

A review article:

**Controversies about the
History of Transylvania Revisited
(1986-2004)**

Andrew Ludanyi

Béla K. Király, László Veszprémy, *et al.*, eds. *History of Transylvania*. Trans. Bennett Kovrig, Péter Szaffko, *et al.* Toronto and New York: Hungarian Research Institute of Canada and Atlantic Research and Publications, East European Monographs, No. 581 and Atlantic Studies on Society in Change, No. 106. Distributed by Columbia University Press, New York, 2001. (A translation and re-edited version of *Erdély története* originally edited by Béla Köpeczi, László Makkai, Zoltán Szász, *et al.*, 1986.), Vols. 1-3....

The *History of Transylvania* being reviewed here is a thorough compendium of studies collected in three volumes. It is a scholarly achievement that evolved over decades and has a seminal history of its own. A perusal of the front piece of the three volumes provides a hint of the complex organizational effort that went into the production of the English translation of the three-volume *Erdély története* published in 1986. Yet the English version is at the same time something more and something less than the Magyar version published by the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The publication of the Magyar version in 1986 had the effect of a bombshell in East European historical studies and also in the state-to-state relations of Romania and Hungary. It represented a break with the past and a significant fracturing of the post-World War II monolithic, ideological control of Romanian historians over Transylvania's past. Up to 1986, under the aegis of proletarian internationalism, but more significantly under the influence of Soviet hegemonial demands, nationality issues and conflicts were swept under the rug. They were the concerns of each satellite state, the internal matter of the respective communist party states. In Romania under Gheorghe

Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu the country became more and more a Romanian nationalist party state.

The Romanian reaction to the 1986 publication of *Erdély története* reflected much passion because Nicolae Ceaușescu's political order depended on Romanian nationalism to bolster an otherwise faltering and discredited dictatorial system. As early as on 27 February 1987 the Council of Nationalities convened in Bucharest addressed this "historical" challenge. President Ceaușescu provided the keynote address and described the three volumes as a "falsification of history." He went on to accuse the authors and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences of disturbing the "harmonious relations" between brotherly socialist states. But, he was not satisfied with this political condemnation. He also put his personal authority on the line as a historian, reaffirming the veracity of the theory of Daco-Roman continuity as well as presenting the official Romanian perspective on a number of other contentious issues that had been raised or challenged by *Erdély története*. Ceaușescu was followed onto the podium by other political, minority, and so-called scholarly leaders who continued the tirade of denunciation from prepared texts concerning a work that had not been read by the members of the platform party.

This official party statement was supported by the frenzied attacks of Romanian historians with the intent of informing the outside scholarly world about this "scholarly travesty." On 7 April 1987 a full-page advertisement appeared in the *London Times* which accused the Hungarian Academy of Sciences of supporting the "falsification of history." This was followed by reviews and review articles in the *Romanian Review* and the publication of a special English-language pamphlet entitled "A Conscientious [*sic*] Forgery of History of Transylvania under the Aegis of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences" under the authorship of Stefan Pascu, Florin Constantiniu and others. According to Béla Köpeczi's introduction to the new English version of *Erdély története*, *History of Transylvania*, the authors of this pamphlet

...reiterated the basic tenets of Romanian historiography with regard to Daco-Roman continuity, the autonomy of the Transylvanian voivodeship, the national endeavors of the voivode Mihai Viteazul, the justified rebellion of Transylvania's Romanians during the Hungarian War of Independence in 1848-49, and the oppression of Romanians by Magyars in the period of the Dual Monarchy.... They credited Transylvania's Romanians for the annexation enshrined in the Treaty of Trianon, evoked the oppression of Romanians and the deportation of Jews between 1940 and 1945 in Northern Transylvania, and reiterated that the nationality question had been satisfactorily settled in Romania.

They branded *Erdély története* a revisionist and chauvinist work reminiscent of Hungarian historiography in the Horthy era. (pp. 10-11)

The general international scholarly reception of *Erdély története* was the opposite of this official Romanian line. Extensive reviews appeared from the pens of Norman Stone, Gerhard Seewann, Martyn Rady, James Niessen, Thomas Szendrey and others that put the appearance of the three volumes in a much more positive light. Although the reviewers provided both positive and negative critiques of certain aspects of the three volumes, they also observed that this work was a welcome, even invaluable addition, to the study of Transylvanian history.

Two scholarly conferences were also devoted to the assessment of these volumes, one held in Debrecen, Hungary, in October, 1987, the other in Paris in November, 1992. The Debrecen conference provided the forum for twenty-eight historians. It permitted a thorough survey of the three volumes with critiques of the major subjects, methodology, themes and time periods of the work. The great merit of the conference was that the critiques appeared under the editorship of István RÁCZ in a collection published in 1988 under the title *Tanulmányok Erdély történetéről* [Studies on the history of Transylvania]. This work provided detailed critiques which became invaluable for the newer editions of the series as well as for the publication of the abridged one-volume versions of *Erdély története* appearing in Magyar in 1989, in German in 1990, in French in 1992, and in English in 1994.

The Paris Conference, although more limited in participation, but recorded on videotape and subsequently broadcast on television, included three French participants as moderators/commentators, three Romanian participants, two of them signatories of the Times advertisement, and three Hungarian authors/editors of the original three-volume work. Although the position of the Hungarian authors and the Romanian participants had not changed dramatically since 1987, the tone of the discussion was much more civilized and informed. At least two factors were responsible for this. First, the political climate changed after the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the death of Ceaușescu in 1989, and the presence of the French historians as moderators and commentators acted as brakes on extremist dialogue. The end result of these discussions and of the reviews which appeared at that time was that the authors/editors now felt justified in attempting to have the entire three-volume set translated into English. In this effort it is important to note that a trans-Atlantic effort came into being including not only the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, but also the Hungarian Research Institute of Canada, the Atlantic Studies on Society in Change series and the East

European Monograph series, with the financial support of the Soros Foundation.

