitors to absorb information at their own pace. The fragmented and thematic approach to Bánffy's life encourages visitors to draw their connections and interpretations.

The exhibition does not provide a straightforward narrative but instead offers puzzle pieces that visitors must assemble mentally. Using reflective surfaces, both literal (mirrors) and metaphorical (thematic reflection on Bánffy's life), creates an emotionally resonant experience. Visitors are encouraged to reflect on Bánffy's legacy and the lasting impact of his work and life. The connection to the physical space of the castle and the legacy of the Bánffy family adds emotional depth, particularly in the final room, where the focus shifts to what remains of the Bánffy legacy today.

Conclusion

The narrative curation pushes the boundaries of traditional museum experiences by exploring new ways to tell stories and frame objects. This dynamic approach makes exhibitions more accessible and appealing to diverse audiences. Compelling storytelling transforms exhibitions from static displays into engaging experiences by connecting artifacts through coherent narratives. This approach enhances visitors' connection to the objects, making historical content more accessible and memorable while fostering deeper emotional engagement and immersive learning.

The "Miklós Bánffy" Museum exhibition effectively employs a range of narrative design elements to create a rich, layered story that intellectually and emotionally engages visitors. By balancing authenticity with modern technological enhancements, the exhibition offers a nuanced and immersive exploration of Miklós Bánffy's life and legacy. A comprehensive approach to exhibition design involves carefully orchestrating various elements, as demonstrated by the "Miklós Bánffy" Museum at Bánffy Castle. This exhibition effectively utilizes a fragmented narrative structure, thematic representation, and the unique architectural features of the castle to create an immersive environment that reflects the multifaceted life of Miklós Bánffy. By employing multimedia, interactive components, and reflective surfaces, the exhibition encourages visitors to engage with the story actively, drawing their connections and interpretations.

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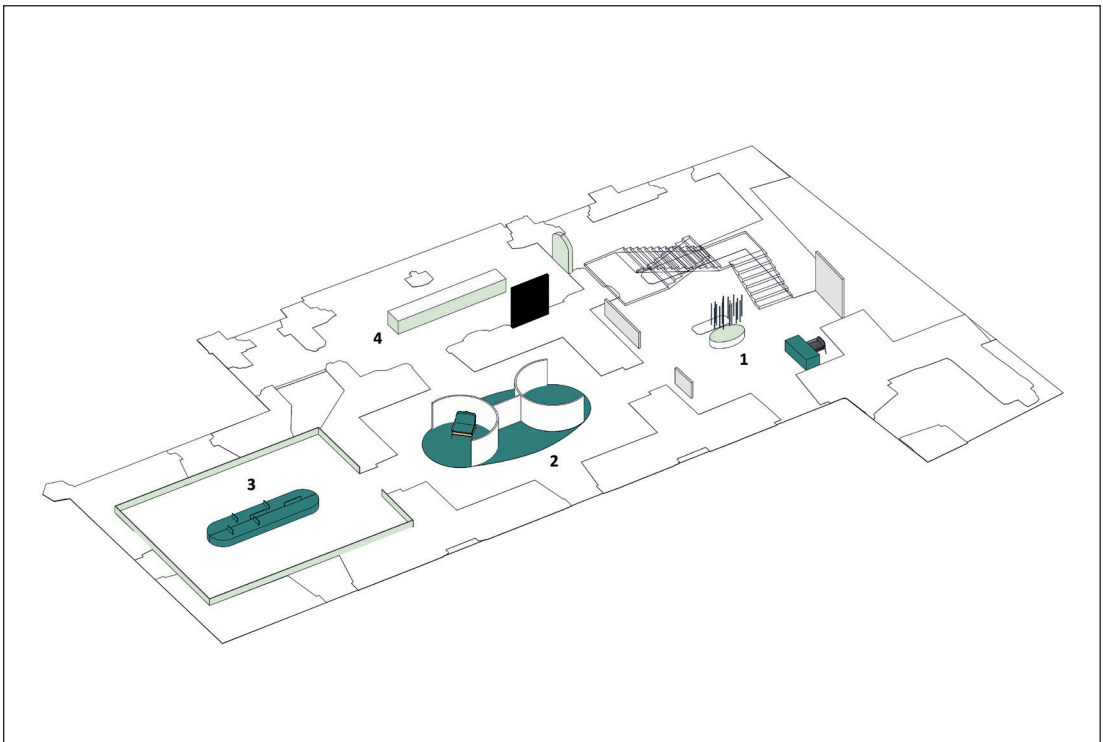


Fig. 1. Axonometric representation of the “Miklós Bánffy” Museum (project by Camelia Sisak).

