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**“RECOLLECTIONS FROM TRANSYLVANIA DURING THOSE
TEMPESTUOUS DAYS.”
THE TRANSYLVANIAN FRONT OF WORLD WAR I AS REFLECTED IN
THE MEMOIRS OF TRANSYLVANIAN SAXONS**

Abstract: Romania’s entry into World War I opened up a new front to the north and to the east of the Carpathian Mountains, where the Romanian Army was conducting military operations with the purpose of occupying Transylvania. Romania’s declaration of war caused panic among Transylvania’s Saxon and Hungarian populations, triggering the evacuation of these ethnic communities from the areas into which the Romanian troops were about to advance. This study illustrates the ways in which different Saxon civilians and military in Transylvania experienced those moments of armed confrontations and the “Romanian occupation.” The analysed texts provide details about the daily life of the population behind the front, about the exodus and the refuge of some civilians towards the interior of Hungary, and about the Romanian and German military manoeuvres in Transylvania.

Keywords: the Great War, Romanian Army, Transylvanian Saxons, diaries, memoirs

Preliminaries

With Romania’s entry into World War I² and the crossing of the Carpathians by the First and the Second Romanian Armies during the night of 14/27 – 15/28 of August, 1916, the great eastern front of the conflagration was extended from Galicia to the Danube, new battlefields being opened in the intra-Carpathian area, which had been shielded, up to that point, from military operations and from clashes between armed enemy forces.³ The advancement of the Romanian armies in Transylvania was stopped after three weeks, in mid-September 1916, due to the military disaster of

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² The scholarship about the Great War is impressive. It includes collections of diplomatic and military sources, memoirs, interpretations, historiographic reconstructions, historical syntheses, as well as literary and film productions. For a historiographic overview, see Petra Ernst, Sabine A. Haring, Werner Suppanz (ed.), *Aggression und Katharsis. Der Erste Weltkrieg im Diskurs der Moderne*, Wien, Passagen Verlag, 2004; Jay Winter, Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History. Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005. For a presentation of the events, see Jay Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War, Volume I. Global War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014; Jay Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War, Volume II. The State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014; Jay Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War, Volume III. Civil Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014; Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich and Irina Renz (eds.), *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg. Erneut aktualisierte und erweiterte Studienausgabe*, Paderborn, Ferdinand Schöningh, 2014.

³ On the great eastern front of the war, which covered the territory from the Baltic Sea, in the north, to the Aegean Sea, in the south, see Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front. Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000; Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front, 1914–1917*, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1975.

Turtucaia. They had moved cautiously on Transylvanian territory, across distances of 10 to 100 km, and had managed to conquer Toplița, Brașov, Făgăraș and Avrig. However, they had failed to take over Sibiu because of some blunders committed by the Romanian Army's commander.⁴ However more than a third of the areas inhabited by the Saxons had been occupied. The Romanians' entry into Transylvania had caused panic among the Saxon and the Hungarian populations. Even if the elite of the Saxons reacted more calmly than the Hungarians, they encouraged the evacuation of their co-nationals from the pathway of the Romanian armies, causing an exodus towards inner Transylvania and Hungary, and inspiring fear in those who were stubborn enough to stay put, who did not wish to abandon their homes and possessions.

On the basis of published and unpublished sources, identified in the Saxon publications of the time and in the Brukenthal Collections of the National Archives, the Sibiu County Branch, I will illustrate, in this study, the manner in which different opinion leaders of the Saxon communities or simple Saxon peasants and soldiers perceived the period of the "Romanian occupation" and that of armed confrontation between the two military camps – Romanian vs. German-Austro-Hungarian – in Transylvania. The texts analysed here provide precious details related to the daily life of the population behind the front lines, the exodus of some civilians from the advancing front, their refuge towards the interior of Hungary, the Romanian and German military manoeuvres in the areas of Sibiu and Făgăraș, as well as the personal experiences of the authors and their families in the whirl of the events.

The Transylvanian Saxons and World War I

The Transylvanian Saxons⁵ were a German minority in Austria-Hungary, which amounted to 230,697 souls on the 31st of December, 1910, according to their own statistics.⁶ They welcomed the war with euphoria, their feeling of loyalty and duty to the sovereign in Vienna being doubled by their awareness of their national roots and their strong confidence in the invincibility of the German Empire, which they considered to be their true "country of origin" (Mutterland) and the foremost among the European states in terms of culture, science, progress and military technique. The mobilization was accompanied by strong sentimental overtones, being supported by the elites, who were hoping for a quick victory of the Central Powers. This can explain the prompt answer to the call to arms that had been launched by Emperor Franz Joseph. The number of enrolled soldiers was considerably enhanced

⁴On the Kingdom of Romania's participation in the war, see the excellent work of the American historian Glenn E. Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefield in World War I*, Lawrence, Kansas University Press, 2011; on the Transylvanian front from an Austro-Hungarian perspective, see *Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg, 1914-1918*, Hrsg. Österreichisches Bundesministerium für Heereswesen; Kriegsarchiv Wien, Band V, Wien, 1934, pp. 223-358.

⁵ For an up-to-date history of the Transylvanian Saxons, see Ernst Wagner, *Istoria sașilor ardeleni*, trans. by Maria Ianus, București, Editura Meronia, 2000; Michael Kroner, *Geschichte der Siebenbürger Sachsen, Band I-II.*, Nürnberg, Verlag Haus der Heimat, 2007-2008.