In the short-run, the publication of the English language *History of Transylvania* in 2001, did not have the kind of polarized response either at the level of scholarship or interstate relations as did its Hungarian predecessor. The changed political climate was one reason, but probably more significant was the fact that the work was now in a language easily accessible to scholarship on a global level. This also means that in the long-term this English version will have greater impact on the perceptions and scholarship of the Western world. While this result is in itself to be applauded, it also throws into stark relief the great obstacle that faces scholarship appearing only in Magyar. Scrutinizing Transylvanian history through the English-language window means missing much of the original message, because *History of Transylvania* (2001) is both something more and something less than *Erdély története* (1986).

The English version is less than the original because its physical limitations are more pronounced. The original had a 7" by 10" per page format whereas the new version has only 5 1/2" by 8 1/2" of space per page. Although this increases the overall number of pages of the English version, it eliminates the wealth of maps, diagrams, charts, and pictures that appeared in the original version. *Erdély története* had an exuberant collage of visual documentation, including 783 black and white photographs, 127 colour photographs, 58 maps, 38 tables, and 27 charts and diagrams. *History of Transylvania* retains only the maps, but even those appear only in black and white and usually only on the 5 1/2" by 8 1/2" reduced space of the individual pages, i. e., there are no fold-out or coloured maps.

History of Transylvania is less than its predecessor in one other way. It does not try to cover developments since the Treaty of Trianon (1920). In the introduction to the compilation Béla Köpeczi excuses this omission by presenting two arguments: first, the political constraints of the time when it was written provided a distorted perspective. Therefore, this section did not deserve to be translated; second, historical objectivity is unattainable in the analysis of "recent events." This is a weak excuse and the result is unfortunate. The 1920-1989 section should have been rewritten just for the English edition. This would have counteracted the negative effects of a study such as that of Kurt W. Treptow's edited volume on *A History of Romania* (New York, 1996), which continues to perpetuate the time-worn dogmas of the past.

Treptow's edited volume of 1996 was almost a direct but unstated response to the English one-volume abridged version of *Erdély története*. It provides a basic summary of most of the Romanian arguments discussed

above. The appearance of the three-volume *History of Transylvania* in 2001 is therefore a welcome addition to the literature because in a real sense it approaches Transylvanian history from a new perspective, even if it lacks a discussion of many important twentieth-century developments, including the Second Vienna Award (1940) and the nationality policies of the respective governments from 1920-1989. It emphasizes the history of the region, including all the peoples that have contributed to the formation of its history. In other words, it does not regard Transylvania as the stage on which only one people enacted their aspirations. It uses a comparative approach, which enables the reader to appreciate the region's events from the perspective of all the major actors — Magyars/Szeklers, Romanians and Germans/Saxons and Swabians — as well as the contributions of Jews, Armenians, Bulgars, and others, even peoples who have stepped off that stage, or have been absorbed by others, such as the Goths, the Huns, or the Gepids, and the Avars.

The strength of this approach becomes evident when it is compared to Treptow's *A History of Romania*, which tries to construct the history of the region as if it had always been a Romanian "country." This approach is a unilinear interpretation that deposits into history the present political borders of Romania and lets these borders dictate the content. In other words, it assumes that the "Romanian countries" were destined to become Romanian even before the unification of Wallachia (Oltenia) and Moldavia with Transylvania following World War I. It assumes that a national destiny was already unfolding in the mind and the actions of Michael Viteazul (Michael the Brave) during his brief voivodeship of the "three countries" at the beginning of the seventeenth century (1599-1601).

The contrast between these two approaches is reflected in the number of pages of text devoted proportionately to the different phases of the region's history. *History of Transylvania* devotes approximately 330 pages to the prehistory of Transylvania, 250 pages to its medieval evolution, and 300 pages to the period from the 1526 battle of Mohács to the end of the Fifteen Years War (1591-1606). It devotes the entire second volume to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with a slight overlap into the beginning of the nineteenth, leaving the third volume to confront the problems of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (to 1920). Compared to this, Treptow's volume devotes a scant fifty pages to ancient history, mainly to develop the Daco-Roman thesis. His study then devotes the next eighty pages to the Middle Ages ending with the "First Unification of the Romanian Lands" (1599-1601). The next chapter devotes seventy pages to the "Early Modern Age" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whereas 160 pages

are devoted to the modern age (1821-1918), and 185 pages to the twentieth century from 1918 to 1989.

History of Transylvania contains an evolved discussion of the region's past and relates it to the struggles of its peoples. It avoids the pitfalls of an ethnocentric bias. Overall, it succeeds in achieving this purpose. Its weakness is in part a consequence of human fallibility and mortality. The original authors/editors are not the ones who reedited the English version. Many of the authors had passed away by the early 1990s, including András Mócsy, Zolt Trocsányi, and László Makkai. Many new authors joined the ranks of the reediting process including Gábor Vékony, Ambrus Miskolczy and István Bóna. Furthermore, the translation and reediting also added Béla K. Király, László Veszprémy, Bennett Kovrig, and Péter Szaffko to influence the final reformulated text and content of the three volumes. The influence of the content and translation of the abridged 1994 version also had its impact. In terms of the format, this resulted in a better final product. In terms of content, it led to an overly cautious presentation. The dropping of the analysis of the 1920-1989 period indicates this fact.

