

THE LEGACY OF HANS SACHS VON HARTENECK ON MIKLÓS BETHLEN

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Abstract The article presents the controversies between Hans Sachs von Harteneck and Chancellor Miklós Bethlen by taking into consideration the financial and representation issues of the Three Nations of Transylvania on the brink of the 18th century.

Keywords Harteneck, Bethlen, contribution, Saxons, Hungarians.

The end of the 17th century was for the Transylvanian Saxons a difficult time. Although they were pleased by the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Habsburgs, they had to rethink their political strategy. The German-language Habsburg rule seemed to be the natural choice for an alliance with the Saxon Nation, who tried to establish a special relationship with it. Hans Sachs von Harteneck adopted this policy, despite many concerns regarding the Roman Catholic propaganda of the Empire and the relations with the noblemen and with the Szeklers (Hungarians), who were much more interested in a Transylvanian coalition to rescue the Principality's status quo in matters of governing bodies and religious freedom. The disputes between the two fractions began with the distribution of very high wages to Vienna and fair representation of each nation in the official delegations.

Due to the War of the Spanish Succession, emperor Leopold raised the annual tax of Transylvania to 800.000 fl. By the courtesy of Count Johann Friedrich von Seeau, chairman of the *Cameratica Commissio*, the amount was reduced to 750.000. On the Diet of 1701 and 1702, the representatives of the three nations negotiated a system of division for this enormous amount of money. They also decided to send a delegation to the Viennese Court, hoping to achieve a further discount of 150.000 fl. After lengthy discussions, a delegation of three members was appointed: Chancellor Bethlen Miklós (nobleman), Lőrinc Pekry (Szekler) and Thomas Schmied von Scharffenbach as the Saxon representative. The Saxons, however, were not satisfied with the nomination of Scharffenbach, for whom not a single Saxon representative voted, because they did not trust him. They asked the Gubernium's

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permission to nominate their representative themselves, with the exclusion of the Diet's plenum. The Gubernium allowed an exclusively Saxon vote, but stated that it would not accept the appointment of a Gubernial councillor. The Saxon Diet members protested against this decision by withdrawing their support for the common delegation of the three nations, and announced that they would send their own delegation to the Court.¹ The noblemen and the Szekler were appalled by the Saxon's retreat, and held Johann Sachs von Harteneck, Count of the Saxon Nation, responsible for this "backstabbing". These actions ignited a very passionate discussion between the Hungarian nations and the Saxons, of which Bethlen Miklós and Harteneck became the main exponents.

In the *Scriptum Anti-Bethlenianum*,² Harteneck depicts his opponent in the worst of terms. The pamphlet dates back to late 1701 or early 1702, but the original document is no longer extant. According to the document, young Bethlen was well mannered and seemed to have great intellectual abilities. After coming of age, he turned out to be a major disappointment, he let down his country, his nation, and his actions harmed his relatives and friends. Even as an adolescent, Bethlen was a problematic character. According to Harteneck, the future chancellor loved stealing, mocking and bullying his playmates, and these traits he also retained as an adult – he became arrogant, sarcastic, stubborn, tyrannical, greedy, hypocritical, committing lese majesties, disregarding his nation and disrespecting the Church. The major accusations against Bethlen are as follows:

1. While the country was occupied by foreign troops and rioters raging against the establishment, pillaging and taking innocent lives, Bethlen thought that it would be better to depart for Vienna, where he could gain personal favours and influence.³
2. As he returned from Vienna with the *Diploma Leopoldinum*, he could not refrain from bragging, stating that he was its author, as if he had held the king's hand and made him write. He was pursuing, regardless of the means, the office of Gubernator.
3. After general Veterani lost the battle, he went to Vienna to negotiate, thus without official orders.
4. The writing of the *Columba Noe* served no other purpose than his own self interest.