⁶ Friedrich Teutsch, *Die Siebenbürger Sachsen in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, Leipzig, Verlag von K. F. Roehler, 1916, p. 350.

by the number of volunteers. There were also donations in money, agricultural products and goods for the war loans.⁷ The protraction of military operations, Romania's entry into war and the opening of the Transylvanian Front exerted great psychological impact on these communities, creating a state of insecurity and panic, which triggered the phenomenon of the refuge. There was a massive evacuation of the elites and the masses towards areas that were under lesser threat from the front line.⁸ The victory of the Entente, the Anglo-French alliance which had been joined by Italy in 1915, by Romania in 1916 and by the USA in 1917, the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy⁹ and the fierce desire of preserving their own identity within the new political framework, which they hoped it would be as favourable as possible, led, in January 1919, to the adoption of the well-known Proclamation of Mediaş, which declared the Saxons' unilateral adhesion to Transylvania's union with Romania.¹⁰

The pieces of information regarding the Transylvanian Saxons' participation in the war effort of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and the impact of the conflagration on the small German-speaking communities in Transylvania have a general character, the only relevant accounts being offered by Friedrich Teutsch, Bishop of the Saxons, in a few pages of his works about the history of the Transylvanian Saxons and the history of the Evangelical Church A.C. in Transylvania. Teutsch briefly presented the human sacrifices, the requisitions, the social, economic and humanitarian contributions made by the Saxon nation as the war had progressed. He believed that the unexpectedly long duration of the war had been extremely burdensome, the 37,533 soldiers who had been sent to the front representing 16% of the total Saxon population. By the end of the war, a tremendous number of casualties had been registered: of the total of 37,533 men who had enrolled, 10,343 had received military decorations for the courage they had shown on the battlefields, 3,532 had lost their lives in the theatres of war, 1,318 were reported missing, 4,779 were injured, 1,449 returned home invalided, 4,840 were taken prisoner. 1,865 Saxon women became widows of war and 4,346 children were orphaned. According to Bishop Fr. Teutsch, the Transylvanian Saxons' material contribution to the war effort of the Austro-Hungarian state amounted to 3 million Kronen, to which were added the damages incurred during the armed clashes that

⁷ Mircea-Gheorghe Abrudan, “Atitudinea conducerii Bisericii Evanghelice din Transilvania față de izbucnirea Primului Război Mondial,” in Rodica Groza (ed.), *Sebeș, timp regăsit. Lucrările Conferinței “100 de ani de la declanșarea Primului Război Mondial. Contribuția sebeșenilor la război și Marea Unire” (5 decembrie 2014)*, Sebeș, Editura Emma Books, 2014, pp. 65-82.

⁸ Emil Sigerus (ed.), *Aus der Rumänenzeit. Ein Gedenkbuch an sturmbelegte Tage. Zugunsten der siebenbürgisch-sächsischen Kriegswitwen und -weisen*, Hermannstadt, Druck und Verlag von Joseph Drotleff, 1917.

⁹ On the dual monarchy's participation in the war and on its dissolution in the autumn of 1918, see the impressive work of Viennese Professor Manfred Rauchensteiner, *Der Erste World und das Ende der Habsburger-Monarchie 1914-1918*, Wien-Köln-Weimar, Böhlau Verlag, 2013.

¹⁰ On the Saxons' adhesion to Transylvania's Union with Romania and the conference they held in Mediaș, see Vasile Ciobanu, *Contribuții la cunoașterea istoriei sașilor transilvăneni 1918-1944*, Sibiu, Editura Hora, 2001, pp. 29-67; Idem, *Germanii din România în anii 1918-1919*, Sibiu, Editura Honterus, 2013.

took place in Transylvania in the months of August - September 1916, when the battles had caused the evacuation of 30,000-40,000 Saxons from the affected areas.¹¹ In the city of Braşov and its surroundings alone, the number of those who left the area amounted to 20,000: the vast majority of these were Germans, but also Hungarians. On the 27th and 28th of August, 1916, no fewer than 29 trains of refugees left the train station of Braşov, heading for the interior of Transylvania.¹²

Like other nations that had been dragged by the leaders of the big European states into the attrition warfare of the trenches, many representatives of the Saxon elite (generals), of the middle-classes (priests, teachers, lawyers, civil servants), who had enlisted on the front but had returned to their homes, or of the peasantry, the petty merchants, the craftsmen and in-keepers, who had taken refuge elsewhere or remained in their native communities, which were now under Romanian “occupation,” wrote down their memories of those events. They produced journals, biographical notes, correspondence, oral histories and memoirs related to their experiences at the time of the conflict. Some of them published their notes during the war or in its aftermath, generating a rich and varied literature¹³ which revealed their own thoughts about the ordeals they had directly experienced during those terrible years of armed confrontation, violence, all manner of privations, refuge, epidemics, confessing about the horrors and terrors they had been exposed to – willingly or not – in those difficult moments when their lives hung in the balance, in the immediate presence of death.¹⁴

“Recollections from Transylvania during those tempestuous days”

The first part of this study’s title and the heading of this chapter paraphrase the titles of the majority of the memoirist texts, brochures and volumes signed by the Transylvanian Saxons and published mostly in Sibiu in 1917. These works relate or recount the events that occurred in the southern and south-eastern areas of

¹¹ Friedrich Teutsch, *Geschichte der evangelischen Kirche, Band II. 1700-1917*, Hermannstadt, W. Krafft Verlag, 1922, pp. 587-615; Idem, *Die Siebenbürger Sachsen in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, 2. vermehrte Auflage, Hermannstadt, W. Krafft Verlag, 1924, pp. 280-287.

¹² Harald Roth, “Die Rolle der siebenbürgischen Städte im Ersten Weltkrieg,” in Harald Heppner (Hrsg), *Umbruch mit Schlachtenlärm. Siebenbürgen und der Erste Weltkrieg*, Köln-Weimar-Wien, Böhlau Verlag, 2017, p. 151.

¹³ For an overview of the memoirs about the Great War written by Transylvanian Saxons, see Mircea-Gheorghe Abrudan, “World War I in the Memories of the Transylvanian Saxons,” in *Transylvanian Review*, Vol. XXV, No. 4, Winter 2016, pp. 48-64; Idem, “Die Memorialistik des Großen Krieges. Eine neue und glaubhafte Quelle der Geschichtsschreibung? Studienfall: Der Erste Weltkrieg widerspiegelt in den rumänischen und siebenbürgisch-sächsischen schriftlichen Erinnerungen aus dem Banat und Siebenbürgen,” in *ASTRA Salvensis*, year II, no. 4, 2014, pp. 72-80; Idem, “Primul Război Mondial reflectat în istoriografia și memorialistica saşilor ardeleni,” in Ioan Bolovan, Gheorghe Cojocaru, Oana Mihaela Tămaş (eds.), *Primul Război Mondial: Perspectivă istorică și istoriografică/World War I. A Historical and Historiographical Perspective. Lucrările Conferinței Internaționale Primul Război Mondial – perspectivă istorică și istoriografică, 3-5 iunie 2014, Cluj-Napoca*, Cluj-Napoca, Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane/Presă Universitară Clujeană, 2015, pp. 75-84.

