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## Migration of the Brassó (Braşov) County Csángó: The Impact of Politics, War, and Economy

The Csángó people are of two groups: the Moldavian Csángó, who live along the outer rim of what was once the Kingdom of Romania, and the “Seven Villages” Csángó, who live in the arch of the Carpathians near Brassó (Braşov), the near-last Transylvanian city along the former Hungarian-Romanian border. Despite its name, this latter group actually occupies a total of ten municipalities, four of which – Bácsfalu (Baciu), Türkös (Turcheş), Csernátfalu (Cernatu), and Hosszúfalu (Satulung) – form the single village of Négyfalu (Săcele). Near these lie three others – Tatrang (Tărlungeni), Zajzon (Zizin), and Pürkerec (Purcăreni) – and a bit further in the other direction, i.e. towards Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca), are Krizba (Crizbav), Barcaújfalu (Satu Nou), and Apáca (Apaşa). Until 1848, these villages were populated by serfs who laboured for the Brassó Saxons and adhered, under the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, to the Lutheran faith. Though there exist a number of facts from the group’s past to explain how they came into serfdom, as that does not belong to the topic at hand, they will be omitted for the purposes of this paper. Still, it should be pointed out that religion has been not only an important element in their lives, but also a force behind their tendency toward migration. By contrast, the Csángó of Moldavia, who do not share the same origins, are Catholics. In the paper to follow, I will be discussing the impact of various migrations of the inhabitants of these villages over past two centuries on the lives of the group’s members.

### **Bucharest: A City for Good Money**

To begin with, when one speaks of the lives of the Bucharest Csángó, it is important to distinguish between two different periods, each associated with a different country. The first Csángó migration occurred during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the group were citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, over the span of several decades. The second migratory period took place between the two world wars, after they had become Romanian citizens. The sources for research on both these periods derives from ecclesiastical documents, the recollections of pastors, articles published in the

local and Transylvanian press, and accounts provided by various travellers. Though there were several travellers and priests who recounted meeting Hungarians in the old Romanian principalities, there is no concrete data regarding the migrations of those in question (to Walachia in the first instance, and, following the unification of the two Romanian principalities, to the Kingdom of Romania, known as Regat, in the second), that is, about why they left or how they proceeded. The historic record reveals only that they ended up settling in various areas of the former territory, and that in places like Câmpulung, Ploiești and Bucharest they even formed what may be regarded as Hungarian population hubs. Following the formation of the Kingdom of Romania, many were found working in Bucharest, the capital of the new unified domain. Regarding the reasons for the Hungarian presence in Romania in the first place, one explanation may be that men did not want to lose years of their lives serving in the Hungarian army or, prior 1848, did not want to toil as Saxon serfs. All else is pure speculation, based on what is known of early Csángó migration. In the case of one of the Csángó villages (Apáca/Apața), for example, it is unknown whether the inhabitants were looking for work in Bucharest, as was the case with those of the other nine villages, given that they ended up labouring for Saxons in the vicinity of Brassó (Brașov). Once the Csángó arrived in some of the smaller cities of Walachia, and later in the Kingdom of Romania, in the absence of any Hungarian Lutheran denomination, they joined the Reformed (Calvinist) Church, with Reformed pastors coming all the way from Bucharest where none lived nearby. Accounts of the new arrivals in parish literature describe them as wild people who suddenly broke into Hungarian if a traveller used that language, though such fanciful images are likely a reflection of the author's surprise.

The situations and religious lives of the Csángó in Bucharest were more organised. During the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we know only that there was a Hungarian community with both a Catholic, and a Reformed church, whose members came not only from Székelyföld (sometimes anglicised as “Székely Land” or “Szeklerland”), but also the Seven Villages area. Though there was a German Lutheran church available in Bucharest, the Csángó chose the Reformed faith of the Székely for reasons of language. What little else is known derives from the comments of clergy, who noted certain strange customs, including those related to death, which they found to resemble the practices of Eastern Orthodoxy. This implies that the pastors, in the final minutes of a dying man's life, were implored to administer Holy Communion, as its omission would be thought to bring eternal damnation.<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastical documents from the Csángó's places of departure are similarly tight-lipped in describing them. Parish registers from Csernátfalú (Cernatu), for example, note only that they had “gone off whoring” in Walachia [“Oláhországban elkurváltott”].

