

# New Europe College Yearbook 2012-2013



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# IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NATION, ON THE MARGINS OF THE ACADEMIA: HISTORIOGRAPHY IN BANAT IN THE LONG 19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

## Abstract

This paper analyzes local historiography in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Banat. By that time, Banat was a multicultural periphery of the Kingdom of Hungary, at the same time battlefield of Magyar, Romanian, Serbian and German nation-buildings. Local historiographic production emerged from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. As Banat had no university, this historiography found itself on the margin of academic community, its members being mostly self-trained amateurs. Unlike similar amateur local historians in Germany, in Banat the amateur scholarship was constructed in order to meet the demands of the nation-building elites.

**Keywords:** historiography, regionalism, national identity, Banat.

“If professional history was the visible tip of the iceberg in our period [the 19<sup>th</sup> century], the subject of this chapter is the larger and less visible part, since many people received their impressions of the past from the work of amateur historians. [...] This was true for other periods too but it was especially true in this so-called age of historicism”, claims historian Peter Burke.<sup>1</sup> However, despite its obvious importance for the creation and popularization of the repository of national knowledge, the works of amateur historians have received little attention from scholars of historiography. “Ignored hitherto by historians of science”, argues Borbála Zsuzsanna Török, “*Landeskunde* was immensely popular throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the German-speaking realms of Europe, and was a rich field for identity construction on various scales, from the local to the European”.<sup>2</sup>

Following these statements, this paper examines local historiography in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the context of competing nationalisms and identity constructions in Banat, a multicultural periphery of Hungary.

## **I. National and Local Scholarship in Hungary in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

“Hungarian historiography during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was of European rank, as, except for the national romantics, it followed the institutions and streams elaborated in Western Europe, particularly in Germany”, claims historian Vilmos Erős.<sup>3</sup> This statement is definitely true: by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the University of Budapest, the Hungarian National Archives, the Historical Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (established in 1854) and its various source publications, the Hungarian Historical Association (established in 1867) and its journal *Századok* (Centuries, established in the same year), all followed the mainstream European historical scholarship.<sup>4</sup> The institutional boom and the subsequent professionalization put Hungary on the map of European historical scholarship.<sup>5</sup> Hungarian historians, though rarely being genuinely interested in theoritizing history, followed the European trends of historical scholarship with a relatively small delay: they wrote history in national romantic manner in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century like Julius Michelet,<sup>6</sup> employed the Rankean model of historicism in the second half of the century, and became influenced by social and economic history by the early 1900s.<sup>7</sup>

However, the progressive character of Hungarian historical scholarship is less convincing if one examines historiography produced outside the great academic centers (Budapest, Vienna, Kolozsvár/Cluj). Like elsewhere in Europe, the interest in the past provoked authors and institutions without a proper academic profile to write about their own history. In most cases, this “own history” meant local and regional history. The quality of local and regional historiography did not meet the standards set on the national level: “Our local historiography completely fails to provide basis [for macro-historiography]. It does not satisfy even the most primitive demands”, observed Elemér Mályusz, the innovative and prolific social historian in 1931.<sup>8</sup>

While the professional academic community clearly followed the German model of historiography in terms of institutions, methods and ideology, local amateurs did so only to a certain extent. The most important

forum of local research, the learned society appeared in Hungary as well, covering the territory of a county in most cases. Provincial museums appeared, too. These associations and museums published their research results in their own periodicals; furthermore, some cities and counties commissioned local intellectuals to publish their history in monographs. In particular, the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were a fruitful period, as the festivities in 1896 commemorating the 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Magyar conquest of the Carpathian basin indicated the production of representative volumes discussing local history.<sup>9</sup> However, these institutions resembled their German contemporaries only superficially. In Germany not only were far more learned societies and publications than in Hungary but the whole system functioned in a definitely more professionalized way. By the early 1900s, major German universities established specialized departments for regional history (*Landesgeschichte*).<sup>10</sup> Scholars of the field held regular conferences and prestigious periodicals were published to discuss the results of local history beyond their immediate region, too, the most eminent being the *Korrespondenzblatt des Gesamtvereins der deutschen Geschichts- und Altertumsvereine*, established in 1852.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond the gap in professionalization, the difference of the offered vision of the past is even more remarkable. In Germany, local and regional historians utilized their own past to demonstrate different emphasis, sometimes even values contradicting the Prussia-dominated *Kaiserreich*. Historian Gabriele B. Clemens asked if

the intellectuals engaged in historical societies participated in the process of nation-building and whether they formed part of that elite which, through communication, forged an imagined community or contributed to that as a scientific community. The answer is negative, as the overwhelming majority of the historians in the associations forged regional identities.<sup>12</sup>

Georg Kunz also argued for the regionalist agenda of the learned societies in Germany, though in his claim the associations' program oscillated between regional and national identities.<sup>13</sup> Learned societies in Germany, except for the Prussia-based ones, had a complicated relation to the German nation-state, claim both Clemens and Kunz. By elaborating regional history, these associations stressed their objections to the centralization of Berlin.

In spite of the fact that a detailed analysis of the agenda of Hungarian learned societies and, in more general, regional historiography has not

been carried out yet, it can be presumed that they did forge national identity and did contribute to national scholarship, in contradiction to their German counterparts. In Transylvania, for instance, three learned societies emerged: the Association for Transylvanian Studies (*Verein für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde*) associated with Lutheran Saxons, the Transylvanian Museum Association (*Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület*), an institution to organize Magyar scholarship, and the Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People (abbreviated as ASTRA), which represented Romanian nationalist goals already in its name.<sup>14</sup> Below these associations encompassing the macro-region of Transylvania, in Alsó-Fehér/Alba de Jos County a Historical, Archeological and Natural Scientific Association (*Alsófehérmegyei Történelmi, Régészeti és Természettudományi Társulat*) was founded.<sup>15</sup> Despite the fact that all these learned societies had a regional focus, in fact they oriented themselves far more to forge national scholarship. Analyzing the latter society, historian Péter Erdős claims that

its authors aimed less at forging sub-national history and identity of a region (county), it was rather the great history, that of Rome, the Hungarian Middle Ages, and the Transylvanian Principality, which offered them an evident framework, in which they had to locate themselves.<sup>16</sup>

It can be postulated that the pattern of Transylvania may be transmitted to other part of Hungary as well and to claim that regional historiography in Dualist Hungary was definitely more nation (and in the Magyar case, also state) oriented than in Germany, despite their superficial structural similarities.

