SAXONS' MENTALITIES AND LEISURE TIME

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Abstract: The colonization of Transylvania by the German population occurred at the initiative of Hungarian royalty at the end of the 12th century and the beginning of the 13th century. They brought new agricultural techniques from the West and developed the economy of the intra-Carpathian province through crafts. Their autonomous organization in Transylvania developed certain mentalities over the centuries. Also, their leisure time was organized: children were trained and educated to practice sports and play a musical instrument. Winter holidays and Easter were spent in the community, and dance gatherings provided young people with opportunities to meet and parents to agree on the startup of new families. The preservation of ethnicity was socially achieved through such marriages, and economically through guilds composed only of Saxon citizens.

Keywords: associations, folk theatre, reading societies, religious celebration.

I. Introduction

The Settlement of German Population in Transylvania

Beginning with the reign of King Géza II the Hungarian royalty wanted to control the territory between the Carpathians. Hence, German colonists were brought in the area. The colonization occurred in several stages from the Northwest to the Southwest of Transylvania and culminated with the organization of the provostship and later the province of Sibiu. During that time, at the initiative of the papacy and Hungarian royalty, the Teutonic Knights settled in Bârsa County (Țara Bârsei) in 1211. They did not remain there for very long: they showed signs of independence and were expelled a few years later.

After this period, the "Fundus Regius" (i.e.Royal Domain) territory inhabited by the Saxons, was established. King Andrew II of Hungary through the Golden Bull issued in 1224. The initial privileges were preserved and expanded with the establishment of the Saxon University in the 15th century.

The Saxons' obligations to Hungarian royalty consisted of:

- An annual tax: Martinzins (which was distributed in the territory by local authorities, per units of 10 households called Dica);
- War obligations - very demanding in the centuries I am discussing in this article (such as fortifying citadels or organizing military troops);
- Financial and produce obligations during wartime;

In exchange, the Saxons benefitted from organizational and administrative autonomy (by seats and districts), and the status of their towns was acknowledged by royalty. The Saxons were led by a district administrative head in Sibiu, whereas in the territory they were under the rule of royal and seat judges who led the administrative units. The Saxons also had the right to act as the first instance in court, and hence most criminal cases were settled by the Saxon district head or by the Saxon University.

The guilds - organizations of craftsmen from towns and villages - also needed to have their own status and be acknowledged by the University. They represented a benchmark of prosperous economic life in Transylvania. The role of the church, especially the Evangelical Church, in the community during the time period covered by this article consisted in maintaining moral and healthy principles. The development of schools signals the evolution of well-knit communities. Various associations of "boys and girls from the

Saxon settlements" were first attested in 1370 in Sibiu(1). The constant care for youth and their development according to moral principles was obvious.

II. Preservation of the ethnic spirit

The Saxons, like other ethnic groups, were keen on preserving their ethnicity. That was obvious across multiple levels such as their living arrangements, the language they spoke or their religion. Thus, even when there were mixed Romanian-Saxon communities, they did not live together but separately in well-defined spaces, on separate streets, or even in separate neighborhoods. In this respect, they lived alongside other communities rather than together with Romanians or Hungarians.

The German language and the Evangelical religion were two essential factors in preserving the identity of the Transylvanian Saxons. Even though they spoke the Saxon dialect at home, schooling was conducted in modern German. In the smallest communities there were primary schools, while gymnasiums (secondary schools) functioned in two important centers: Sibiu and Brașov. Those who wanted to attend university level studies had the doors of European universities open to them.

The Church and its priests were the unifying factors in the Saxon community. The Church took care of maintaining moral conduct norms in Saxon settlements, shepherded both young people and newlyweds, and organized religious celebrations according to the Evangelical calendar. Marriages were forged within the ethnic group, thus preserving traditions. Exceptions were rare and flouted by the community.

Printed media, reading societies and folk theaters were other factors contributing to the preservation of Saxons' ethnic spirit and represented a small part of their mentality. We are reviewing their role in safeguarding the Saxon community's salient features below.

1.1. German language printed media

Printed media was a means to communicate and relay community issues. It emerged in the mid-18th century as a general phenomenon and represented a means of expression highlighting general political, socio-economic, or cultural events, as well as important local events concerning only a specific community. The German language press targeted the Saxon ethnics and their communities. In major urban areas like Brașov or Sibiu, printed media appeared early -17th century- in the form of leaflets. In the 18th century newspapers would be diverse and issued on a regular basis. They reached almost all Saxon communities in Transylvania through various distribution means. Our article will focus on two examples of local media: a newspaper issued in Sighișoara *(Gross-Kokler Bote)*, and another one published in Sibiu but targeting the Saxons in Rupea *(Repser Heimatdank).*

The Gross-Koller Bote (*The Messenger of Târnava Mare or The Messenger from Târnava Mare*) was published twice a week in Sighișoara from 1923 to 1940. It was also subtitled *Schäßburger Zeitung.* It addressed both the German community in Sighișoara and Saxons from surrounding areas. It appeared in a tabloid format and was 6-8 pages long. The main article was posted on the front page and dedicated to important weekly events: commemorations of secular or church leaders, or nationalist articles about Saxon rights. Page 2 featured episodic articles about the history of Saxon settlements – for example in 1932 Hemine Melas publishes an article titled "About Rupea's past" in two issues of the journal, and the same article is continued until 1935. The whole issue dated 23rd December 1934 is about Christmas: the first two pages include articles about the significance of Christmas, Christmas poems, and donatiosn made on this occasion.

