
BOOK REVIEWS

THE SZEKLETS AND THE SECUIZATION OF ROMANIANS

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ABSTRACT

*The content of this paper is a review of G. Popa Lisseanu's work *The Szeklers and the Secuization of Romanians* by G. Popa Lisseanu. The importance of this subject matter can hardly be overstated, since it deals with an issue that is less researched, although it affects the lives and existence of many present-day citizens of Romania and the very existence of some Romanian communities, namely the Secuization of Romanians. This is a sensitive issue closely linked to two other problems: the persistence of the Dacian-Romanian element in Dacia (especially in what is known as Transylvania and its eastern part, which constitutes a hindrance for the Hungarian politicians, men of culture, and so on, who dream about the utter assimilation and denationalization of the Romanian population) and the question of the origin of the Szeklers. The topic discussed is vital for Romania because of the Secuization of the Romanians, or more precisely, their Hungarianization since this process is still ongoing today employing church and school as tools. G. Popa gives a warning signal regarding this predicament of some parts of the Romanian population that, although it constitutes the majority in Romania, faces some serious troubles regarding its existence in some regions of the country. The author tries to raise the necessary awareness about this situation, hoping that the authorities in charge will take the required measures as soon as possible. The present review is useful because it presents, in a synthetic manner, a series of important information that clarifies a problem that is still having an impact and raises the issue of the denationalization of Romanians, as well as of the destabilization of the Romanian state.*

Keywords: Romanians, Szeklers, identity, denationalization, Transylvania.

CONTEXT OF THE BOOK

The present work is a short fragment of a larger work on the Romanians of the Szeklerland and was presented at a conference that the author gave on December 1st, 1932, in Cristur, within the framework of the conferences organized by the "Astra" Society of Transylvania³⁶³. This work aims to complement the praiseworthy work done in the same direction by two other professors, Sabin Opreanu from Cluj and Teodor Chindea from Gheorgheni³⁶⁴. The work constitutes a response to a pressing

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³⁶³ G. Popa Lisseanu, *Secuii și secuizarea românilor [The Szeklers and the Secuization of Romanians]*, Bucharest, "Universul" Newspaper Publishing House, 1932, p. 3.

³⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

problem, namely the denationalization of Romanians from Szeklerland, which has become a constant problem over time and against which the Romanian state does not take any action.

ISSUE DISCUSSED: ROMANIANS IN SZEKLERLAND

The problem discussed by the author is that of the Romanians of the Szeklerland, who, over time, were subjected to a permanent process of denationalization by the Hungarians once they arrived in these territories. The historical context was favourable to the Hungarians since they had to change their behavioural patterns after the defeats at Merseburg, Lech (955), and Adrianople (970). Their actions of devastation and plundering stopped due to the influence of the Germans, especially thanks to the marriage of Geiza's son Stephen the Holy to Gizela of Bavaria³⁶⁵. Thus, instead of continuing the destruction of the civilizing work of Charles the Great, the Hungarians were turned into propagandists of the Western civilization, which was represented in the Middle Ages by the worldly power of the Popes. From that moment on, contact with Romanians had become inevitable. The Hungarian-Romanian symbiosis may have been fatal to the Hungarian element, but it was certainly fatal to the Romanians in eastern Transylvania. Here, although our compatriots, the Szeklers, could be Romanianized, they became, due to special circumstances, an efficient force that succeeded in the process of denationalization of the native Romanians³⁶⁶. The Romanian problem in the area known today as "Szeklerland" is delicate. The researcher faces a tricky situation for two main reasons, which until now have also remained insufficiently researched: the persistence of the Dacian-Romanian element in Dacia and the question of the origin of the Szeklers³⁶⁷.

The persistence of the Dacian-Romanian element in Dacia

Regarding the first problem, namely, the persistence of the Dacian-Romanian element in Dacia, Hungarian historians have denied the idea that Romanians were autochthonous in the regions north of the Danube. They claimed that the Romanians were foreigners in this area and that they had arrived from the Balkan regions after the arrival of the Hungarians³⁶⁸. However, by researching the old documents and chronicles in more detail and with a more critical eye, Romanian historians have found that when the Hungarians arrived in Pannonia, they found a vast and widespread mass of Romanians, not only in the present-day regions of Transylvania but also in northern Hungary, in the counties of Ung, Bereg, and others, and even

³⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

³⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 6–7.

³⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

³⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

beyond the Tisza and Danube. These Romanians remained only on the other side of the Tisza. Those who lived in Pannonia, at the time of Hungarians's arrival, dispersed, some taking the way of wandering, and others becoming Hungarianized in the mass of the newcomers³⁶⁹.

