

Hungarian Cultural History in the Second Half of the 19th Century in Transylvania

Hungarian Periodicals and the Hungarian Cultural Heritage in Transylvania

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Abstract

Against the background of the capitalist economic structures and in the historical context of the second half of the 19th century, Transylvania and the social-cultural activities of its population present a varied, very complex image. The studied material shows the special role the periodicals played in the second half of the 19th century as they modelled people's view on the world and society, on culture and science, they changed mentalities, and also identified, made known and diffused the elements which constituted the cultural heritage of the different nationalities. Each nationality made efforts to collect, preserve, valorise and diffuse these values among the readers, considering that this cultural heritage, meaning national identity as well, was a national responsibility. The cultural-political role of the category of intellectuals was extremely important, as they became the motive power for the evolution and modernization of society, while the cultural institutions, the existing secondary schools and universities became the centres of scientific and cultural activities.

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Against the background of the capitalist economic structures and in the historical context of the second half of the 19th century, Transylvania and the social-cultural activities of its population present a varied, very complex image destined to arouse the curiosity of the researchers interested in this period.

In what follows we shall discuss some aspects, which we consider remarkable and which were outlined as the result of our studying

the chosen material: periodicals published in Transylvania in the second half of the 19th century.

The material at our disposal, an abundant periodical collection, shows, in an obvious manner, the special role the periodicals played in the period discussed by us. They modelled people's view on the world and society, on culture and science; they changed mentalities, and also identified, made known and diffused the elements which constituted the cultural heritage of the nationalities living side by side in Transylvania at that time. Each nation tried to get acquainted with, to protect and to enrich its own heritage by any means in order to realize its national objects. The ideals of national justice and independence became a creed in this period, without which the people living in the respective age could not imagine their future. The development of the culture generating institutions made these ideas more efficient and dynamic.

The intellectuals' cultural-political role was much more important than one might have thought according to their numerical proportion, since they wished to become and remain the motive power for the evolution and modernization of society in this period.

Having analyzed the profession and social class of those who edited and wrote into the important periodicals, which had an evident cultural impact, it is revealed that some of them belonged to the aristocracy, the nobility and the clergy, while the majority was represented by intellectuals without a solid economic base: journalists, professors – usually working in local secondary schools –, museologist, archivist, librarians, lawyers etc. One thing seems to be certain: those in a modest material situation had not had access to the journalistic, cultural and scientific life yet. Basically, irrespective of the differences, we discover – if we analyze the origin and the ideas of each writer or the evident exceptions – that the main orientation was determined by the dominant ideologies of the age.

Skimming through the columns of the periodicals we could observe that, in a period in which scientific activity had just began to develop and was not yet vigorous enough, many historians, ethnographers, men of letters etc. began their carrier later, having worked in other domains at first. Thus, beside professional historians, people trained in other fields also wrote historical works, also some noblemen without an occupation found in history an enticing – but also somehow obligatory – intellectual activity. Many of these made important discoveries in the field of historical researches and, though they had had no professional training, the necessary knowledge being acquired through

private study (in some cases the study methods taking rather peculiar forms), their strong wish to enrich their national culture urged them to investigate the past, even if they were not professionals. Their contribution is evident and worth taking into consideration as regards the preservation of the Transylvanian cultural heritage.

The Hungarian intellectuals from Transylvania, showing great diversity with respect to their studies, were able to assimilate the achievements of middle-class culture and science. Besides contributing to their diffusion, they even developed them on the basis of autochthonous realities. The communication with Western cultural and scientific centres was facilitated by the fact that many scholars had studied in Western European universities.

We believe that it was not a specifically Transylvanian phenomenon that the great cultural institutions – as in the case of Hungarian scientific life the Transylvanian Museum Society for example – or the secondary schools with a great tradition, as well as the university of Cluj became centres of scientific and cultural activity, places where the most important scholars of the age met systematically. These spiritual workshops offered a fertile ground for their ideas and the development of their talents in different domains.