¹⁴ For a thematic approach to this issue, see Toader Nicoară, “Omul și moartea în Marele Război. Atitudini și comportamente,” in *Apostrof*, year XXVIII, no. 2 (321), 2017, pp. 15-19.

Transylvania in the months of August, September and October 1916. One work that stands out among all the others, in terms of its editorial scope, its massive dissemination and popularization among the German-speaking population of Transylvania was edited by the Sibiu-based historian and publicist Emil Sigerus,¹⁵ under the title *From the Time of the Romanians. A Book of Remembrance about Those Tempestuous Days*.¹⁶ Curiously, even though this interesting volume was disseminated only among the Saxons at that time (in 1917 alone, 3 successive editions were published, but they had sold out by early 1918),¹⁷ it is little cited and known about in the scholarship. In fact, after the “Union of Transylvania” with Romania, or the “annexation” (Anschluss) of this province to the Romanian Kingdom, as the Saxons referred to it, Sigerus’s book suffered a veritable *damnatio memorii*, as Professor Frank M. Schuster has recently pointed out in a comprehensive, pioneering study on the experiences of the Saxons from Cisnădie during the refuge and the Romanian occupation.¹⁸

The volume edited by Sigerus is a testimony about the way in which 13 influential opinion leaders of the Saxon communities (Lutheran Bishop Friedrich Teutsch, Evangelical ministers, teachers, jurists, writers and the two wives of Evangelical pastors) perceived the period of the “Romanian occupation” or that of armed confrontation between the Romanian and the German-Austro-Hungarian forces in Transylvania. In the first sentence of the foreword, signed by the editor on the 24th of November, 1917, Sigerus pointed out that “this book is a volume of memory, of recollections about a terrible period!” Further, Sigerus evoked the terrors, the sorrows, the dangers and the dramatic atmosphere to which the “Saxon people” had been exposed during the months of August and September 1916, when, after two years of war, “its destructive whirlwind burst into our country from the east.” Even though more than a year had passed since those events, the editor emphasized that those experiences “are deeply ingrained in our minds” and readers could now have the opportunity to acquire insights into the ordeals and the destinies of their co-nationals from those bygone days of fear and dread, as well as into those

¹⁵ Emil Sigerus (1854-1947) was an ethnographer, collector, historian and publicist, born in Sibiu, in the family of Senator Karl Sigerus. He followed the profession of bookseller for a while, and then he dedicated himself to the collection of folklore and folk traditions. In 1885 he founded the “Carpathian Museum” in Sibiu, based on his own collection of about 500 objects, in particular pitchers, plates, pewter pots and textiles. He was also one of the founding members of the “Transylvanian Carpathian Association.” For a while, he was editor of the Sibiu daily *Siebenbürgisch-Deutsches Tageblatt*. For more biographical details, see Brigitte Stephani (ed.), *Emil Sigerus. Volkskundliche und kunstgeschichtliche Schriften*, București, Editura Kriterion, 1977.

¹⁶ Emil Sigerus (ed.), *Aus der Rumänenzeit. Ein Gedenkbuch an sturmbelegte Tage. Zugunsten der siebenbürgisch-sächsischen Kriegswitwen und -weisen*, Hermannstadt, Druck und Verlag von Joseph Drotloff, 1917.

¹⁷ Cf. Hermann Hienz, *Bücherkunde zur Volks- und Heimatforschung der Siebenbürger Sachsen. Zweite, erweiterte Auflage der “Quellen zur Volks- und Heimatkunde der Siebenbürger Sachsen”* [Buchreihe der südostdeutschen historischen Kommission, Band 5], München, Verlag R. Oldenbourg, 1960, p. 60.

¹⁸ Frank M. Schuster, “Zwischen Idylle, Abenteuer, Solidarität, Sorge und Furcht. Heltauer Flucht- und Besatzungserfahrungen 1916,” in Harald Heppner (Hrsg.), *Umbruch mit Schlachtenlärm*, p. 247.

“deeds of charity which our Saxon people, so terribly afflicted, benefited from and which should not be consigned to oblivion.” In the end, Emil Sigerus mentioned the fact that the proceeds of this volume would be divided amongst the war widows and orphans of the Saxon nation, admitting also that the shortage of paper and printing materials had forced him to select only a few of the texts he had received for publication. He ultimately expressed his hope that better times might foster the publication of further revised editions.¹⁹ Along with the editor’s foreword, two “patriotic” poems – one of “sorrow” and another of “longing” – signed by Josef Lehrer, five texts recalled the “Romanian period” in Braşov, Râşnov, Codlea, Cislădie and Cincu Mare; six others presented the general state of turmoil, the Saxons’ exodus and their refuge from the advancing front, as well as the atmosphere in which they returned home; while two others, signed by journalist Viktor Zyske and by Bishop Friedrich Teutsch, described the situation of the Saxon refugees in Budapest and, respectively, of the “national Church during the days of the Romanians’ invasion.”

Beyond the military events, the tragedy or the horrors encountered in any theatre of war, beyond the pain, fears, anxieties and privations suffered by those who had been forced to take the path of refuge, beyond these experiences that would be justly condemned by any rational human being, the overall stance of the articles and their ideological undertones were firmly anti-Romanian. Conclusive statements such as “The ghost of Greater Romania has been forever dispelled,”²⁰ or “Let the dream of dazzling Romanian brilliance forever remain nothing more than a dream”²¹ brought out to the surface old Romanian-Saxon antagonisms and fierce polemics that had been waged between the Saxon and the Romanian historians of those times,²² especially regarding the status of those two nations on the territory of the former “Royal Land,”²³ but revealing, at the same time, the fact that the authors of these

¹⁹ Emil Sigerus, “Zur Einleitung,” in Emil Sigerus (ed.), *Aus der Rumänenzeit*, pp. III-VI.