The English translation of *History of Transylvania* is generally good, with the exception of some unfortunate weak points in the preface and in the acknowledgments which were probably added at the last moment without the benefit of a stylistic review. The volumes are also marred by some typographical and spelling errors. These — or, at least, many of them — could have been screened out with the help of additional proofreading. But an enterprise of this magnitude is bound to retain such imperfections regardless of the efforts to eliminate them.

The content of *History of Transylvania* also requires some specific reflections to pinpoint its merits. First, the addition of brief biographical sketches of prominent individuals as an appendix (Vol. I, 807-815, Vol. II, 799-810, and Vol. III, 810-819) is definitely beneficial. Second, the retention of the diversity of interpretations is also an asset. Unlike the homogenized nationalist versions of the region's history, the Béla K. Király-edited volumes continue the diversity of its predecessor. Just two examples may suffice. First, the two interpretations of the Hungarian settlement of Transylvania differ. István Bóna's interpretation, presented with archaeological evidence, argues that the Hungarians entered Transylvania from the east and used it as a base for conquering the Pannonian lowlands and the central plains. László Makkai presents the contrasting argument that the Hungarians had first conquered the plains region and Transdanubia and then spread eastward, incorporating/consolidating Transylvania in the eleventh rather than the tenth century.

A later section, Vol. I, 593-769 of the *History of Transylvania* presents two other conflicting interpretations, relating to Suleiman the Magnificent's policies of expansionism into central Hungary and Transylvania. Two historians, Katalin Péter and Agnes R. Várkonyi, argue that Ottoman Turkish policy at the time was not driven by an insatiable appetite for new territories but by rational considerations, and by a flexible application of Ottoman power. This included, among other considerations, a willingness to depend on indirect control through local princes, as in Transylvania, or through voivodes in Wallachia and Moldavia. But the counterarguments are also presented by Gábor Barta, who contends that much of Ottoman policy was driven by an irrational desire for expansion. These are characteristics of the three volumes that indicate a rejection of dogmatic interpretation on all the significant issues of Transylvanian history.

This openness and commitment to listen and to present a balanced view of existing interpretations is one of the principal merits of the three volumes of *History of Transylvania*. As Péter Takács points out in his critique of the first version of the compilation (*Tanulmányok Erdély történetéről*):

The authors have approached historical problems in a scientific way. This approach should take the place of those arbitrary interpretations which have led millions of people to accept a distorted image of their past. The authors have also smashed a taboo. So far even historians themselves have ... believed that if they keep quiet, they will not do any harm to the past. Today the authors convince us that silence is no remedy for injustice, misinterpretations and false evidence. (p. 283)

This same conclusion also applies to the Béla K. Király-edited version! These three volumes should be on the bookshelves of all Central and East European research centres and in the collections of all major universities in the English-speaking world.

Editor's note: A slightly different version of this review article appeared in the *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 31, 1-2 (2004): 127-30. We're indebted to this journal's editors for permission to re-print the review here.

Editor's note: In the appendix below we reproduce most of the review of the original, Hungarian version of *Erdély története* by the late Thomas Szendrey (1941-2003). It appeared in vol. 16, nos. 1-2 (Spring-Fall, 1989) of our journal, pp. 137-50.

APPENDIX

A History of Transylvania: Its Impact and Reception

Thomas Szendrey

Béla Köpeczi, ed. *Erdély története*. 3 vols. Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1986.

History should be written *sine ira et studio*, but that is never wholly possible; nor can it ever measure up to the Rankean ideal, but nonetheless should attempt to approach it. These volumes on the history of Transylvania certainly attempt this in spite of the great temptations and difficulties involved in writing about this part of the world and its competing nationalisms.

However, there is another factor in the writing of history than the scholarly intentions of the historians, namely the political-cultural context in which one of necessity must live and work. Then there is also the network of world politics and the particular place in it occupied by both reader and writer, which in turn gives rise to interpretations and evaluations, indeed misinterpretations and re-evaluations based upon subjective interests. This is something no writer or historian can fully anticipate or control. The work has a life of its own and becomes a part of the consciousness of its readers, living on and influencing life in its myriad dimensions. This review is thus an expression of this consciousness in the life of one historian, hopefully a fair and meaningful one.

A detailed and comprehensive three volume history of Transylvania has been published under the aegis of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and edited by the then minister of cultural affairs Béla Köpeczi, a literary and cultural historian of some renown. The work has generated more controversy among historians, politicians, and the public in Hungary, Rumania, and indeed throughout the world, mostly on account of the bitter response it has elicited from Rumanian academic and political circles. This has been augmented and followed by the defence of the volumes by spokesmen for the Hungarian government as well as those by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.¹ Furthermore, scholars throughout the world, especially those concerned with the history of East Central Europe and also those dealing with minority issues, have also responded to the volumes and the controversy surrounding them in both the media and scholarly publications.² One needs to add that if the interest extends beyond purely academic circles and is perceived of in political terms, even the language of publication, i.e. Hungarian, mostly ceases as an issue of concern. After all, numerous significant and controversial books have been published in the Hungarian language without generating interest and controversy of this magnitude, extending from the pages of leading world newspapers to the halls of the U.S. Congress and beyond.