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1 Source: Egyházi élet Romániában. [Ecclesiastical Life in Romania.] *Erdélyi Protestáns Közlöny* 1877. VII/39: 429.

During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bucharest was a good place to earn money, offering a destination for youth whose parents wished them to save for the future and even attracting entire families. Most women and girls who worked in the city served as cooks or maids in rich Romanian or Jewish households, jobs that were not without risks, as some girls were subject to the advances of their employers or their sons, with some recorded cases even ending in suicide. Male migrants became carters, hauling bread in horse-drawn wains, or engaged in home construction. It is often said, in fact, that Bucharest was the product of Hungarian Székely and Csángó labour and could thus be considered the second largest Hungarian city after Budapest. As early as the 1880s, articles began cropping up in the Brassó newspapers on the topic of how migration to Romania might be halted, one idea being to improve local handicrafts, with particular reference to the weaving for which the town was well-known abroad. The debate, however, was broadly theoretical, with little to offer by way of practicality or impact.

This migration of the Csángó in pursuit of labour in Bucharest continued until World War II. In the words of Hosszúfalu (Satulung) native Ilona Köpe (age 66), one of the informants for this paper: “My paternal grandmother, Mrs. András Tomos née Sára Benedek (1899–1976), worked as a servant for a lady named Florica in Bucharest from 1918 until 1922. She cleaned, cooked, took care of the children, and did other women’s work, for which she was quite well-paid. The family came to like my grandmother and, after her marriage, came to visit her every summer. Unfortunately, the relationship did not continue after my grandmother died. I can say, however, that the culinary tastes of the girls and women from the Seven Villages were formed and refined in Bucharest. Until then, daily meals consisted in little more than bacon, eggs, beans, potatoes, and cabbage. After World War II, when the need for carters and servants in Bucharest had passed, the Csángó began working in local factories in their native lands, primarily in Brassó [Braşov], and began to modernise. For good masons, however, the opportunity for work in Bucharest continued. Frankly, a servant’s position in Bucharest was viewed as more of an apprenticeship than a job, as one generally returned with a lot of knowledge others found valuable.”

On the topic of lifestyle and entertainments in the Romanian capital, more research is still needed. It is said that the Csángó frequently gathered for Sunday dances at the Cişmigiu Parc and that in general, the Csángó and Székely each lived their own separate way. Most of the information available in this regard pertains to the church and religious life. In Bucharest, the Lutheran Csángó attended the Reformed Church for reasons of language, and though they supported the church with considerable monetary and other donations, they were not seen as equal members of the congregation. This, in addition to the prolonged stay in Bucharest, led to the eventual establishment of a Lutheran church for the Csángó’s separate use. The first Lutheran service in Hungarian was held in one of the rooms of the Reformed school in 1927. Associated groups included a women’s society, a choir, a youth organisation, and a newspaper known as the *Harangszó* [“Bell Toll”]. The

first pastor, Zoltán Sexty, took up his position in 1934. By 1936, the community had purchased a lot on Badea Cârțan street and constructed what was known as a Lutheran Home (Evangélikus Otthon), including a prayer house that was eventually transformed into – and in 1957 consecrated as – the group’s church. The Csángó also had their own burial ground, known then (as now) as Calvin Cemetery. This Lutheran “island” was a place of charity, one that – based on what is known of Csángó customs from the period prior to their migration – may very well have been built from the donations<sup>2</sup> of community members. Given its relatively recent establishment, the full complement of documents produced since the day of its founding are all available for scrutiny. Upon further research, church registers, which list donors and donations and therefore give a reasonable idea of the number of the people who belonged to the community, could potentially reveal just how many people originally left the Csángó villages of Barcaság.

During World War II, as an impact of missionary work among the Jews, a Romanian Lutheran congregation – today part of the Hungarian organisation – was also formed. In the meantime, many of the Bucharest Csángó lost the ability to converse in their native language, continuing to attend church services in Hungarian, but speaking primarily Romanian at home. A decrease in community population at this time furthermore indicates that the Csángó’s former special identity (in Barcaság, to be Csángó is to be Lutheran, just as to be Csángó in Moldavia is to be Catholic) was beginning to fade. This change is also highlighted by the simultaneous failure of the Romanian Lutheran community to increase their numbers.

