

# The Székelys in Transylvania

Markus Peter Beham (Vienna)

Review of Roth, Harald (Ed.): Die Szekler in Siebenbürgen. Von der privilegierten Sondergemeinschaft zur ethnischen Gruppe. Köln et al.: Böhlau 2009 (Siebenbürgisches Archiv. Archiv des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde; Third Series, Vol. 40), 280 pp., ISBN 978-3-412-20240-8, € 27,90.

The present volume is the end-result of the conference „Die Szekler im Kontext der Völker Siebenbürgens“ of the Arbeitskreis für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde Hermannstadt. The collection represents the first comprehensive publication on the ethnic group of the Székely in Transylvania in German language and is, as such, long overdue. Each of the contributions included is accompanied by a summary in English, Romanian and Hungarian, thus making the volume accessible to a wider audience.

The two parts of the volume, one on historical sources, the other on historical research into Székely history, are preceded by a particularly helpful introduction by Sándor Pál-Antal. Not only does he outline the history of the Székely until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but he also begins with a critical examination of the differing and, in some cases, very controversial theories on the origins of the Székely. This most certainly facilitates access to this topic to scholars who have until now had to make their way through an almost impenetrable forest of articles and other publications, some of which are only available in Hungarian or Romanian, in order to gain a picture of the present status of research and discourse.

The first part, on historical sources, comprises contributions on medieval archaeology alongside medieval and early modern sources on the Székely group. Elek Benkő looks into findings from the time before the Székely settled in the so-called Székely Land. Adrian Ioniță presents a comparative view on artefacts from within the contemporary Székely region as well as other places to assess their way of life from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Lajos Demény then goes on to describe the genesis of the new series of the source edition *Szekler Urkundenbuch*. Kinga S. Tüdős, in her contribution, discusses the relevance of conscription lists and urbaria for historical analysis of the Székely people. The last contribution, by Gernot Nussbächer, is a list of sources on the history of the Székely group to be found in the archive of the Honterus Community of Braşov.

The second part of the volume gives an overview of the present state of the discourse and research ranging from the Middle Ages up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, several new questions are mapped out and analysed. Zoltán Kordé extensively deals with the origins of the Székely, whereby he is particularly concerned with etymological questions, customs and interrelations with Hungarian tribes. The contribution by Konrad Gündisch not only follows the privileges spoken out toward the Székely people but also those of other ethnic groups. His tabular comparative listing of medieval group privileges of all ethnic groups represented in Hungary is hereby particularly valuable. Besides providing for an introduction to the volume in discussion, Sándor Pál-Antal also describes the origins, development and manner of functioning of the administrative structures of the Székely region up until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century in his contribution *Die Herausbildung der Szeklerstühle*. The following article by Gabriella Olasz examines the typology of Székely settlements from the origins to the present day. It further includes several collected illustrations on the typology, which provide an additional facet to the text. Judith Balogh deals with the situation of Székely nobility at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and takes into account the effects of the downfall of the Hungarian kingdom for the Székely people. Judit Pál is represented with two essays. The first analyses the autonomy of the Székely in view of the developing modern state, while in the other she tackles the processes of modern statehood. In this context, she takes a look at the role of the few existing members of the bourgeoisie in Transylvania as well as the effects of industrialisation upon traditional trades. The following contribution, by Ákos Egyed, is also concerned with the loss of Székely autonomy in favour of Hungarian statehood. The final article by Gusztáv Mihály Hermann goes on to then once more outline the general development of the Székely people in their political role and social context in Transylvania.

The volume is rounded off by a concise list of the contributors and a particularly useful tri-lingual register of place names in Hungarian, Romanian and German, which greatly facilitates work with the volume.

The publication in discussion most certainly represents an important contribution if not a fresh starting point for the newer German speaking researchers and the discourse on the subject. A great proportion of research results, which have until now only been available in Hungarian, are now accessible to a German speaking audience. At the same time, the contents



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of the individual contributions are available for a much wider circle of readers as a result of the multi-lingual summaries at the end of each article.

Anyone wishing to work on the Székely people in the near future, be it with regard to the Middle Ages, the Modern Age or in a contemporary context, will necessarily have to come across this volume and will without doubt find it useful to consult it and base research upon its contributions.

Translated by Janet Beham

