

THE TRANSYLVANIAN QUESTION IN PRESENT-DAY LITERATURE

BY
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During the past two decades Hungarians have written comparatively less about Transylvania, its past and present, than Rumanians.

Hungarian historical science has refrained from being drawn into a controversy. There was no need to repeat its long-established views based on historical facts. It did not keep on reiterating — in the present difficult times, which as regards the relations between Hungary and Rumania may be described as a truce as far as the Press is concerned, it could not keep on reiterating — its opinions. *Silence, however, in the present instance does not mean that the Hungarians have abandoned their firmly fixed opinions; on the contrary, it means that Hungarian historical science wishes to respect the truce, and does not consider this a proper time for polemics, nor does it see any reason why it should declare its views every now and then, or state its attitude over and over again.*

The reverse may be observed on the other side, where the truce is being violated by repeated efforts to justify the Rumanian point of view and present what Rumanians consider the facts of the case in various new lights.

To mention only one or two striking examples, let us first take John *Lupas's* article published in the "Excelsior" of Bucharest, on 10th February, in which, by means of a scientific analysis of the name "*Erdély*", the writer tries to draw the conclusion *that "Transilvania" is the more correct and suitable form.* This opinion was echoed on 23rd February, in the Bucharest "Universul", by *Seisanu*, himself a Transylvanian, who was obviously inspired by *Lupas's*

article. Lupas definitely states that he was impelled to write it because "the time has come to issue instructions, not only to all schools, but also to the administrative, military, educational and economic departments to use the name *Transilvania* and nothing else. This would be of great service in standardizing the use of this name, and would also eliminate the confusion arising in books translated from foreign languages into Rumanian in which *Ardeal* and *Ardelean* are used instead of *Transilvania* and *Transilvan*." We are justified in supposing that this was also the object of Seisanu's article, although even a cursory glance reveals signal differences between the two.

Lupas's article is, namely, a serious article absolutely nationalistic in character, while Seisanu's is propaganda pure and simple. *Lupas does not deny that the word Ardeal is of Hungarian origin, but Seisanu declares it is merely a corruption of Ardelan, the name of a Persian province, and has nothing in common with the Hungarian word Erdély.*

We have no means of ascertaining which name would be more acceptable to the inhabitants; and we certainly do not wish to interfere if the Rumanians prefer to use the name *Transilvania* instead of *Ardeal*. It is only from a scientific, and absolutely non-political, point of view that we have some observations to make, lest by failing to do so we should create the impression that we have no conviction of our own, and confirm Lupas's assertion that the name *Ardeal* is a word derived from the Hungarian. (The same is true of "Transylvania", for, although there is no trace of Hungarian in that word, it is a Latin translation of a Hungarian expression and therefore continues to have a Hungarian meaning.)

We fully agree with Lupas's theory based on historical facts that *in the beginning Transylvania was called Ultrasylvania*. We are glad that M. Lupas has noticed this, for it brings us nearer to the Hungarian origin and meaning of the word. *The designation "Ultrasylvania" was namely applied to the part of Hungary lying beyond the forests and*

which in Hungarian was therefore called "*Erdőelve*". Lupas's theory must, however, be modified, for the Hungarian name was not derived from the Latin, on the contrary, the Latin name Transylvania is a translation of the Hungarian word "*Erdély*". It was only in the eyes of the Hungarians and viewed from Hungary that Transylvania was "the land beyond the forests" (we must not forget that the word land does not always mean a State, especially here), for that part of the Hungarian State lay beyond the wooded regions that separated it from the centre. Although our historians have not hitherto dealt exhaustively with the history of deforestation, a favourite theme with the historians of the West (German, French, Belgian writers) and one of growing importance, it may be established that the eastern part of the Great Plain of Hungary, in particular its downs, was covered with vast forests which have mostly disappeared. *The name of the territory lying beyond them was not invented by the Hungarian king or the Hungarian Administration, it was born on the lips of the people, as its colloquial form and use show.* This proves that the Latin name *Ultrasylvania* was not translated into Hungarian, but that the chroniclers and Chancellery, whose documents, like the records of the period, were drafted in Latin, translated the name "*Erdőelve*" into that language, Latinized it, that is to say.

The same thing happened in connection with the Cumanian districts in the hills and across the Alpine regions to which the Hungarians gave the name of "*Havaselve*". (*Havasok*=Alps), later known as the "*Havasalföld*". This was translated into Latin as *Transalpina*, and not *vice versa*.