Obviously, there must be a number of reasons for this vast interest in a rather lengthy (almost 2,000 pages) and detailed scholarly work dealing with a small and isolated geographical entity populated mostly by Hungarians, Rumanians, and Germans (Saxons); a part of Rumania since the peace treaties after World War I, it was for most of its history a part of the Hungarian kingdom and also for approximately 150 years an independent principality quite conscious of its Hungarian ties. The interest is certainly not evoked either by the style and detail of the three rather hefty volumes, representing difficult reading even for one well versed in the history of the people and nations involved. Perhaps the interest can be explained in part because nothing comparable has been written or published in Hungary for more than forty years; this, however, would only explain the interest in the volumes by Hungarians and Hungarian-reading specialists and scholars dealing with these topics....

The concern and interest of Rumanian historians and the reading public in Rumania should be and is self-evident. The volumes deal with topics which involve their ancestors in Transylvania, the development of the Rumanian nationality there, and their status in the region, among other issues.³

Nonetheless, the volumes deal with these topics in a way which often challenges the assumptions of Rumanian national sentiment and especially Rumanian nationalist historiography. Indeed, the response to these volumes

border on politically induced hysteria, by no means a proper response to volumes from which the Hungarian chauvinistic mentality and tone, which had marred some other writings on this theme, are decidedly missing. One cannot but believe that the Rumanian response, especially by its political leaders and many of its historians and writers, is unwarranted and unjustifiable.⁴

There must be more to the generally expressed Rumanian attitude toward these volumes than a concern with scholarship and alternative interpretations; the tone of the writings and polemics directed against the work certainly points in such a direction. In the judgment of this reviewer this something else is the politization of scholarship, especially history, to serve the goal of creating a unitary national state by the current regime at the expense of destroying the national past of the major ethnic minorities in Rumania today, namely the Hungarians and Saxons of Transylvania. The changes in nationality policies the past twenty years certainly point in this direction. Consider the following; many local archives, especially in Transylvania have been gathered together and forcibly removed to Bucharest and other locations; decrees have limited education in the languages of the minorities and publication opportunities have been greatly restricted. The list could be extended to include political and socio-economic decisions which have impacted negatively on the quality of life in Rumania, but these have also affected all citizens of the state regardless of nationality and have led to some limited manifestations of dissatisfaction with the regime and the unparalleled and unprecedented number of refugees (and not just ethnic Hungarians) seeking refuge in Hungary and elsewhere.

All of these events have had an impact on the conscience of peoples throughout the world, especially in Western Europe, the United States, and Canada (which together with Hungary sponsored a resolution on human rights at the Vienna conference on cooperation and peace) and which has resulted in some unpleasant and damaging political publicity for the Rumanian regime. Quite simply, the fate of the largest national minority in East Central Europe — the Hungarians of Transylvania — is a matter of some concern and this is by no means totally unrelated to the history of Transylvania and its peoples. Thus, the publication of this three volume *Erdély története*, by the publishing house of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, has once again focused attention on an issue which for the past forty years has been kept alive mostly outside of Hungary. It is to this situation that we must now turn.

With the imposition of the Soviet hegemony over East Central Europe in the immediate post-World War II era, it was stressed that the imposition of a new internationalist ideology would remove or at least alleviate the national

antagonisms of the region. Given the extent and depth of nationalist sentiment this did not and has not happened, but two consequences of the somewhat altered nationality situation in post-war East Central Europe must be noted nonetheless. First of all, the peoples of the region suffered a similar fate under native Stalinist regimes. Secondly, the Hungarian minority in Rumania obtained more autonomy, especially in educational and cultural matters, than during the Ceaușescu years. It was undoubtedly the situation of the Hungarian minority, especially during the past few years, which led to the decision on the part of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (with the necessary consent of the government) to proceed with the publication of this work.

In a preliminary unpublished review of this work, Nándor Dreisziger noted that the publication of these volumes was a "debt paid in Budapest,"⁵ after more than forty years of official silence about Transylvania. One might extend this observation by noting that the historical consciousness of the elder generation had not forgotten about Transylvania, but had no forum to express its concern. The younger generation, meanwhile, generally only knew about Hungarians living in Rumania and was mostly unaware of the historical connection between Hungary and Transylvania. It was the joint activity (still mostly unrecognized) of Hungarians in the western world and the writings and activities of writers such as Gyula Illyés and Áron Tamási on behalf of the Hungarian minorities which awakened the consciousness of many Hungarians and brought about a renewal of interest and concern with Hungarians beyond the borders of Hungary in the early 1970s.⁶ Hungarian writers and scholars in the western world had not been affected by caesura of official non-concern for Transylvania and the Hungarian minorities generally and had kept alive in their consciousness the historical connection of Hungary and Transylvania, even if not always with the necessary critical spirit. One could thus argue that the confluence of concern for Transylvania by Hungarians throughout the world was united by the rising intolerance of the Ceaușescu regime toward its minorities generally and the Hungarian one specifically. The most recent manifestations of this concern were the huge demonstration at Budapest on June 27, 1988 and the ongoing activity of the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation and other such organizations in the United States and elsewhere.⁷ All of these and other activities are tied in with the renewed interest of Hungarians with Transylvania and the publication of these three volumes is also tied in with this, even if only indirectly, with the consequences of its publication, and certainly not with the intentions of its writers who consistently maintained a sense of scholarship and a moderate tone in their work. In spite of the extent and quality of the three volumes (and the large number

of copies sold and distributed), for many people it still remains a mostly unread symbol of care and concern resting on their bookshelves for others to see. It should be noted that the scholarly level and sometimes turgid style ill suits this work for a popular audience. For academics and scholars, however, it is and remains an essential and latest component of an on-going tradition of historical writing on Transylvania....

