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Human and material loss during the 1848-1849 revolution and civil war in Transylvania

Abstract

The 1848-1849 revolution has all along been looked upon with great interest by the historians. While having been analyzed under various aspects, **the human and material loss** issue has not formed the subject matter of a thorough and systematic research, the history works invoking them, in the general context of the revolution, in order to make evident the sacrifice of the Romanian nation in the fight for social and national rights, to denounce **the repression and atrocities the Romanians were subjected to**, being considered as “*reactionary*” for not having accepted “*the union*” of Transylvania to Hungary and the civil rights provided by the Hungarian Revolution. The importance of researching this theme is so more relevant since the archive documents have only been scarcely researched, the main reason being the policy of the Austro-Hungarian regime and the influences of historiography currents after World War II, the accent being laid on the proletarian internationalism and on not endangering good terms with coinhabiting nationalities.

The work is based on unpublished **archived documents** found with The County Head Office of the National Archives collection of Mureş and Alba, representing the correspondence between local and “*government*” administrative authorities / institutions, and reports from local Greek-Catholic priests sent to the consistory in Blaj regarding the human and materials loss suffered by their parishioners, the information being completed by **specific works and published sources**.

In order to demonstrate the existence and evolution of a strong **revolutionary movement** and also the participation of the Transylvanian Plain inhabitants in the revolution, **the repression** exercised over the Romanian and the Transylvanian Saxons, priests and local leaders in particular, in order to unveil the events, the atmosphere and mentality as truthfully as possible, we resorted to presenting, sometimes to their full extent, the inquiries conducted by **martial tribunals** (“*rögtön ittelő törvény*”, tribunals for immediate trial) against the Romanians.

Archive documents, memoirs and historical works have allowed us to reconstruct the participation and the material and human loss suffered by the Romanians within the geographic area of the Transylvanian Plain.

As a presenting methodology, the chronologic criterion of the revolutionary events was followed, while analyzing the respective matter in the general context of the revolution. Therefore the present work is structured to comprise the following chapters:

I. Preface

II. Historiography regarding the subject matter and documentation sources

I. Romantic historiography

I. Memorialistic works

a. Romanian memorialistic works

b. Hungarian memorialistic works

c. Transylvanian Saxons memorialistic works

II. Positivist historiography “*The Critical School*”

III. Post-war historiography

IV. Contemporary historiography

V. Archive funds and collections

III. The revolution outburst in the Habsburg Empire. First revolutionary movements in the Transylvanian Plain

IV. Thomas’ Sunday (“*Duminica Tomii*”) Assembly in Blaj – April 18 to 30, 1848

V. Actions preceding The Grand National Assembly in Blaj – Mai 3 to 15, 1848

VI. The Grand National Assembly in Blaj – Mai 3 to 15, 1848

VII. Repressive actions against the Romanian movements in the summer of 1848 in the Transylvanian Plain

VIII. Cluj Legislative Assembly – May 29 to June 16, 1848. Position towards “*the union*” of Transylvania to Hungary

IX. Liberation Day – June 18, 1848

X. Romanian’s opposition towards 1848’s autumn recruitment

XI. Third Assembly in Blaj (September 15 to 28, 1848). Social-national movements in the autumn of 1848 in the Transylvanian Plain

XII. Information regarding the organization of Romanian legions in the Transylvanian Plain

XIII. The sharpening of conflicts between the Romanians and the Hungarian authorities. The path leading to the civil war

XIV. The questioning and imprisonment of the Romanians having joined the Romanian legions

XV. The Hungarian army offensive against the army led by Colonel Urban

XVI. The questioning and imprisonment of the Romanians having joined the army led by Colonel Urban

XVII. Târgu Mureş city during the austrian administration (November – December 1848)

XVIII. Administrative, military and judiciary organization of the Mureș District after the conquest by the Hungarian armies led by General Bem