The activity of the persons who had an important role in the political and cultural life, as well as the increasing thirst for culture breathed new life into the scientific life of the Age of Reform.¹ Scientific and cultural societies, as well as the Hungarian Academy made great efforts to put an end to the isolation of scientists.

Many participants gathered also at the meetings of the Transylvanian Museum Society. The Hungarian nobility of Transylvania supported the national efforts with money and influence, some of its representatives (Imre Mikó, Zsigmond Kemény, Domokos Teleki) initiating activities for the development and preservation of the national culture. “They are the pride of the nation: they are the eternal watchers in the night, they urge those awake on to work by their deeds, they rouse the sleeping ones”² and “Those noblemen who do not work with us we do not

¹ Important period in the history of Hungary before the Revolution of 1848 (1825–1848) marked by the introduction of a series of political, economic, social and cultural reforms. (Translator's note.)

² „A nemzet büszkesége; ők az éj örök virrasztói, tettel kiáltják az ébrenlevőket munkára, serkentik az alvókat.”

count among ourselves”¹ – affirmed Imre Mikó, threatening these persons with exclusion from the Hungarian nation.²

The cultural heritage of a people usually can be estimated on the basis of the marks left by human activity on the environment. These offer us information on the life and activities of people from different ages and the development of artistic and technical abilities in the course of time. The cultural heritage is also connected with national identity and the national responsibility of preserving the existing monuments, archaeological and architectural sites as well as cultural environments.

In our opinion the concept of cultural heritage should also contain some aspects met in the subjective way in which a people thinks about its own ethnical identity (the sentiment of patriotism) and the many ideas and feelings expressed in literary, scientific or popular creations.

In the second half of the 19th century the inclusion of national history into the universal development became a requirement in Transylvania too. To search for the origin of the nation, was a general research direction, specific to the age related to national pride and ambition. Historical sources were continuously collected and published. Thus, in the Hungarian press often appeared writings on the origin, language³ and history of the Székelys.⁴ Hungarian history, mainly if it appeared as a motif in the history of arts, was a matter of pride.⁵

¹ *Erdély története* (The History of Transylvania), III, Budapest, 1986, p. 1610.

² Ákos Egyed, *Falu, város, civilizáció. Tanulmányok a jobbágy felszabadítás és a kapitalizmus történetéből Erdélyben. 1848–1914* (Village, Town, Civilization. Studies on the History of Capitalism and the Emancipation of Serfs in Transylvania. 1848–1914), Bucharest, Kriterion Publishing House, 1981, p. 292.

³ *Gyulafejevári Füzetek* (Bulletin of Alba Iulia), 1862, II, pp. 1–29.

⁴ “The Székely nation is the direct descendant of those Huns who founded the European Hun Empire under Attila. After the downfall of this Empire it was possible for some thousand Huns to survive in that part of Dacia which we call today the Székelys’ land. While those opinions and statements which deny the Hunnic origin cannot be maintained” (“A székely nemzet azon húnok egyenes maradéka, kik Attila alatt az európai hún birodalmat alapították, ennek összeomlása után nem volt lehetetlen néhány ezer húnak Dacia azon részében, melyet ma székely-földnek nevezünk megmaradni, mikor is a kritikát nem állják ki azon vélemények és állítások, melyek a székelyek hún eredetét el akarják odázni”), in: *Gyulafejevári Füzetek*, 1861, I, pp. 39–66. See also in: *A Székely Nemzeti Múzeum Értesítője* (The Bulletin of the Székely National Museum), 1891, II, pp. 75–275.

⁵ *Keleti Virágok* (Oriental Flowers), 1889, I, no.5, pp. 177–196.