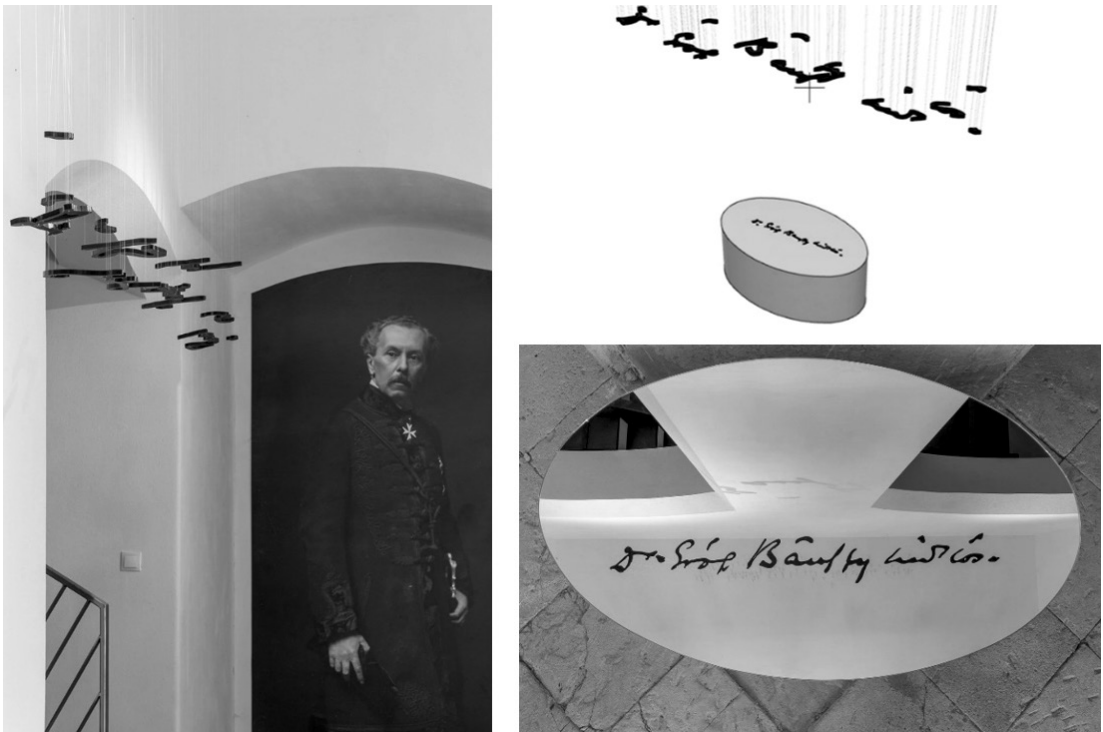


Fig. 2. The signature installation from the first room (photos by Hunor Bako, 3D rendering by Camelia Sisak)



Fig. 3. Second room (a.) and third room (b.) (photos by Hunor Bako).



Fig. 4. Fourth room – loggia (photo by Hunor Bako).

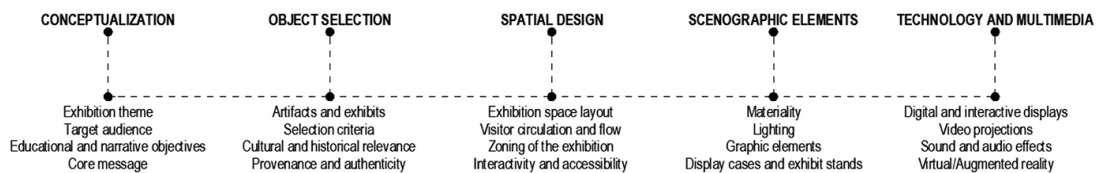


Fig. 5. Diagram of exhibition design elements.

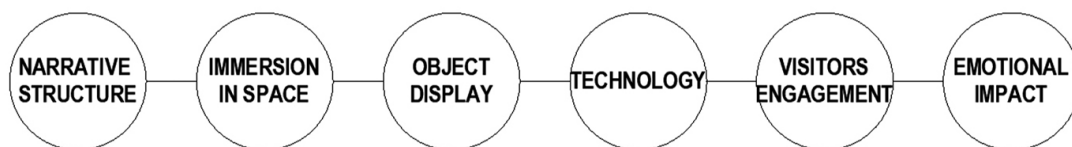


Fig. 6. Elements of storytelling exhibition design.



Battle of Tannenberg, Diebold Schilling, Spiezer Chronik, Bürgerbibliothek Bern, Mss.h.h.I.16

BOOK REVIEWS

Ioan Marian ȚIPLIC, *Între Est și Vest. Necropola medieval timpurie de la Orăștie – Dealul Pemilor X2*, [Between East and West. The Early Medieval Necropolis from Orăștie – Dealul Pemilor X2], Honterus, Sibiu, 2022 (with contributions by Zeno Karl Pinter, Maria Emilia Crângaci Țiplic), pp. 156, ISBN 978–606–008–129–6

Reviewed by ERWIN GÁLL^a – SZABOLCS NAGY^b

From the perspective of early medieval archaeology, publishing a source in a field considered so scarce is welcomed by the scientific community. It refers to bygone phenomena unrelated to today's capitalist, neoliberal world. This is all the more valid in the case of a burial site¹ that has been almost fully investigated.

The book consists of three vast chapters, linked together by a logical thread, simultaneously somewhat independent from one another.

The first chapter (pp. 11–41) introduces the archaeology of *Terra Ultrasilvana* – as the author calls it – in the early medieval period. Considering that the central topic, the backbone of the work, is the analysis of the burial site from Orăștie–Dealul Pemilor/X2, we will touch on the first chapter only tangentially.

The chapter under discussion (*Terra Ultrasilvana: History and Archeology of the 10th Century*) has four subchapters. The first subchapter discusses the geography, demography, and chronology of Transylvania. The author mentions several times the repercussions of Marxism on archaeology in Romania.

We must emphasize that most of Marx's concepts were vulgarized during the communist period (essentially, a form of state capitalism) and before. Thus, they can be classified as vulgar-Marxism when applied to historical periods.²

In the second subchapter (pp. 23–31), the author presents the burial rites and rituals of the early medieval period. In subchapter 3, we read a commentary on the so-called funerary horizons from the early medieval period (ninth–eleventh centuries) (pp. 31–37). In our opinion, the methodology of presenting the populations of Transylvania in very clearly delimited groups is questionable since, basically, we do not know even two identical

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¹ We favoured to use the term burial site because we consider the use of the term “necropolis” incorrect, which derives from the Greek (νεκρόπολις) being a compound of the words “dead” (νεκρός – nekros) and “city” (πόλις – polis), which, in general, had not existed in the 10th century in the Middle Danube Basin. We also did not use the term “cemetery,” which also comes from Greek, referring to Christian burial places. Since the term's meaning has social and institutional implications concerning Christian burial sites on the territory of the Roman Empire since late antiquity, it is clearly incompatible with the archaeological context of our sites or other 10th-century non-Christian burials.