1. Administrative-military reorganization
2. The action of disarming the Romanians
3. Reintroduction of the institutionalized repression

XIX. Romanians' opposition against military recruitment of January – February 1849

XX. The 1849 Romanian community in Târgu Mureș

1. Punitive measures taken against “*collaborationist*” Romanians
2. Sequestering and auctioning the material goods of the Romanians in Târgu Mureș

XXI. Ioan Bucur – a case of espionage in Târgu Mureș during the 1848 – 1849 revolution

XXII. Punitive actions against the “*collaborationist*” Hungarians in Târgu Mureș

XXIII. Repressive actions taken against the Romanians in the Transylvanian Plain in 1849

XXIV. The Zagăr Transylvanian Saxons case

XXV. Romanians and Hungarians in the 1848-1849 revolution

The Iobăgeni-Mitrești-Vărgata case

XXVI. The activity of the penal and civil tribunal in Târgu Mureș

1. The activity of the penal tribunal
2. The activity of the civil (ordinary) tribunal

XXVII. Material loss of the Romanians and Transylvanian Saxons in the Transylvanian Plain

1. Sequestering and auctioning of the Romanians' and Transylvanian Saxons' material goods
2. The Romanians and Transylvanian Saxons' resistance against the April – July 1849 recruitments
3. Romanian and Transylvanian Saxons' material loss caused by the Szekler troupes' robberies

XXVIII. The material contribution to support the Austro-Russian armies. War tax

XXIX. Revendicating actions in the autumn of 1849 for the material goods recovery

XXX. Human loss during the 1849 – 1849 revolution and civil war. Recording of the dead, widows, orphans and invalid

XXXI. Aspects regarding the Romanian priests' situation during the first years following the revolution

XXXII. Conclusion

XXXIII. Annexes

XXXIV. Selective bibliography

The historiography of this matter has been conceived so as to include the historical works in the historiographic currents: **romanticism, positivism (the “*Critical School*”), postwar and contemporary historiographies.**

Within **romanticism**, the emphasis was laid on pointing out the works with memorialistic specific. **The Romanian memorialistic** started out during the last phase of the revolution and coincided with the political factors' strive to obtain national rights within the unfavorable climate created in Vienna after the revolution, to demonstrate the Transylvanian Romanians' sacrifices, and continued with using history as a weapon to obtain national rights. Resorting to the document, the methodical research, the rigor and the critical spirit of the **positivist historiography** during the inter-war period brings forward "*the history of the country through the small ones*". The new historiographic orientation imposed by **Mihail Roller** after the World War II has laid the accent on the social fight, thus making a fundamental change with regards to **the national identity**. There are two steps to distinguish in the mystification process of the history: **a stalinist one in the 1950's**, which subordinated the historic discourse to the goals of a foreign power, minimizing the national feeling, and the second one, **neo-stalinist, in the 1960's**, which exaggerated the nationalism, used **to serve the totalitarianism**, turning, after 1974, from the marxism of the proletarian internationalism into **the nationalist socialism** progressively affirmed after 1985. The Romanian historiography dilemma is to be solved by the Romanian historians after **the December 1989 revolution**, through rewriting the history, through the return to tradition, to the national and local history.

On the basis of the information offered by the Mureș memorialistic (Romanian, Transylvanian Saxon and Hungarian), as well as by archive documents, it was managed to reconstruct and point out **the participation of the Transylvanian Plain inhabitants** (which, from the administrative point of view belonged to Târnava and Turda counties and Mureș District), in all the important events of the 1848-1849 revolution, **starting with the first manifestations and assemblies in March – April, the Assembly in Thomas' Sunday of April 18 to 30 in Blaj, the Grand National Assembly in May 3 to 15, 1848, the refusal to fulfill the robots, the rejection of "the union" of Transylvania to Hungary, the position of non-acceptance towards serfdom abolition, decreed by the Transylvania's legislative assembly of June 6 to 18, 1848, afraid that in this way "the union" would be recognized, and the participation in the third Assembly in Blaj from September 15 to 28, 1848.**