Besides the historical sources, legends and historical tales were often used as a theme by the authors of historical articles published in periodicals, their role being to give a stimulating example for the young generations (for example: Count András Szentkereszti's sword preserved in the museum of the Calvinist secondary school in Târgu-Mureş, sword sent by the English as a sign of gratitude for the count's heroic deeds in the battle from 25 April 1794; the tale narrating how the Székelys obtained their charter of liberty under the reign of King Matthias Corvinus;¹ King Matthias' visit in the Cluj;² the legendary fighter in the Roşia Montana mountains, Ecaterina Varga;³ the character of Hungarian warriors who had lightning in their eyes, were excellent horsemen, armed with swords, bows, maces from head to toe, had muscles of steel, their movement being tempest, their anger: death⁴).

It is to be remarked the fact that the historians of the age, besides being interested in the evolution of public life, also wished to educate the new generations in the spirit of the love of native country and nature. The writers of the age had as an important aim to help their readers in getting to know the historical and geographical aspects of their country. The letter form – seeming the most convenient – was used to present the geological evolution and the description of the geographical aspects, as well as the flora and fauna of the country.⁵

The most interesting writings on the geography of Transylvania were published in the specialist journal *Erdély* (Transylvania) edited by the Transylvanian Carpathian Society. The articles described, among other things, Lunca Mureşului – this article being followed by illustrations (this being a rarity in the press of the age) –; they evoked the

¹ “nec habet aliquis dominorum plus, nec servorum minus – de libertate”, in: *Marosvásárhelyi Füzetek* (The Bulletin of Târgu-Mureş), 1858, I, no. 1, pp. 87–92.

² *Keleti Virágok*, 1889, I, no. 5, pp. 110–127.

³ *Keleti Virágok*, 1889, I, no. 5, pp. 164–171.

⁴ “Mindeniknél kard, ij, buzogány, meg puzdra, Vas izmuk a vérten majd keresztül duzzad; Mozdulások: vihar, a haragjuk: halál, Jaj annak ezerszer, a ki utjokba áll!” In: *Marosvásárhelyi Füzetek*, 1896, no. 1, pp. 45–47.

⁵ *Gyulafejevári Füzetek*, 1861, I, pp. 7–37. See also: “I am so bold to ask you to walk arm in arm with me [...] in search of the most interesting regions of our beloved and beautiful country and if I ask you for this tour, I hope you will be susceptible for the beauties of nature” (“fel merem szólítani kegyedet, velem karöltve [...] buvárkodni, forrón szeretett szép hazánk érdekesb tájékain, s ha felhívám e természetrajzi körútra mivelte szellemének, reméllem fogékony kedélye sem marad el”), in: *Marosvásárhelyi Füzetek*, 1860, II, no. 5/6, pp. 307–376.

curative, hydrotherapeutic and balneotherapeutic effects of the watering-places of Transylvania or of the mineral springs, insisting upon the necessity of commercializing them more intensely. They also encouraged the efforts made to improve the balneal tourism and, implicitly, the autochthonous economy.¹ These presentations usually functioned as advertisements. The spas of Sovata, Jigodin, Jabenita, Homorod, Szejke, Şugaş, Tuşnad, the springs in Biborţeni, Bodoc, Borsec, Corund, the sulphurous cave in Turia, the Saint Ann Lake² were presented in detail. The spa of Vâlcele was described by several articles being the oldest and most appreciated watering place, having already existed in the seventh decade of the 18th century.³ Its balneal character could be compared to that of the similar health resorts from St.-Moritz, Rippoldsau, Reinerz, Elster, Franzensbad, Schwabach, Spa, Pyrmont. Natural rarities are mentioned too: the Split Stone, the Jews' Table⁴ or the edelweiss.⁵

Besides geography, the history of Transylvania was also a frequent subject in the columns of the Transylvanian periodicals and it was considered important for the readers to get acquainted with it too. Different themes and personalities were discussed going through the different phases of Transylvanian and Hungarian history. The inherited traditions and the specific local conditions were highlighted attempting to find plausible explanations for the treated phenomenon. Readers were probably interested in town histories (such as of Cluj), the problem of the census in the Székely region or the figure of the 1848 revolutionary, Pál Vasvári.