* * *

Even a cursory examination of the development of Hungarian historiography will confirm that the history of Transylvania has always been a significant component of it. From the earliest chronicles, through the writings of the Renaissance and humanist scholars, the accounts of seventeenth century memoir writers, and extending into the era of modern and contemporary historical scholarship, Hungarian and Transylvanian history have generally been treated as parts of an integral entity, even when some parts were independent or under foreign rule at different times in a more or less common past. One should also add that this common history included the past of the non-Magyar peoples who also live in Transylvania.

These historical writings before the eighteenth century generally dealt more with the monarchy and aristocratic and military elements of the society and did so generally without sharply distinguishing ethnic or national background; that was not their primary consideration. With the eighteenth century — and accelerating in significance — there commenced a great interest in the past which resulted in the formulation of national histories for the various peoples of Europe generally, but especially for those who lacked a distinct historical tradition of their own. It was thus during the late seventeenth and mostly during the eighteenth century that there developed distinct historiographical traditions in Transylvania among Hungarians (in addition to the already developed currents of Hungarian historiography), Rumanians (in conjunction mostly with the Moldavians and Wallachians), and Saxons (also distinct from other German historical developments). Needless to say, these emerging traditions could best be described as incipiently self-conscious, leading eventually to a fully developed romantically inspired nationalism.

Some examples of this development can be pointed out here, but it is not possible to provide a comprehensive account of these historiographical traditions.⁸ Nor do these volumes discussed in this review provide more than an episodic and scattered historiographical account — one of their most obvious shortcomings. A distinctive historiographical tradition emerges from

the writings of Gábor Bethlen, prince regnant of Transylvania in the early seventeenth century, including especially the writings of Bethlen himself, that of his court historian Bojthi Veres Gáspár and also János Kemény among others.⁹ This tradition was continued apace during the balance of the century and even beyond. A few examples may be noted: Péter Apor, *Metamorphosis Transylvaniae* (1736); Péter Bód, *Magyar Athenas* (1766); also the historical writings of Mihály Cserei, Pál Ember Debreczeni, József Benkő, and János Kénosi-Tózsér. Among the Saxons one must take note of Marton Schmeizel who taught a generation of Saxon historians in Transylvania. Hence in the centuries during which modern historical scholarship developed, the Hungarian and Saxon scholars of Transylvania produced valuable work.

Rumanian scholarship in Transylvania also began to develop in the early and mid-eighteenth centuries and found support among the Rumanian aristocracy and clergy. Especially significant was the political and scholarly work of Inochentie Micu-Klein and his activities were significant for the subsequent development of Rumanian historical consciousness,¹⁰ specifically the first formulation by him of the theory of Daco-Roman-Rumanian continuity in 1735. There were hardly any other significant formulations before this time.

The ongoing interest in and concern with the past of the various peoples who populated Transylvania through the centuries received an obvious impetus from the gradual extension of nationalism to more and more elements of the population. Historical writings increased in number and became the foundation of those historically based ideologies which became and continue to be significant for shaping and influencing the historiographical tradition and historical-political consciousness of these peoples. The more strict devotion to scholarly canons characteristic of many (by no means all) eighteenth century works gradually gave way to historical writings and attitudes characterized by a sense of romantic nationalism; this may have been helpful for the development of literary and cultural life in a national context. It was certainly not favourable for the maintenance of the commitment to finding out what happened, so essential to the continued writing of sound history. Indeed, the historical works of the first half of the nineteenth century (with very few exceptions) were characterized more by a love of nation than dedication to historical truth. A romanticized version of the history of the peoples of East Central Europe became — and continues to persist in some form — as a component part of the respective historical mythology of these peoples. This has not been salutary for either scholarship or the promotion of understanding among these peoples. The political history

of Transylvania is certainly a telling and instructive commentary of this situation.¹¹

Late nineteenth century historical writing (and this historiographical tradition continued certainly until 1914) found itself ensnared in a political-cultural conflict. As it moved away from many of the illusions of romantic historiography toward a more positivist and scientific historiography, the historical consciousness of their readers (the educated public generally) was still informed — indeed captivated — by prior vision. Thus scholarship, while moving away from that vision found itself out of touch with a nationalist inspired political system. The activities of scholars and writers such as Sándor Szilágyi, Henrik Marczáli, and Imre Mikó among others, thus did not always mesh with popular ideals and aspirations about past, present, and future. Rumanian historical scholarship also became substantially more nationalistic (cf. Xenopol, Iorga, etc.) for the reason that historical studies and consciousness emanating therefrom served well Rumanian nationalist aspirations.

This politization of historical scholarship led to mutual recriminations and fostered attitudes of hostility and misunderstanding. All of this was then caught up in the throes of World War I and its all too well-known consequences, specifically the division of Austria-Hungary by the peace treaties of St. Germain and Trianon.¹² Nor did this fail to have an impact on scholarly life generally and historical writing specifically. While some attempts were made to maintain the necessary dedication to the principles and moral demands of historical scholarship, the shock of Trianon — probably the greatest tragedy in the history of the Hungarian nation¹³ — was simply too much and the revisionism born of the dismemberment of Hungary acted as an impetus to politicians and very many scholars and historians to point out the injustices of the changed situation of Hungarians in this region of Europe. Thus, a new revisionist historiography was born and while in the hands of competent historians (such as Gyula Szekfű, Bálint Homan, Sándor Domanovszky, and Imre Lukinich among others) it retained a sense of qualified professionalism, qualified, however, only in the context of revisionist attitudes; the other characteristics remained on the same high scholarly level as previously.