The origins of the Szeklers

Hungarian historians have developed several theories regarding the origins of the Szeklers, which will be outlined below. They faced a conundrum. They would have wanted to consider the Szeklers as being the most ancient people in Transylvania, without being forced to acknowledge them as a separated and different nation that had become Hungarian over time. If the Szeklers were Huns, as the chroniclers claim, or the remnants of the Gepids, as the priest Karacsonyi claims, or the remnants of the Avars, according to Sebestyen, we cannot then speak of the Hungarian unity of soul. From this perspective, the Hungarian problem is that in the absence of a unity of soul, people can no longer claim the homogeneity of their race³⁷⁰.

Hunnic theory

Next to the anonymous Notary of King Bela, another important Hungarian chronicler is Simon of Keza. He was a priest at the court of King Ladislaus IV (1278–1290) and is the author of an excerpt from the Acts of the Hungarians (*Gesta Ungarorum*). Both in Anonymus' time and in the time of Simon of Keza, the idea that the Hungarians were descended from the Huns had been popularized, even though modern science has established that they are different people altogether. Simon of Keza, who also accepted the medieval tradition of the descent of peoples from the sons of Noah, asserted that the Hungarians originated from Menrot, a descendant of Japheth who had two sons, Himor and Magor, from whom the Huns and Hungarians were supposed to stem. Like Dragoș-Vodă, Hunor, and Magor, taking after a deer, they reached the shores of the Meotide Sea and, finding beautiful and fruitful land, settled there³⁷¹.

Three passages from Simon de Keza's book are particularly relevant to Romanians:

“After his return from his expedition in the west, Attila remained in Sicambria – today's Buda – for five years and, before rebuilding his army, granted the request of the cities of Pannonia, Pamphylia, Dalmatia, Phrygia and Macedonia, exhausted by so many plunderings and sieges, to go to Apulia, leaving only the Vlachs who had been their (the Huns') shepherds and colonies, (i.e., farmers), to remain in the place”³⁷².

³⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

³⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

³⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

³⁷² „După întoarcerea sa din expedițiunea din apus, Attila rămânând la Sicambria – Buda de astăzi – timp de cinci ani și, mai înainte de a-și reface armata, a încuviințat cererea cetăților din Pannonia, Pamphilia, Dalmația, Phrigia și Macedonia, istovite de atâtea prădăciuni și asedii, să se ducă în Apulia, rămânând pe loc numai Vlachii care fuseseră păstorii și colonii, (adică agricultorii) lor, (ai Hunilor)”, in *Ibidem*, pp. 13–14 .

To an impartial and unprejudiced researcher, it is clear from this fragment that of all Attila's peoples, only the Vlachs remained, being the local people who were shepherds and farmers that didn't want to leave precisely, since they were on their ancestral land³⁷³.

“The Szeklers remained on the plain of Chigla, a place that has yet to be identified, until the second coming of the Huns, that is Arpad's Hungarians. They helped the Huns to conquer the country, and afterwards they were rewarded with a part of the country, which was not located in Pannonia, but in the mountains. There they went to live among the Blacks, whose alphabet they also used”³⁷⁴.

It follows from what is quoted above that, at the time the chronicle was written, the Romanians lived in the mountains of Transylvania and were literate having their own Cyrillic alphabet. Moreover, Iorga believed that the Cyrillic alphabet of the Romanians was also used by Szeklers who lived mixed with them³⁷⁵.

“At the end of the war, of Attila's descendants, only foreigners remained in Pannonia. The slaves, the Greeks, the Germans, the Messianics, and the Vlachs, who in Attila's time did the work of the serfs”³⁷⁶.

Simon of Keza tells us that, among other populations, the Messinians and Vlachs remained in Pannonia. However, we do know that both the Messinians and the Vlachs were Romanians during the Middle Ages. This information was also confirmed by other chronicles and by an anonymous geographer who, in 1308, spoke of the two parts of Hungary, calling them Messia and Pannonia, both of which were the homes of Romanian shepherds³⁷⁷.

Theory of Szeklers colonization

If, in addition to the chroniclers, we take into account the oldest documents pertaining to the Szeklers, the conclusion is that at the beginning of their presence on these lands, they were not located in the South-East of Transylvania. They were present all over the country, fulfilling a military duty, wherever there were objectives to be defended³⁷⁸. We find them in Bihar, as free city guards, and in Baranya, as kings' servants. In any case, wherever one encounters the Szeklers, one finds that “they are not a tribe apart, as most Hungarian writers maintain, but a profession”³⁷⁹. The fortresses built on the hills to the right of the Olt in the Făgăraș region, which

³⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

³⁷⁴ „După ce secuii, care au rămas în câmpia de la Chigla, localitate încă neidentificată până acum, până la venirea de-a doua oară a hunilor, adică a ungarilor lui Arpad, și după ce i-au ajutat pe aceștia la cucerirea țării, au primit ca recompensă o parte din țară, dar nu în Pannonia, ci în munți, unde au trăit amestecați cu Blackii, al căror alfabet l-au întrebuințat și ei”, in *Ibidem*.

³⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

³⁷⁶ „După ce s-a sfârșit războiul, dintre urmașii lui Attila, au rămas în Pannonia numai străinii. Sclavii, Grecii, Germanii, Messianii și Vlachii, cari, în timpul lui Attila, făceau serviciul poporului de jos, al robilor”, in *Ibidem*.

³⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁷⁹ „ei nu sunt un trib aparte, cum susțin cei mai mulți scriitori unguri, ci o profesiune”, in *Ibidem*, p. 16.

were guarded for the most part by the Szeklers, also date from around this period: Halmeag, Galați, Feldioara, Găinari, and Săcădate. However, the settlements of Szeklers that were brought here were only maintained in Halmeag and Noul Roman, near Găinari³⁸⁰.

The hypothesis of the colonization of the Szeklers, only for the purpose of defending certain objectives, is not sustained by facts, since from Crizbar to the mountains of Harghita there was a whole line of fortifications. The existence of these fortifications would be pointless, had the Szeklers lived, since the time of the Huns, on the eastern edge of Transylvania. Would these fortifications have ever been built, leaving outside them the same-speaking population of the Szeklers, as they were found to have been in the 12th century? Clearly not. Therefore, it cannot be admitted that beyond the line of fortifications, there was a Szekler population, and that behind the line of fortifications there were also Szeklers³⁸¹.

Colonization of the counties of Trei Scaune and Ciuc with the Szeklers occurred around 1150³⁸² because the Hungarian forces could not defend their own borders. The kings, who had also taken upon themselves the task of being the agents of the Holy See and spreading Catholicism in the East, also decided to colonize the country with the Germanic population. The stated aim of colonization was to defend the borders on the one hand and to raise the country economically. We do not know exactly when the latter colonization took place³⁸³. The oldest documents relating to the presence of Germanic settlers in Transylvania date back to 1191, and those about the Szeklers from 1210³⁸⁴. A crucial point to consider is that even if those documents speak about the Szeklers, it does not follow from that that Transylvania was colonized by them, but only that they existed in this area at that time³⁸⁵.

The true colonization with the Szeklers in the county of Trei Scaune occurred later, after 1222. They originated from colonies first established on the left bank of the Mureș, between Orăștie and Sebeș³⁸⁶. In the beginning, the life of the Szeklers settlers was hard³⁸⁷. A few years later, in the region of Orăștie-Sebeș, around 1280, there was a strong presence of Romanians, while the Szeklers disappeared almost completely³⁸⁸. From the Andrian diploma dated 1224, we learn that the Sepsî region was settled only after this year, while the Kizdi and Orbai regions only after 1224³⁸⁹. The Szeklers had colonized the Ciuc plain much later and in lesser numbers. On this account, it can be explained why there are entire exclusive Romanian villages to be

³⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

³⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

³⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 22.

³⁸³ *Ibidem*.

³⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

³⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

³⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 25–26.

³⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

found in that area of the region³⁹⁰. We do not know when colonization took place, but we do know that it was done by kings for military purposes³⁹¹.

The name of the Szeklers settlements indicates the Romanian identity of the place and its inhabitants:

“In the dictionary of Mr. Martinovici and Mr. Istrati, we find no less than 48 localities bearing the name Szekler and 81 with the name Hungarian. Undoubtedly, when an attribute is given to a locality it is done to qualify it. Could we imagine a village in Dolj County, for example, being labelled as ‘Romanian’? And if Olahfalu was the name of the present-day village of Vlahița, it was either because the village was formed as a colony or because, unlike the other villages around, which were Szeklers, it was inhabited at a certain point in time by many Romanians. The villages on the outskirts of Odorheiu County Szekelyfalva, Szekely Szallas, and Ujszekely, were formed later by the colonization of Romanians. Moreover, since these villages were populated by Serfs and the Szeklers were not serfs, their colonization can no longer be doubted”³⁹².

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT AND ITS PUBLIC UTILITY

The problem addressed by this book, namely the Secuization of Romanians, is another name for their Hungarianization. This is an ongoing process carried out mainly through church and school, as already mentioned³⁹³. The Romanian state is, according to the in-force Constitution, a national, sovereign, independent, unitary, and indivisible state³⁹⁴. Therefore, the indirect message of the book is that when the “being of the state” is under attack, its representatives must take action as quickly as possible to defend it. Otherwise, we can speak of a besieged state.

