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Consequences of the Resettlement of the Bukovina Székelys between 1941 and 1944

In the 18th century, significant demographic changes took place in Hungary. By the end of the 17th century, fights against the Turkish and then the Habsburg had resulted in a massive loss of population, and vast areas became desolate. This started the migration process in the 18th century, which caused the significant enlargement and transformation of the population of Hungary. As a result of internal population movements, immigration and organised resettlements, the country's population doubled, but the proportion of Hungarians fell below 50 percent, and the country became a linguistically, inter-denominationally mixed (Barta 2000: 94–95, 153–154). The Habsburg government introduced reforms, renewed its foreign policy, jurisdiction, education, the functioning of churches, among other things, and reorganised the army. The reorganisation of the Empire's south-eastern border guard led to the loss of the Székelys' former privileges and freedoms.¹ This led to a bloody conflict between the Austrian government and the Székelys, causing massive human sacrifices and a strong wave of emigration as they fled in masses from Székelyföld (Székely Land).² Székelys emigrating, fleeing at that time later settled in Bukovina, which had a Ukrainian-Romanian indigenous population. This is how the Bukovina Székely group was formed. Bukovina was part of the Moldovan principality of the Polish Kingdom, then in 1775 got under the jurisdiction of Austria. From then on, it became a multi-ethnic area; alongside the Ukrainian and Romanian majority, Austrian-German, Polish, Slovak, Slovenian, Serbian, Croatian, Armenian, Jewish and Gypsy populations settled as well, and the Bukovina Székelys established their villages named Andrásfalva (Măneuți), Hadikfalva (Dornești), Istensegíts (Țibeni), Fogadjisten (Iacobești) and Józseffalva (Vornicenii Mici) (Sántha 2009: 36).

During the one and a half centuries spent in Bukovina, they preserved their Hungarian language and culture and their Western Christian – Roman Catholic

1 Székelys are a Hungarian ethnic group who had lived in Transylvania from the 12th-13th century serving as border guards. Székely Land, along with Transylvania, became Romanian territory in 1920 (Kósa 1981a, 1981b).

2 Within the Kingdom of Hungary, Székely Land is a territory of the Transylvanian principality where Székelys have lived in a large group since the Middle Ages (Kósa 1981a, 1981b).

and Calvinist – religion. The Székelys living here followed the Roman Catholic and, to a lesser extent, the Calvinist faith. They had their own churches, priests and schools, and formed mostly endogenous communities. They were large families with many children, thus from the end of the 19th century the overpopulated villages released emigrant groups of thousands in search of livelihoods.

As a result of these emigrations, the former Bukovina Székelys still live in Serbia, several places in Romania, and in Canada and South America (Oberding 1939/1991: 110–118). Bukovina became part of the Kingdom of Romania following World War II., with the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, ie under Romanian jurisdiction, and the fate of the Székelys living in this minority deteriorated (Sántha 2009: 113–114). In addition to the perceived and increasing minority oppression, the overpopulated villages also had livelihood problems. From the impoverished and minority oppression of the Székely population of Székely, the settlement, ie settling in Hungary, became an urgent necessity (Sántha 2009: 126–127).

This demand coincided with the intention of the Hungarian government, which officially dealt with the issue of the Bukovina Székelys' repatriation in 1940. Eventually concrete discussions started as to which areas could be considered for the accommodation of nearly 3200 families. (Sajti 1984: 6–13.) Finally, Bácska, an area in southern Hungary, was brought up, which, under the decree of the post-war peace treaty, was under Serbian rule from 1920, where southern Slavs moved during this time. In 1941 Bácska was returned to Hungary, and some of the southern Slavs who moved here were expelled so that the Bukovina Székelys could settle. According to the plan, Bukovina's Székelys would be brought back on Hungarian soil, and the unfavorable ethnic relations would also be sorted by settling a Hungarian population. (Sajti 1984: 27)