Spreading the news by the Târnava county head Bánffy János, according to which armed Romanians gathered in Blaj would head towards the Plain localities and Târgu Mureș in order to liberate Florian Micaș from prison, the proclamation of Bărnuțiu **as "the king" of the Romanians** raised panic among the Hungarian inhabitants which, **on September 18 devastated the houses of the Romanian archpriests Partenie Trombițaș and Ilie Farago**, elected at the second national assembly in Blaj as members of the national delegation beside the Cluj legislative assembly, and also the house of the tradesman **Dimitrie Fogarași**, member of the delegation meant to present the grievances of the Romanian nation to Vienna.

A special chapter has been dedicated to the Romanians' refusal **to obey the military recruitment law**, adopted by the Hungarian parliament on July 11, 1848 and established through the 8370/B decree from August 29 of the Minister for Internal Affairs Szemere. The Romanians' attitude was due to the perception, in the collective mental, that the army represented **the "lords"** interests, the law not being sanctioned by Emperor Ferdinand, its validity being contested through not recognizing *"the union"* of Transylvania to Hungary.

In the autumn of 1848, after the Lutița assembly, by the invasion of armed Szekler troupes, they proceed to **setting villages and churches on fire, rob and kill Romanians, set Ungheni on fire, occupy, set on fire and devastate Reghin**. The documents demonstrate the military and tactical organization of the offensive action directed towards the Romanians in the villages between the Szekler area and Cluj, Turda, Alba Counties, Arieș District. As a result of the resistance against the Szekler troupes and of the conquest of **Târgu Mureș** city by the Austrian imperial army led by general Gedeon, **the Austrian administration is instituted**, under the command of Anton Lindner and afterwards of Major Clococeanu. The Romanian legions gathered under the command of prefects Vasile Macariu Moldovan, Nicolae Vlăduțiu and Constantin Romanu Vivu proceed to **disarming the Szekler and Hungarian troupes**. The Szekler capital **Târgu Mureș becomes the gathering and deliberating place of the tribunes** from the Plain villages pertaining to the legions led by the abovementioned prefects.

The documents allow us to present the implication and **participation of the Transylvanian Saxons** from the beginning of the revolutionary events by **the refusal to keep fulfilling robots and submitting tithes** to the landowners, by the constitution of **the national guards**, the participation on the Romanians' side to the three **National Assemblies in Blaj**, by **the refusal to join the Hungarian army**, by the repression exercised for having had the Saxon villages **robbed out**, by **imprisonments and killings** (see the Zagăr Saxons' case). The repression policy against the Transylvanian Saxons was motivated by their **refusal to unconditionally accept "the union"** of Transylvania to Hungary, but moreover by the support from the *"Transylvanian Saxon University"* given to **the intervention of the Russian troupes**, then present on the Wallachia territory in order to defeat and free the country from under the Hungarian government and army dominance.

The conquest of Transylvania by the Hungarian army under the lead of general Bem has marked a new step in the course of the events that succeeded in the year 1849. The fear of the Romanians' movements has determined the Hungarian authorities to proceed to **disarming and strictly supervising the Romanian and Saxon inhabitants**, and everybody who did not share the Hungarian revolution ideas, who were against the Hungarian government, constitution, army, and against *"the union"* of Transylvania to Hungary.