² “Vulgar Marxism refers to a simplified or distorted version of Marxist theory that oversimplifies or ignores some of its key concepts and principles.” For a detailed analysis, see Lerner 1939, 557–567; also Tamás 2021.

burial sites (and, in fact, from no other period either)! Meanwhile, the burial sites in several areas of the Middle Danube Basin present elements of the material culture and funerary manifestations of what Kurt Horedt named the “Blandiana B” group (men with weapons in their inventory but without the remains of a horse, respectively, women adorned with various categories of ornaments and accessories).³ If we consider the burial sites without weapons and horse depositions in the central areas of the Middle Danube Basin, we can register a much more extensive list than in the Transylvanian Plateau.⁴ Accordingly, we either have to discard the names of groups from Transylvania or extend these names for the entire territory of the Middle Danube Basin! We support the theory that the population of the Alba Iulia–Brândușei Street burial site I has origins – at least culturally – from the southern Lower Danube region.

Since 2004, possible connections with the Lower Danube based on diverse burial orientations and the deposition of lithic elements in grave pits have been pointed out.⁵ What does this *connection* consist of, and how can it be interpreted? It remains to be clarified and determined whether we can talk about *migration* or/and *acculturation*.

At the same time, the author’s observation (p. 37) regarding the differences in the evolution of funerary rituals between Transylvania and the extra-Carpathian regions can be included in the field of research history since a comparison of this kind is yet unprecedented. In Transylvania, the pagan funerary manifestations practically disappeared at the beginning of the eleventh century, and 52 Christian cemeteries were registered around churches (“churchyard,” see p. 41, map 2) by the thirteenth century. On the other hand, in the extra-Carpathian region, pagan manifestations were documented until the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries, and genuinely Christian cemeteries – which also have a church – can only be documented from the fourteenth century!

The fourth subchapter discusses aspects of funeral habits from the perspective of burials from a later period when Christianity had expanded following political decisions (pp. 37–39). From a structural perspective, we believe this subchapter does not find its place in the volume. It would only fit within a comparative analysis framework with the extra-Carpathian regions, where this phenomenon can be documented from at least two centuries prior.

The central subject of the volume – as shown by its title – is the analysis of the burial site from Orăștie–Dealul Pemilor/X2 (pp. 43–78). Unfortunately, the scarcity of the osteological material prevented the author from carrying out the anthropological analyses. The graves were described following the current scientific requirements.

Out of the 71 excavated graves, the archaeological team could document the funeral act of depositing harness pieces in 15 such features but without the presence of horse skeletal remains, a typical occurrence during the tenth century and at the beginning of the subsequent one. There has been intense scientific debate on whether the burial with harness pieces would symbolize the horse, which was not deposited in the grave for various reasons. In our opinion, the lack of horse remains can be explained by economic factors (there were simply no horses due to epidemics and community impoverishment). The

³ List and analysis: Gáll 2020, 311–316, site list 1, map 1.

⁴ List and analysis: Gáll 2020, 318: site list 3, map 3.

⁵ Gáll 2004–2005, 344–347, 351–359, maps 4–5.

analysis of the archaeological material focused on examining the material culture, from adornment items to harness components. It should be noted that certain pieces offer an opportunity for a more precise dating of the burial site: the finger-ring from grave 11 decorated by punch marks⁶ and the horse bits with a single bar (three in this burial site: graves 6, 26, 39).⁷ The case of the lock-ring in grave 38 remains open for debate. Though unclear, it is probably a type called coiled terminal, which confirms a late dating but had been in circulation in the tenth century; according to the author of the volume, it would be a lock-ring with an S-shaped end (pp. 81.; see also the technical drawing: Pl. 22/B/1). The lock-rings with the S-shaped end were not present in the graves, which once again confirmed that this ornament had not spread across Transylvania before the first decades of the eleventh century. On the other hand, whether the snake-headed bracelet (grave 51) was specific to the material culture of the eleventh century or if it can be dated from the second part of the tenth century is debatable.⁸

The conclusions of the volume (pp. 79–82) summarize the dating of the burial site and specific aspects of the funerary ritual (for example, the position of the offering vessels). We generally agree with the absolute dating proposed by the author, between 950 and 1010 (p. 82), adding that based on the snake-headed bracelet, respectively, the open finger-ring, we cannot exclude an even later date, i.e. the first decades of the eleventh century.

The bibliography, plates, photographs, and plans of the burial site follow the author's final remarks. Based on these, we can conclude that the work will be valued particularly by scientific experts, but we also hope that it will prove helpful to students or non-specialists in the field.

⁶ Individual archaeological material from this grave (ball-end bracelet, open finger-ring) indicates connections to the *Köttlach* material culture. On this topic, see: Horváth 2015, 387–451.

⁷ We shall discuss this issue in another input!

⁸ Kovács 1994, 117–138.

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Liviu CÎMPEANU, *Cruciadă împotriva lui Ștefan cel Mare. Codrii Cosminului 1497* [Crusade against Stephen the Great. Codrii Cosminului 1497], Humanitas, București, 2022, pp. 336, ISBN: 978–973–50–7719–8

Reviewed by RAUL-ALEXANDRU TODIKA*

Stephen the Great, Prince of Moldavia (1457–1504), has been a towering figure in Romanian historiography. Revered as a national hero, his legacy has been the subject of extensive academic and popular narratives. Similarly, the ambush at Codrii Cosminului in 1497 has been recognized as one of the most brilliant military victories in Moldavian history. Faced with a Polish invasion led by King John I Albert (1492–1501), Stephen the Great successfully repelled the larger and better-equipped Polish army by exploiting Moldavia's dense forests and his knowledge of medieval "guerrilla" tactics (i.e. ensnare and ambush).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Romanian historians such as Nicolae Iorga celebrated Stephen as a defender of Orthodoxy and a symbol of resistance against foreign domination. Iorga and his contemporaries emphasized Stephen's victories against the Ottomans, Hungarians, and Poles, framing him as a paragon of Romanian unity and independence. Iorga's works framed Stephen's victories, including the ambush at Codrii Cosminului, as symbolic of Moldavia's enduring resistance against foreign domination. However, his interpretations often leaned toward romanticized depictions, focusing more on the moral and symbolic aspects of Stephen's reign than its historical complexities. This nationalist lens elevated Stephen to mythic status, often at the expense of a nuanced understanding of the geopolitical complexities of his time.