Scholarship discussing the evolution of Hungarian historiography did not address the background of this difference yet. A mono-causal reasoning has been delivered by Mályusz:

Our county boundaries did not separate our homeland [Hungary] into politically sovereign, independent parts, therefore a flourishing local historiography, similar to that of Germany, could not develop.<sup>17</sup>

However, Hungary was not always a country governed directly from the capital but several territories experienced administrative autonomies. Mályusz claims that in these lands, in particular in Transylvania, Croatia, Slavonia and in Southern Hungary the impetus for a regional



historiographic tradition based on the heritage of administrative structures could have been present. To test the thesis of Mályusz, this paper will analyze the 19<sup>th</sup> century historiography of Banat, a province of roughly 28,000 km<sup>2</sup> between the rivers Danube, Maros/Mureș, Tisza and the Western parts of the Carpathians. Since it had been conquered by the Habsburg Empire from the Ottomans in 1716, Banat experienced various administrative positions, ranging from a military frontier to an individual crown land of the Empire. It was completely integrated into Hungary as late in 1884. Therefore, the obstacle, Mályusz thought to prevent the development of a regionalist understanding of history, was definitely absent in Banat. However, as this paper will argue, local historiography was as much nation (and also state, in the Magyar case) oriented, as the Transylvanian examples. A *Heimat*-vision skeptical to the national center à la Germany, did not emerge neither in Banat.

## II. Banat: A short Overview

Between 105 and 271 Banat was under Roman rule. Following the Roman withdrawal in 271, various barbaric peoples lived in the area, including Huns, Avars, and Slavs. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, it became the frontier of the First Bulgarian Empire, to be replaced by Hungarian rule of St Stephen (997-1038) in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century. As a frontier now of the Kingdom of Hungary, several banates were organized along the Southern border of the country; the modern name Banat comes from these. Hungarian rule was destroyed by Ottoman expansion in 1552, which lasted until 1716.

When the Habsburg army conquered Banat in 1716, it found a devastated and unpopulated land due to the long lasting wars. An intensive colonization took place, which attracted large number of Germans, Serbs, Romanians, and Magyars, and also smaller groups of Bulgarians, Greeks, Albanians, Frenchmen, Spaniards and Jews. As a result, Banat became one of the most heterogeneous territories on the European continent. Banat was under military government until 1779, when its Northern and central parts were integrated into Hungary, while the Southern territory remained a special Military Frontier until 1884. Between 1849 and 1860, the region formed part of the Serbian Vojvodina and Banat of Temesvár/Timișoara, a province designed to satisfy the demands of Serbian national protagonists of the Southern provinces of the Habsburg Empire. In 1860, the Serbian

Vojvodina was dissolved, as an Austro-Hungarian reconciliation process started, and Banat was re-integrated into Hungary. Finally, in 1884, the Military Frontier was also dissolved and the complete Banat became part of the Kingdom of Hungary within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

Hungarian authorities divided Banat into three counties: Torontál County (seat Nagybecskerek/Zrenjanin), Temes County (seat Temesvár/Timișoara) and Krassó-Szörény County (seat Lugos/Lugoj). In 1900 the region was inhabited by ca. 1.5 million people, split along religious and linguistic cleavages, as Table 1 demonstrates:

Table 1. Population of Banat according to language in 1900.

County	Total population	Ratio of (%)							
		Romanians	Germans	Serbs	Magyars	Slovaks	Croats	Others	Total
Torontál	609362	14,4	30,2	31,5	18,8	2,5	0,7	1,9	100
Temes	476242	35,2	35,9	13,6	12,2	0,6	0,1	2,4	100
Krassó-Szörény	443001	74,1	12,5	3,0	4,8	0,9	0,1	4,7	100
Total	1528605	38,2	17,7	26,8	12,7	1,4	0,3	2,8	100

Source: *A magyar szent korona országainak 1910. évi népszámlálása: Első rész. A népesség főbb adatai községek és népesebb puszták, telepek szerint*, Magyar Kir. Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, Budapest, 1912.

Table 2. Population of Banat according to religion in 1900.

County	Total population	Ratio of (%)							
		Roman Catholics	Greek Catholics	Orthodox	Lutherans	Calvinists	Jews	Others	Total
Torontál	609362	46,7	0,6	45,5	3,7	2,0	1,1	0,3	100
Temes	476242	44,0	2,6	46,9	2,5	1,8	2,0	0,1	100
Krassó-Szörény	443001	19,1	4,1	73,5	0,5	1,8	1,0	0,0	100
Total	1528605	37,9	2,2	54,1	2,4	1,9	1,4	0,2	100

Source: *Ibid.*

As the province was inhabited by various peoples, it experienced the competition of several nationalist projects throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Banat became the playground of Magyar, Romanian and Serbian nation-buildings, to be followed by German nationalism appearing in early 1900s and intensifying in the interwar period. As early as in 1790, a Serbian National Congress was held in Temesvár/Timișoara, which demanded the secession from Hungary and the formation of a separate Serbian crown land from the Southern provinces of the Empire. Serbian-Romanian controversy characterized the Orthodox Church, which led to the formation of national churches in the 1860s. From the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, the Hungarian government increasingly promoted a Magyar nationalist agenda, in particular in schooling and cultural policy and in administrative matters.