Moreover, the author confesses that the work he wrote is a wake-up call pertaining to a dangerous situation. He acknowledges that he is not the first one to make it known. The predicament of the Romanian population from South-Eastern Transylvania presents the reader with a problem whose resolution is vital:

“an alarm call. Others have sounded it before us, but they have not been heeded. We hope, however, that step by step, as the real situation becomes known – for today, we

³⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

³⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

³⁹² „În dicționarul d-lor Martinovici și Istrati întâlnim nu mai puțin de 48 localități cari poartă numele de secuiesc și 81 care poartă numele de unguresc. Fără îndoială, un atribut se dă pentru a specifica, pentru a caracteriza o localitate. Ne-am putea oare închipui că un sat din județul Dolj, bunăoară, să se numească «românesc». Iar dacă Olahfalu s-a numit satul de astăzi Vlahița, aceasta s-a făcut desigur, fiindcă acest sat s-a format ca o colonie sau că, spre deosebire de celelalte sate dimprejur, care erau secuiești, în acest sat se găseau, la un moment dat mulți români. Și, fără îndoială, satele din marginea județului Odorheiu: Szekelyfalva, Szekely Szallas și Ujszekely s-au format mai târziu prin colonizare între români. Și, ținând seamă că aceste sate erau populate cu iobagi, și că secuii n-au fost iobagi, colonizarea lor nu mai poate fi pusă la îndoială”, in *Ibidem*, pp. 28–29.

³⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

³⁹⁴ ***, *Constituția României [Romanian Constitution]*, Available at: https://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site2015.page?den=act2_1&par1=1#t1c0s0sba2, Accessed on: January 20, 2024.

must confess, it is not known at all, or almost not at all – the necessary measures will be taken to correct and stop the ongoing evil, measures that we do not feel the time is right to mention here”³⁹⁵.

NECESSARY CLARIFICATIONS

Primacy of Romanians in the area known today as “Szeklerland”

It should be established at the outset that the primacy of the Romanian element is undeniable in Transylvania, particularly in the so-called “land of the Szeklers”, at the time of the arrival of the Hungarians. The presence of the native Romanian population is attested to in written chronicles³⁹⁶. Furthermore, it is worth noting that when we meet the Szeklers for the first time, we find them side by side with the Romanians³⁹⁷. Last but not least, the persistence of the Romanian element in Dacia was attested to by a consistent and indisputable series of evidence³⁹⁸.

The evidence of primacy, duchies, and voivodships – rudimentary forms of Romanian organization – is also undeniable: the Romanians, formed by the fusion of Roman and Dacian elements, could not be deprived of certain institutions, even if their form was rudimentary at the time³⁹⁹. Due to the expansion of ‘Catholicism’ in Transylvania, a huge pressure was exerted on the wealthy Romanian class to convert to Rome. By doing so, the Romanian upper classes could preserve their privileges. This is why many Romanians are recorded in documents of the time as Hungarians, even though they were not. Returning to the forms of organization, there was a plethora of Romanian voivodes and counts in Transylvania to be found. In 1326, the Negul voivode of Hodoș, in 1335 Bogdan voivode in 1335, who was about to change to Catholicism. In 1345, five voivodes converted to Catholicism, and in 1363, the Ivan, Bog, and Bale families were founded in Beiuș. Due to pressure from Hungarians, all these voivodes and their families switched to Catholicism and increased the number of Hungarians⁴⁰⁰.

Secuization of the Romanian Nobility

By Romanian nobility, we refer to the voivodes and counts, but it must be said that in addition to them, there was another privileged class, namely the boyars⁴⁰¹.

³⁹⁵ „strigătul de alarmă. L-au dat și alții înaintea noastră, dar n-au fost ascultați. Avem însă, de astădată, speranța că încetul cu încetul, cunoscându-se situația reală, căci ea astăzi, trebuie să o mărturisim, nu se cunoaște deloc sau aproape deloc, se vor lua măsuri de îndreptare și de stăvilire a răului, măsuri pe care nu găsim momentul potrivit de a le semnala aici”, in G. Popa Lisseanu, *quoted work*, p. 60.

³⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

³⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁹⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 31–32.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

How and why the nobles were Hungarianized:

“the Hungarian state was never a national state, but an ecclesiastical state, the king being the representative of the Pope of Rome, from whose hands he was obliged to receive the apostolic crown, and any nobleman, by the very fact of his ennoblement, became a follower of Catholicism. All the voivodes, all the cnes, and all the nemeses – the name of boyar was preserved only in Făgăraș – were Hungarianized, taking the Catholic religion until the Reformation, and then even another confession”⁴⁰².

Persecution of Romanians during the Transylvanian Principate as brutal repression of opposition

It must be said that many nobles opposed Hungarianisation and, thus, they became the target of the persecutions of the Hungarian power. This persecution had 3 phases:

1. Phase 1: Romanians who maintained their religion were considered schismatic, heretic, and persecuted by Catholics. For example, the Synod of Buda in 1299 decided that they had no right to build Churches or even to join one, and if they did not respect this, they would be physically assaulted⁴⁰³. In 1428, King Sigismund ordered the confiscation of the property of all nobles and counts who held Orthodox priests on their estates. Romanian priests, on the other hand, had their wealth confiscated and were expelled from the country. Furthermore, Orthodox people who wanted to marry Latins were not allowed to do so unless they converted to Catholicism, and baptism was also forbidden⁴⁰⁴.
2. Phase two: persecutions against “heretical Romanians” increased in the age of the Calvinist princes. As proof of this, the Transylvanian Diet of Sibiu in 1566 decided that the priests of the Romanians who were leading them to “perdition” would be expelled from the country if they did not convert to Catholicism, regardless of their hierarchical position⁴⁰⁵.
3. The third phase of religious persecution occurred after the Roman Catholic union. The Romanians, left without their natural leaders, helplessly endured the viciousness of the times. These times were especially disastrous for the Romanians of the Szeklerland⁴⁰⁶.