The mid-twentieth century, particularly under the influence of the communist regime in Romania, saw a shift in historiography toward ideologically driven narratives. In communist Romania, Stephen the Great's image was co-opted by the regime, which emphasized his role as a defender of the people and a precursor to socialist ideals, thus being portrayed as a ruler who protected the Moldavian "peasantry" from exploitation by foreign powers and as a leader of anti-imperialist struggles. As such, the battle of Codrii Cosminului was interpreted as a victory not just for Moldavia but for the oppressed classes. While this perspective brought attention to socio-economic factors in Moldavia, the ideological framing often led to oversimplified narratives that ignored the multifaceted nature of Stephen the Great's reign and leadership, ignoring his political pragmatism and the complexities of medieval society. Among mid-twentieth-century historians, Constantin C. Giurescu stands out for his balanced approach to Stephen's reign in contrast with the historiography of the time. Giurescu explored Stephen's diplomatic and military strategies, offering detailed analyses of key battles, including Codrii Cosminului. He emphasized Stephen's ability to navigate the competing interests of Poland, Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire, presenting him as a shrewd and adaptable leader.

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The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries witnessed a return to critical historiography, with scholars adopting multidisciplinary approaches and engaging with international debates. Ștefan S. Gorovei has been a leading figure in the modern study of Stephen the Great. His work emphasizes the pragmatic and strategic dimensions of Stephen's leadership, particularly his use of diplomacy to secure Moldavia's autonomy. Gorovei's analysis of the Battle of Codrii Cosminului reframes it as a carefully planned operation that combined guerrilla tactics, local support, and an understanding of the terrain. Gorovei's scholarship is notable for its reliance on primary sources and integration of broader geopolitical contexts, moving beyond nationalist interpretations. Ioan-Aurel Pop has contributed significantly to understanding the broader historical context of Stephen's reign. His work explores Moldavia's position at the crossroads of Central and Eastern Europe, highlighting the challenges Stephen faced in balancing alliances with Poland, Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. Pop's analyses underscore the strategic importance of battles like Codrii Cosminului in maintaining Moldavia's independence. Adrian Andrei Rusu also contributed heavily to the historiography of Stephen the Great and medieval Moldavia. Combining historical analysis with archaeological evidence and focusing on societal dynamics, Rusu offers comprehensive and balanced examinations of one of Romania's most celebrated rulers.

Liviu Cîmpeanu's *Cruciadă împotriva lui Ștefan cel Mare. Codrii Cosminului 1497*, published by Humanitas in 2022, not only provides a fresh perspective on the 1497 Polish campaign against Moldavia, which culminated in a disastrous ambush at Codrii Cosminului, but also offers an opportunity to evaluate the broader historiography surrounding Stephen the Great, Moldavian history, and late medieval Eastern European geopolitics.

Cîmpeanu's book is divided into five clear and cohesive chapters and an epilogue that guide the reader through the events leading up to, during, and after the battle of Codrii Cosminului. Cîmpeanu's methodology is rooted in critical analysis of primary sources, including Moldavian, Turkish, Polish, and German chronicles and documents of diplomatic correspondence. He combines this with insights from modern historiography, offering readers a balanced and well-rounded perspective. What sets Cîmpeanu's work apart is his ability to weave these academic sources into a narrative that is both accessible and engaging. His descriptions of the political negotiations, the logistical challenges of medieval warfare, and the forested terrain of Codrii Cosminului bring the era vividly to life.

At the heart of the book lies the ambush of the Polish army from Codrii Cosminului, a masterpiece of asymmetrical warfare. Cîmpeanu delves deeply into Stephen's tactical genius, highlighting how the Moldavian ruler turned the dense, rugged terrain to his advantage. Rather than engaging the numerically superior Polish forces in open combat, Stephen orchestrated a series of hit-and-run attacks, using the forest as a shield and a weapon. The result was a devastating defeat for the Polish army, whose retreat turned into a rout as Moldavian forces harried them. One of the book's strengths lies in the detailed reconstruction of the ambush, from the strategic placement of Moldavian forces to the psychological toll on the Polish soldiers as they found themselves ensnared in an unfamiliar and hostile environment. These sections are vivid and engaging, supported by references to chronicles and archaeological evidence.

Historians have long debated the motivations behind the Polish campaign. Traditional accounts, particularly those influenced by Polish sources, framed the invasion as a punitive expedition to secure Moldavia's loyalty and territorial concessions. However, more recent scholarship has emphasized the broader geopolitical stakes of the conflict, including Poland's desire to assert dominance in the region and strengthen its position against the Ottoman Empire. Liviu Cîmpeanu's book represents a notable contribution to this debate. He argues that the campaign was presented as a "crusade" against a disloyal vassal state but was, in reality, driven by political ambition and territorial expansion. His work highlights the ideological framing of the conflict, demonstrating how both sides used religious rhetoric to justify their actions. His exploration of how religious narratives were weaponized to justify political ambitions offers valuable insights into the interplay of faith and power in late medieval Eastern Europe.