Pages 3-4 or 5-6 include the "Daily Information" section, which was the most comprehensive and interesting from the entire newspaper. The information published is about the organization of the ecclesiastical gathering where the Evangelical bishop would also

participate, women's or men's association meetings, music concerts, weather reports, events aimed at the commemorations of community personalities, organization of events such the Christmas ball, political information such as Hitler's' s rise to power, local council elections or the opening of kindergartens.

Pages 7-8 include advertisements whish are quite diverse:

- Summer garden opening at hotel Imperial in Sibiu;
- Public bath schedule and prices;
- Obituaries;
- Housing rentals;
- Land and garden sales;
- Repair services for various objects;
- Charitable donations;
- Announcements about new book releases and advice to purchase them;
- Christmas lottery tickets;
- Business advertisements (for alcoholic drinks - Johann Leonhard's Diana,purchase of old jewelry purchase or old sewing machines);
- Publication of other newspapers like *Bukarester Tageblatt* targeting the German community in Romania.

The paper provides glimpses of daily life through which we can reconstruct the preoccupations of a community closely connected with regional and European events. Leisure time and its quality were a constant concern in Saxon communities. The latter were characterized by a playful spirit that perfectly combined with efforts to advance educational background and acquire moral principles required by the social fabric.

1.2. Reading Societies

Reading societies represented a pleasant way to spend long winter evenings in both urban and rural environments. For Saxons, these replaced the traditional work gatherings and evening gatherings ("clăci" and "șezători") that were specific to Romanian communities. Under the guidance of priests and school teachers, they were a way to spend leisure time. During these gatherings, particularly in the evening, people would read aloud passages from the Bible, stories, fables, and tales. In larger, more cosmopolitan Saxon cities, the wealthy people and bourgeoisie would gather in reading societies and even present their own creations, read newspapers published in the West or in Transylvania, discuss politics, or play cards.

Reading societies represented primarily an opportunity for socializing and spending leisure time. In rural communities, they were held only during winter. Once spring came and work in the fields began there was no more time for such gatherings. In the city, it was like a five o'clock tea gathering held one day a week in the homes of aristocratic families. However, the Saxons' moderation was renowned, and there was no waste, and more importantly, no conflicts or incidents occurred at these gatherings because the sanctions included in city regulations for such incidents were harsh.

Theatrical performances is another example of spending leisure time.

2.3. Folk theater and festive events

Folk theater was primarily linked to the community and performed during its celebrations such as the annual gathering of the neighborhoods, the beginning of Lent or during the events related to Ash Wednesday. Remescu Mirel conducted a detailed study on the imagination employed by such events that aroused villagers' laughter. In this respect, he

made a comparison between two settlements: Saschiz and Valea Viilor. The whole community participated in the celebration but the main role players belonged to the Saxon community. Exhibits of bizarre costumes and different roles can be found at the carnivals or Fortzug as they were called in the Saxon dialect, as well as during the events celebrating the Neighborhood Day on January 24. They would dress up as various characters: huntsmen, brides, soldiers, policemen, or as grotesque characters who frightened people but were meant to drive away spirits. The evil spirits of winter were banished and the coming of spring was heralded. It was a special theater like ceremony with masks conducted in the streets. The strange procession was accompanied by the merry laughter of people attending. The locals standing at the gates would serve the latter with drinks and doughnuts. It was a means to spend leisure time and celebrate at the same time. The school band or the mature men's band accompanied the bizarre processions and the music contributed to the nuances of characters' lines. Such street celebrations were the game of Lolelor in Agnita, the March of the Horses in Saschiz or Marientag in Viilor Valley. The ad-hoc theater was representative for the Saxon tradition. The authorities, the priest and the headmaster of the local school were responsible for the organization and smooth running of the events.

III. Leisure Time

3.1. Organization of the Brass Band

Musical education was a parallel activity to general education in all Saxon communities. Music teachers or people who knew how to play an instrument would teach groups of children. Small groups of instrumentalists would perform at school celebrations. Later, these musicians would become part of the town's Brass Band Associations, called Blasmusik (in the Saxon dialect).

The role of professional bands was to entertain people during Sunday afternoon promenades, perform during various Saxon celebrations and accompany funeral processions. These were associations of instrumentalists funded from the town hall's budget. A brass band's composition consisted mainly of brass and wind instruments and could include up to 25-30 people. Most groups were composed of men. In cities like Brașov or Sibiu, there were also the bands of students from German high schools. Learning how to play an instrument and participating in a band was a useful way to spend leisure time and, in particular, a means to engage young people and adults in community entertainment and other activities.