Nonetheless, Banat remained a rather peripheral area of national competition. No major national institutions emerged in the region: Serbian national activity centered on Karlóca/Karlovci (the seat of the Orthodox archbishop) and Újvidék/Novi Sad (seat of the cultural association *Matica srpska* and the only Serbian secondary school in Hungary); Romanian national institutions concentrated rather in Transylvania (Nagyszeben/Sibiu and Brassó/Brașov). The Hungarian government, promoting ethnic

Magyar nationalism, focused also on the territories where nationalist competition was more significant.<sup>18</sup>

### III. Integrating Banat into National Histories

After Banat had been conquered by the Habsburgs in 1716, it was directly governed by the Viennese authorities. Satisfying the demands of the Hungarian estates in 1779-1780, Empress Maria Theresa dissolved the direct Viennese government and integrated the province into the Kingdom of Hungary (with the exception of its Southern part, which remained a Military Frontier, controlled by the Habsburg military administration). Banat thus arrived to Hungary exactly in the period when Herderian national ideas started to penetrate in the country.<sup>19</sup>

The emergence of national ideas included the construction of national historiography, too, which at the same time underwent dramatic change in methodology and institutional framework. History became an academic discipline by the revolution of the German historicist school, whose influence was significant East of the German-speaking lands, too. The revolution in historical scholarship was not limited to methodology but largely influenced its social consequences. History became a key discipline for new social concepts, liberalism, nationalism and democracy.<sup>20</sup>

Being part of this European trend, Magyar, Romanian and Serbian historians elaborated narratives aiming at conceptualizing national identity, creating national past and space. They created a “glorious history, which was *ancient, continuous, unified and unique*”.<sup>21</sup> As unity was a major objective, the first wave of historiography preferred to ignore provincial history and focused rather on the national level. Therefore, Banat appeared in the romantic historiography of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century rarely.

#### 1. Eternal Romanity

Romanian national historiography emerged as a multi-centered enterprise in Moldova, Wallachia and Transylvania.<sup>22</sup> Romanian authors elaborated the vision of the unity of Romanian people, albeit living under the sovereignty of different countries. This unity was provided by their language and psyche, which was directly derived from the Romans of Dacia.<sup>23</sup> This historiography concentrated thus on the antiquity and

found its heroes among Wallachian and Moldovan princes, in particular in Michael the Brave, who, for a short time, ruled both provinces and Transylvania, too. Being the demonstration of unity their most important goal, the two most important Romanian historians of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Mihail Kogălniceanu and Nicolae Bălcescu ignored the Banat. Both of them referred to the region as part of the Roman-Romanian space as an appendix of Transylvania but not on its own right.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, Wallachia-based intellectuals originating from Transylvania and Banat elaborated a modern history of Banat. In 1848, August Treboniu Laurian (1810-1881) published the first Romanian history of Banat under the title *Temisiana or a short history of the Banat of Timiș*. Being born in Transylvania, Laurian studied in Cluj, Vienna and Göttingen, moved to Wallachia to become a professor at St Sava College in Bucharest, then at the University there. He was also a founding member and for some six years chairman of the Romanian Academy. Laurian was a devoted Latinist, claiming that the Romanian language and people derived from Latin and the Romans only, therefore Romanians were true heirs of Roman civilization. Hence, for Laurian, the importance of Banat was the fact that it was the first part of the province Dacia occupied by Romans. He also claimed that Banat was Dacia's most Romanized part, thus it preserved the pure Latin-Romanian language most. Further importance was ascribed to the region for its medieval history. Relying on *Gesta Hungarorum*, a 12<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian chronicle, Laurian claimed the existence of a Christian Romanian state in Banat under Bulgarian suzerainty. This state became part of Hungary in the 11<sup>th</sup> century but maintained a special form of government. Laurian finished his narrative in 1718, the date which terminated "Turkish despotism" and put Banat under a Christian power. Indeed, as in 1711 Moldova and Wallachia lost their right to choose their own rulers and the High Porte directly appointed their princes (the so-called phanariots), Banat and Transylvania remained the only territories to maintain Christian Romanian civilization. In his later works, Laurian extensively dealt with Romanian history and placed Banat in the Romanian national history.<sup>25</sup>

A similar approach was elaborated by Vasile Maniu (1824-1901), a Lugos/Lugoj-born historian and politician and émigré in Wallachia. His *Historical-critical and literary dissertation about the origins of Romanians in Traianian Dacia*, published in 1857, was based on the Transylvanian School to argue for Latin-Romanian continuity and primacy. However, Maniu added two important dimensions to the emerging Romanian

narrative. First, he claimed that the medieval “Wallachian districts”, which functioned as a military frontier in Southeast Banat, maintained Romanian autonomy. Second, he claimed the decay of Banat Romanians after Serbian immigration of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which led to the formation of the shared Serbian-Romanian Orthodox Church.<sup>26</sup>

These arguments became the core of the Romanian national reading of Banat history in the following decades. Alexandru Dimitrie Xenopol (1847-1920), the doyen of Romanian historiography of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, thus narrated Banat in the framework of Romanian unity. For Xenopol, Banat’s contribution to the Romanian nation was the maintenance of its Romanian population since the antiquity, its statehood in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and its Medieval autonomy.<sup>27</sup> He also claimed the direct geographical connection between Banat and Transylvania on the one hand, and Banat and Wallachia on the other.<sup>28</sup> This claim was reinforced by the influential linguist, Bogdan Hasdeu:

From all regions inhabited today by Romanian North of the Danube, Banat and Oltenia, with their extension to the communes of Hațeg region, are the only ones which represent an uninterrupted geographic-historical continuation of the Romanian people, a nest from where Romanization gradually extended to the lands of the West, North and East.<sup>29</sup>

## **2. Banat into Hungary**

Magyar Romantic-national historiography boomed from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The most important authors, Mihály Horváth and László Szalay, argued for the unity of Hungary and Transylvania and stressed the liberal constitutional tradition of the country.<sup>30</sup> Particular regions did not receive special attention; Magyar historians rather focused on a comprehensive history of the country in order to justify the liberal and national demands of home rule within the Habsburg Empire. The only region receiving particular attention was Transylvania.<sup>31</sup>

For the doyen of romantic Magyar historiography, Mihály Horváth, Banat was interesting only when discussing the questions of sovereignty. Horváth thus praised the 9<sup>th</sup> century Magyars to conquer to province and condemned the Habsburg rulers and Serbs for the violating Hungarian national interest and law by separating Banat.<sup>32</sup>

Banat remained a forgotten piece of Magyar national historiography until the 1860s. The first author to discuss Banat in Magyar national

narrative was Frigyes Pesty (1823-1899), a native of Temesvár/Timişoara. Despite lacking any formal university studies, Pesty became member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1859 and soon emerged as a leading expert on medieval Hungarian history. His work was largely concentrated around the history of Banat and Southern Hungary.<sup>33</sup>