Additionally, the book provides an in-depth analysis of the diplomatic maneuvers preceding the campaign, particularly the fragile alliances and rivalries between Moldavia, Poland, Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. Cîmpeanu distinguishes himself by examining Stephen as a heroic figure and a calculating and resourceful leader who adeptly navigated the treacherous political waters of late medieval Eastern Europe. His focus on the Polish campaign challenges the tendency in earlier historiography to prioritize Stephen's conflicts with the Ottoman Empire. This perspective shift contributes to a broader understanding of Moldavia's position in the regional geopolitical context and enriches the reader's understanding of why the Polish campaign occurred and failed so dramatically. In the last part of his book, Cîmpeanu examines the aftermath of the battle, particularly its implications for Moldavian-Polish diplomatic relations and Stephen's reputation in the region.

Although Liviu Cîmpeanu's writing style is clear and accessible, the book's structure sometimes hampers readability. The fact that the book is divided thematically, which, while logical in theory, sometimes leads to repetition, fragmentation of the argument, and disruption of the chronological flow. For instance, discussions of the political motivations behind the campaign are scattered across multiple chapters rather than being consolidated early on. This fragmentation occasionally makes it difficult for readers to follow the development of the conflict. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, Cîmpeanu's writing is both scholarly and evocative, striking a balance that will appeal to academic audiences and general readers. At the same time, his rigorous analysis ensures that the narrative remains grounded in historical evidence.

As a short conclusion, I believe that Liviu Cîmpeanu's *Cruciadă împotriva lui Ștefan cel Mare. Codrii Cosminului 1497* is a masterful blend of historical scholarship and narrative storytelling. Through meticulous research and engaging prose, Cîmpeanu brings to life a pivotal moment in Moldavian history, offering fresh insights into the complexities of medieval politics and warfare. His portrayal of Stephen the Great, as a cunning strategist and a steadfast defender of his people, is inspiring and thought-provoking. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in Romanian history, medieval warfare, or the intricate dynamics of Eastern Europe in the late fifteenth century. By shedding new light on an iconic episode, Cîmpeanu enriches our understanding of the past and underscores the enduring relevance of these historical struggles in shaping national identity.

Tamara SCHEER, *Language Diversity and Loyalty in the Habsburg Army, 1868–1918*, Habil. thesis, University of Vienna, Vienna 2020, pp. 309, DOI 10.25365/thesis.65387*

Reviewed by KONRAD HARRIS GERGELY-KISZELLA**

The issue of linguistic and national identity in the late Habsburg Monarchy has been a very well-established research topic among historians in the past century. Given its vast methodological possibilities, this subject's generosity has produced numerous books, studies, and articles. In contrast to previous, well-entrenched, narratives that regarded nationality as the main rival to the supranational idea of the Habsburg state in determining one's identity, Pieter Judson's recent *new history* of the empire has shaped the current understanding of this question. According to Judson, loyalty to one's nationality (defined mainly but not exclusively by spoken language) did not necessarily imply a lack of attachment to the dynasty or state. Furthermore, imperial institutions tried to accommodate the linguistic and cultural diversity of the empire by developing a pragmatic yet flexible bureaucratic system that, in part, constituted a framework for shaping national and civic identities. Tamara Scheer's recent work addresses the issue by analyzing how one of the most far-reaching supranational institutions of the Monarchy, the army, has dealt with questions related to language and loyalty.

Tamara Scheer is an adjunct professor at the Institute for East European History at the University of Vienna and currently heads a research project at the Pontifical Institute of Santa Maria dell'Anima, in Rome. Her research is focused on cultural dynamics in the late Habsburg Monarchy and their subsequent political implications, specifically language use in public spheres and institutions. She has published studies on the Austro-Hungarian Army or the First World War, tackling subjects such as the home front and the military administration in occupied territories. Her habilitation thesis, *Language Diversity and Loyalty in the Habsburg Army* (published in German as *Die Sprachenvielfalt in der österreichisch-ungarischen Armee*) combines the two aforementioned research fields in an effort to investigate how the multilingual nature of the Dual Monarchy was reflected in the functionality of its armed forces before and during the war. Besides offering a comprehensive study of the army language system, the book challenges old notions regarding the inherent connection between loyalty or disloyalty of a particular nationality and the multinational army. In this regard, the study's main premise states that the bureaucratic framework of the Habsburg military tried to adapt to the cultural diversity of the empire and "offered a multi-layered environment for loyalty and disloyalty during the last decades of the Monarchy" (p. 5).

* The scientific contents of the thesis have been published in German: Scheer 2020. This book review is based on the 2020 habilitation thesis. Differences between the two texts are minimal in terms of content, and structural discrepancies will be pointed out throughout this review.

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Regarding its structure, the thesis has a symmetrical configuration. It consists of eight chapters divided into four parts, two chapters each, not counting the introduction and section devoted to sources and methods, and bibliography. The seemingly missing component is the conclusions, which are actually spread at the end of each part, an arrangement that I find very useful from a reader's viewpoint, as it proves helpful in following the narrative. However, the published book has a slightly different structure: the four parts are divided into ten chapters due to restructuring the first two parts into three chapters each. The added two chapters focus on the military schools and officers' language acquisition, and military training in the context of multilingualism, respectively. It should be noted that both topics were addressed in the thesis version but not as separate chapters. Furthermore, the printed version lacks individual conclusions, opting to combine them in a single part.

Before engaging each of the four topics, a few remarks regarding the section entitled *Note to Sources, Methods and Language Use* would be merited, as it offers several guiding points to any researcher studying the late Habsburg Army. The sources used stem from many legislative, administrative, and bureaucratic backgrounds, as well as autobiographies, press or unpublished archival materials. Moreover, the section stresses the diversity in nature and format of these sources, alongside their limitations (pp. 20–22). The ample use of army statistics (*Militärstatistische Jahrbücher*) is most welcome, as this particular source, while not unknown, has not been used to its full potential.¹ A particular methodological principle, stated and applied throughout the study regarding approaching national identities, is avoiding linking one's language to one's own perceived national identity. Thus, the study works with more specific notions, preferring "Croatian speaker" over "Croatian soldier" (p. 24). Regarding personal names, the text maintains the spelling employed in the archival sources, but it uses English or modern place names to ease reading.