Bácska was a completely different natural, economic, social and political medium compared to Bukovina. As part of the Hungarian Kingdom, Bácska had been inhabited by Hungarians for thousands of years, was one of the most densely populated, rich agricultural, cereal, fruit and vine-growing areas of Hungary in the Middle Ages, which, as a result of peasant wars, Turkish campaigns, the long occupation, and the destruction by Serbian troops, grew wild and lost a large part of its Hungarian population (Kocsis 2011: 339). At the turn of the 20th century it became almost completely depopulated (Kocsis 2011: 341). As a result of resettlements, it became a multinational and multidenominational region, but the number of Hungarians were also gradually increasing, reaching the highest proportion compared to other ethnic groups by the beginning of the 1900s (Kocsis 2011: 367). The 1910 census identified the local population as 38% Serbian, 28,1% Hungarian, 21,4% German, 6% Croatian (Bunyevac, Sokac), 5% Romanian and 3,7% Slovakian (Kocsis 2011: 367).

At the end of the World War I, Serbian troops occupied southern Hungary, saying they had joined the occupied territories to Serbia. The Yugoslav land reform discriminated against the Hungarians, for example, the land was only given to a Slavic

population (Török 1941: 209–210). In the framework of the land reform, the southern Slavs, the so-called ‘dobrovoljac’ were introduced here. They were voluntarily fighting during the World War I. against the Austro-Hungarian Empire, mostly from Crna Gora, Bosnia and Serbia (Valastyán 2013: 51).

In the spring of 1941, the South Slavs settled after 1920 were displaced by the Hungarian authorities and their Bukovina Székely settled in their empty houses (Gombos 1942: 21). According to the Romanian-Hungarian agreement on the resettlement of the Székelys signed in May 1941 (Sajti 1984: 26), the deployment of the Hungarians in Hungary to the Hungarians in Bácska was carried out for forty days, in 1941 between May 10 and June 21 (Óry-Oberding 1967: 185). The allocation of the evacuated dwellings and the associated real estate properties was completed in three months (Óry-Oberding 1967: 186). The approximately fourteen thousand people were moved to twenty-eight settlements, farms and farms that are located one hundred kilometers apart.

The administration of the villages, the unity of families, generations, the organization of ecclesiastical life and health care, the launching of education and management belonged to the tasks of the Government Commissioner. Schools, health homes, kindergartens and day care centers were set up in the colonies, and the latter provided childcare for the children under supervision. Originally there was no church in any of the settlements, so one of its suitable buildings was designated as a place of sanctuary and worship. Economic colonists were placed in the villages, who in the first year were assigned a controlling role in the agricultural work carried out jointly (Óry-Oberdnig 1967: 185) in accordance with the instructions of the district economic inspector.³ In addition to the Government Security, the military administration also took part in the placement of the Székely settled families, creating the necessary tools and conditions. (*Picture 1.*)

Many historical writings were born about the installation itself.⁴ My research focuses on how Bukovina’s Székelys lifestyle, mentality, community life, and, in general, the culture of Bácska spent three years.

Available sources and recollections also show that the period between 1941 and 1944 was decisive for the population. In addition to this, Bukovina’s Székely self-consciousness developed at this time, when they met with organized health care, day-care nursery schools, Hungarian-language education, and new economic knowledge for them. (*Picture 2.*)

3 “After the harvest, all settler families received their prescribed portions; over a hectare’s worth of corn [...] as well as 1kg of bread and 250 gram of bacon for each couple.” (Óry-Oberdnig 1967: 185.)

4 Writings by György Gombos (Gombos 1942), Antal Halász (Halász 1941), Zoltán Csuka (Csuka 1941) vagy Mihály Szabados (Szabados 1941), and studies by Mária V. Kápolnás (Kápolnás 1994) and Gábor Vincze (Vincze 2001) and others discuss Moldavian Csángós arriving together with Bukovina Székelys. Preludes, details and political aspects of the systematic resettlement are discussed by Enikő A. Sajti. (Sajti 1982, 1984, 1987, 2004, 2010). Balázs Valastyán discusses the resettlement, land distribution, work of the settlement supervisors (Valastyán 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Seres 2009) while Attila Seres published relevant documents held in the archives of Szent László Association.