Harteneck continues to denigrate the chancellor by claiming that his

¹ Ferdinand Ziegler, *Harteneck, Graf der sächsischen Nation, und die siebenbürgischen Parteikämpfe seiner Zeit, 1691–1703: Nach den Quellen des Archives der bestandenenen siebenbürgischen Hofkanzlei und des sächsischen National-Archives in Hermannstadt*, (Hermannstadt: Druck und Verlag von Th. Steinhaußen, 1869), 181–182.

² *Ibid.*, 277–285.

³ *Ibid.*, 277–280.

character and actions had the following negative traits:

- Like a Spaniard, hypocrisy and an excessive appreciation of his own person.⁴
- The rapacity of the Dutch.
- In the mixture of foul merchandise, a Savoyan.
- French, in expressing concepts that can be easily mistaken.
- Shares principles of the monarchomachs with the English
- In his love for licentiousness, a Pole
- Jealous, like an Italian
- And so monstrous that it hardly deserves to be called anything other than some kind of Minotaur.

In the conclusion, he states: "Indeed, his country is Transylvania, from which however, he hardly bares anything besides calling it his birthplace."

According to Zieglauer, this acidic tone was meant to cope with the *Declaratio hungaricae et siculicae nationum ad saxoniam nationem*, a document released by Bethlen on 19 May 1702, in which the chancellor revoked the Contract between the three nations from 1693, because the Saxon officials were on the verge of annulling or changing it.⁵ Bethlen states that the Hungarians could take over the Saxon's part of the contribution, but only if their *gravamina* were fully accepted and endorsed by the Court. The Hungarians' major issue with the Saxons was the status of the latter ones, who wanted to be treated like noblemen, but pay wages like commoners. He also observed that the Saxons showed disrespect to the noblemen, and backed and inspired by the German occupation of the Principality, they strived to become the leading nation of the country, trying to discredit the Hungarians. As he finished describing how the Saxons found new ways to seize more power, Bethlen offered examples of how the Saxons despised Transylvanian noblemen, the best example being: "They usually speak in this manner: Even if I am a Saxon, I am noble and I do not consider myself inferior to any count"⁶

Bethlen's declaration is more of a testimony of the disappointment of the Hungarians, rather than a systematic argumentation against the Saxon grievances: the *Fundus regius*, their only state, is richer than the Counties, and the Saxon officials and functionaries, even if they did not possess land, were not impoverished at all in later times.⁷

On the other hand, Harteneck is much more methodical. On 7 January 1702, the Comes presents to the Diet an elaborated reform of taxation.⁸ It is a vast

⁴ Ibid., 285.

⁵ Ibid., 265.

⁶ Ibid., 268: "Ejusmodi est talis loquendi formula: Etiam si sim Saxo, non tamen me nobile quocunque comite reputo inferiorem."

⁷ Ibid., 271.

⁸ Ibid., 225–255.

document that includes not just financial issues, but also political and juridical ones. A very interesting part about the Saxon's labour day is also included, in which Harteneck demonstrates that six or eight hours of hard work would not be enough for a craftsman to both sustain his family and pay taxes.⁹

Some technical details of this proposal are treated tersely in *Observationes momentosa, circa normam sub repartitionis quarti contributionalis, tam inter nationes, quam caeteras contribuentes provinciales in annis superioribus practicatae sub anno 1702 septembris scriptae*.¹⁰ Even if the title is Latin, the text itself is German. It cannot be said for sure if the original text was indeed German, or someone had taken the liberty of translating it into this language. It is also intriguing that it is somehow structured like a catechism, with questions and answers. It could have been made for study purposes. In this case, it is very possible that Heydendorff himself had compiled it for his own use, from an original document that is now lost. The questions are as follows:

1. Which are the *Loca Taxalia*, specified by the *Approbate* and *Compilatae Constitutiones*?¹¹
2. How many *Loca Taxalia* are there?¹²
3. Whether the *Loca Taxalia* preceded *Fiscalia*, and how could some of them lose their status.¹³
4. Whether some *Loca Taxalia* were annexed by the Counties, thus bringing prejudice to third parties, and making their new lords more competitive.¹⁴
5. Whether the Szekler paid taxes, although they had the obligation to go to war on their own horses and with their own weapons if the Prince commanded so?¹⁵

⁹ Ibid., 253.