Pesty's main aim was at proving the unitary and Magyar character of Banat in the Middle Ages. He claimed that the 'Wallachian districts' were not autonomous bodies but were proper parts of the Hungarian royal administration. Furthermore, he questioned their Romanian character: according to Pesty, these districts were rarely called Wallachian, their nobility spoke exclusively Magyar and their 'ordinary' Romanian population also knew Magyar.<sup>34</sup> Pesty also discussed Banat of Severin, a medieval administrative unit around modern Turnu-Severin. Pesty entered into polemics with Romanian authors, particularly with Hasdeu, claiming Hungarian suzerainty over Severin. For Pesty, the Severin *kenez* was just a clerk in the Hungarian royal administration; therefore, he regarded the claims of Romanian historiography about the Romanian statehood and autonomy absurd.<sup>35</sup>

Pesty also criticized the very geographical concept of Banat. As early as in 1868, he argued for the invalidity of the term 'Banat' or 'Bánság'. During the Middle Ages, there had been several *bani* governing particular territories along the Southern border of Hungary, claimed Pesty, yet a *banus* of Temes never appeared in the sources. Therefore, the 'ignorant' and 'malevolent' Austrian administration of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries coined the term Banat without any historical background, in order to justify the secession of the region from Hungary proper. Furthermore, the narrative of Romanian authors to put Banat into the united Romanian space disregarding political borders, was also vehemently attacked by Pesty, who insisted on the importance of state borders. The political motivation of Pesty was clear: he regarded Banat an ancient Hungarian territory, therefore its separate administration and the Military Frontier were unhistorical and immoral to him. As a historian, Pesty firmly believed that historical arguments played a significant role in political decisions, therefore he did not hesitate to make historiography serving politics. It is noteworthy that Pesty entered into polemics in a similar way with Croatian historiography over the validity of the term Slavonia (the Eastern part of Croatia around Osijek). He claimed that the incorrect usage of Slavonia enabled Croatia to secede this region from Hungary proper and justified instead Croatian rule.<sup>36</sup>

From the 1870s the controversy of Magyar and Romanian historiography entered into a new phase. In 1871, Austrian linguist Robert Rösler published a book about medieval Romanian history claiming that the Romanian language had come into being on the Balkans and Romanians immigrated North of the Danube in the second millennium only, making Magyars older inhabitants of Transylvania than Romanians. Magyar scholars immediately subscribed for this theory. At the same time, positivist source criticism claimed the unreliability of *Gesta Hungarorum*, including the very existence of any polity in Banat by the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The outcome was that Magyar historians now rejected any Romanian presence in Banat until the High Middle Ages. Therefore, both the origins, and, based on Pesty, the subsequent medieval history of Banat could be seen as predominantly Magyar.

### **3. Reading Serbian Banat**

The emerging Serbian master narrative discussed the history of Banat in even less details. The most important topic of the Serbian historiography was the medieval Serbian state, its failure at the battle of Kosovo and its modern resurrection. Regarding the history of Serbians in Hungary, the privileges of Emperor Leopold I and Orthodox Church history were discussed in detail. The main goals of this historiography were the demonstration of unity the Serbian people living in four different states (Serbia, Montenegro, Habsburg Empire, Ottoman Empire) and their just demands for sovereignty. Banat never received a considerable attention in this narrative: during the Middle Ages, it did not belong to Serbia, and the privileges did not differentiate between regions of Hungary, therefore a separate discussion of Banat was not needed.<sup>37</sup>

## **IV. Writing Provincial History *in loco***

### **1. Enlightened Forerunners**

At the time of its conquest, Vienna had very limited knowledge about the Banat. To support the colonization of the province, several civil servants drafted descriptions of the region, which routinely included a basic historical introduction.<sup>38</sup> The best study was written in 1774 by Johann Jakob Ehrler, a financial clerk in Temesvár/Timișoara. Written to



support the cameralist policy of the Austrian administration, the history of the province received only minor attention in Ehrler's work. He had to cope with a practical challenge: during the Ottoman period and the Habsburg-Ottoman wars actually all local archives were destroyed. Neither did Ehrler use contemporary secondary literature (the works of Hungarian historians Gyögy Pray or Mathias Bél). The study opens with a short historical overview which justifies the Habsburg rule over Banat. Relying on classical authors, Ehrler depicted the ancient glory of the province, which was followed by barbarism and started to flourish again only by the Habsburg acquisition.<sup>39</sup> Ehrler's work remained unpublished; despite it was used by Habsburg authorities, it did not make any impact on Banat historiography.

Instead of Ehrler, it was Francesco Grisellini (1717-1787), a Venice-born Austrian scholar and clerk, who emerged as the founding father of Banat studies.<sup>40</sup> As a freelancer scholar, Grisellini spent three years between 1774 and 1777 in Banat, and in 1780 published his *Attempt of a political and natural history of the Banat of Temesvár*. Grisellini justified his book by a typical enlightened reasoning: only few lands in Europe were as unknown as Banat, despite it deserved attention by its booming civilization standards, diverse population and the remains of the Roman times. During the years Grisellini lived in Banat, he travelled most of the region and compiled all available information of the past of Banat, ranging from ancient authors to the most up-to-date historians. He particularly praised the Habsburg administration to terminate the Ottoman barbarism and tyranny and to civilize the province.<sup>41</sup>

## **2. The Dawn of National Historiography**

By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, it was still Grisellini the only author, who discussed the history of Banat at the length of a book. However, neither Grisellini's old-fashioned method (use of few original sources), nor its ideological background (supra-national, Austrian enlightenment) satisfied the emerging Banat intelligentsia, which increasingly found itself influenced by national master narratives. Despite of the Banat origin of several authors, these narratives were produced in the national centers of knowledge in institutions whose main task was to elaborate national sciences. National academies of sciences, universities in the national capitals and in the Serbian case the Matica srpska and the Orthodox Church provided the institutional framework of the production of these

narratives. As a peripheral and multicultural borderland, Banat rarely received significant consideration in these narratives. Therefore, these visions did not meet the demand of local intellectuals who aimed at writing a more precise history of the region. "Even though recently admirable works have been published about the history of Hungary, not each Banater can be expected to form a clear picture of the past of his *Heimat* out of the mass [of the literature]. Yet, this knowledge is a must for any cultivated person", claimed for instance Johann Heinrich Schwicker, author of an early Banat-monograph.<sup>42</sup>