The first part, entitled *The Legal Framework of the Habsburg Army's Language System*, describes in its first chapter the military institutions from a functional perspective following the 1868 reforms. The following chapter explains the language system adopted by the military establishment in 1869 and what considerations stood at the root of its implementation. It is argued that the system, structured on three levels (the command-, service-, and regimental or soldiers' languages, respectively), was based on the Austrian constitutional principles regarding language rights (p. 59) but applied as well to Hungarian citizens that served in the "common" Imperial and Royal Army. The limitations of this system, owing to pragmatism and practice, are subsequently pointed out. Additionally, this chapter analyses how the army categorization and classification of language and nationality among its officers and enlisted men evolved due to practicability and political decisions. The conclusion to be drawn in this regard is that the concept of "nationality" was fluid, to a certain degree, on account of the army bureaucrats' perception of rules and realities (pp. 64–66). In any case, Scheer argues that misconduct regarding army language rules was less a product of national prejudice (at least during peacetime, as it can be pointed out) but more likely the outcome of ignorance or simple convenience (p. 83).

The second part, *The Habsburg Army's Language System and the Military Personnel*, addresses the language system's impact on the rank and file and the officer corps,

¹ A notable exception is Deák 1990.

respectively, and each of these groups is discussed in a separate chapter. In the case of the latter group, the study notes the complex issue of placing a national label on Habsburg officers, as virtually all of them spoke German on a daily basis, indifferent to their cultural background or mother tongue, and their national identity could be assumed by either army bureaucrats or themselves (p. 161). Furthermore, the chapter explains the arduous language-acquisition endeavour to which commissioned officers were subjected. The author succeeds in portraying a realistic description of the process, situationally analyzing to what degree the lack of language skills hampered (or not) the training of the recruits. Special attention is given to NCOs and their role as intermediaries between officers and the ranks and file.

The third part, *The Habsburg Army Language System in the Public Sphere*, focuses on the dynamics that connected the military institution and the vast social and political fabric of the Dual Monarchy concerning language use. The first chapter is centered on garrison life and the interaction between local populations and the troops stationed in the area in light of cultural and language differences. The contact between languages of army personnel and civilians also gave way to multiple instances of cultural exchanges, best represented by the so-called “Army-German,” a linguistic phenomenon that manifested in many shades across the empire, as Scheer points out (pp. 182–183). The second chapter is devoted to the generous topic of *Language and Politics*, examining the Austrian and Hungarian political debate separately. On the one hand, in the *Reichsrat* (Austrian legislature), language rights were constantly invoked as arguments during political debates between the national parliamentary groups. While none of them questioned the system itself, how it was put into practice stood at the center of political debates. On the other hand, the Hungarian parliamentary debates were substantially different, partly due to the lack of similarities in the constitutional framework (p. 207). While similar issues to those in Austria regarding the shortcomings of the language system were brought forward by the nationalities, the main political debate among Hungarian politicians or journalists concerned the dominance of the German language in the common army, at the same time, criticizing how state language was “degraded” to the status of a regimental language (p. 209). These particular grievances, often invoked during the compromise negotiations held every ten years, resulted in adjustments to the language system that allowed Hungarian to gain some privileges over the other soldiers’ languages but still fell short of securing the same status as German (p. 216).

The fourth and final part, *The Habsburg Army’s Language System during the Great War*, analyses how different nationalities were perceived internally by individual soldiers and the military establishment, as well as to what extent the language system worked in wartime conditions. I would argue that the last two chapters are most relevant to the historical research regarding the Austro-Hungarian Army’s multilingual nature since most studies on this topic approach it in view of the Habsburg troops’ conduct during the war. While the study does point out the main difficulties imposed by the chaotic nature of war on the language system, it argues that operational lack of performance cannot be solely traced back to the multilingual nature of the army. While the challenges associated with language diversity may have hampered military operations to a certain extent, they significantly contributed to hardship and alienation, which often led to desertion

(pp. 264–266). The other major topic discussed regards the relationship between loyalty and certain nationalities in the army. This chapter brings new arguments supporting the idea that “disloyal nationalities or language groups” was rather a concept projected by military commanders and political leaders than a fact. This prejudice, which originated from wartime suspicions and the need to justify military failures and operational errors, eventually contributed to the alienation of the nationalities in question.

To conclude, it is safe to say that Tamara Scheer’s contribution represents a more than welcomed analysis of a rather less-understood but essential issue in understanding the inner workings of the Habsburg army, empire, and its many peoples. The study’s primary merit lies in critically addressing the wartime prejudices that evolved into faulty and misguided historical perspectives later on. This is accomplished by providing a broader context and a critical interpretation of a wide variety of official and biographical sources.

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Sabrina P. RAMET, *East Central Europe and Communism. Politics, Culture and Society, 1943–1991*, Routledge Open History, Taylor & Francis Group, London–New York, 2023, pp. 338, ISBN 978–1-032–31818-9

Reviewed by ANDREEA-SABINA COJOCARU*

Labels are good as far as one leaves them behind. In a few words, this is what Sabrina P. Ramet does in her latest book: she chooses to deny herself the possibility of presenting East Central Europe from 1943 to 1991 through labels. Using her “keen understanding of the intimate relations between ideas, institutions, and human behaviors,” as Vladimir Tismăneanu wrote of her in the preface of the cited book, she is moving *forward* in approaching the development of the communist world.