¹⁰ National Archives of Romania, Sibiu Office, The records of the Lutheran Parish in Mediaş, No. 29, 286–307. It is a copy from the second half of the 1700s made by Michael Conrad von Heydendorff, part of the first volume of his *Collectanea*, which he began in 1752. Hans Sachs von Harteneck is indicated as an author in the index. A copy made by Josef Trausch (1795–1871) is kept in the Archive of the Lutheran Church in Braşov, signature: IV.F.1.Tq.173/24, 695–718.

¹¹ Harteneck, *Observationes momentosa*, 268: “Waß vor *Loca Taxalia* in der *Approbatis* vel *Compilatis* *Constitutionibus* speciefieret seyn?”

¹² Ibid., 290: “Wie viel *Loca Fiscalia* seyn?”

¹³ Ibid., 291.: “Ob die *Loca Taxalia* ehe bevor unter die *Fiscalität* gerechnet worden, und wie etl[liche]. davon weg kommen”

¹⁴ Ibid., “Ob nicht gewisse *Loca Taxalia* nicht in *praejudicium* tertij ad *Comitatus* getzogen worden, und die in *beneficium* *Comitatum* anietzo in *ipsorum* *medium* concurrirte(n)?”

¹⁵ Ibid., 292: “Ob die Szekler (in und zu) deren gemeinen Land Anlage(n) das ihrige contribuieret ungehindert Sie obliigert war(en) zu Feld zu gehen, und mit ihrem Gewehr und Pferdt(en) zu dienen, wohin der Landes-Fürst begehret hat? ”

6. When had a Contract been made between the Counties and The Saxon Nation, stipulating that the latter had to pay taxes for 1.400 households (porta)? How and when did the Counties begin to contribute the same amount as the Saxons?¹⁶

Answering the first question, Harteneck enumerated the entities that were bound by law to pay taxes: the counties, the *loca taxalia* (privileged or free townships with representatives on the Diet), inordinary places (Lat. *loca extra seriem dicarunt*, Hung. *rovatlan helyek*), noblemen without possessions (Lat. *nobiles non possessionati*), Romanian priests (Germ. *wallachische Popen*), Greeks, border fortresses (Bran, Turnu Roșu, Dej, Bistrița), salt mines (Turda, Cojocna, Ocna de Sus, Ocna de Jos, Ocna Sibiului, Sic), the millers, the Szekler, the Saxons. The Saxons paid the highest taxes of them all, 36.000 fl, while the Szekler only paid 5.000 and the Counties paid 4.500 dollars (germ. *Thaler*). He also argued that the counties were trying to diminish the number of their households and that they had taken over in the past the so called extra villages,¹⁷ which were originally meant to be of common use. The impoverished noblemen also seized land by force, giving it over to the counties. The counties had taken over villages from the Saxons, like Huedin or Cerghidul Mic.¹⁸

The second and third questions are answered by stating that the Principality also had its own domains, the *loca fiscalia*, managed by the Treasury. After listing all the places and dominions belonging to the principality's treasury, the Comes criticised the fact that all of them later became free and privileged. He invoked a sentence spoken by many Hungarians: "*Fundus Regius* means nothing more than *Fundus Regis*".¹⁹ Făgăraș, Abrud and Alba Iulia were considered to belong to the treasury, but he thought that they could have once been *loca axalia*; however, the records were not accessible to him.²⁰ In the issue of the annexed villages (4th question), Harteneck says that it is true and very clear (germ. *ganz klar und wahr*).²¹

The *Observationes momentosa* continues by providing arguments against the exemption of the Szekler from paying taxes.²² Harteneck considered that the Szekler also had the obligation to pay taxes, as military service or otherwise. He brought up the Diet's decisions between 1586 and 1665 and delivered the chronology of Saxon contributions from this period. The Szekler were now strongly

¹⁶ Ibid., 298: "Wenn der Contract über den Porten mit den Comitaten und der Sächsischen Na(tion) gemacht ward, und die letztere die 1400. Porten übernommen? Dann wie und wann die Comitaten den Sachsen gleich zu contribuieren angefangen?"