Yet, after the publication of Grisellini's *Attempt*, almost a century passed without significant results. In the *Vormärz* two authors appeared, though the quality of their works definitely lagged behind that of Grisellini. In 1826-27, the Orthodox priest and civil servant in the Habsburg and Orthodox Church administrations, Nicolae Stoica de Hațeg (1751-1833), wrote a *Chronicle of Banat*. Being born to a clerical family in Southwest Banat, Stoica attended different schools of the region but never studied at university. His *Chronicle* was an outdated combination of medieval world chronicles, *annales* and the enlightened scientific approach. Similar to medieval chroniclers, Stoica started his work by the Biblical story of creation of the world and guided his readers through ancient history, to be followed by an inconsistent, *annales*-style history of the Byzantine Empire, Hungary, Transylvania and the two Romanian principalities. In fact, the history of Banat is discussed in detail only from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, partly as a compilation of Grisellini and some contemporaries, partly as his own memoirs. Compared to Grisellini and Stoica's Transylvanian Romanian contemporaries, such as Petru Maior, Samuil Micu-Klein and Gheorghe Șincai, The *Chronicle* was a clearly primitive attempt. As it remained unpublished, it could not function as the starting point of any modern narrative on Banat.<sup>43</sup>

The other author of the period was Ágoston Bárány (1798-1849), lawyer and clerk in the Torontál County administration. Bárány was born in Miskolc, a town in central Hungary; after leaving his hometown for Torontál, he became an advocate of Hungarian patriotism in the Southern counties.<sup>44</sup> His *Dawn of Torontál County* (1845) and *Memory of Temes County* (1848) were the first works to discuss the history of the region in Hungarian. Despite Bárány was member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, his works remained marginal and forgotten pieces. Bárány's method was anachronistic and naive: he merely extracted the evidence concerning the history of Banat found at some older authors

of Hungarian history and completed them by some data of Grisellini. Bárány's compilation was without any critical stance whatsoever. Yet, Bárány's primitive methodology offered an important novelty: he put the region in the framework of Hungarian national history by claiming Magyar demographic domination throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>45</sup>

### 3. Transition to modern historiography

The massive production of local historical works started in the 1850s and 1860s. These decades brought fundamental changes in the political environment of Banat. The 1848 revolution brought first liberal reforms but it soon turned into a bloody civil war, which hit particularly the cities Temesvár/Timișoara and Fehértemplom/Bela Crkva. After the failure of the Hungarian war of independence, the neo-absolutist Austrian government seceded Banat from Hungary and together with some other territories in its West turned it into a crown land under the name Serbian Voivodeship and Banat of Temeschwar. This crown land did not last long, as it was abolished in 1860 and reintegrated into Hungary. In the same year, a centralized, restricted liberal constitution was inaugurated, slightly modified in the following year, turning the Habsburg Monarchy into a federal state. This structure was abolished in 1867, when the Hungarian political elite was able to ensure Hungary an almost complete home-rule within the Monarchy. The other important event in Banat was the breakup of the Orthodox Church. For Romanian national leaders the Serbian domination in their common Orthodox Church was the most painful grievance. In 1864, a Romanian Orthodox Church with the seat of Nagyszeben/Sibiu was established, to be sanctioned by the Hungarian Parliament in 1868.<sup>46</sup>

The first historiographic result of the period was the *Monograph of the Royal Free City of Temesvár*, written by the city's mayor Johann Nepomuk Preyer (1805-1888).<sup>47</sup> Preyer, a prolific author and politician, promoted modest liberal reforms before the revolution, found easily compromise with post-1849 absolutism, and became a civil servant in liberal post-1867 Hungary. His *Monograph* oscillated between Habsburg *Kaisertroue* and Hungarian *Landespatriotismus*. His methodology was unoriginal, accidental compilation of already existing literature. In order to comply with censorship, Preyer simply did not mention some politically hot events, mostly those related to the 1848 civil war.<sup>48</sup>

Similar strategy and oscillation can be observed at those two works, which discussed the history of Banat, first time since Grisellini. Both of them

were published in 1861 (which means that they were written in the 1850s) by young authors as their academic debut; both authors were of German origin, born in Banat. The first one was Leonhard Böhm (1833-1924), a native of Fehértemplom/Bela Crkva, a town in the Military Frontier. Böhm came from a family of artisans, attended the Piarist gymnasium in Szeged but the 1848 revolution and civil war prevented him from finishing secondary education. He never attended university; instead, worked as a smith in Vienna and several other towns of Austria. After returning to his hometown, Böhm started his literary career.<sup>49</sup> His first piece, *History of the Banat of Temes*, was published in 1861.<sup>50</sup> The other work, published in the same year, was the *History of the Temeser Banat* by Johann Heinrich Schwicker (1839-1902), an elementary school teacher in Nagybecskerek/Zrenjanin.<sup>51</sup> Schwicker came from a family of rural intelligentsia. His poor financial conditions prevented him from higher studies, thus he became school teacher and by self-training gymnasium teacher.<sup>52</sup>

The employed methods of Böhm and Schwicker were relatively similar. None of them relied on original sources; instead, they extensively used Grisellini and filled the gaps of medieval and early modern Banat by evidence of Hungarian history in general. Schwicker terminated his narrative in the year 1780, the incorporation of Banat into Hungary, in order to avoid judgments of politically hot issues, but Böhm was daring enough to write until his very days. These methods earned them the severe criticism of Frigyes Pesty. Pesty criticized the title of both works, as for him only the term South Hungary was acceptable. He also remarked the low quality of both works, demonstrated their several factual errors and the lack of original sources. Neither Böhm, nor Schwicker “stood on the level of our contemporary scholarship”, summarized Pesty.<sup>53</sup>