²⁰ Wilhelm Morres, “Kronstadt und Großrumänien,” in Emil Sigerus (ed.), *Aus der Rumänenzeit*, p. 122.

²¹ G. Lander, “Die Rumänenzeit in Rosenau,” in Emil Sigerus (ed.), *Aus der Rumänenzeit*, p. 142.

²² For details on this historiographical polemic, see Sorin Şipoş, *Silviu Dragomir – istoric*, third revised edition, foreword by Ioan-Aurel Pop, Deva, Editura Episcopiei Devei și Hunedoarei, 2015, pp. 256-261.

²³ This expression designates the territorial entity set up under the *Diploma Andreanum* (1224). It included the geographical area of Transylvania bounded to the north by the Mureş River, to the south by the Olt River, to the east by the village of Drăuşeni and to the west by the town of Orăştie. It was on this territory that the German colonists who came to Transylvania in the 12th-13th centuries were settled. The Royal Land was subsequently organized according to some specific structures: 7+2 seats and 2 districts, according to a model imported by the colonists from their native areas and adapted to the space of Transylvania. This territory included large or small settlements inhabited by Romanians, Saxons and Szeklers and enjoyed a wide autonomy, but the right of citizenship belonged solely to the Saxons, i.e. the followers of the Evangelical confession. This area was placed under the legal administration of the Saxon University, with the headquarters in Sibiu, which was to function as a seat of political and administrative authority, headed by the Saxon *comes*, until 1876, when the government in Budapest decided to dismantle this entity and to administratively restructure entire Transylvania into counties, after the traditional Hungarian model. Walter Myß (ed.), *Lexikon der Siebenbürger Sachsen*, Thaur bei Innsbruck, Wort und Welt Verlag, 1993, p. 424.

articles had assumed the slogans and clichés commonly spread by the propaganda of the Central Powers²⁴ against the states and nations warring on the other side of the barricade.²⁵

Some of the texts contained in this volume, such as the one signed by Wilhelm Morres about “Braşov and Greater Romania,” made explicit reference to the way in which the Romanians perceived the exodus of the Saxons and the Hungarians, as well as to the robberies and thefts some Romanians perpetrated in the abandoned houses of the refugees. Speaking about the area of Braşov, Morres wrote: “the local Romanians witnessed this desolate wave of migration in utter silence and whatever they could save, they saved for themselves. Those, however, who had lost their houses situated at the edge of the village would have immediately occupied the most affluent households that had been deserted by the Saxons. [...] A revealing case for the Romanians happened in Râşnov (Rosenau in German), where the deserted Saxon parsonage was immediately taken over by the Romanian priest in the village.”²⁶ Referring, further, to what had happened in Braşov and to the way in which the Romanians of Braşov seized the possessions the Saxons had left behind, Morres generalized by writing that “with or without the help of the Romanian Army” the local Romanians had “carried out several robberies of the abandoned houses.”²⁷ This anti-Romanian tone of the articles included in the volume that Sigerus edited in 1917 expresses the Saxons’ negative-derogatory attitude towards the Romanians, in general, and towards those from the Kingdom of Romania, in particular. It also explains, to a large extent, not only why this collection was not re-edited, but also why it practically disappeared from the book market and why it is so difficult to be found in the public libraries of contemporary Romania. The copy I have studied is kept in the library of the Institute for Culture and History of the Germans in South-Eastern Europe from Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich.

Of course, other sources from that time showed that in reality things did not happen in the way Wilhelm Morres described them, for he clearly perceived and described those events from a one-sided angle, imparting therefore solely a negative view upon the Romanians. In fact, the perspective must be nuanced by collating and comparing the testimonies of Saxons, Romanians, Hungarians or people of other ethnicities who wrote about the area of Transylvania that had been occupied by the Romanian Army or about villages located in the proximity of the front. For instance,

²⁴ For details about their war propaganda, see Ulrike Oppelt, *Film und Propaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg. Propaganda als Medienrealität im Aktualitäten- und Dokumentarfilm*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002; Eberhard Demm, *Ostpolitik und Propaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Frankfurt am Main-Wien, Peter Lang, 2002; Klaus-Jürgen Bremm, *Propaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Darmstadt, Theiss Verlag, 2013; Elisabeth Buxbaum, *Des Kaisers Literaten. Kriegspropaganda zwischen 1914 und 1918*, Wien, Eduard Steinbauer Verlag, 2014.

²⁵ On the instruments and the dissemination of this manipulation, see Tudor Valentin Neamţu, “Propagandă și cenzură în Transilvania ‘Marelui Război’”, in Anamaria Macavei, Roxana Dorina Pop (eds.), *Scieri pe alese. Lucrările Conferinței Naționale O filă de istorie: om, societate, cultură în secolele XVII-XXI*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2012, pp. 353-368.

²⁶ Wilhelm Morres, *Kronstadt und Großrumänien*, in Emil Sigerus (ed.), *Aus der Rumänenzeit*, p. 85.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

the Saxon ministers from Vurpăr (Burgberg) and Șura Mare (Großscheuern) noted in the chronicles of their parishes from the second half of 1916 that the “hyenas of the battlefields” included not only Romanian military and civilians, but also Hungarian, Saxon and German military and civilians, and that the “Romanian troops, which marched as the enemy into the territory, behaved very humanely.” The minister in Șura Mare bitterly noted that “we should not omit or overlook the fact that even among the Saxons, there were good-natured, well-off people who encroached on the wealth and the properties of the clergy.” The conclusion of the parish priest from Vurpăr captured very suggestively the changes affecting human conduct during the Great War: “morality clearly disappears” in times of war.²⁸