In Saschiz, "the first brass bands attested in the region had been established since the 14th century, and their activity continued until the 19th-20th centuries. In Saschiz, the first attestation of the brass band dates back to 1737 and is recorded by a document from the heritage of the evangelical church heritage which specifies that the band was composed of 30 instrumentalists"(2)

Dance evenings were another leisure time activity.

3.2. Dance gatherings and balls

Dance gatherings and balls were organized on the occasion of major religious holidays: Easter and Christmas. They were often organized on the initiative of local Lutheran parishes. They were closed events - only ethnic Saxons gathered- aimed at preserving tradition and allowing young people to get to know one other and start new families and together in such events. They were organized in public places: church halls, cultural halls or even outdoors. Participants would play games, dance and socialize. People had thus the opportunity to catch up on local rumors and to observe their community members.

Before the First and Second World War, these gatherings had to be approved by the local authorities and fire brigades. The archives in Brasov contains numerous such documents

with requests for the organization of meetings requiring such approvals. The events were well supervised to contain agitators' activities.

The picturesque charm of Sighișoara is revealed by a traveler who notices the groups of German schoolchildren who "had the privilege of ringing the bells of St. Nicholas church and attending funerals, for which they were paid. It was also their custom to sing four times a year under the windows of the inhabitants, which brought them a certain income"(3).

Balls were numerous: "many of the celebrations during the year ended with a ball for young people. There were also special balls organized by the craftsmen's associations, neighborhoods or brotherhoods" (4). Such events were organized in accordance with important dates and seasons. In autumn there were two balls: one dedicated to the harvesting period and the other to the conscripts (that is the young males who would join the military and leave the community for a longer period of time).

Before Advent, two celebrations were held: November 11th - St. Martin's Day and November 25th - St. Catherine's Ball (the last ball before Christmas). Balls were held in all Saxon communities during: Christmas holidays, Pentecost and Easter. Additionally, at the end of January, two more balls were organized: neighborhoods' party on January 24th and the ball of the married couples. Everybody attending these balls wore traditional outfit and brought food and drinks from home. The local brass band, dance groups and the folk theater representatives would entertain people.

By far, the most complex Saxon celebration was the Carnival or Fasching organized at the end of Advent. Originally, that was certainly a pagan celebration. The carnival was the means to express the joy that the cold winter season ended and spring was about to begin, as well as a way to drive away evil spirits. For example, in Agnita, Sibiu County, there was the custom of using the so-called "Iole" - people wearing masks and small bells meant to drive away evil spirits. The event would las for a whole week. People dressed up as various characters and the entire community rejoiced.

Family events were also held within and with the help of the community. Weddings are one such example.

3.3. Family events: weddings

Weddings were a good opportunity to consolidate relations within families. They were organized after the parents of future groom and bride would make the preliminary agreements, the girl's dowry was established and the engagement was announced in the church.

Wedding preparations were conducted by neighborhood members throughout the week before the event and included gate decoration, slaughtering pigs and poultry, preparing food. The whole community participated in the wedding ceremony. Traditional clothing consisted of festive folk outfit worn by wedding guests and the attire of the bride and groom was the most festive. Weddings represented important moments in a community's life, and the ritual consisted in the religious ceremony performed in church followed by the feast at the groom's house. The young couple received gifts ranging from land to household items, clothing, bedding, and many good wishes.

In traditional Romanian communities the whole village participated in weddings and their steps were strictly observed: the engagement was performed with parents' approval, establishing the girl's dowry, inviting participants to the wedding, the official religious wedding ceremony and the feats. Wedding orations are representative for the oral culture of the Romanian people, as well as for its playful spirit. The orations were made by master of ceremonies ("vornic") who conducted the entire ritual. Unfortunately, nowadays, traditional customs are no longer preserved. What is more, rituals of other peoples are borrowed and

they are in no way related to Romanian traditions. Nowadays, weddings have become a means to exhibit luxury and more often than not a grotesque show.

3.5.Playing sports

Playing sports and establishing gymnastic teams was a common element in all German schools. Playing sports was part of the education offered to young people. Several times a year there were inter-school and inter-high school sports competitions. Harmonious development of body and mind was an important desideratum, as well as a way for adults to spend their free time and an opportunity to socialize.

IV. Conclusion

Our study illustrates some aspects of everyday life in the Saxon communities in Transylvania. It is about a community that has adapted to the realities of the landscape and created its own economic, political and cultural structures. For 800 years, community members have preserved the dialects of the areas in Western Europe from where they came and thus managed to communicate one with another. At the same time they also learned modern German in school and that obviously opened up new perspectives. The salient feature of Saxon communities is the preservation of their ethnicity and of the activities incurred by that. Among activities contributing to ethnicity preservation we can enumerate playing sports, performances of brass bands and folk theater groups, and celebrations where dancing or playing mask games at the end of winter as a ritual of renewal. The participation of the whole community in the preparations anticipating marriage ceremonies or accompanying the departure of community members from the living are representative for the Saxons' mentality and sensitivity at the same time. The Saxons consider Transylvania their home, even if their main arguments are of an economic nature. That is why, even if they have immigrated to Germany, they return at least once a year to their native land.

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