Revisionism became the central concern of the political and cultural life of inter-war Hungary and resulted in some very obvious dislocations in the historical consciousness of very many Hungarians; often it led to highly unrealistic political and cultural attitudes and fostered the acceptance of catastrophic and radical historical and political visions.¹⁴ For example, at the time of the second Vienna Award (1940), when a part of Transylvania was restored to Hungary, a commemorative album entitled *Erdély* (Transylvania)

was published with the participation of many of Hungary's most esteemed scholars and politicians and this undoubtedly reflected rather evidently the revisionist program and its attitudes.¹⁵ However, even this volume still exhibited a substantially more moderate tone and was characterized by more respect for the standards of language and scholarship than the most recent (since the mid-sixties) Rumanian government sponsored historical or other writings on Hungary.¹⁶ Needless to say, not all writings produced by Rumanian and Hungarian writers and scholars about each other are characterized by such invective. It is precisely these three volumes which provide numerous examples of understanding and cooperation among the various peoples inhabiting Transylvania.

Movement away from excessively revisionistic attitudes on the part of Hungarian scholars and historians can be noted by the early 1940s; one must mention the establishment and work of the Teleki Institute; also, Gyula Szekfű's book *Etat et Nation* (1942) represents a movement away from revisionism as did the writings of László Gáldi and László Makkai; the latter wrote a number of books including *Erdély története* (1946) and edited the second volume of the work under review.

The changed attitude was in no small measure the result of World War II; revisionism — or, at the very least, its most outspoken version — was tempered by the crucible of war and defeat, the consequence of which was the reconfirmation of the Trianon frontiers at the Paris peace conference of 1947. The imposition of Soviet hegemony over East Central Europe after the war engulfed both Rumania and Hungary and this common condition caused more concern for the Hungarians and Rumanians respectively than the nationality disputes; immediate post-war relations between the various peoples were better, though by no means free of conflict and controversy. Hungarian historians in post-war Transylvania carried out some historical work characterized by sound scholarship and a somewhat more conciliatory spirit, especially the work of Lajos Kelemen and his students, but this nonetheless remained the work of a tolerated minority; the same is true with regard to the work of Imre Mikó.

The Rumanian historical attitudes were mostly maintained, but marked gradually by an ever increasing Marxist character. This also occurred in the case of the scholarly work of the national minorities; Marxist hegemony became the order of the day. Although hampered by the restrictions of this ideology, the internationalist attitudes of the Soviet imposed regimes somewhat attenuated nationality conflicts, at least until 1962. Since that time the increasingly intolerant nationality policy of the Ceaușescu regime has weighed ever more heavily on the nationalities, especially the large Hungarian

minority. Indeed, there has been and continues to be a strongly chauvinistic tone to Rumanian political and cultural policies. This was also evident in the planning and execution of the International Congress of Historical Sciences held in Bucharest in 1980.

On account of the close connection between some elements of Hungarian revisionism and Nazi Germany, most manifest in the German role in the two Vienna awards, the post-war regimes were not particularly receptive to the revisionism of the pre-war years, but were nonetheless somewhat concerned with the fate and future of the Hungarian minorities. This changed abruptly with the imposition of the Soviet-backed communist government in 1948 and revisionism — and even nationalism — became in effect taboo subjects. Hungarian nationalism and concern with Hungarian populations in the so-called former succession states were neglected and proscribed. The struggle against nationalism and its manifold manifestations occupied the time of many historians and ideologues. Although there remained some minimal evidences of concern with the minorities, the issue continued to be neglected and even actively discouraged until the early 1970s, at which time a few studies on Hungarian minorities once again appeared and some public attention was once again focused on these issues.¹⁷ With the exception of a few relatively minor and highly specialized historical writings on the minorities, the three volume *Erdély története* published in 1986 was the first comprehensive history of Transylvania produced in Hungary since the volume entitled also *Erdély története* by László Makkai some forty years earlier. His scholarly activity thus provides the only continuity of writing on Transylvania in Hungary today....

[*Erdély története*]... [had] angered and provoked the Rumanian government; thus this history of Transylvania not only became a scholarly concern but entered the political arena. Rumanian government reaction to these volumes has been virulent in the extreme and the academic and cultural media have taken their cue from the government response.

* * *

In this connection it may be useful to examine the motivation of Hungarian historians for producing this work; it should be evident from the amount of work and effort that went into it that it has been in the planning and writing phases for a number of years and thus could not have been motivated by strict political considerations alone. In another sense, however, it represented an ongoing concern which had been kept under political wraps for quite some

time; the history of Transylvania, after all, has always been a part of or intimately related to the history of the Hungarian peoples for a thousand years and has always been studied or written about by Hungarian historians as they dealt with the history of Hungary. The publication of a separate or specific history of Transylvania, however, has been subjected to political restraints for many years since 1946. Hence, the publication of these three volumes now is not totally unrelated to either the political vicissitudes of the last forty years in Hungary specifically and the Soviet bloc contextually; nor is it unrelated to the much longer tradition of Hungarian historical writing about Transylvania.

The reasons motivating the publication of these volumes were stated and specified in a lecture given by Zsigmond P. Pach (academician and director, Institute of History, Hungarian Academy of Sciences) entitled "Why do we write the History of Transylvania," presented to a professional conference devoted to this topic and published in the literary-cultural weekly *Élet és Irodalom* (Life and Literature).¹⁸ Pach makes three key points in his lecture.