Under the title *The Sibiu Chronicle of the War*, Emil Sigerus published, in January 1917, his daily journal entries, complete with the reflections of other people who had stayed in the city during the period in which the Transylvanian theatre of war had moved very close to Sibiu: 28 August– 28 October 1916. The chronicle describes life in the city of Sibiu and the experiences of its citizens prior to and during “the Great Battle of Sibiu” which, in spite of its name, bypassed the city itself, as the military operations unfolded in the hinterland, particularly in the villages of Șelimbăr and Cisnădie. The Olt Corps of the First Romanian Army, under the command of Colonel Traian Moșoiu, hesitated to occupy the city “due to a grotesque chain of mistakes, misunderstandings, and indecision at every level of the Romanian command structure,” as American historian Glenn E. Torrey concluded,²⁹ even though the military personnel, the civil servants and nearly two-thirds of the population had been evacuated from Sibiu. While it does not use an anti-Romanian tone, *The Sibiu Chronicle of the War* is focused exclusively on the pulse of Saxon or German life in the city. The perspective is exclusively that of a Transylvanian Saxon, references to his Romanian co-nationals, brethren of the “enemies” or “invaders” being altogether absent. This chronicle evinces the same pro- and pan-German feeling encountered in the case of the great majority of Saxon memoirist texts. Emil Sigerus expressed his relentless hope, and then his appreciation and joy that salvation had come from the victorious German troops, which were now raiding across “savage Wallachia.” Sibiu had been relieved by the commander of the Ninth German Army, General Erich von Falkenhayn,³⁰ to whom Sigerus had actually dedicated this

²⁸ Ulrich A. Wien, “Die Evangelische Landeskirche A.B. in den Siebenbürgischen Landesteilen Ungarns während des Ersten Weltkriegs,” in Harald Heppner (Hrsg), *Umbruch mit Schlachtenlärm*, pp. 188-189.

²⁹ Glenn E. Torrey, *România în Primul Război Mondial*, translated from English by Dan Criste, Meteor Publishing, București, 2014, p. 73.

³⁰ On the German military campaign he led in 1916-1917 against the Romanians, see Erich v. Falkenhayn, *Der Feldzug der 9. Armee gegen die Rumänen und Russen 1916-17. Zweiter Teil: Die Kämpfe und Siege in Rumänien*, Berlin, Verlag von E.G. Mittler & Sohn, 1921; Adolf Köster, *Die Sturmschar Falkenhayns. Kriegsberichte aus Siebenbürgen und Rumänien*, München, Albert Langen, 1917.

volume. The general’s photograph was effectively reproduced on the book’s front page.³¹

Two other prominent Saxons wrote about the Battle of Sibiu in 1917: the head priest of the Evangelical parish church in Sibiu, Dr. Adolf Schullerus, known especially for his theological, ethnographic and philological writings, and Captain W. Petricek. Schullerus, who remained in the city, in spite of the evacuation orders, and who depicted in a narrative and, at times, homiletic manner the image or the likeness of the “Dead City” and its “salvation.” The subtitle of his work is: “Images from the days of the Battle of Sibiu,” which, as Schullerus stated, had taken place on the days of 26-30 September 1916.³² Schullerus interpreted the fact that the city had not been bombed, being saved from the enemy troops, as the work of divine providence and as “a miracle of the Lord,” accomplished through “human power and might,” a miracle in which God had revealed Himself. Trained in the spirit of the Holy Scriptures, the Evangelical minister Adolf Schullerus did not chastise or stigmatise the Romanians and the neighbouring kingdom, for which he used solely a neutral, so to say, appellative: “the enemy.”

Unlike Sigerus and Schullerus, whose works illustrated the perspective of the inhabitants of Sibiu on the battle that had taken place in the hinterland of their city, Captain W. Petricek provided details related to the planning and conduct of military operations. He reproduced orders, telegraphic dispatches and plans for the movement of the Austro-Hungarian troops, as well as an annex on the graves of the heroes who had fallen in the Battle of Sibiu. His work does not have the beauty and historical-theological nuances of the preceding texts, but it uses the technical language typical of a military who was concerned, or even obsessed with conveying to his contemporaries accurate information about the military operations and the movements of troops in the theatres of war.³³

Ten years after the events of August-September 1916, Albert Dörr – the then Mayor of Sibiu, subsequently Prefect of Sibiu County – published a volume of war memoirs and journal notes entitled *Sibiu between Two Fronts*. The book describes the administration and daily life of the city in the period 27 August – 31 October 1916. Dörr specified in his foreword that the purpose of his volume was to recount “the purely human events of the situation in which the inhabitants of the city found themselves every day, avoiding any political and military comments.” In spite of his claim of objectivity, the mayor of yore, who was now Prefect of Sibiu, mentioned his strong belief that “the annexation of Transylvania to Romania” was an act of “historical justice,” even though both he and his entire Saxon people regretted, from the bottom of their hearts, that up until 1926 “this country, blessed by God, had not

³¹ Emil Sigerus, *Hermannstädter Kriegschronik. Nach Tagebuchaufzeichnungen*, Druck und Verlag von W. Krafft, Hermannstadt, 1917.

³² Adolf Schullerus, *Die tote Stadt. Erlösung. Bilder aus den Tagen der Schlacht von Hermannstadt*, Druck und Verlag von W. Krafft, Hermannstadt, 1917.

³³ Hauptmann W. Petricek, *Um Hermannstadt. Ein Zeitbild aus der rumänischen Invasion. Den Hermannstädter Freunden zugeeignet*, Buchsuck von Fritz Lederer. Mit vier Beilagen, Druck und Verlag von Jos. Drotleff, Hermannstadt, 1917.