The consequences of these persecutions were: conversion to Catholicism for some or the exile of the firmest Orthodox believers, who had to flee Transylvania for the other two Romanian Principalities. Most damaging for the native Romanian population was the eradication of their nobility in the South-East region of Transylvania⁴⁰⁷.

⁴⁰² „statul unguresc n-a fost niciodată, un stat național, ci un stat bisericesc, regele fiind reprezentantul Papei de la Roma, din mâinile căruia era obligat să primească coroana apostolică, orice nobil, prin însuși faptul înobilării sale, devenea un adept al catolicismului. Toți voivozii, toți cnejii și toți nemeșii – numele de boier s-a păstrat numai la Făgăraș – s-au maghiarizat, primind religia catolică până la reformă, și în urmă chiar și altă confesiune”, in *Ibidem*, pp. 33–34.

⁴⁰³ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

Szekler status during persecution

The Szeklers had a privileged status because:

“They had an old family and tribal organization. They were not serfs, but free citizens, exempted even from taxes”⁴⁰⁸.

“By the fact that the Szeklers had been colonized in the most exposed parts of Hungary, it was deemed natural that they should obtain privileges which the other citizens of Hungary did not have”⁴⁰⁹.

The Secuization of the Romanians during the Habsburgs and during dualism, or how did the privileges of the Szeklers influence the lives of the Romanians?

The privileges of the Szeklers have caused Romanians long-term suffering. The losses that the Romanians have endured in the last two centuries in that part of Transylvania have been seriously documented. The existence of these documents that cannot be denied allows the historians to follow closely the process of Secuization that the Romanians people have been subjected to⁴¹⁰.

Estimated number of Secuized Romanians

From the statistics of the time, we learn that in the last two centuries alone, the number of Romanians, who amounted to 30% of the entire population of Szeklerland, has fallen to 5%. The remaining 25% has been lost in the mass of the Szeklers. This difference represents a loss of 130.000 – 140.000 Romanians out of a total population of about half a million⁴¹¹.

The instruments of the denationalization of Romanians were the church, schools, army, administration, justice, war, and poverty

The Secuization of Romanians has been achieved in several ways. The Secuization proceeded first by attacking the institutional pillars of the Romanian community. The two institutions that guaranteed the preservation of Romanian identity – the Church and the School – were the most affected⁴¹². Later on

“the Secuization intensified when Hungarianization became the ruling dogma in Budapest. It had to be achieved by making use of all existing means, – through the army, the administration, the judiciary and, above all, through economic means”⁴¹³.

⁴⁰⁸ „aveau vechia organizațiune familiară și de trib. Ei nu erau iobagi, ci cetățeni liberi, scutiți până și de dări către fisc”, in *Ibidem*, p. 36.

⁴⁰⁹ „Prin faptul că Secuții au fost colonizați în locurile cele mai expuse ale Ungariei, era firesc ca ei să obțină privilegiile pe care nu le aveau ceilalți cetățeni ai Ungariei”, in *Ibidem*.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

⁴¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

⁴¹² *Ibidem*, p. 39.

⁴¹³ „secuizarea s-a intensificat, când maghiarizarea s-a prefăcut la Budapesta în dogmă de guvernământ, – prin toate mijloacele, prin armată, prin administrație, prin justiție și mai ales prin mijloace economice”, in *Ibidem*.

The Church

Through the pressure exerted on Orthodox Christians, all but absolutely all branches of their spiritual life were affected. Christians generally feel a need to commune with God in general and especially at certain moments in life, such as during baptism, marriage, illness, or death. The link between us and God is naturally mediated by the priest. Therefore, it is vital for the spiritual survival of a community. In the absence of a Romanian priest, the Christian was forced to turn to another priest, regardless of his denomination. Thus, religious needs have led many Romanians to switch to foreign denominations⁴¹⁴.

Apart from spiritual needs, the Church placed great emphasis on financial stimulation in its process of denationalization. Because Hungarian churches were supported by the state, they benefited from a large amount of income that they used to “reward” those who renounced their faith. Therefore, Romanians who switched to a Hungarian denomination were exempted from any church payment. In addition, when a person made the switch, they received money from the priest as a reward⁴¹⁵.