One may ask, in this case, what could be her *final destination* and by what means she wants to get there: we will try to answer these questions by understanding her chosen path of interpretation, also addressing a few examples of Ramet’s approaches to various topics – gender equality, cultural policies, collectivization etc.

With a background in political sciences, international relations, philosophy, and the history of communism and post-communism in East and Central Europe, Ramet acknowledges the importance of multidimensional perspectives of her approach. Author of fifteen previous scholarly books, she already had a so-called “database” of published and unpublished sources that she could use. Sabrina P. Ramet is true to her well-defined aims from the outset and does not call her work one of synthesis. She takes these case studies of Eastern and Central Europe to another level, that of a comprehensive analysis of communist countries that explains how the system works through its adjacent and underlying systems.

By describing the dynamics of the communist society, Ramet’s book is indeed a dynamic one, full of *movement*: considering the evolutions and involutions of communist regimes during this vast period addressed, 1943–1991, the author successfully outlines a world through defining processes. In other words, *the movement* lies in how Ramet manages to address, interchangeably, the topics that depict the similarities and differences between communist countries. To visualize this, one may think of the *Brownian motion* – where the random motions of particles depend on the *environment* they are in. Ramet describes this *environment* in an original style by explaining the mechanisms of utopian thinking. The randomness of motion lies in the unintended consequences of communists trying to obtain equality and control of political life through different policies, depending on the situation of every country.

In other terms, Ramet stresses the differences between what early communists promised to accomplish versus what they ended up doing regarding building a prosperous society in general. This is where historical knowledge and various keys of interpretation

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intertwine: from the beginning, Ramet explains her choice for a functionalist approach by mentioning Robert K. Merton's work on understanding unanticipated or unintended consequences.¹ Functionalism is a theoretical perspective that focuses on the functions performed in society by institutions and hierarchies. Within this theory, function refers to the extent to which a given activity promotes or interferes with the maintenance of a system. We argue that this allows Ramet to pay more attention to cultural and social dimensions which are often overlooked in political histories. Not only does she state the importance of a functionalist approach, but she also understands why one may think of functionalism as obsolete.

Ramet uses functionalism to introduce three broad perspectives – social, political, and cultural – that interweave to portray each country, pointing to similarities between former communist countries. In this case, politics means not only power, patronage, and policies, but also confrontations between communists for different values and programs. She also advances the idea of fluctuating interpretations of Marxist ideology depending on who holds power over the whole system.

We appreciate the internal coherence that Ramet built: she does not avoid giving examples of policies that could have strengthened societies (for example, the equality between men and women in the workplace etc.) but aims to explain in each case why these good ideas have not been put into practice. Alternatively, if they were, the logic of her arguments returns to the starting point of unintended consequences. Her comparative analysis is welcomed in this case because even if some of the information may be presented repetitively sometimes, the particularities of the communist regimes of Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and the German Democratic Republic are well described at the end.

Ramet delivers a detailed critique of specific communist regimes and their impact on society and culture, but she does not point out the transnational influences. Although she presents similarities, in this regard, one can affirm that Ramet's choice is to *limit* herself to analyzing politics, societal changes, and the impact of cultural policies in each country.

Moreover, Sabrina Ramet does not provide a methodology for further research, as the book does not present a categorization of the types of recurrent unintended consequences. Although she details aspects of culture, such as the impact of music, art, and literature in an original style, she lacks the means to globally re-analyze the main ideas from each chapter.

Even though each chapter delves into the complex interplay between political developments, cultural shifts, and societal changes, this book could also serve as a theme-based read. For example, if one is interested in studying the topic of gender equality in Eastern European countries, the mapping of the sub-chapters presented could be seen in a somewhat didactic way. Her diachronic approach also emphasizes this didactic way, given that at the end of every chapter, Ramet presents general conclusions.

The book's table of contents portrays how the subject is structured in six chapters. The introduction (*Communism's unintended consequences: An introduction*) refers to aspects we mentioned earlier related to the chosen perspective of functionalist interpretation. The next three chapters (*The Soviet bloc, part one: 1944–1956*, *The Soviet bloc, part two: 1956–1980*, and *The Soviet bloc, part three: 1980–1989*) are meant to divide her analysis into several

¹ Merton 1936.

critical periods: the establishment of Stalinism and Late Stalinism (1944–1956), the period of reformist opportunities (1956–1980), and the decline of communism during the 1980s. Following the chronological axis, she also presents themes such as the role of religions, gender equality, arts, media, and youth. Her narrative style combines the intention to contextualize important events, such as Stalin's death, the Hungarian Revolution from 1956, or the evolving meaning of Charter 77, with a nuanced view of how satellite states were influenced altogether by certain events depending on the periods mentioned earlier. Last but not least, the fifth chapter, *Socialist Mavericks: Yugoslavia and Albania, 1943–1991*, is dedicated to the so-called *outcasts* of the communist world based on the Kremlin's decision not to exercise an active role of control of their governments.

Before analyzing the first period, 1944–1956, Ramet presents in her first chapter useful insights into the nature of communism and the common grounds of operation all through the Soviet bloc. She also addresses another classification of the period into five phases based on the *evolution* of the communist regime – a perspective that combines her knowledge and the functionalist approach. She begins by describing the period of implementing communism (1944–1948/1949) in all countries so that she can continue analyzing the period of *high Stalinism* (1948/1949–1956). In the first part of this chapter, Ramet is concise and relies more on political explanations. For example, this is how she punctuates Gomulka's role in 1956: “The legitimization of Gomulka in the public eye was an unintended latent function of the persecution to which he had been subjected and, of course, also of his persistent defiance. Riots in Poznan on 28 June over economic issues made the question of leadership seem all the more urgent” (p. 58). Concerning politics, Ramet understands how to portray each country based on the evolution of the historical dynamics during this period of the communist machinery's establishment.