managed to be turned into what it could become and what we hope it will be for all its inhabitants: a paradise.” Indeed, Albert Dörr did neither condemn, nor judge the Romanians’ military deed, but limited himself to rendering the events through which the inhabitants of the city had passed at the time of the two fronts, insisting on the measures imposed by the authorities for maintaining order *intramuros* and reproducing, in his text, several official documents issued by the Austro-Hungarian civil and military authorities, a series of epistolary and oral dialogues between him and various Saxon politicians, military officials and civilians that were interested in the life of the city during the military confrontations or who visited the city afterwards. This memoirist text is important because it reveals a few lesser-known aspects of the everyday life of those who remained in the city after the evacuation of the authorities and of two-thirds of the civilian population (more than half of them were Germans, a quarter Romanians, including the Romanian institutions, the Orthodox Metropolitanate and the Theological-Pedagogical Institute, and other nationalities), capturing the fact that in the absence of the police and army forces, the locals of Sibiu formed a civil guard at his initiative. This guard took over the tasks of maintaining public order. It was composed of 113 Saxons, 63 Romanians and 7 Hungarians, who took upon themselves to prevent robberies and to manage the critical and tense situation. Written ten years after the events, when the outcome of the Great War was well known, Albert Dörr’s memoir is devoid of the anti-Romanian passion and biases that could be detected in the texts of Schullerus and Sigerus. It shows a very balanced perspective and a desire to avoid offending the sentiments of the Romanian authorities.³⁴

The category of memoirs about the Romanian invasion and military occupation and, respectively, about the Transylvanian Front also includes other, shorter texts. In what follows, I will focus on four of these. Two of them were published and the other two, unpublished, are preserved in the Brukenthal Collection of the National Archives in Sibiu. Printed in the pages of *Calendarul prietenului popular transilvănean* [The Calendar of the Transylvanian Popular Friend], in the 1918 issue, the first text was written by the Sibiu-based historian and journalist Georg Adolf Schuller (1862-1939), under the title “Two Paintings from the First Romanian Days.”³⁵ It recalls the events that occurred in South-Eastern Transylvania, especially in the areas inhabited by the Saxons, during the second half of August 1916. The second was written by Carl Reich from Cârța, a village on the bank of the Olt River, where lie the ruins of a famous Cistercian monastery from the 13th century.³⁶ Reich kept a chronicle of his native village during the years 1905-1930. One of the chapters is entitled “How the war came to us, too.” It describes the tumult of the rural life of

³⁴ Albert Dörr, *Hermannstadt zwischen zwei Fronten. Kriegserinnerungen nach Tagebuchaufzeichnungen*, Druck von Josef Boschner, Hermannstadt, 1926.

³⁵ G. A. Schuller, *Zwei Bilder aus den ersten Rumänentagen*, in *Kalender des Siebenbürger Volksfreundes für das gemeine Jahr 1918*, 49. Jahrgang, Hermannstadt, Verlag und Druck von Jos. Drotleff, pp. 135-147.

³⁶ On this monastic hearth, see Michael Thalgott, *Die Zisterzienser von Kerz. Zusammenhänge, [Veröffentlichungen des Südostdeutschen Kulturwerks. Reihe B: Wissenschaftliche Arbeiten, Band 50]* München, Verlag Südostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1990.

the Saxons and the Romanians there during the months of August-October 1916.³⁷ The other two (unpublished) texts are signed by Major Adolf Reiner, who completed his memoirs about “The Defence and Evacuation of Sibiu in September 1916” on the 2nd of May, 1917,³⁸ and by the civilian Ferdinand J. Roth, who recalled the atmosphere in Făgăraş, five years after the events, under the title: “My Memories from the Time of the Romanians, from the 27th of August until the 7th of October, 1916.”³⁹ The tone of these memoirs is balanced. They focus on the suffering of the refugees, on their sense of up-rootedness, on the anxieties and terrors of those who would not be evacuated, as well as on the behaviour of the soldiers and officers of the Romanian Army, who did not commit abominable abuses, despite what some Saxons had thought or had been warned they would have to suffer if they did not go into refuge in deeper Hungary. The texts provide precious details about the daily life of the population behind the front lines, the exodus of some civilians from the theatres of war, the Romanian and German military manoeuvres in the areas of Sibiu and Făgăraş, as well as the personal experiences of the authors and their families in the maelstrom of events.

Another text that should hold our attention, due to the richness and uniqueness of the information it contains with reference to the events that took place in the urban and rural milieus of Braşov and the Land of Bârsa, in the tumultuous context of the war and of the Transylvanian Front, is the autobiographical work of Ernst Karl Schnell, the Mayor of Braşov, entitled *From My Life. Memories of Times Old and New*, published in the city at the foot of Tâmpa Mount, in May 1934.⁴⁰ Schnell talks about the heated atmosphere in Braşov on the Sunday of the 27th of August, 1916, caused by the news of Romania’s declaration of war. He highlights a unique detail among all the other Saxon memoirs about the war, namely that he was rather confused by this news because he had received assurances from the authorities of the Austro-Hungarian state that Romania would not enter the war against the dual monarchy. He stated the following: “I want to mention here that we, the sub-prefect and the mayor, have received orders from above to reassure the population and to refute, in every way possible, the notion of a declaration of war from Romania. They were, however, many cautious gentlemen who did not believe what we told them, but the news they received from Bucharest. As we learned later, the mobilization had been decreed in Romania a few days before.”⁴¹ Mayor Schnell also noted the poor military defence of the city. The few Austro-Hungarian troops in the area were unable to cope with the onslaught of the Romanian Army, which, unaware of the situation, advanced “with great caution and restraint.” The mayor expressed his opinion that if

³⁷ Carl Reich, *Wie der Krieg auch zu uns kam. Tagebuch 1916 + Kerzer Chronik, Schriften, Briefe*. Herausgegeben von Friedrich Schuster, Sibiu/Hermannstadt, Honterus Verlag, 2011.

³⁸ Adolf Reiner, “Verteidigung und Evakuierung von Nagyszeben (Hermannstadt) im September 1916,” in *Serviciul Judeţean Sibiu al Arhivelor Naţionale, Colecţia Brukenthal*, Inv. 106, L. 1-8, doc. 123.

³⁹ Ferdinand J. Roth, “Meine Rückerrinerung aus der Rumänenzeit vom 27. August bis 7. October 1916,” in *SJSAN, Colecţia Brukenthal*, Inv. 106, L. 1-8, doc. 132.