Archaeological discoveries occupied an important place in the reviews. This showed that specialists were interested in and preoccupied with spreading the results of their researches in order to diffuse the values of the cultural historical heritage. Excavation results had central import in these periodicals. Scientifically accurate articles presented for example the discovery of Roman coins on the bank of the river Aghireş in the

¹ *Erdély (EKE)* [Transylvania (TCS)], 1892, I, no. 1, pp. 10–14, 14–18, 41–44.

² *Erdély (EKE)*, 1892, I, no. 4, pp. 108–116, 148–149, 169–173.

³ “Vâlcele became an important watering place in the seventh decade of the previous century” (“a múlt század hetedik évtizedében lendült fel Előpaták, mint fürdő”, in: *Erdély (EKE)*, 1892, I, no. 8/9, pp. 307–313, 321–325.

⁴ “Két természeti ritkaság” (Two Natural Rarities). “I. Maladinkő (Hasadtkő)” (I. Split Stone), “II. A Zsidó-asztal” (II. Jews' Table), in: *Erdély (EKE)*, 1892, I, no. 10, pp. 387–389.

⁵ *Erdély (EKE)*, 1892, I, no. 10, pp. 391–393.

Turkey oak forest on the Great Mountain near Ilieni¹ or the beautiful Calvinist church in Pădureni (Mureș County). This latter study contained a drawing on and the architectural scheme of the building and the reproduction of three fragments of mural.²

A special place was accorded to the history of culture and to archaeological studies. To study archaeology, the auxiliary science of history, became an important task for intellectuals.³ The old murals from the 13–15th centuries in the churches of Derj, Pădureni, Chilieni, Ghelința, Biborțeni in Covasna County, Filea, Mărtiniș, Crișeni in Harghita County, Sâncraiu de Mureș, Sântana de Mureș, Ulieș and Gălești in Mureș County were presented and described in detail. The authors asserted that any object preserved from the past was the proof of an old culture and it represented the conditions of private and social life in that age.⁴ Memories must be preserved with piety irrespective of the nation they belong to. The interest for the historical development of mankind must be constant, the task of contemporaries being to collect, protect and administrate those relics and, in the case of historical monuments, to immortalize them in drawings.⁵ The decorative elements used on the

¹ *A Székely Nemzeti Múzeum Értésítője*, 1891, III, pp. 3–8.

² *A Székely Nemzeti Múzeum Értésítője*, 1891, II, pp. 276–290.

³ “Seeking out old churches in the Székelys’ land, I shall bring to light the murals found on their walls and I shall save them from decay. Generally, archaeology is one of the auxiliary sciences of history and its practice must be one of our significant tasks from a cultural point of view” (“a székelyföldi régi egyházakat felkutatva, az azok falain talált falképeket napfényre hozom s azokat az enyészettől megmentem. Általában a régészet azon tudományok egyike, melyek a történelem segédforrásait képezik s melynek ápolása kulturális szempontból egyik kiváló feladatunkat kell, hogy képezze”), in: *A Székely Nemzeti Múzeum Értésítője*, 1891, II, pp. 33–74.

⁴ “Each relic confers a data on the living conditions of the past partly from a familial, religious point of view, partly from the point of view of society, state organization, legislation and culture in general” (“mindenik reliquia egy-egy adatot szolgáltat a hajdankor életviszonyaihoz, részint családi, vallási, részint társadalmi, államszerkezeti, törvénykezési s általában kulturális szempontból”), in: *A Székely Nemzeti Múzeum Értésítője*, 1891, II, pp. 33–74.