In the course of my work I would like to investigate the circumstances and consequences of the Bácska installation, the events of the years spent in Bácska, and examine the changes in everyday life, lifestyle, family, relational relationships, religious life and culture.

I have been working more intensively since 1998 with the Székely Bukovina. The Hungarian center of the ethnic group is Bonyhád in Tolna County. The Bukovina National Association of Székelys, which has been in operation since 1989, has been digitizing for twenty years, collecting photographs and documents held by the Székely families. Thanks to this, source-related photographs and original documents related to the period (1941–1944) and the area (Bácska) are available in digital form. Between 2004 and 2012 I worked as an ethnologist at the Völgység Museum in Bonyhád, where the largest public collection of the Székelys of Bukovina is located. During this time, I received valuable data from the inventory of objects, photos and documents.

In recent years, I have reviewed some of the large-scale installation documentation contained in the Hungarian National Archives, from which we can get more information on the public health, social, cultural, educational, church, and management issues of the villages in the Székely settlements.⁵

In addition, I got acquainted with the manuscripts, reports and photographs of the collections from 1941 to 1944 in the Ethnological Archives of the Museum of Ethnography (Budapest).⁶ I visited some of the former Székely settlements in today's Serbia, taking photos of their current status, old settler houses, farm buildings, agricultural land. I have been interviewing 20 years ago with Bukovina-born 1941, who provided valuable information and additions to my topic from their own or family's life history.

The recollections and written documents I have collected and known from the literature testify that, although compared to the past one and a half centuries spent in Bukovina, these three years are just a short break in the history of the Székelys of Bukovina, yet they have brought profound changes in the life of the community and the individual. All remembrance or their descendants were set up as a major event in Bácska. The experience of "repatriation" affirmed the members of the community in their belonging to the Hungarians, and by becoming one of the focal points of domestic and international interest, we can be regarded as an identity-building situation, because they were then summed up as Bukovina's Székely so they got into the news and public awareness, then they started to show them positively through their values, highlighting their Hungarians, their tasty dialect and their rich traditions.

Politicians, journalists, ethnographers and anthropologists sought out as depositors of the ancient culture of Hungarians.⁷ The press was informed by the

5 TML X./51. Documents of the Székely Museum Association of Bonyhád, 1897–1947, Box 1-55.

6 NM EA 8175-8200, 28547, 28544, 28493, 28492, 28174.

7 MNL-OL-K428-MTI-Könyomatse-Daily Reports, June 19, 19, 20, 24.

Hungarian State of its scale-specific deployment action. Propaganda, a lively interest, came back to the Székely community in Bukovina, and after being a former minority, they finally felt equal and even special. The published reports served political purposes and presented the installation action as the sole success of the government, which became known not only in Hungary but also internationally. The press of the countries belonging to the Axis powers, the Italian and German newspapers sympathized with the government's deployment action.⁸

Translated by Noémi Cselik

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⁸ MNL-OL-K428-MTI-Printout-Daily Reports, June 18, 21, 21, September 2, November 6, November 8, December 18, 23, 27,

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Archives

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A bukovinai székelyek telepítésének következményei 1941 és 1944 között

A bukovinai magyar falvak lakosságát 1941-ben Bácskában a „dobrovoljácok” (szerb önkéntesek) lakóházaiba költöztették, majd onnan néhány év múlva, anyagi javaikat hátrahagyva menekülniük kellett. 1945 májusában a dél-dunántúli falvakban a kitelepített németek házait jelölték

ki számukra új otthonul. A bukovinai székelyek történetéről számos, több szempontból közelítő írás született, arról azonban, hogy mi történt velük 1941 ősztől 1944 ősziig, már kevesebbet tudunk. Az itt eltöltött három év eseményeinek, változásainak felkutatása ez idáig még nem történt meg. Az öt falu népét, mintegy tizennégyezer főt huszonnyolc településre szétszórva, egymástól akár száz kilométerre fekvő szállásokra telepítették. A falvak vezetése, a nemzetségek összetartása, az egyházi élet megszervezése, az oktatás minden településen megoldásra várt. A szerző arra keresi a választ, hogy ez milyen módon sikerült, és milyen hátrányt szenvedett a korábbi zárt közösség, miközben addig ismeretlen új hatásokkal és jelenségekkel is szembesülniük kellett.