The school

Another instrument through which mass denationalization was achieved was schools. One of the reasons that made this possible was that the school, being the servant of the church, *ancilla ecclesiae*, was directly and immediately influenced by what the priests decided, as they had a free hand to order in their schools, which were all denominational⁴¹⁶. In Szeklerland, the Romanian population had fewer denominational schools at its disposal because the church (or other denominations) was poor and helpless, not being supported by the authorities; thus, the Romanian communities did not have the means to support the schools. Under these conditions, Romanian pupils were forced to learn in Hungarian denominational schools, where they did not hear a single Romanian word⁴¹⁷.

Moreover, Romanian pupils who wanted to gain access to superior levels of study were forced to convert to the Hungarian confession⁴¹⁸. Romanian teachers also had to show “pronounced Hungarian feelings” to be able to teach and to be “trained” in this respect, they were sent to exclusively Hungarian areas. Once the teacher was “trained” in accordance with the “new values”, he was sent “as an agent of Hungarianism” to Romanian localities⁴¹⁹. The denationalization of Romanians through schools was organized, continuous, and growing action. The main target thereof was the construction of an unitary Hungarian state⁴²⁰.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 42–43.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 45–46.

The army

The army was another aggressive instrument of Hungarianization. Pressures and abuses were frequent and multi-directional: for example, Romanians from Romanian counties were transferred to regiments where the language of instruction was German, and young recruits from the so-called “Szeklerland” to Hungarian regiments. Moreover, even after finishing their military service, former soldiers who wanted to re-join either the army or the gendarmerie were forced to change their religion; otherwise, they were not accepted⁴²¹.

The denationalization of Romanians through the army was a constant practice throughout the years:

“During the war, young Romanians were sent to the most exposed places, precisely because they were Romanian. The Secuization of Romanians through the army was done in old times so that Romanians could benefit from the privileges of the Szeklers; it was done later, during the functioning of the regiments of the stables, – Romanians from Făgăraș County/being recruited in the cavalry regiment of the Szeklerland (...). Some of the Romanians who were Secuized reached high ranks and even became the most prominent representatives of the Hungarians”⁴²².

Another eloquent example is the case of the First World War, when only Transylvanian Romanians were enlisted, not the minorities. Since at that time, an important indicator of Romanian nationality was religious membership, many Romanians declared themselves as belonging to the reformed tradition(s) to avoid the risks posed by being dragged into a military campaign and, after the war, at the insistence of the priests, did not return to the law of their ancestors⁴²³.

The Administration

The administration, along with schools and especially the Church, was also an instrument of mass denationalization because it affected the lives of Romanians, no matter how hard they tried to avoid it. An important moment in this process was when the idea of a Hungarian unitary state became a dogma for the Budapest government. As a result, the denationalization of the Romanians no longer encountered any obstacles and was carried out “openly, without any scruples, without any embarrassment”⁴²⁴.

⁴²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

⁴²² „În timpul războiului, în locurile cele mai expuse erau trimiși tinerii români, tocmai fiindcă erau români. Secuizarea românilor prin armată s-a făcut în timpurile vechi pentru ca românii să beneficieze de privilegiile secuilor, s-a făcut mai târziu, în timpul funcționării regimentelor grănicerești, – românii din județul Făgăraș/ fiind recrutați în regimentul de cavalerie din Secuime (...). Unii dintre românii secuizați au ajuns la grade înalte și au ajuns chiar să fie reprezentanții cei mai de seamă ai ungarilor”, in *Ibidem*, p. 49.

⁴²³ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

⁴²⁴ „pe față, fără niciun scrupul, fără nicio jenă”, in *Ibidem*, p. 50.

The reasoning behind this approach was as follows: after the union of the Principality of Transylvania with Hungary in 1848, the country's rulers feared that the union would not last. Therefore, during this era of forced Hungarianization, they sought to strengthen the Szekler element in Transylvania. To achieve this, the Szekler element was favored at the expense of other nationalities. Thus, the Hungarians did not retreat from their actions. In short, a privileged situation was created for the Szeklers to "eliminate the Romanians"⁴²⁵.

The instruments of denationalization through administration are as follows:

The Composesorates

A special type of property, the composessorial property, was established in Szeklerland. There had been indeed composesorates before, but they were only forest composesorates and were established following the introduction of the frontier regiments of Empress Maria Theresa. At the end of the dualism in 1867, the forest composesorates were joined by field composesorates⁴²⁶. First, with the introduction of the cadastre, *i.e.*, land registers, between 1870 and 1880, the forest composesorates were declared private property, even if the former land surveyors had only the right to use them⁴²⁷. In other words, Hungarian magistrates, who were supposed to protect the state's wealth and not to alienate it, entered these Szekler composesorates in the land registers as owners of forests instead of the state, which was the rightful owner. Thus, the aim was to create a privileged situation for Szeklers. With the creation of the field composesorates, other injustices arose because Romanians could only enter these composesorates if they renounced their nationality⁴²⁸.