The Pest government, through the governmental commissaries and the local authorities, **have reintroduced the tribunals for immediate trial, reorganized through the mixed civil and military tribunals. The questioning of the Romanians and Saxons arrested** were in the first place after establishing their implication in the events in the autumn of 1848, their participation in the Romanian camps or in the Austrian army led by Anton Puchner and their opposition towards the Hungarian government and constitution. In order to outline the picture of the Hungarian repression materialized in **the arrest and questioning of the Romanian priests and leaders**, we resorted to presenting them by grouping the villages based on territorial areas: Târnava Valley (Târnava County), Mureş Valley and Niraj Valley (Mureş District). We are not able to indicate any village or area where the Romanians' resistance was of lower intensity, as people revolted everywhere, by retreating with the Romanian camps remained under the lead of tribunes and captains (**prefects Nicolae Vlăduţiu, Vasile Moldovan have retreated in the Apuseni Mountains and fought by the side of Avram Iancu, while Constantin Romanu Vivu was assassinated in a villain manner**); they refused to obey the orders of the authorities and supported **the Romanian camps by providing them with supplies, which were taken to Cetatea de Baltă and from there to Blaj, where they were passed on by Axente Sever.**

The fear of the Romanian movements has determined the Hungarian authorities to proceed to disarming and strictly supervising the Romanian and Saxon inhabitants as well as everybody who did not share the Hungarian revolution ideas. Moreover they organized national guards as well as **hunting and "petty thieves" troupes**, which, under the lead of young **Jenei József**, have undertaken a series of thefts, robberies, killings on the Romanian population of the Mureş District villages, but also of the neighboring counties Târnava, Turda and Cluj. This fact raised the disapproval of the neighboring counties, which requested the questioning of hunting troupes leaders, including Jenei József, as the devastated population could no longer pay the taxes and provide material support to the Hungarian army.

In order to support the military effort, given the condition where Hungary was more and more subjected to the Austrian counteroffensive, and subsequently to the Russian intervention, they proceeded to recruitments from among the young people. And, similarly to the September 1848 recruitment action, the Romanians and Transylvanian Saxons have opposed and tried to escape recruitment by retreating in the woods around the villages or have joined the Romanian camps or the army led by Anton Puchner. The deserting of the enrolled ones became a usual phenomenon.

With no regards to the amnesties given by general Bem according to which the ones returning to their homes, giving up arms and promising they would not show future disapproving or hostile attitude, a true vendetta was conducted against the “collaborationist” inhabitants. The goods of many Romanian citizens in Târgu Mureş, Orthodox archpriest **Partenie Trombitaş**, Greek-Catholic archpriest **Ilie Farago**, tradesmen **Dumitru Fogaraşi and his son-in-law Ioan Bardoşi**, retired warrant officer **Ioan Raica**, currier **Mihai Sebeni**, refugees at the same time with the Austrian army retreat, were **sequestered and sold through public auction**, the money obtained being deposited with the state treasury to support the Hungarian “*war machine*”.

The members of the Romanian community from the city, suspected by the Hungarian authorities of having adopted a disobedient attitude towards the Hungarian government and constitution, who rejected “*the union*” of Transylvania to Hungary, being considered “*agitators*”, were **chased and imprisoned**. For having detained information, many servants were arrested: the two abovementioned archpriests’, the ones of Cozma Petru, Augustin Gheorghe, Dumitru Sebeni, Blaga Dani etc. All the same the authorities proceeded to questioning **the Hungarians**, starting with the Târgu Mureş Mayor Lázár János and the members of the council, who **collaborated with the enemy**, with the Austrian administration respectively, instituted after the city’s conquest by general Gedeon on November 5, 1848.

In the village world there was the same reality: the goods of the ones having left their homes, afraid of the revolution and the military recruitment, were **sequestered and sold through public auction**. To this “*official*” way of robbing the population, another, as mentioned above, came to add: **the robbery** practiced by various Szekler troupes who were terrifying the population, and also “*the military executions*” (providing food and quarter for the military troupes). Addressing the district and county commissions, after the defeat of the revolution in the autumn of 1849, the deprived and robbed Romanians tried, through witness depositions, **to recover part of the robbed goods**, animals in particular. Their approach remained most of the times with no finality, given the fact that the sequestering documents were not correctly filled in or the new owners were clerks or relatives of the judges.