First of all, he rejects any association with prior Hungarian nationalism and revisionism, stating in the process that they as Marxists are opposed to all kinds of nationalism and also reject nationalist Hungarian historical writings. Secondly, Pach rejects with equal vehemence the older, newer, and most recent formulations of Rumanian nationalist historiography as well, specifically the theory of Daco-Roman continuity and the related "historical rights" of the Rumanians to Transylvania. This brief critique is then concluded with a third point, namely the unwillingness of Hungarian historians to engage in a nationalist dispute, stressing instead that the history of Transylvania forms an integral part of both Hungarian and Rumanian history and that historical scholarship should not be used to deny the existence or rights of the other.¹⁹

This statement, while undoubtedly academic in tone, and not dealing specifically with the political dimension of the conflict over Transylvania and the human and national rights of the minority populations, nonetheless stands out in bold relief from the bulk of the Rumanian statements and reviews of these three volumes. The reaction of the Rumanian party and political leadership, as first formulated by Ceaușescu and repeated by numerous others on many levels and at different forums, accused the Hungarian government of fascist tendencies, Horthyite revisionism, and the utter falsification of history, among other similar charges and characterizations. Many of the statements were then repeated in not only the popular, but also the professional and academic media and official government publications in foreign languages. The vehemence and tone of these responses and reviews have even been noted by western scholars who have reviewed these volumes in literary and professional reviews. Herewith are but two examples. Norman Stone, writing in the

Times (London) *Literary Supplement*, concludes as follows: "Meanwhile, the sheer hardship of life, in terms of hunger and cold and darkness, is the one thing that has remained genuinely internationalist in present-day Rumania. That darkness, to judge from the over-reaction of the Rumanian Academy of Sciences to a scholarly work of high standard, goes far."²⁰ Another reviewer, Martyn Rady, writing in the *Slavonic and East European Review*, writes the following: "Nevertheless, despite the evident scholarship of its contents and the impressive — and hitherto unsullied — reputation of its individual contributors, *Erdély története* has been roundly condemned in Rumania as a mischievous work which deliberately falsifies the historical record."²¹ It should be noted that this review attempts sympathetically to understand the Rumanian version of Transylvanian history and their point of view.²²

Professional reviews of this work inevitably praise its scholarly tone, comprehensiveness, organization, and the conscious effort to incorporate the history of the Saxons and Rumanians. While written from a Hungarian perspective, its discussion of the Rumanian role in the history of Transylvania is quite detailed and balanced; there is no denial of their role and place in Transylvania and the chauvinism expressed by some Hungarian statesmen and writers in the latter nineteenth century is as roundly condemned as the formulations of Rumanian historical mythology. There is evident some disagreement on the interpretation of the role of the Rumanians in the 1848 revolutions, but then Hungarian historians are not agreed on similar issues concerning 1848 in other parts of Hungary either. There is a very detailed discussion and analysis of the early settlements which conclude, on the basis of archaeological and historical analysis, that the theory of Daco-Roman continuity is not tenable; it should be stressed that some Rumanian archaeologists also dispute that point on the basis of archaeological and historical evidence.²³

It may be instructive to point out that the periodization and some of the discussion is based upon self-confessed Marxist categories, but this is generally subdued and thus only marginally evident. Furthermore, the books are supplemented by comprehensive bibliographies; further documentation can be found in the notes which are not as extensive as one is used to in historical monographs. However, this is not so much a monographic study than a synthesis and if viewed in that context the documentation can be judged as sufficient. There is one disturbing element and that is the excessive role assigned to the history of economic affairs and the vast amount of such detail; this is especially evident in the third volume covering the period since 1830. Intellectual and cultural affairs are not given as much prominence as one would have desired and the role of the churches is mostly limited to their

political role. The rich spiritual and theological heritage is not given its proper estimate. These comments notwithstanding, the work achieves its major goal of presenting a synthesis of the history of Transylvania.

Having previously noted the response of Rumania's political leadership to this work, a brief characterization of the reviews and statements of some Rumanian scholars may also prove instructive. Sadly, however, these statements in their essentials follow the lead and tone of the political declarations; indeed it was expected, even mandated that this be so. The work under discussion is generally characterized as a malevolent work which deliberately falsifies history in the service of Hungarian revisionism. An essay by Titus Popovici entitled "Deliberate Falsification of History: Method and Style" manages to gather more invective — punctuated by personal insults against one of the major authors, László Makkai — and distortion into fifteen pages than most writers. Just one example, and by no means the most offensive, is the following: "I shall endeavor to describe the content of *Erdély Története*, a still-born product of a gang-rape of history, showing no leniency to the 'intellectual' stature of the authors of this hybrid concoction which displays a distressing simplicity and lack of sophistication even in the use of nuances."²⁴ One should add that the description of the content assumes the work to be a cheap pulp novel, a characterization varied and repeated any number of times. Obviously, this kind of writing is best left without comment.

Another such critique, while somewhat more subdued in tone, discusses mostly the first volume, specifically the archaeological chapters written mostly by András Mocsy. Not satisfied with disagreeing with Mocsy's conclusions, which is after all a right any reviewer and critic possesses, they constantly characterize it as tendentious and non-scientific; however, the constant repetition of charges without substantial other or contrary evidence does not qualify as a critical assessment.²⁵

The attribution of ill will, obvious chauvinistic attitudes, the falsification of history — charges constantly repeated — is also typical of an article entitled "A Conscious Forgery of History under the Aegis of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences."²⁶ After a brief review of some contested points typical of most Rumanian critical observations on these themes, the authors, including Stefan Pascu, a leading Rumanian historian specializing in the history of Transylvania, assert "that the national question has been fully and finally settled,"²⁷ thereby denying even the very existence of minority populations in Rumania. After this political assertion, the review goes on to castigate some of the writers personally and bemoans the lack of attention to twentieth century developments, specifically noting that the volume does not

mention what the reviewers characterize as the “great” industrial accomplishments of socialist Rumania.