⁴⁰ Ernst Karl Schnell, *Aus meinem Leben. Erinnerungen aus alter und neuer Zeit*, Kronstadt, Verlag der Markusdruckerei, 1934.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 146-147.

the Romanians had not proceeded in this way, they would have been able to conquer the city of Braşov the very next day after the declaration of war and would have captured all the city and county authorities, both civilian and military, along with all their secret documents and their assets.⁴² Schnell listed the orders received from the Ministry of the Interior in Budapest related to the emergency evacuation of the male Hungarians and Saxons aged between 17 and 55 years from Braşov. He was one of these men, so after he left Friedrich Fabricius in charge of the city, he immediately left Sibiu, together with his family, on the afternoon of the 28th of August. Writing retrospectively, Schnell noted that his decision to leave Braşov had been wise because “my Romanian friends later told me that as the leading authority in the city, I would certainly have been arrested and interned somewhere in the old kingdom.”⁴³ According to his assessments, more than 20,000 people had left Braşov at that time. The refugees, who were embarked into 29 trains, represented “nearly 80% of the non-Romanian population of Braşov.” Those who were “seriously ill and the elderly” stayed put. They had received the task of taking care of the properties and belongings of all the others. “Before long, they were all frantically waving the Romanian tricolour flag, which they had all made in a hurry.” The mayor also provided precious information about the period of the Romanian occupation in the city. Schnell emphasized that both when the Romanian troops were in town and in the intermezzo between their withdrawal and the return of the Austro-Hungarian authorities, the city “suffered minor damage,” the “empty houses and abandoned homes” leaving the impression of *res dereclita*, not only in the face of the enemy, but also, “unfortunately, of the friend.”⁴⁴ After a journey of two days and two nights, Schnell arrived in Budapest, his family stopping at Bekes-Csaba, where he remained and worked “more than ever in my life,” for five weeks, until October 9, when he took the train back “home.” The trip to Braşov lasted nine days, during which time he met especially the various commanders of the German Army, his dinner with General Falkenhayn being described at large. Unlike the other Saxon memoirs published in 1917, the recollections of Karl Ernst Schnell, printed almost two decades after the hostilities, in the political framework of Greater Romania, contained no offensive or negative references to the period of the Romanian invasion, but confirmed the plans of the Hungarian government, endorsed by a few Saxon political leaders, to change the ethnic and religious configuration of Transylvania at the end of the war, admitting that during the war “Kronstädter Allgemeine Sparkasse,”⁴⁵ the Saxon bank from Braşov, had been drawn into a comprehensive program for the purchase of land along

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 147.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 150.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 153.

⁴⁵ For details about the history of this institution, see Măriuca Radu, “Kronstädter Allgemeine Sparkasse” *prima bancă din Braşov și din Transilvania*, în *Țara Bârsei*, new series, no. 3, Braşov, 2004, pp. 89-94. The electronic version of this study is available at: <http://tara-barsei.ro/wp-content/uploads/2008/11/radu2004.pdf>, accessed on 18 September 2015.

the Olt River valley and in the Land of Făgăraș, where German Lutherans (Russlanddeutsche), brought from the south of Russia, were to be settled afterwards.⁴⁶

Another journal, still unpublished, from the time of the war⁴⁷ is the one that was kept by a young Saxon petty officer, who later asserted himself and became known in Transylvanian culture as the historian, writer and man of culture Otto Folberth.⁴⁸ Out on the front in Galicia, one day after Romania’s entry into the war, on the 28th of August, 1916, Folberth wrote down the following: “It seems that Romania has declared war on us. From now on, all I want is to defend my motherland!” On the same subject, the lieutenant reproduced, the next day, an excerpt from a letter sent by his father on the 23rd of August, 1916, in other words, 4 days before the declaration of war of the Kingdom of Romania: “in Brașov and Sibiu, the German youth are building solid ramps for the posting of heavy artillery. There is nothing special to be seen here, other than the many military trains travelling towards Brașov.” Folberth’s conclusion was: “my motherland, my motherland is at war! How could this not shatter and stimulate me?!” On the last day of the same month of August, he noted resignedly: “Brașov has been evacuated by our people. Thus has been torn the first flower from our Saxon bouquet! But I can’t really believe this.”⁴⁹ His journal entries from the days of September 1916 are particularly rich in information related to the evolution of the front in Transylvania and the situation of Folberth’s family, who left the city on the 31st of August, heading to Turda, then (some of them) to Debrecen, and (others) to Chichinda Mare in Banat, from where they sent him a long letter on the 4th of September, which was reproduced in full in the journal and through which the lieutenant was informed about the exodus of the Saxon and Hungarian population from the path of the Romanian troops and about the evacuation ordered by the Hungarian authorities in all the counties south of the Mureș River. The letter described the atmosphere of “enormous panic among the population.” People were leaving, in helter-skelter manner, to seek refuge, accompanied by children and elderly people, by cattle and domestic animals. The author’s marginal comments are full of emotions and powerful anxieties due to the

⁴⁶ Măriuca Radu, “Kronstädter Allgemeine Sparkasse”, p. 91, note 8. Ernst Karl Schnell, *Aus meinem Leben*, pp. 144-146, 174-192. For details about these plans, see Gábor Egry, “Debates on Colonization Plans among the Transylvanian Saxon during the First World War”, in Sorina Paula Bolovan, Ioan Bolovan, Rudolf Gräf, Corneliu Pădurean (eds.), *Mișcări de populație și aspecte demografice în România în prima jumătate a secolului XX. Lucrările Conferinței internaționale “Mișcări de populație în Transilvania în timpul celor două războaie mondiale”*, Cluj-Napoca, 24-27 mai 2006, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2007, pp. 57-69.

⁴⁷ Folberth’s journal was typed during 1999 and 2000 by one of his sons, Paul J. Folberth, and it can be accessed in electronic format on the website of the Transylvanian Institute in Gundelsheim: <http://siebenbuergen-institut.de/special-menu/span-stylecolor000000-text-decorationunderline-transylvanicaspan/die-tagebuecher-von-otto-folberth/>, accessed on 28 January 2016.