⁵ “From the point of view of our general culture we must be interested in everything related to the gradual development of mankind, this is why we have as a task not only to protect antiquities, but also to collect them, arrange them according to the scientific requirements of our age and to immortalize in drawings the monuments exposed to decay” (“Minket az általános művelődés szempontjából mindannak érdekelni kell, mi az emberiség fokozatos fejlődésével összefüggésben áll, miért a régiségeknek nem csak megóvása, hanem azok

ceilings and altars of churches (in Delnița, Șumuleu-Ciuc, Târcești, Căpeni, Inlăceni, Moacăș and Sâncrăieni), on embroideries of religious or worldly objects, on ceramics and furniture speak of the nation's culture and history.¹

Some issues connected with the history of religions (Unitarian, Calvinist), the mission and the role of the Church in solving the social problems or the autonomy of the Roman Catholic Church were in the centre of attention too.²

Ethnology and the folklore were quite frequent themes in the periodicals of the age which published the texts of some Székely folksongs,³ studies on the Easter folk customs and the ornaments used on painted Easter eggs,⁴ on the analysis of the wandering gipsies' signalling system⁵ or on some ethnological aspects.⁶

The press of the age abounded in discourses or studies which tried to descry the importance and the role of literature in people's life. The aim of an appropriate education was to develop the latent talents of the young generation and to encourage them in autodidactic activities.⁷ With this end in view the reading societies and literary circles were founded. The works of literary criticism evoked the nation's great precursors Ferenc Kazinczy, István Széchenyi, Bertalan Szemere, Gábor Döbrentei, Kristóf Kerszturi, Péter Bod, János Apáczai Csere, Ferenc Toldy, Pál Kócsi P., Sámuel Gyarmathy, György Aranka and Imre Mikó. They also analyzed the former generations' literary activity and the most important representatives of the Hungarian culture and literature. Literary translations became a permanent preoccupation for the men of letters. Literary texts were translated from English, French, Persian, German,

gyűjtése, azok korszerű rendezése s az enyészetnek kitett műemlékek rajzban való megörökítése is feladataink közé tartozik"), in: *A Székely Nemzeti Múzeum Értesítője*, 1891, II, pp. 33–74.

¹ *A Székely Nemzeti Múzeum Értesítője*, 1891, II, pp. 33–74.

² *Gyulafejevári Füzetek*, 1890, III, pp. 1–13, 1–15.

³ *Korány*, 1861, pp. 26–27; 1863, p. 116.

⁴ *A Székely Nemzeti Múzeum Értesítője*, 1902, III, pp. 32–77.

⁵ *Erdély (EKE)*, 1892, I, no. 1, pp. 38–41.

⁶ *Erdély (EKE)*, 1892, I, no. 7, p. 300.

⁷ "Allow us, dear reader, to tell you in a few words what has encouraged us to this endeavour. The aim of rational education is to help the pupils start their independent activity by developing their innate talents." („Engedd meg kedves olvasó, hadd mondjuk el pár szóval, mi bátorított minket e vállalatra. A józan nevelés célja a növendékekben eredetileg meglévő tehetségeket kifejtévé ön munkásságba indítani"), in: *Korány*, 1863, pp. III–X.

Romanian¹ (Edgar Allan Poe, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Alexander Humboldt, Heinrich Heine etc.). It will be possible to translate natural scientific works into Hungarian successfully when more studies in this domain will have been published in Hungarian language and the readers' knowledge will have reached the adequate level.²

Several articles evoked prominent personalities and presented their works with the aim of instructing the readers. Thus we can read a translation made by Miklós Wesselényi from a text on the philosophy, psychology and perception of time or a ballad on Brutus written also by Miklós Wesselényi,³ a short story by Elek Benedek⁴ or a letter by Kelemen Mikes written on 25 March 1760.⁵

A quite "fashionable" literary genre was the travel diary. Most of them described journeys in Italy, the itinerary being impressive: Trieste, Venice, Verona, Milan, Bibliotheca Ambrosiana, Certosa, Turin, Genoa, Livorno, Pisa, Messina, Naples, Giardini, Taormina, Catania, Etna, Syracuse, Palermo, Monreale, Monte Pellegrino, Vesuvius, Capri, Caserta, Rome, Vatican, Frascati.⁶ The travel diary seemed to be a literary genre preferred more by women writers, and if the author was a man the difference of style was evident.⁷ For example Gábor Kemény's analytical and critical style is striking as compared with the one used by Juliska Lázár or Mariska Biela. Thus, Kemény acknowledged the usefulness of travelling, stating that one can learn much in the course of a journey. All the travellers acknowledged that the development of the means of transport had a beneficial effect upon the progress of industry, economy and commerce. The development of these means also had a beneficial effect upon culture as it made easier the distribution of books

¹ *Keleti Virágok*, 1889, I, no. 5, pp. 17–25, 45–79, 101–109, 227–236, 245–271, 384–388.