Those who returned to their native municipalities brought many changes. Most obviously, the money they had saved resulted in the construction of larger, taller houses; yet change was not limited to the private sector. In one 19<sup>th</sup> century example, István Simon of Bácsfalu (Baciu), who had earned a great deal of money in Bucharest, upon his return to his home village, bought a new organ for the church, donated a parcel of land for use as a cemetery, built a small funeral home, and constructed a water pipeline for the village, all with his own money. In 1904, Simon was awarded the “iron cross” for his good works by Austrian emperor Franz Josef.

A second impact of the Bucharest migration – as described by Csernátfalú (Cernatu) pastor Béla Kiss in a series of articles published in *Evangélikus Élet* [Lutheran Life], the newspaper of the Hungarian Lutheran church in Romania – was that the Csángó began dressing themselves in urban fashion, foregoing the simpler costumes of their native villages and eventually facilitating the near-disappearance of traditional clothing. Another set of changes involved food and meal preparation, as revealed by a survey of period cookbooks. In one example, a booklet from Csernátfalú (Cernatu) formerly owned by the mother of Vilma Pajor includes several recipes for pudding (written *budinka*, using the Romanian word), and one for

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2 The church received two large-scale donations of buildings and land of a combined value of more than one million *lei*. The donors were Mrs. Toncovianu, Anna Andor Szász and Mrs. Bartha, Ilona Balázs Szén (*Evangélikus Élet* [Lutheran Life]. 25 Sept. 1938. 2.).

stuffed peppers. The latter dish is given the name *töltött árdéj*, where *ardei* is the Romanian word for pepper. (The continued use of this word in several Hungarian villages today serves as indication of the vegetable's provenance.) Naturally, these are just two of many dishes whose origins trace back to the Bucharest migration. (Picture 3.)

## The Csángó in America

While it is known that the masses of people leaving Hungary in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to seek a better life in the United States included a great many Csángó, the questions of how many came from this particular region and when they left have never been examined in depth. In the discussions with informants conducted for the present paper, the subject of this type of migration surfaced only tangentially. One object shown to me by several different families in Krizba (Crizbav) was a Bible or hymnal that had been sent by relatives from the U.S., in each case featuring a special cover, usually adorned with a chalice of ivory. One of my informants, Lehel István Kovács, also had an interesting postcard from one of his ancestors, Ferenc Fazakas, who had served on the Carpathian at the time of the Titanic's fateful last voyage. Fazekas – who settled in France sometime after 1920 – had sent the postcard of the ship home to show his relatives where he worked. Doubtlessly, stories such as these remain a good potential point of departure for learning more about the period.

## Migration During and Following Periods of War

Beyond migration for work, the period in question also witnessed population shifts as a result of Romania's declaration of war after the August 1916 invasion of Transylvania. Specifically, people living near the border – mostly Hungarians, including some Csángó – moved to take refuge in the centre of the country. The Csángó of Brassó (Braşov) County travelled by train or, more often, by cart to Torontál County, today part of Serbia. Many of them still retell the stories of their parents or grandparents regarding how they travelled, where they went, what they carried with them, and even what tragedies happened along the way. Etelka Barkó of Bácsfalu (Baciu), for instance, told of how her grandparents had always grown pumpkins in their garden for use in feeding their stock. As refugees, however, they witnessed locals in the places they stayed eating pumpkins themselves, a habit they then followed upon their return home.

It should be noted that when, during World War II, Northern Transylvania was returned to Hungary, Brassó (Braşov) County remained part of the Kingdom of Romania. As a result, many men (most of them deserters), and sometimes even families, crossed the Romanian-Hungarian border to begin a new life in Székelyföld

(Székely Land). This migration prompted the founding of the mission community of Lutheran Csángó refugees, one of the reasons one still finds a Lutheran church in still found in Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfântu Gheorghe) today. During the wartime years, a large number of men joined the Hungarian Army, a circumstance that came with its fair share of tragedy. An opportunity for fresh research on this particular topic has recently arisen with the discovery of a number of previously unreviewed documents on Brassó (Braşov) County in the Romanian National Archive.

To summarize the impacts of the migration on the Csángó communities under scrutiny, the first consideration to note is the aim of earning money and attaining a better lifestyle, spending either back home on larger houses, or merely in the support of family members. A second purpose, primarily among younger people, was to gain new knowledge for future family life. Returning youth brought new ideas back home with them even when migration occurred as the result of a tragic historic event, such as subjection to serfdom or the onset of a world war. Because no research or fieldwork completed to date has focused on these topics, the facts gathered for this paper were at best tangential, leaving this area one for deeper, more intense scrutiny in the future.