⁴⁸ For details about Folberth and his war journal, see Mircea-Gheorghe Abrudan, “My participation in the First World War”. The Manuscript Diary of the Transylvanian Saxon, Otto Folberth, in Ioan Bolovan, Rudolf Gräf, Harald Heppner, Oana Mihaela Tămaș (eds.), *World War I. The Other Face of the War*, Cluj-Napoca, Romanian Academy, Centre for Transylvanian Studies/ Cluj University Press, 2016, pp. 133-142.

⁴⁹ *Otto Folberths Tagebücher, Band 03, Drittes Kriegstagebuch*, April bis Oktober 1916, pp. 22-23.

events that were underway in his “motherland.” On the 12th of September, Folberth wondered rhetorically: “will the whole world fall apart?.” The tension was to subside towards the end of the month, amid encouraging news received from home, especially from his grandfather, who had not taken refuge and who, thus, could inform him, in a letter sent on the 22nd of September, that “your house is completely occupied by German officers, and in the kitchen people are cooking frantically. The German officers and troops consist, as a rule, of gentlemen, and as friends and brethren of the same nation, their presence is most welcome.”⁵⁰ The fear near the front, the terrors of the exodus, the hardships of the evacuation process and the feelings of alienation triggered by the Transylvanian Saxons’ departure from their native places, the exaltation manifested towards the “fraternal” German troops and the repulsion towards the Romanian “invasion” were experiences that were recorded, in one way or another, by all the Saxon memoirists from the time of the Great War. So were the moments when the advancement of the Romanian troops was blocked, when they withdrew and, respectively, when they were “chased” away “across the Carpathians” and when the south-east of Transylvania was “liberated” by the armies of the Central Powers.⁵¹ In the case of Folberth, the exaltation he felt when the Romanians were forced to withdraw took the form of a spiritual co-participation in “our victory” and of empathy towards his nation, his happiness being expressed through verbs such as “we have overcome” or “we have prevailed.” In addition to this, on the 8th of October 1916, he wrote down the following apothetic conclusion: “I rejoiced hearing on the phone that my motherland is free again, and that Braşov has been occupied by our people.”⁵² Located hundreds of miles away, Folberth empathized with his family and his people. His vision, as a Saxon soldier on the battlefield, was surely emblematic of all the Saxon combatants fighting in the trenches of Galicia and Italy.

Finally, let us focus on a series of memoirist fragments from the ranks of the peasantry and the craftsmen. For reasons of space, I will briefly refer to the memoirs of Maria Miess from Veseud, who, at the age of 85, reminisced about the events that had triggered the refuge, which happened when she was 23 years old, in the following words: “It was the autumn of 1916, in the middle of World War I. The harvest had been gathered. (...) The news about the refuge came not unexpectedly, but it surely took us by surprise. The servant of the village chancery, Gesch, gathered us one morning and informed the commune that at 10 o’clock one person from each house should come to the chancery. (...) We were told that the Saxons must prepare for refuge. Every household would have to make a cart available. In that cart they would have to take food, clothes, valuables and other important things. The Romanian Army had been marching, and fighting was possible. Through this retreat they wanted to bring us to safety, moving along the Târnava.” The Saxon woman remembered,

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 25-28.

⁵¹ Emil Sigerus (ed.), *Aus der Rumänenzeit*, passim; Mircea-Gheorghe Abrudan, *World War I in the Memories of the Transylvanian Saxons*, passim; Idem, *Primul Război Mondial reflectat în istoriografia și memorialistica saşilor*, passim.

⁵² *Otto Folberths Tagebücher, Band 03, Drittes Kriegstagebuch*, April bis Oktober 1916, p. 31.

further, that the peasants of Veseud were persuaded with great difficulty to leave the village because they were afraid of looting, “since Romanians and gypsies of Veseud will stay in the village.” But in the end, the Saxon community decided they needed to leave, just three old families being left behind. Maria Miess recounted the frenzy that had seized the village when the decision of the commune reached the people: the peasants sacrificed their chickens and pigs, made bread, gathered the laundry, prepared food, repaired their barrels and their carts, “buried their food supplies,” and then they formed a large herd of cattle. The exodus was presented in the following terms: “A day after the departure of the herds, the people in the village left. The households were deserted, one by one, one cart following another, first those that were horse-drawn, then the ones drawn by oxen and cows, all assembled in one long line. The bells were ringing from the church tower. The old mayor’s wife kissed even the stones in front of the gate goodbye.” We can notice, therefore, the strong psychosomatic impact experienced by the villagers at the time of their forced departure from their native land. The refuge of the Saxons from Veseud did not last long. They were accommodated for a few days in Bârghiș, from where they were to return to their homes after the attack of the Romanian Army was rejected by the “German and Austrian” troops they had met along their way. The fact that the front passed through Veseud did not leave deep traces. Maria Miess remembered that “only the households of the neighbours across the street had been robbed.” “Pigs and fowls” had vanished. From some houses “the wine and the grain had been taken away, and clothes and laundry had been stolen here and there.” In a way, the material losses were compensated, somehow, by the bales of fabric left behind by the Romanian Army, which were distributed to the people in the village.⁵³ The life of the Saxon inhabitants of Veseud was, thus, jolted out of the humdrum of daily routine at the end of the summer of 1916, but it resumed its natural pace after a few days, continuing its peaceful existence afterwards.

The Transylvanian Front of World War I led to the exodus of the Saxon population from the path of the Romanian Army. This large-scale refuge meant that many Saxons and Hungarians fled towards the centre of Transylvania, Banat and interior Hungary. Their experiences were recorded in diaries, memoirs and correspondences which reveal the hardships endured by the people behind the front lines, during military operations. The Romanian Army was perceived in different ways by the Saxons, who blamed the invading enemy for various abuses committed either directly or indirectly, by tolerating the looting that took place in the occupied territories. On the other hand, several representatives of the Saxon clergy described the events with greater detachment, showing that the moral decay afflicting the people behind the front was encountered among all the nationalities in Transylvania.

⁵³ Irmgard Sedler, Werner Sedler, “Zied (Veseud) – Ein Dorf im Ersten Weltkrieg 1914-1918. Fakten und Erinnerungen,” in Harald Heppner (Hrsg.), *Umbruch mit Schlachtenlärm*, pp. 239-241.