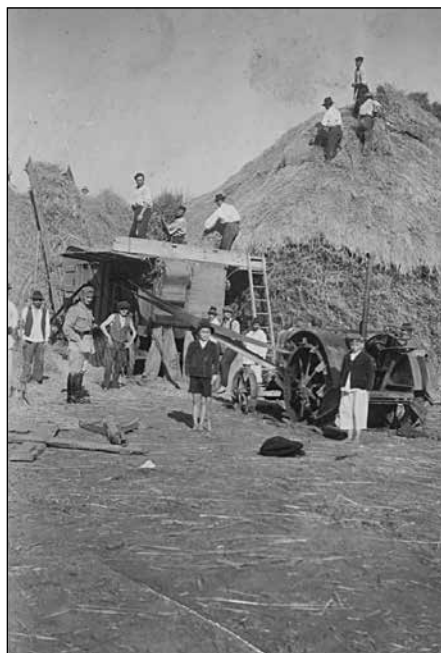
Consecințele strămutării secuilor din Bucovina între anii 1941–1944

În anul 1941 populația satelor secuiești din Bucovina a fost așezată în regiunea Bacica, în casele voluntarilor sârbi (numiți „dobrovoliați”), însă doar după câțiva ani au fost nevoiți să părăsească această regiune, lăsându-și bunurile materiale în urmă. În mai 1945 casele nemților relocați din satele regiunii Dél-Dunántúl au fost desemnate drept noile cămine ale secuilor. Despre istoria secuilor din Bucovina s-au născut numeroase lucrări, din diverse puncte de vedere, însă nu știm prea multe despre ce s-a întâmplat cu aceștia între toamna anului 1941 și cea a anului 1944. Cercetarea evenimentelor, schimbărilor din acești trei ani nu s-a efectuat până în acest moment. Populația celor cinci sate, aproximativ 14 000 de persoane, au fost așezate în 28 de localități diferite, împrăștiate chiar și la o sută de kilometri unele de altele. Conducerea satelor, legătura dintre neamuri, organizarea vieții bisericești, educația erau probleme ce trebuia rezolvate în fiecare localitate. Autoarea dorește să cunoască cum s-au reușit toate aceste lucruri, și ce dezavantaje a resimțit această comunitate, care anterior fusese o comunitate închisă, în timp ce a fost nevoită să se confrunte cu noi influențe și fenomene necunoscute.

Consequences of the Resettlement of the Bukovina Szeklers between 1941 and 1944

In 1941 the population of the Szekler villages from Bukovina was moved to Bácska, into the homes of the Serbian volunteers ('dobrovoljac') from where, but a few years later they had to flee, leaving their belongings behind. In May 1945 they were ordered to take up residence in the abandoned homes of expelled Southern Transdanubian Germans. There have been several works written from various points of view about the story of the Bukovina Szeklers, but less is known of what happened to this population between 1941 and 1944. Research into the events and changes of these three years has not been carried out yet. The population of five villages, some 14000 people were moved to 28 locations separated by hundreds of kilometres in distance. The governance of villages, maintenance of lineages, organization of religious life and education had to be dealt with in each locality. The author is interested in how this was achieved and what disadvantages the formerly closed community endured while they also had to face unfamiliar influences and phenomena.

Pictures



1. Threshing control in settled villages, Horthyvára, 1941



2. Group of day-care nursery schoolers, Horthyvára, 1941