² "When we shall have a natural scientific literature, when the reader will have the possibility to reach the present day level of natural sciences: the time for translating the «Cosmos» into Hungarian will come too." („Majd ha természettudományi irodalmunk lesz, ha az olvasó magyar irodalmi termékekből is eljuthat a természettudományok mai színvonalára: eljövend a «Kosmos» magyarrafordításának ideje is.”) In: *Marosvásárhelyi Füzetek*, 1858, I, no. 1, pp. 42–57.

³ *Korány*, pp. 64–75, 102–104.

⁴ *Keleti Virágok*, 1889, I, no. 5, pp. 164–171.

⁵ *Marosvásárhelyi Füzetek*, 1860, II, no. 5/6, pp. 425–435.

⁶ *Gyulafejevári Füzetek*, 1862, II, pp. 121–258.

⁷ A „Teleki Blanka” Kör [...] *Kis Emlékkönyve* (The Small Album of the “Teleki Blanka” Circle), 1896, IV, pp. 5–13.

and it helped people in developing their aptitudes and abilities as well as facilitated their travels. Gábor Kemény regarded the things experienced in Italy with critical eyes. He found the Italians loud, which remark was also connected with his participation at the Roman carnival full of burlesque scenes and figures. He criticized the Roman emperors' ambition of establishing institutions for "infamous amusement", affirming that if they had loved the people that much, they would not have established so many places of entertainment and would not have given "dangerous toys to the child" (gladiator games).¹ He mentioned three famous cemeteries, the vault of the Scipio family, the library, the antique and some modern sculptures, the Egyptian and Etruscan museum, the art gallery. He was delighted with Raphael's Stanze and Michelangelo's Laocoon. He also praised the antique Hellenic culture. The old Greeks, Gábor Kemény stated knew very much, expressing refined thoughts, feelings and passions in works of art. For Gábor Kemény the antique Greek culture was a flourishing one, being similar to the period of virile maturity. Those who travel, he stated, do not have the time to direct their attention towards the people living in the visited place, towards the citizens and the members of the society in question, though a traveller eager for knowledge should also be interested in local men. He also recommended that one should prepare and plan his journey on the basis of the information offered by the good guidebooks.²

Finally, we may affirm that it is evident: the mosaic-like ethnographical image of Transylvania represented an additional cause for each nation to defend and to wish to enrich its ethnical heritage. The change of attitudes and of political directions was mirrored by the periodicals of the age.

A periodical could be edited by a group of renowned historians, philosophers, naturalists, but the numerous ideas elaborated by them in their articles essentially were not always original ones, some thoughts being borrowed from former thinkers, others occurring in the same measure in other contemporaneous works too. This fact, however, does not disparage the role of the great personalities of the Transylvanian cultural and scientific life from the studied era, for they had often the

¹ Had they loved the people that much, they would not have made "so big houses for infamous amusements and they would not have given dangerous toys to the child." (Ha a népet annyira szerették, akkor nem csináltak volna „nemtelen mulatságokra akkora hajlékokat, valamint nem adnak ártalmas játékszert a gyermek kezébe.") In: *Marosvásárhelyi Füzetek*, 1859, II, no. 2/3, pp. 83–121.

² *Marosvásárhelyi Füzetek*, 1859, II, no. 2/3, pp. 83–121.

merit of disseminating in Transylvania some modernizing ideas and knowledge, close to the European level and of giving form, vigour and prestige to some diffuse or only budding autochthonous ideas.