CHAPTER 2

The Friends of Progress in the Transylvanian Age of Reform

The Hungarian Age of Reform, as the roughly two decades of political and social reforms before 1848 were called, brought the maturation of the national and liberal perspective in politics and scholarship. This chapter shows how Landeskunde received a new momentum in these decades, when identification with the nation as a cultural community, transcending social boundaries, overwrote territorial allegiance as part of a Hungarian politics that took place both in Transylvania and Hungary. As seen in the previous chapter, Landeskunde within the Hungarian intellectual milieus had endorsed cultural unification already in the decades prior, as reflected by the declarations of György Aranka. The 1830s and 1840s enhanced the public visibility of patriotic scholarship in an emerging public sphere, consisting of voluntary associations and periodicals, which endorsed the exploration of the Transylvanian fatherland. The new movement of voluntary associations kept certain references to the earlier exclusive intellectual milieus, but it also presented new features. Knowledge about the patria became the building block of a more generally understood self-formation (Bildung) and of national improvement. As the present chapter will argue, the dilemma of the 1830s concerned the channeling of the growing popular interest in Landeskunde into more institutionalized forms. The ensuing solutions and strategies for designing specific social spaces to the practice of Landeskunde and honismeret reveal the cultural and political differences in the attitude of the elites behind these plans.

The first two sections present the attempts at the institutionalization of scholarship in the Transylvanian Saxon and Hungarian milieus. The Verein für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde was established in 1840, initiated as a voluntary association, whose program and social profile shall be looked at in greater detail further below. The simultaneously emerging twin project, the Transylvanian Museum, modeled after the Hungarian National Museum (1808), was similarly a grassroots initiative of the Transylvanian Hungarian cultural elite, and yet its final agenda was drafted at the diet. Intended as the academic successor of the Manuscript Editing Society of Aranka, it was planned as a state-funded institution. Even if eventually the campaign did not receive the approval form the Viennese chancellery, the preparations reveal a consistent cultural policy of the Hungarian elites in Transylvania. The second part of the chapter analyses
the dynamics of the Transylvanian scholarly public in the 1840s and asks about the possibilities of scholarly cooperation between Saxon and Hungarian intellectual milieus in the context of an ethnically divided civic sphere.

The Age of Reform combined the demand for social and political modernization with the linguistic Magyarization of the administration and parts of the educational system. Enjoying support from Hungary, its proponents aimed to create the prerequisites for civil liberties by abolishing serfdom and removing territorial privileges in the process of establishing a Hungarian parliamentary state. This was the core of the Transylvanian Hungarian reform movement, which inevitably stirred the Saxon opposition in the provincial diet. By the eve of the Hungarian war of independence in 1848, the Transylvanian Diet had accepted the union of Hungary and Transylvania in an effort to save their autonomy in the emerging nation-state. The Romanian political elite too, who, apart from the Greek Catholic bishops, had no representation at the Transylvanian Diet, either tied their acceptance of the union to their recognition as the ‘fourth nation’ or rejected it in favor of an autonomous Transylvania; a *sine qua non* for their leaders was the recognition of Romanians as a nation equal to the others. The Hungarian politicians’ refusal of Romanian requests for national-political emancipation was couched in terms of prospective liberal rights for the whole population of Transylvania.

In order to understand the cultural developments, it will be necessary to first cast a glance at the social background and patronage of scholarship of a patriotic bent in the broader European French- and German-speaking context, most prominently Prussia, since the latter shaped the outlook and strategies of the Hungarian and Transylvanian elites. The most important novelty in this respect is the reorganization of education along neohumanist values, and the further engagement of the state in the institutionalization of a historicized and national interpretation of culture. After the Napoleonic Wars, the Prussian state embraced the quickly growing social movement for the ‘musealization’ and preservation of ‘monuments,’ the latter recognized as having a national and historical significance. As early as 1819, the Prussian Ministry of Spiritual, Educational, and Medical Affairs began supporting the systematic collection of the movable and immovable artifacts declared to be of historical value.

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