While it is correct that the history of Transylvania published by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences treats the history of Transylvania beyond 1918 only very briefly in a postscript type of chapter, even that fact may be explained by other considerations. The historical sources and the necessary critical analysis of those has not as yet been completed and finalized, but more to the point; these events are still too close in time to allow the necessary perspective for a nuanced, sound, and balanced analysis. The events of World War II, the passions engendered by human rights issues, the current situation of the Hungarian minority there, are all factors which make it emotionally difficult to achieve the necessary scholarly striving for some semblance of objectivity.

The history of twentieth century Transylvania still remains to be written. In this connection, it should be stated that the publication of these volumes has already engendered a renewed interest in the past and present of Transylvania. This interest must be maintained and it is surely to be hoped that cooperation with historians from Rumania, and especially, the involvement of historians from Transylvania's minorities in the future will be possible once the tone changes and the minorities in that country can once again continue to develop their cultural identity. In spite of the hope here expressed, the prospects appear even dimmer if one examines the future of education and cultural life for the minorities there. The destruction of villages planned by the Ceaușescu regime, which elicited a huge demonstration in Budapest, also pushes the possibility of intellectual and cultural cooperation further into the future. Even in this context, one of the marchers in the Budapest demonstration carried a sign which read: “We do not wish the return of Transylvania, but rather the restoration of a more human life in Transylvania.”²⁸ This sentiment should be read in the light of the statements cited from the reviews published in the Rumanian media....

NOTES

¹ Statement of the Hungarian government as given in *Magyar Nemzet* (Budapest), April 2, 1987.

² See for example a review by Norman Stone "Bad blood in Transylvania," *Times Literary Supplement*, October 2-8, 1987, p. 1066.

³ These were probably the most sensitive issues in the eyes of the Rumanian reader. The reviews to be cited later tend to confirm this.

⁴ A judgment shared by most reviewers; cf. Stone review cited in n. 2.

⁵ Preliminary, unpublished review by Nandor Dreisziger.

⁶ The writings of Gyula Illyés were instrumental in awakening interest in the fate of Hungarian minorities. Some of his essays and poems encouraged many others, such as Sándor Csoóri and István Csurka.

⁷ The Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, and organization of mostly young Hungarians in the U.S. and Canada has been involved in the political arena, relief work, and publications. It has issued a number of reports on the situation of Hungarian minorities, and established a broad base of support. There are also numerous other organizations active in the support of human rights in Transylvania in the western world.

⁸ Two articles by the current writer may be of some interest in connection with these matters: "Hungarian Historiography and European Currents of Thought," in *Society in Change: Studies in Honor of Béla K. Király*, ed. S.B. Vardy (Boulder, Co.: *East European Quarterly*, 1983), 391-411.; "Inter Arma: Reflections on Seventeenth Century Educational and Cultural Life in Hungary and Transylvania," in *From Hunyadi to Rákóczi: War and Society in Late Medieval and Early Modern Hungary*, ed. Béla Király and János Bak (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1982), 315-334.

⁹ László Makkai, ed., *Erdély öröksége* (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1941), vol. 4.

¹⁰ *Erdély története*, vol. 2, pp. 1030-1034.

¹¹ Much of the historical mythology can still be found in the public consciousness.

¹² Trianon formed the basis of the Hungarian revisionism and the attempt to undo some of it was the basis of inter-war Hungarian revisionism.

¹³ The comment that Trianon was the greatest tragedy in Hungarian history was once made to this reviewer by John Lukacs. It is certainly comparable to Mohács. Hungarian historians are finally coming to terms with it once again. See the text of a radio interview conducted with a number of Hungarian historians by András Gerő, "Trianon a történelemben és a történeti tudatban," *Világosság*, April 1988, pp. 219-237. It should be stressed that only 3 pages deal with Trianon in the three volume *Erdély története*, which is almost shockingly disproportionate.

¹⁴ Some of these would include the various theories about the supposed Turanian and Sumerian origins of the Hungarians; also evident were the number of right radical political organizations.

¹⁵ *Erdély* (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1940). The volume was also published in a number of foreign languages.

¹⁶ Compare with some of the Rumanian reviews of the *Erdély története* cited later in this review.

¹⁷ It is only now that there is ready acceptance of books on minority issues in Hungary.

¹⁸ *Élet és Irodalom*, Oct. 23, 1987 as reprinted in *Látóhatár*, Jan. 1988, pp. 147-152.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 151-152.

²⁰ Stone, review in *Times Literary Supplement*, cited in note 2.

²¹ Review of *Erdély története* by Martyn Rady, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 66, 3 (July 1988), p. 482.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 484-485.

²³ *Erdély története*, vol. 1, p. 301.

²⁴ Titus Popovici, "Deliberate Falsification of History: Method and Style," *Romanian Review*, vol. 41, no. 5, p. 87.

²⁵ Dumitru Berciu *et al.*, "Fallacious Theses on the Making of the Romanian People and Language," *Romanian Review*, vol. 41, no. 7, pp. 74-88.

²⁶ Stefan Pascu *et al.*, "A Conscious Forgery of History under the Aegis of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences," *Romanian Review*, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 3-21.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁸ *Tüntetés a Hősök Terén* (Budapest: Eötvös, 1988), p. 15.