The logic of things was as follows: the Hungarian state started a real state policy in order to give the Szeklers more and more privileges and not to give up their nationality, which was in reality Hungarian. In 1901, the Ministry of Agriculture in Budapest found that many Szeklers had been leaving their homes and that their property had remained in foreign hands, and it set up a commission in Târgu Mureș to study the problem and propose solutions. Based on the commission report, the Ministry gave 300.000 crowns to establish a common and 30.000 crowns to breed cattle. All this money was for Szekler counties only. The Ministry was also informed that the Romanians in the region were mostly engaged in sheep and cattle breeding, which meant that those advantages were used by Romanians and not Hungarians, which is why, in 1902, the Ministry approved other funds for the establishment of communal composesorates, which could only be made up of the Szekler people⁴²⁹.

⁴²⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴²⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴²⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

⁴²⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 51–52.

Industrial enterprises

After the founding of the composesorates, measures were taken to ensure that Szekler manual workers could be employed in industrial enterprises, whereas Romanians were forbidden from doing so. The only way to get employed by these enterprises was to become a member of a Hungarian confession/community⁴³⁰.

The Cooperatives

Another extremely important moment during the denationalization process of the Romanians was the creation of cooperatives, which were given money on loan at a very low interest rate to take over the property of the Romanians. To accomplish this, instruments were created, such as the “Szekely Kirendelcseg” Institute, which took the Romanians’ property using the Szeklers⁴³¹. For example, in the exclusive Romanian commune of Laureni, in 1911, owner Gego Carol intended to sell his land. Although the authorities of Laureni’s commune wanted to buy the land, the management of the Institute “Szekely Kirendelcseg” telegraphically bought the entire estate. As a result, a quarter of the Romanian inhabitants of Laureni’s village had to leave it to find another way to make a living⁴³².

Land redistribution

Along with the composesorates, another mechanism that had a disastrous influence on Romanians’ national identity was land redistribution, as the best lots were given to the Szeklers/ Hungarians, while the more isolated ones, on ravines or hillsides, were given to Romanians, even in cases where, prior to the land redistribution, Romanian lands would have been located near the villages in which they lived. Moreover, in some areas, Romanians were forbidden from buying land before renouncing Orthodox Christianity. Ioan Negrea from Aita Mare, for example, bought a house and did not put it in his name until he renounced his faith and changed his name to Fekete Ianoş⁴³³.

Economic constraints

Economic constraints were another effective instrument of annihilation of the national identity of the Romanian population in times of multiple financial problems. For example, the family of Count Mikes, from the county of Trei Scaune, favored the passage of Romanians into the heart of Szeklerland through various economic acts, such as building materials and firewood. This is how many families were denationalized, including the Dogariu-Kadar family. Also, the counts Zethäl and Bernath, from Micloşoara’s commune, forbade the Romanians from working on their land unless they changed their religion. Under these conditions, more than 48 families were Secuized⁴³⁴.

⁴³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

⁴³¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴³² *Ibidem*.

⁴³³ *Ibidem*, pp. 52–53.

⁴³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

OTHER UNDENIABLE EVIDENCE OF ROMANIANS' SECUIZATION

Szekler traditions, customs and fairy tales

One proof of the Romanianness of the Szeklers, who came out of our nation, are the Romanian customs, traditions, and fairy tales accurately preserved by our compatriots. Here are a few examples:

“The Szeklers keep the fasts, especially the Lent and the Feast of the Holy Cross; they know the days of fasting and the days on which fish is eaten; they go to confession and confession regularly; they observe the feasts of the Orthodox church, Sânpetru, St. Elijah, St. Foca, Epiphany, Ascension, and others”⁴³⁵.

“(…) believe in the Mother of God, even the reformists (…) come at Epiphany to the river and take the Holy Water; they come to the Romanian priest to celebrate their day of liturgy and call upon him to read to the sick person’s head or to make a blessing in case of misfortune or sickness in the cattle, believing that only the Romanian priest has divine grace; they call upon him to bless a new house; they ask that the bells of the Romanian church be rung when the clouds gather in summer, so that hail does not hail; at the funeral, they cover the mirror in the house of the dead, take the decorated apple to the grave and give the priest a candle and a cloth”⁴³⁶.

“Besides, the fairy tales and folktales from the Szekler region are nothing but our Romanian fairy tales. We need only quote ‘The Gypsy in the Shepherd’s Hut’ to realize that is borrowed from the Romanian folklore”⁴³⁷.

The Romanian language of the Szeklers

The denationalization of Romanians can also be demonstrated by the many loan words present in the language of the Szeklers. Many names of localities, valleys, hills, lowlands, coasts, plains, and fields still bear the stamp of the native Romanian presence, although they are used by the Szeklers. Sometimes, because of the denationalization process, these names are translated, changed, or even renamed⁴³⁸. Because of their multitude, we cannot list all the place names that we find in the so-called “Szeklerland”, but here are some examples: Desiș, Dosuri, Coastă, Frumoasa,

⁴³⁵ „Secuii țin posturile, în special postul Păresimilor și de ziua S-tei Cruci; cunosc zilele de harți și zilele în care se mănâncă pește în post; se spovedesc și se cuminecă regulat; păzesc sărbătorile bisericii ortodoxe, Sânpetru, Sf. Ilie, Sf. Foca, Bobotează, Înălțarea și altele”, in *Ibidem*, p. 54.