¹⁷ Ibid., 286: "Dorffschafften extra dicas".

¹⁸ Ibid., 286–290.

¹⁹ Ibid., 291: "Fundus Regius heiße so viel als Fundus Regis".

²⁰ Ibid., 290–291.

²¹ Ibid., 291–292.

²² Ibid., 296–298.

pleading for exemption. Their argument was based on the 14th article of the *Diploma Leopoldinum*, which stated that the Szekler noblemen had been freed from all taxes and wages, but had to go to war on their own expenses.²³ Harteneck explained the introduction of this article with the presence of Bethlen in Vienna, who argued that the Szekler defended the Fatherland not because they were obliged by law, but because of some particular agreement (*e particularium quorundam consensu*) and not for having to serve their lord and master.²⁴ The delegation managed to receive the confirmation of the countries' laws in a time when the monarch and the Court did not have the time to study them. Harteneck answered the alleged exemption by citing from the Diet's Articles from 1557, when the Szekler lords had to pay 5.000 fl. to Queen Isabella, thus demonstrating that this nation had in fact never been exempt from paying taxes. If they had never been free of taxes, the *Diploma Leopoldinum*'s 14th article is nothing more than an endorsement of this fact.²⁵ The last question is answered by Harteneck on a vast number of pages.²⁶ In 1661, the Saxons had to pay taxes for 2.400 households, and, in 1663, for 2.000 households.²⁷ The counties had always had fewer, around 1000 households. The high wages led the Saxons to poverty and made them gain debt, they could neither pay the troops, nor persuade their lenders to give them money, and realised that, in order to survive, they had to demand fewer households for which to pay. The discussions came to a conclusion with which the Saxons were not satisfied: the Hungarians agreed to reduce their taxes by 600 households. The new quantum was settled in the 1692 Contract between the three Nations, to 1.400.²⁸ Since then, the Saxons tried to implement a new, much fairer contribution system. They even came up with the idea of a *connumeration*, a census, which could not be realised because of Chancellor Bethlen's opposition.²⁹

Harteneck ended his argumentation by enumerating facts regarding his Nation's disadvantages:

- It was poorer and more in debt than the counties.
- It had to accommodate more troops than the counties
- The counties had a larger taxpaying population, even day labourers from the *Fundus regius*.³⁰

²³ Carolus Szász de Szemeria, *Sylloge tractatum aliorumque auctorum publicorum historiam et argumenta b. diplomatis Leopoldini, resolutionis idem quae Alvincziana vocatur, illustrantium*, Claudiopoli, Tilsch et filium, 127.

²⁴ Harteneck, *Observationes momentosa*, 297.

²⁵ Ibid., 297–298.

²⁶ Ibid., 298–307.

²⁷ Ibid., 298–299.

²⁸ Ibid., 300–303.

²⁹ Ibid., 304, his argument: It is not always good for a Prince to know the might of his realm.

³⁰ Ibid., 304–306.