A classical proof of the truth of what we have said is the fact that the Rumanians who migrated to Transylvania called the Cumanian districts on the lower reaches of the Danube by the name of *Transalpina* and *Erdély* by the name of *Transylvania*, not *Dacia*. Despite their Latin origin, they have preserved no trace of Roman tradition, for they simply accepted the names used at the time of their migration by the inhabitants of those parts. Although to the immigrants

from the south the Cumanian areas and *Erdély* were on their side of the Alps and the forests, they did not drop the common syllable in the Latin words *Trans-silvania* and *Transalpina*. In other words, they adapted their own rendering of the names to that in use in those regions. They even went further: not only did they accept the name "*Erdély*" without demur, but also *many of the Rumanians who settled in Transylvania adopted the family name of Ardelean, calling themselves "Erdélyians" and not Transylvanians, much less Dacians or Romans.*

This foreign, Hungarian-sounding name *Ardelean* is probably an obstacle in the way of Rumanianization. If so, this exceedingly common family name will have to be changed, for who will believe that families of that name did not acquire it through intercourse with the Hungarians, or through the influence of their proximity, but that they brought it from Persia?

Viewed in this light it will be seen, on the one hand, that science is being enlisted in the service of politics, and on the other, that ancient traditions and the memory and evidence of centuries of evolution are to be set aside to further political ends.

This is shown, for example, by the circumstance that although, in his opinion the name "*Erdély*" is a foreign word of Hungarian origin, Lupas nevertheless attempts to prove the ancient Rumanian character of that region, in other words, the opposite of what logically follows from the use of a name of Hungarian derivation. How, in that case, can he explain the circumstance that an autochthonous Rumanian population should have chosen a foreign name for their country, and that *the number of Rumanians who adopted the family name of Ardelean is larger than that of the Hungarians who took the name of Erdélyi?*

That one German *savant*, according to Lupas, seeks the origin of the name *Erdély* in *Sanskrit* and another, according to Seisanu, in Persian, merely shows that those German authors are totally ignorant of the history of

the settlements in Transylvania and Hungary. We ourselves have not devoted much attention to the question; much less have we ever thought of bringing the results of our researches to the knowledge of foreign science. This is the plain reason why we meet with incomprehensible and far-fetched theories about the simplest questions. For instance, *instead of a Sanskrit-Persian theory or a Thracian-Pelasgic one, would it not be simpler and more credible to say that in the Middle Ages the Hungarian name for an "erdő" (forest) was "erdö", that the "havasok" (Alps) were called "havasok", "Erdély" was "Erdöelve" and the "Havasalföld" (Transalpine) was "Havaselve"?*

Lupas was right in discarding speculations and frankly telling the Rumanians of the "Regat" (Old Rumania) that the name Ardeal derives from the Hungarian word *Erdély*. It is evident that it is not his intention to deny the Hungarian origin of the word, but to eliminate it from the Rumanian language by substituting the more Latin name *Transilvania*. This, naturally, is a matter that does not concern us; it is something outside our sphere of interests, and at the most we might venture to point out that, since the name *Ardeal* was used by the Rumanians, not by the Hungarians, the substitution of another term will merely mean a centuries-old name chosen by the Rumanians themselves and not forced on them by the old Hungarian régime.

Among the many facts and details of the Transylvanian problem and of Hungary's relations with Rumania, the Rumanian Press has been devoting special attention to *the question of King Matthias's origin*. For this year the Hungarian nation will celebrate the five-hundredth anniversary of his birth, and the Rumanians have seized the opportunity to assert that Matthias was of Rumanian extraction.

Not being of the opinion that fruitless discussion or propaganda is likely to afford a solution or help to improve relations between the two countries, we shall not reply in the Press to the Rumanian denial of the Hungarian origin

of that king. Hungarian historical research has not led to a definite opinion *pro* or *contra*, for it concedes the Balkan origin of the Hunyadis, but claims their descent from the Emperor Sigismund, who, as we know, was not a Hungarian. What Hungarian historians stress on the one hand is *John Hunyadi's* childhood and the loving care with which the Emperor followed his career and supported him, and, on the other, the fact, which Rumanian historians forget, that *John Hunyadi was never a son of the Greek Church, to which at that time every Rumanian without exception belonged.* John Hunyadi was all his life a member of the Latin Church, from his first appearance in history to the day of his death, and besides this he, as well as his son Matthias, held so steadfastly to the policy pursued by Sigismund that till Matthias's death there was no deviation from its course. And that course cannot be said to have run parallel with the character and aspirations of the Rumanian Principalities on the Lower Danube.

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