While Pesty’s academic criticism contained plenty of fair points, he went further to accuse Böhm of political bias as advocate of a centralized Austrian identity (*Gross-Österreich*).<sup>54</sup> Despite being published in 1861, Böhm’s 700 pages long work was finished in August 1860, i.e. during Austrian neo-absolutism, when freedom of speech was severely restricted. Böhm’s *History* contains several points demonstrating his Habsburg loyalty: he highly praised Habsburg rulers for liberating the province from the Ottomans and bringing population and civilization. Moreover, discussing the 1848 revolution Böhm accused Lajos Kossuth of dictatorship and terror; yet, any other narrative in the late 1850s was just impossible in neo-absolutist Austria. On the other hand, Böhm clearly welcomed the 1779 integration of Banat into the Hungarian “fatherland”,

praised “the noble Hungarian nation” but criticized the still existing Military Frontier for its anachronism and urged its demilitarization (which practically meant integration into Hungary and Croatia, respectively, and was a major demand of the Magyar political elite).<sup>55</sup> Therefore, rather being a blind supporter of Austria, Böhm oscillated between Hungarian *Landespatriotismus* and Habsburg loyalty. The same can be said regarding Schwicker, though in his *History* the Hungarian loyalty was less dominant.

Reacting on the changing political situation and the negative responses, Böhm re-formulated his work in 1864 and published its second edition in 1868.<sup>56</sup> The second edition is remarkably different from the first one. Its academic quality was definitely higher: he corrected several factual mistakes to which Pesty referred to, the references became clearer and the chapters discussing the history after 1718 were abandoned to avoid hot issues. More important is that its commitment to Hungary became even clearer. Böhm stressed liberal-democratic values more, changed the language from German to Hungarian and choose a new title: *Particular History of South Hungary or the So-Called Banat*, in order to conform Pesty’s demand. Yet, this turned out partly: now it was Kálmán Thaly, secretary of the Hungarian Historical Association, who criticized Böhm’s title to equal Banat with South Hungary. Nonetheless, another reviewer praised it as a true patriotic work.<sup>57</sup>

Böhm’s Hungarian commitment was also shown by his later activities. He became an active member of the Southern Hungarian Association for History and Archeology, published the monographs about Fehértemplom/Bela Crkva and Pancsova/Pančevo. These works were more accurate, as Böhm utilized plenty of local original sources; their evaluation was therefore also much more positive. He also entered the local political arena and was elected twice mayor of Fehértemplom/Bela Crkva with the support of the governing Liberal Party.<sup>58</sup> Schwicker chose a different career: he moved to Budapest, became professor of German at the Technical University and a parliamentary representative of the Transylvanian Saxon commune Kereszténysziget/Grossau/Cristian. He intensively published about Southern Hungarian history, the German and Serbian minorities in Hungary. In his agenda, he combined liberal values with national equality.<sup>59</sup>

In the 1860s, when Banat was again part of Hungary, a modestly liberal constitution was inaugurated but ethnic nationalism was not on the agenda yet, the position Böhm and Schwicker offered, seemed the most appropriate for German-speaking Banat intellectuals. Though Böhm’s

commitment to Hungary and Hungarian liberal politics was clearly stronger than that of Schwicker, both of them can be labeled *Hungari*, as explained by Horst Haselsteiner:

The [*Hungarus*] concept was born of the term for fatherland, *patria*. This *patria* formed the basis for a multifaceted one-state patriotism in the Kingdom of Hungary. [...] They wanted to maintain the difference between new nationalism, the inflated form of which they rejected, and their healthy patriotism, clearly preserved and established as a civic goal for Hungary, one worth striving for.<sup>60</sup>

While Böhm and Schwicker elaborated a narrative to support liberal and *Hungarus* Hungary, Nicolae Tincu-Veila (1814-1867), an Orthodox priest and professor at the Seminary of Versec/Vršac drafted the history of the province to promote the foundation of an independent Romanian Orthodox Church. His work, the *Little Church History, Political and National* relied on the Latinist school to claim the historical primacy and demographic domination of Romanians in Banat.<sup>61</sup> However, in contrary to the centralist views of Laurian and Maniu, Tincu-Veila was the first Romanian author to argue for a separate “Banatism”, different not only from the Danubian principalities but also from Transylvania. In Tincu-Veila’s view, this difference was the result of administrative autonomy Banat uninterruptedly experienced since the Middle Ages until the very days of the author. First, Hungarian king St Stephen ensured Banat autonomy within Hungary. Andrew II even provided the same rank to Banat as to Transylvania. Later, Wallachian military districts formed the administrative means of Banat’s autonomy. After the failure of medieval Hungary and Transylvanian rule over Eastern Banat, these districts were not incorporated into Transylvania proper but were governed by the *banus* of Lugoj and Caransebes. The Habsburg government followed up the autonomy of Banat as a separate district and Military Frontier. The autonomous position of Banat enabled the numerical majority of Romanian population and its flourishing culture, reflected in the numerous Romanian Orthodox monasteries, about which Tincu-Veila provides a detailed description. These arguments were used by Tincu-Veila to prove that the Romanians were independent from Serbian Church hierarchy throughout the Middle Ages until the very immigration of Serbian in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Even after that, the Serbian Church had not obtained any right to dominate the

Romanian Church, therefore the shared Orthodox Church was seen by Tincu-Veila as illegal and immoral.<sup>62</sup>

#### 4. Local History in Magyar National Frames

The year 1867 terminated the one and half decades long experiment of centralized Austria. Hungary became almost completely independent from Austria regarding her inner policy. This home rule was used for liberal reforms (among them the regulation of the Orthodox Churches and the abolition of the anachronistic Military Frontier) and at an increasing pace for national homogenization under the umbrella of ethnic Magyar nationalism. The political landscape of Banat was ruled by the Liberal Party, which governed Hungary throughout the period with the exception of a few years in the 1900s.<sup>63</sup> The Liberals promoted the Compromise and the maintenance of the Dualist Monarchy, liberal values and Magyar nationalism. The growing power of ethnic nationalist visions dismantled the *Hungarus* concept. The Serbian-Romanian controversy disappeared, to be replaced by government-based Magyar nationalism, which became the most important “enemy” of Romanian, Serbian and German nationalist politicians. Nonetheless, unlike in Transylvania, the intertwining of liberalism, the vision of progress and Magyar nationalism was appealing for several members of the German, Serbian and Romanian middle-classes. National tensions divided the society of Banat definitely at a lower scale than in other parts of the Hungary and Austria.