The document concludes with a plea to the sovereign:

So it is probably fitting for a ruler (whose realm shall the Almighty protect until the end of times) to willingly and graciously protect the fistful of Germans, who held it together under the tyranny of the Hungarians, through many centuries and multiple changes, like a special Pearl of this Principality, so that they are not to perish now, or to become slaves of the Hungarians (whose cooks and waiters they could never be). However extreme, this is a possibility for the Saxons, if they are not able to pay their own taxes, or to get credit, and will have to sacrifice themselves and be the subjects of the Hungarian lords, from which God and the gentlest Emperor should protect us.³¹

After the outbreak of the Rebellion and Harteneck's execution, the controversies between the Saxons and the Hungarian noblemen lost their importance. Nevertheless, Count Miklós Bethlen maintained a bad reputation among the Saxon historians of the century. Even Georg Michael Gottlieb von Herrmann judged him by his opponent's standards:

Despite his advantages, he remained blinded by his own personality, and did not show the Nations and the Commander General the respect they should have deserved, estranging them. He also presented to the public a rough paper, called *Columba Noe*, thus delivering weapons in the hands of his enemies.³²

A more impartial perspective on Bethlen's actions and personality is delivered

³¹ Ibid., 306–307: “So dann es ist vielleicht e ra(tion)one status eines deutschen Landes-Fürsten (deßen Dominiat der allerhöchste bis an der Welt Ende beschirmen wolle) die Hand voll Teutschen Geblüts welches ist viel secula durch unter ist vielen Veränderungen, unter Ungar Tyranneyen gleichwohl beysammen stehen geblieben, als eine sonderbahre Perle dieses Fürstenthums, nicht ietzo verloren gehen, oder zu der Unger Sclawen (wozu sie als Köch und Kellner es niemahlen bringen können, werden zu lassen), welche Extremität schon vor der Sachsen auch ausstehet, wenn sie aere proprio den Zinß nicht bezahlen können, auch keine Credit mehr haben, sie gehen denn und opfern sich den H(ernn). Ungarn zu Unterthanen auch wofür uns Gott und der allermideste keyser allernädigst bewahren wollen.”

³² Michael Georg Gottlieb von Hermann, *Das Alte und Neue Kronstadt: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte Siebenbürgens im 18. Jahrhundert*, bearbeitet von Oscar von Meltzl (Hermannstadt: Michaelis, 1883), 81, “Bei allen seinen Vorzügen aber blieb er Mensch und ließ sich eben dadurch so verblenden, daß er die Stände sowohl, als selbst den commandierenden Generalen, durch den Mangel an Achtung, die ihnen gebühret hätte, von sich entfremdete und ihnen durch ein unzeitiges Projekt, das er unter dem Titel *Columba Noe* in die Welt gehen ließ, die Waffen wider sich selbst in die Hände gab.”

by Johann Seivert, who considered the chancellor to be a very educated man, a speaker of several languages (Latin, German, French, English, Italian), with knowledge of literature, geography, and history, who did compose the *Diploma Leopoldinum* himself, a true patriot, a loyal statesman and a good Christian. Seivert knows that Bethlen was not arrested because of his political pamphlets, but his enemies had used them in order to discredit him in front of his countrymen. Disillusioned, the former chancellor died in self-imposed exile in Vienna.³³

The early Saxon-Hungarian controversies started over financial issues and ended in one huge controversy over the relations between the two “nations” and their expectations from the new rulers in terms of the future form of the Transylvanian establishment. The Protestant noblemen tried to save the Principality's political institutions and, as Bethlen proposed in the *Columba Noe*, to establish an independent state recognised by both empires. His goal was to anchor the status quo of Transylvania, ensuring international guarantees for it. The Saxons had other priorities: they aimed for a more favourable position in central politics by establishing a direct line of communication with Vienna. Harteneck's policy was to strike a separate deal for his nation, appealing to the loyalty towards the Imperial House and the German tongue.

In time, both parties came to a deeper understanding of Austrian politics and could join forces for a common goal, but they turned on each other if their rights and privileges were endangered. The 18th century showed that it was impossible to evade Vienna's will to eliminate the power and influence of the three Transylvanian nations, and the struggle for existence made both figures (Bethlen and Harteneck) very important in the process of becoming nations based on ethnicity.

³³ Cf. *Siebenbürgische Quartalschrift* 5 (1797): 298–306.