*Translated by the author and language proofed by Rachel Maltese*

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### **A Brassó megyei csángók migrációs folyamatai a politikai és gazdasági események, világháborúk hatására**

A tíz barcasági csángó falu lakói az elmúlt két évszázad során többször hagyták el szülőföldjüket: hol kényszerből, hol szabad akaratukból. Az egykori román fejedelemségekbe utazók már a 19. század elején hírt adtak arról, hogy a Barcaságról származó magyarokkal találkoztak, ám arról, hogy miként vetődtek oda, nem számoltak be a krónikások. A 20. század első felében ott lévőkről már sokkal több az információnk. Nemcsak a sajtóra vagy egyházi jelentésekre támasz-

kodhatunk, hanem megjelennek a családi történetek, hagyatékok, akárcsak az amerikai munka esetében. Ami a barcasági csángók kivándorlásait, illetve meneküléseit illeti, a legjobban feldolgozottak az 1916-os menekülést tekinthetjük, amikor a román betörés után több ezren voltak kénytelenek elhagyni otthonaikat, és igen sokan a tíz csángó faluból a messzi Torontál megyében találtak menedéket.

### **Migrația ceangăilor din Țara Bârsei sub impactul evenimentelor politice, economice și a războaielor**

În ultimele două secole locuitorii celor zece sate ceangăiești din Țara Bârsei și-au părăsit locul de baștină – din necesitate sau din propria voință – de mai multe ori. Călătorii de prin țările române au relatat despre întâlnirea acestor maghiari originari din Țara Bârsei încă de la începutul secolului al XIX-lea, însă nu au pomenit nimic despre cum au ajuns acolo. Despre cei sosiți în prima parte a secolului XX avem mult mai multe informații. Ne putem baza nu numai pe presă sau rapoartele bisericești, ci și pe istoriile, moștenirile familiale, așa cum se observă și în cazul muncii în America. În ceea ce privește migrația, refugiul ceangăilor din Țara Bârsei, cel mai bine documentat ar fi refugiul din 1916, atunci când după pătrunderea trupelor române mai multe mii de persoane au fost nevoite să-și abandoneze căminele, iar destul de mulți dintre locuitorii celor zece sate s-au refugiat în îndepărtatul Comitat Torontal.

### **Migration of the Brassó (Braşov) County Csángós: The Impact of Politics, War, and Economy**

In the last two centuries the inhabitants of the ten Csángó villages of Barcaság (Burzenland) left their homes on several occasion, sometimes by necessity, sometimes by free will. Travellers to the Romanian principalities noted already at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the presence of Hungarians from Barcaság (Burzenland), but mentioned nothing of the reasons or ways getting there. We have much more information on those arriving in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We can rely not only on the press or ecclesiastic reports, but also on family histories and heritage, just like in the case of migration for work in America. Concerning the migrations, respectively refugees of the Csángós of Barcaság (Burzenland), the most documented moment would be the refuge from 1916, when due to the intrusion of the Romanian army several thousand locals were forced to leave their homes, and a large part of the inhabitants of the ten Csángó villages took refuge in the distant Torontál (Torontal) County.

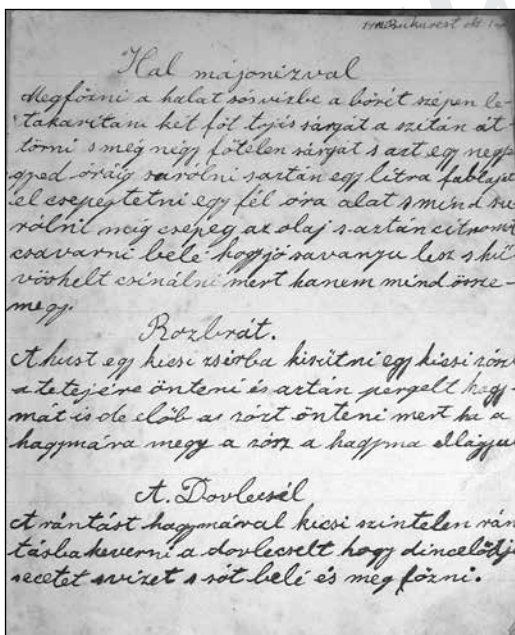
## Pictures



1. Bucharest in the 1900s



2. Anna Benedek Sárancsi with her mother Anna Szabó around 1900



3. Vilma Pajor's mother's hand written cook book