Beside the political conditions, the other factor significantly influencing Banat historiography was its ambiguous professionalization. Banat did not have any lay institution for higher education and the diocesan seminaries obviously did not aim at historical research. As Pesty's attack of Böhm and Schwicker demonstrated, the lag of professionalization seriously limited amateur scholarly endeavors. To overcome this difficulty, in 1872 a Southern Hungarian Association for History and Archeology (*Délmagyarországi Történelmi és Régészeti Társulat*, hereafter DTRT) was established. The initiative came from Zsigmond Ormós, lord lieutenant of Temes/Timiș County, himself an amateur art historian and member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Members of the DTRT were local landholders, members of free professions, civil servants and clerics.<sup>64</sup>

From 1875, the association published the journal *Történelmi és régészeti értesítő* (Historical and archeological bulletin). In 1891 the Southern Hungarian Museum for History and Archeology was opened,

whose collection significantly increased in the following decades.<sup>65</sup> In the context of the Kingdom of Hungary, all these achievements were remarkable: the DTRT was one of the first and largest of local historical societies in the country, the museum was definitely the first outside the capital Budapest to receive an own building and the journal emerged as a solid forum of local historiography. In the following decades, the DTRT functioned as the only institution organizing local scholarship, therefore it dominated the scholarly community of Banat.<sup>66</sup>

Despite its membership included representatives of all major ethnic and religious groups of Banat, the DTRT clearly subscribed for the dominant state ideology, the so-called *magyar állameszme* ("Magyar state idea"). This concept centered on liberal values, progress and the united political body of all citizens of the country but at the same time promoted ethnic Magyar nationalism and supported the Magyar primacy in political life. Zsigmond Ormós, founder and chairman of the DTRT, was for nearly two decades the lord lieutenant of Temes County; in this function he obviously believed in the *magyar állameszme*. As representatives of the middle-classes, so did most members of the DTRT, too. The very name of the association and the museum confirmed this concept well: it read Southern Hungarian, i.e. a mere geographic part of Hungary; the term Banat, indicating potential autonomy, was never used.

The *Történelmi és régészeti értesítő* was published for more than four decades; its detailed analysis of the discourse thus definitely exceeds the limits of this paper. Instead, the DTRT's most important author, Jenő Szentkláray (1843-1924) will be introduced here. Szentkláray was a Catholic priest, teacher and journalist, member of the Hungarian and the Serbian Academy of Sciences, founding member and secretary of the DTRT. Szentkláray came from a Bunjevac family in West Banat; he Magyarized his original name Nedits in 1867.<sup>67</sup>

As a summary of his views, in 1912 he authored a *History of Temes County* for a comprehensive monograph of the county. In this work, Szentkláray applied the Magyar master narrative on Temes County. The Roman period appears here only briefly; instead, the high culture of the Huns and Avars, two peoples Szentkláray believed to be related to the Magyars, is praised in details. For Szentkláray, Banat actually entered the Western world by the foundation of the Christian Kingdom of Hungary. Until the Ottoman conquest, Banat remained a solid part of Hungary; needless to say that Szentkláray did not know about any Romanian privileged territory in the region. Despite he acknowledged the merits of the



post-1716 Habsburg administration to introduce schooling and developing infrastructure, he severely criticized Habsburg rulers for seceding Banat from Hungary. Szentkláray treated the Serbians as 14<sup>th</sup>, the Romanians as 13<sup>th</sup> century immigrants to the county; both peoples were characterized as rather barbaric, without major cultural contribution to the county. He furthermore harshly criticized the Serbian national movement, its demand for autonomy in 1790 and the civil war in 1848-1849.<sup>68</sup>

Discussing the ancient and medieval history of Krassó County, he elaborated the same narrative about the culturally and morally advanced Huns and Avars and the uninterrupted sovereignty of the Kingdom of Hungary. Here, the Romanian population of the county was accused lack of culture and morals, indeed, of undermining the Hungarian state structure.<sup>69</sup>

In spite of his affiliation to the *magyar állameszme*, Szentkláray was not a chauvinist in the modern sense of the word. Rather he believed in the state as the only valid frame of morals, civilization and progress. Similar to many of his contemporaries, he was convinced that only Magyars were able to manage statehood in the region due to their cultural supremacy. He judged multiculturalism by this token: the held Serbian and Romanian demands of autonomy illegitimate and backward.<sup>70</sup> This, however, did not mean that he disdained their culture. Indeed, Szentkláray was a pioneer in Hungary to research into Serbian history. Based on his research in the archives of the Patriarchate of Karlovci, he published the *Historical Memories of the Serbian Monasteries in Southern Hungary*.<sup>71</sup> He justified his research by referring to the ancient Christian heritage of the Orthodoxy and the role these monasteries played in the formation of morals among the Serbians of Hungary. For this work, Szentkláray was elected honorary member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and the Matica srpska.<sup>72</sup>

Loyalty to the state was definitely the default idea among members of the DTRT. Their commitment to ethnic Magyar nationalism varies more: several authors became advocates of an ethnic Magyar viewpoint, while some others showed respect for all ethnic and religious groups. Among this latter group the most important person was Felix Milleker, teacher and founder of the local museum in Versec/Vršac and author of more 300 works discussing local history, who shared a strong loyalty both to the state and to the Banat Germans, esteeming Serbian history, too.<sup>73</sup>

## 5. Competing Visions

The narrative based on the *magyar állameszme* dominated the landscape of Banat historiography. Its rule was, however, not complete. Romanian, Serbian and German intellectuals authored some works to challenge the Magyar discourse. The lack of any competent academic institution outside of the DTRT, however, prevented an effective challenge.