Religion and its impact on the liberalization or closure of society represents an essential topic in Ramet's work, and it is also visible in other published books, such as *Orthodox Churches and Politics in Southeastern Europe. Nationalism, Conservativism, and Intolerance*.² From her work of contributing to and editing this volume, we can see her interest in understanding and further explaining how churches influenced the communist narrative for the masses. Even from the beginning, religious institutions were perceived as obstacles to the socialist transformation of society, and communists understood that collaboration with the clergy would be essential to their survival. Although the case of Poland remained unique due to the strong influence of the Catholic Church, which played a significant role in national identity and resistance to communist rule, her choice of presenting this particular case lies in her intention to explain how latent outcomes work. An unforeseen consequence, argues Ramet at the end of the first chapter, is that the Catholic Church in Poland offered some resistance to the implementation of communism (p. 93).

For the second period, 1956–1980, Ramet begins by briefly explaining the economic trends of this period (until 1970). Judging by this choice, we can affirm that she addresses the *legitimization problem* more accurately and specifically, led by the peaks of the fluctuating economy and resistance movements in each country. Following Stalin's death in 1953, and particularly after the 1956 uprisings in Hungary and Poland, there was a somewhat relaxed atmosphere in politics in Eastern Europe. Władysław Gomułka in Poland and János Kádár

² Ramet 2019.

in Hungary initiated limited economic reforms to improve efficiency and raise living standards, which led, eventually, to a form of their legitimization of power.

From an economic perspective, she argues that the planned economy reveals, *inter alia*, the inefficiency and stagnation of technological progress, as the quality of products could not have been similar to that in the West. Entering a *grey side*, Ramet succeeds in explaining through examples a rather old and cliché vision, that of how prohibition does not stop people but determines them to find illegal alternatives, this being the abortion case, publishing banned books and other forms of literary dissent (*samizdat*) and even forming *underground* churches. By bringing together these varied themes, Ramet serves her own purpose of argumentation and comes closer to the idea of a social history.

Her brilliant narrative style lies in how she addresses cultural themes: “In the US in the 60s and 70s, folk singers Bob Dylan and Joan Baez sang protest songs focusing on social justice and the Vietnam War, but they did not call the American system into question. In the communist world, by contrast, dissidents called the system itself into question” (p. 117). This kind of statement is an example of how she manages to describe the consequences as parts of the *bigger picture* and to further nuance the idea of dissent, given that questioning the regime differs in each country. All in all, her purpose is not to argue which of these unforeseen and latent functions had *the most significant* impact on the course of events. In other words, she pays attention to the mechanisms of dissent and contextualizes the inevitable fall of the communist regimes.

The fourth chapter is shorter than the others, perhaps because of her detailed explanations of system failures throughout the book. Ramet’s approach for this chapter is different – although she presents protests, social movements, and the main dissident actors from each country, she allows herself to continue her narrative by explaining cause-and-effect actions. Only this time, she does not interfere with the *unforeseen* consequences but presents the metamorphoses of societies and the impact Western democracies had on Eastern countries through culture – the appearance of rock, punk, hip-hop, and feminism.

Given her *early interest* in the history of Yugoslavia, we can see that this next chapter is written differently and in a more personal style. This section highlights the unique paths of Albania and Yugoslavia within the broader context of East-Central Europe. As for the two case studies, the author explains the differences between them and between them and other communist states. Ramet begins her analysis with 1943, highlighting the emergence of Tito’s communist-led Partisans as the leading anti-fascist force. Additionally, the Yugoslavs offered substantial support to the Albanian communists during the war, and in the immediate post-war years, Yugoslavia held significant sway over Albania’s domestic and foreign policies.

The author further points out how both countries faced significant challenges under communism, but the nature of these challenges differed. Her analysis shows how Albania’s extreme isolation led to economic and social stagnation, while Yugoslavia’s complex federal structure and attempts at economic reform created different but equally profound issues.

She chooses to point out how Hoxha’s Albania and Tito’s Yugoslavia, even if they ruled their countries for more than four decades, had a drastic shift in their evolution: “By the 70s, Socialist Yugoslavia had developed the most liberal system among the East Central European countries run by communist parties, with small private enterprises, such as

restaurants, able to operate after the reform in 1965” (p. 231), unlike Albania that, in time, became *more* closed to economic changes because of the economic autarky, and to other aspects, being the most isolated country of the satellite states. While initially successful, this economic system eventually faced significant challenges in Yugoslavia, including inefficiencies and regional disparities.

All things considered, we can say that Sabrina’s Ramet path of interpretation led to addressing a wide range of aspects regarding communist societies in East Central Europe. In the end, she demonstrates that the functionalist perspective is not obsolete. With a nuanced view of politics, she questions the historiographical interpretation of viewing communism as a *bad guy*. Rather than giving this label a broad meaning, Ramet emphasizes that communism in Eastern Europe ultimately failed because it could not fulfill its promises. Despite attempts to build classless societies and achieve economic equality, the reality was often far from the ideological goals.

In the sixth chapter, titled *Epitaph*, Ramet explains that the rigid ideologies of communist regimes, along with their failure to meet basic economic needs, gradually weakened their legitimacy. The inefficiency, corruption, and stagnation caused by centralized economies, combined with repression, economic mismanagement, and the absence of political freedom, fueled widespread disillusionment. At the same time, nationalism and internal dissent further destabilized these regimes.

Sabrina Ramet’s latest book pushes some boundaries and crosses them. Perhaps if or when functionalism is completely out of function, her work will still pass the test of time because Ramet’s contribution to generating knowledge and *forward-thinking* is undoubtedly well-received. Her passionate vision of questioning the system’s structures and hierarchies makes her narrative approach appealing and unique.

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