⁴³⁶ „(…) cred în Maica Domnului, chiar și reformații (…) vin la bobotează la rău și iau agheasmă; vin la preotul român să le țină zi de liturghie și-l cheamă să citească la capul bolnavului sau să le facă sfeștanie în caz de nenorocire sau boală în vite, socotind că har dumnezeesc are numai preotul român; îl cheamă pe acesta să le binecuvânteze o casă nouă; cer să se tragă clopotele bisericii românești când se adună norii vara, spre a nu bate grindina; la înmormântare acoperă oglinda în casa mortului, duc la mormânt mărul împodobit și dau preotului o lumânare și un ștergar”, in *Ibidem*, p. 55.

⁴³⁷ „De așijderea basmele și snoavele din regiunea secuiască nu sunt decât basmele noastre românești. N-am avea decât să cităm «Țiganul la stână» ca să ne dăm seama de împrumutul făcut”, in *Ibidem*, p. 57.

⁴³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

Fântoasa, Fântâna, Zăpada, Flămânda, Laz, Mal, Moșie, Pleș, Gulușa, Izvor, Setea, Mocirla, Lunca, Vadu, Secătura, Cocovia, Murgu, Tabla, and many others. These findings also demonstrate that the Romanian language was spoken in those areas⁴³⁹.

Brief clarification: why can't we say that these are simple cultural borrowings?

Although some researchers might argue that the Szeklers borrowed these cultural elements from the Romanians because they lived together, we must also establish that the borrowing is always mutual. However, this is not the case because only the Szeklers borrowed words from Romanians, not Romanians. This linguistic dynamic in fact shows that Szeklers today are Romanians who have been denationalized throughout history⁴⁴⁰.

RECOMMENDATIONS

At the country's leadership level

Knowledgeable people, who have properly documented this problem, have a duty to bring the country's leadership to the issue, to warn of the dangers involved, and the leaders, in their turn, have a duty to listen and act according to the historical truth⁴⁴¹. Furthermore, the Romanian people are duty-bound not to forget the truth that history attests, a truth that was, is, and always will be on the side of the Romanian point of view:

“Our endeavour to reawaken the national sentiment, should not be plagued by the fear of defeat, for we have the justice on our side, and the justice of those who walk in the ways of the Lord always succeeds”⁴⁴².

Intra-Community level

In what concerns the solidarity between the members of the Romanian community, one should bear in mind that Romanians have been under the onslaught of immense and long-lasting pressures and attacks over the years, which is their decisions should be treated with empathy. Gratefulness should be shown to the priests and teachers who, within the limits of their possibilities and in the face of harsh circumstances, fulfilled their duty by saving at least part of the Romanian elements in these regions from complete disaster⁴⁴³.

⁴³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 57–58.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 60.

⁴⁴² „În lucrarea noastră de redeșteptare a sentimentului național, să nu avem nicio teamă de neizbândă, fiindcă noi suntem cu dreptatea în brațe și dreptatea acelor cari merg pe căile domnului totdeauna învinge”, in *Ibidem*, p. 61.

⁴⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 60.

At the intercommunity level

At the same time, patience and compassion must be shown toward the fellow Szeklers, despite the hardships they have experienced. Discussions with them regarding their past and origins should be initiated in a peaceful manner thereby showing them there is almost no difference between them and the Romanian population according to ethnological and anthropological data⁴⁴⁴.

CONCLUSION

The first stage of the denationalization process of the Romanian population is set in the era of the Arpadian kings, the Angevin kings, and the Calvinists, by catholicizing the ruling class, that is, the nobles, because

“the state, at that time, was not a Hungarian national state, but an ecclesiastical state, a clerical state, the kings being the representatives of the papacy”⁴⁴⁵.

The second stage of the denationalizing process took place during the age of the Transylvanian princes when the Romanian element was ostracized and removed from the ranks of the nations of Transylvania by the *Unio Trium Nationum* and later by the laws of Verboczy. The third stage, forced Hungarianization, encompasses the last two centuries and even the present day⁴⁴⁶.

In this way, Hungarian state power has worked in all forms, legal and illegal, to the detriment of the Romanians, who have gradually abandoned their ancestral language and law, increasing the number of Szeklers and eventually Hungarians, without any wish to know their origin⁴⁴⁷.

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⁴⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

⁴⁴⁵ „statul, pe vremea aceea, nu era un stat național unguresc, ci un stat bisericesc, un stat clerical, regii fiind reprezentanții papalității”, in *Ibidem*, p. 60.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 54.