After the defeat of the revolution, the Romanians in Târgu Mureş having remained loyal to the throne and the dynasty during the revolution expressed their discontentment for having been forced to pay their quota of **the war tax** imposed to the city (40.000 florins), asking, on the basis of the government order from October 25, 1849, numbered 1103/C.M.G (General Military Commandment), **to be restituted this tax and for the creation of a research commission to investigate the political attitude of the Romanian citizens** in Târgu Mureş. As a result of the research, the commission concluded on December 5, 1850 that the Romanians only fulfilled the watch duty as members of the national guard.

The reports of the Romanian Orthodox and Greek-Catholic priests regarding the Romanians' human and material loss during the revolution and the civil war, issued on the order of October 15, 1849 by the Transylvania's governor Ludwig von Wohlgemuth, complete the information known until this date about their number, the way the Romanians were killed or wounded and about the orphans' and widows' situation. Human life loss concentrated around the centers where **military confrontations** took place, also "**hunting troupes**", **incursions and martial tribunals** functioning in Târgu Mureș, Târnăveni, Sântioana-Gurghiu.

Under the condition of **the absolutist regime** institution, a new period of repression followed; the so-called "**purification commissions**" proceeded to arresting and searching the priests having participated in the revolution, forbidding them to deal with the political and civil problems of the state.

Even though we have not intended to debate the theme of **the Romanians' denationalization through joining other confessions**, catholic and reformed in particular, the documents reveal the individual or partial renouncement of some Romanian communities to the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic confessions (examples offered by the inhabitants in Dumitrești, Șard, Porumbeni Mari) in order to put themselves under shelter from the troubled times, from the repression they were subjected to by the Hungarian authorities. The Romanians' joining other confessions was one of the elements through which the denationalization and loss of national identity were realized in the Szekler area, which perpetuated over generations.

Generally, during the 1848-1849 revolution, **the Hungarian population followed the Hungarian revolution program**, opposed to the Romanian population, which followed the way drawn by the Romanian revolution, by sticking to the program of the May 3-5 Grand Assembly of Blaj, rejecting in very firm terms "*the union*" of Transylvania to Hungary and the denationalization principles adopted by the Hungarian government. One cannot however speak about a commonly shared view among the Hungarian population; some of them adopted **the program of the Romanian revolution**, they **sworn loyalty to the king** at Monor or in Reghin (the case Mîtrești, Iobăgeni, Vărgata is to be kept in mind), while some others were supporting the pro-Austrian party. We notice, at the level of the mixed collaboration between the Romanian, Hungarian and Transylvanian Saxon inhabitants, the existence of a "*non-aggression*" pact, made between the Romanian villages Chiheru de Sus, Chiheru de Jos, Urișiu de Jos and the Hungarian community in Eremitu, or the ones in **Chendu Mare, Chendu Mic and Bălăușeri, which associated with the Romanian revolution**.

The idea of defense with the life price at the individual level of the land lots, and, at the general level, **the idea of the property right over Transylvania** in the detriment of supporting the Hungarian property and dominance, (like the simple countrymen said, - this country is ours, because we have been here first, they came from Scythia -), the fight for the

introduction of the Romanian administration and of the Romanian language are essential elements, components of the Romanian nation existence at 1848, a nation aware of its rights fundament. The revolution was only a modality which objectively had to fulfill these desiderata. For the moment **“the union” of Transylvania to Hungary was given up and the hungarianisation of the Romanian people was stopped.**

The analysis of archive funds, the recourse to the related bibliography demonstrate that the material and human loss theme approached in this work only represent a contribution to enriching the historiography of the 1848-1849 revolution in the Transylvanian Plain. At the present stage of the research, **the human and material loss cannot be for the moment accounted for**, but we agree with the figure of **35.000-40.000** victims put in circulation in the *“memorandum”* issued in Alba-Iulia in December 1849 by **the Roman-Catholic canonic Ráduly**. The subject matter further remains open to historical research.