The most active was the Romanian side. Patriciu Drăgălina (1849-1917), a geographer and professor at the Orthodox Teacher Training College in Karánsebes/Caransebeș, authored a book *From the History of the Banat of Severin*. His book was dedicated to the memory of the Romanian military frontier regiment, on whose territory he had been born. Despite he claimed that modern historiography was hostile to the Romanians of Banat, he did not make any original research. Instead, he summed up the already existing literature and combined it with the Romanian master narrative to claim comprehensive autonomy of the medieval Wallachian districts and the Banat of Severin.<sup>74</sup>

A similar method, though at a more precise level, was used by Gheorghe Popovici (1862-1927), whose *History of the Romanians of Banat* was the zenith of regional Romanian historiography in the prewar period. Having studied theology in Czernowitz/Chernivtsi and Vienna, Popovici became professor at the Karánsebes/Caransebeș Theological Seminary, to be followed by appointment as protopope of Lugos/Lugoj. As a representative of the Romanian National Party, he was elected to the Hungarian Parliament in 1905 and 1906. Popovici's *History* is a solid work based on the latest Romanian and Hungarian literature. In the foreword, the author made clear that his goal was to provide Banat Romanians with their national history, to replace the foreign and malevolent publications. Hence, he accepted the backbone of Romanian historiography: the Roman continuity thesis and the uninterrupted Romanian population since then. However, he did not claim an uninterrupted autonomy of the Banat Romanians. Two years later, the Romanian Academy of Sciences honored him by corresponding membership.<sup>75</sup>

Romanian nationalism was definitely present in Dualist Banat, but due to its weak infrastructure it could not elaborate an efficient narrative. Neither came into being an effective Serbian narrative. Studies on Banat in the period are extremely rare; the few publications discussed the history of the Orthodox Church.<sup>76</sup>

The chances of a German national narrative were even worse. Despite a German national appeared in South Hungary by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it could not consolidate until the 1920s.<sup>77</sup> In fact, an activist of this movement, Franz Wettel (1854-1938) was the only author to narrate the history of Banat in German nationalist terms. Wettel was a bookseller, editor and landholder without any formal higher education.<sup>78</sup> His *Biographic Sketches*, a collection of short biographies of important people of the Banat based on already existing literature. It aimed at “renewing the memory of memorable men who contributed to the Banat, [...] and by that awakening and maintaining the love of *Heimat*”.<sup>79</sup> Yet, the book consists of biographies of Germans only (with the exception of the Habsburg-Italian Grisellini and Radoslav Edler von Radić, a Serbian cleric loyal to the Habsburg state). The novelty Wettel offered was the narrative: he introduced the history of the Banat as a German enterprise, where civilization and culture was brought by Germans only. Contemporary Magyar historians, among them Jenő Szentkláray, thus accused Wettel of unpatriotism, pan-German nationalism and held the book worthless.<sup>80</sup>

## V. Conclusion

This study opens with the presumption that German historiography had a definite influence on historians in Banat. The fact that none of the analyzed historians studied in Germany, does not undermine this concept. Important features of Banat historiography, such as source publications, source criticism and the obsession with the state were all the methods German historiography elaborated during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These methods arrived to Banat not directly from Germany but through the transmission of Hungarian universities and academic literature. The DTRT clearly followed the German patterns, referring to the flourishing regional learned societies in Germany as a positive model.<sup>81</sup>

Yet, while the methods arrived, the content did so only partially. The examination of the Banat historiography, similar to its Transylvanian counterpart, showed that local historians did use the national framework and did aim at contributing to national scholarship. The fact, that the level of this contribution varied, does not mean question the demand of participating in national scholarship.

Comparing the national and local narratives, one can observe both similar and different features. The whole narration, the topics, the potential

political consequences are strikingly similar. Magyar authors, both in Budapest and in Temesvár/Timișoara, claimed Magyar cultural and political supremacy and questioned the cultural impact of the Habsburg period. They denied the continuity of other ethnic groups, postulated an almost pure Magyar population in the Middle Ages, and underestimated Banat's medieval administrative structures. In contrast to this narrative, Romanian authors, both in Romania and in Banat, argued for the Romanians' uninterrupted continuity since the Roman times and most of them claimed the administrative autonomy of Romanians in various periods of the Middle Ages. They also postulated the unity of the Romanian people on both sides of the Carpathian Mountains. Serbian authors rather focused on church history and the history of Serbian privileges, in order to demonstrate a valid argument for autonomy. The only German nationalist author argued for the German cultural supremacy in the region.

The way Banat authors narrated the place of the region, was thus clearly influenced by their political commitment. Banat was seen as an elusive "non-region" by Magyar historians, who claimed that the particular features of Banat were the results of the Ottoman decay and the artificial Habsburg period. They did not even use the very term Banat but insisted on South Hungary, an expression suggesting a mere geographic delineation in united Hungary. In contrast to this, Serbian and Romanian authors offered a picture which clearly differentiated Banat from the default history of Hungary, yet, this narrative was used again as a tool for purposes of national politics. German-speaking historians of the 1860s, whose Banat histories demonstrated a narrative of multiple loyalties, were replaced by an author using the region again for national agitation. To put it short: whether regional differences to the national centers were claimed or not, all these were determined by national goals. This is a clear difference to Germany, where such an intensive overlap between region and nation existed only in the very center of the *Kaiserreich*, Prussia.

The claim delivered by Mályusz about the central administration of Hungary is definitely an important reason to explain this difference. First, political actors in provincial Hungary were far less powerful could articulate their interests in a definitely less nuanced way than their counterparts in Germany. Second, associations related to the courts of the provinces and the dense network of universities (as a legacy of the territorial fragmentation) were also unknown in Hungary.

Beyond these, the obvious weakness of Hungarian *Bildungsbürgertum* compared to contemporary Germany was also a major obstacle to

articulate regional identity. Hungarian middle-class was definitely more dependent on the state than the German one, hence the stronger reliance on state resources and ideology.

The ultimate reason for the virtually non-existence of a regional understanding of history in pre-World War I Banat was, however, multiculturalism. Due to this diversity, four competing nationalisms appeared in Banat, using historical scholarship for their particular purposes. Only a few historians were able to take a nationally indifferent position (the most prominent being Felix Milleker, who in foremost was a Banater); all others offered their services to construct memory of larger entities, i.e. nations. The mutually irreconcilable visions of the national elites thus prevented an understanding of the past of Banat in regional terms.

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