



Harald Roth. *Politische Strukturen und Strömungen bei den Siebenbürgern Sachsen 1919-1933.* Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1994. 256 pp. DM 58 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-412-09294-8.

Reviewed by Peter Haslinger (University of Freiburg)

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From a Democracy of Alliance to National Socialist Adherence: The Saxons of Transylvania 1918-1933

During the 1990s the Germans of Romania – and especially the community of Transylvanian Saxons – attracted special interest among German historians. Apart from the new research possibilities after 1990, this interest was stimulated by the wave of emigration of Germans in the 1980s and 1990s, leading to a rapid and irreversible dwindling of their number in Romania. The works published in Germany during the 1990s were therefore primarily controversial in two ways. On the one hand, in investigating the relationship between the Saxons and other ethnic groups (mainly Romanians, Hungarians, and Roma) they sometimes exaggerated the harmoniousness of interethnic coexistence. On the other hand, the reflection of National Socialist ideology in the political rhetoric of Saxon organizations had to be addressed. For the period it seeks to cover (1918-1933), Harald Roth's study is most profound in dealing with both questions.

What makes Roth's study worth reading are two points. First, he had the opportunity to study a wide range of archival sources in Germany and Romania: in Romania the archives in Sibiu and Cluj, although unfortunately not those in Bucharest. Second, his main points are based on a careful interpretation of facts, refraining quite successfully from any one-sidedness. His findings, though a bit too detailed in the second part of the work, are generally well embedded in a general picture of an ethnic community that faced modernization and political as well as economic marginalization. In this respect, the book of Harald Roth distinguishes itself positively from studies by Johann Boehm, Karl M. Reinert, and those in

the volume edited by Walter Koenig.[1] This must be underlined although Roth's investigation mostly remains in the sphere of political organizations and cultural associations. Cultural historical or anthropological approaches such as are seen in the works of Annemarie Schenk or Marilyn McArthur[2] are lacking in Roth's work.

Roth's presentation focuses on the following questions: What was the institutional and informal framework that enabled the Saxon People's Party (*Sächsische Volkspartei*) to maintain a monopoly of political representation among the Transylvanian Saxons? Given this monopoly, how were social and other forms of criticism dealt with, and did they result in a change of the structures of political representation? How did the Saxons define their relationship with other German speaking groups and other minorities within Greater Romania after 1918? And finally: What is the earliest period for which we can identify adherence to the National Socialist ideology. When did this point of view become widely accepted among the Saxons?

In his first part, Roth provides a critical survey of the published works on the topic. He notes a discrepancy between the interests of historians in the 1930s and the postwar period, and the lack of work on the 1920s. According to Roth, this is partly due to the lack of adequate archival sources, but also the result of the needs of historiography in Romania before 1989 to present a harmonious picture of relations between Germans and Romanians. Roth begins his examination of the political struc-

ture of the Saxons with the reorganization of the Hungarian counties in Transylvania in 1876 and the accompanying steps toward a relatively modern form of representation. He points out that these changes shaped the structures of political representation and decision making within the Saxon community that would survive with minor changes until the 1930s.

The author describes how the change of statehood from Hungary to Romania was viewed in both countries and how they reacted to the first steps of the new Romanian authorities toward the Saxons. He draws only a very rough picture of the political system of Greater Romania in the interwar period. Saxon organizations operated through corporate bodies without a clear membership, with individuals expected to adhere to the common program called the *Volksprogramm*. The possibilities for political participation at the local level were very limited when it came to issues of national import. The relationship between party structures and the local social and cultural organizations (e.g. the so called *Nachbarschaften*) is seen as very ambivalent and based on mutual ignorance rather than functional symbiosis.

Roth shows that the Saxon People's Party was never successful in linking and coordinating the efforts of both existing structures. In fact, he cites signs of local resistance to the national leadership, such as the successful refusal of some communities to pay the party fees called *Volkssteuer*. He deals with the problem of political representation and the competing policy options by examining those individuals involved in the struggle for leadership and by examining the role played by the *Volksrat* or People's Council. According to Roth, the centralization within Greater Rumania was paralleled by the centralization of decisionmaking within the *Volksrat*. In describing the attempts at unified action with other German groups within Romania, primarily the Swabians of the Banat, Roth emphasizes the personal rivalry between the two main German representatives within interwar Romania, Rudolf Brandsch and Hans Otto Roth. Within the *Verband der Deutschen in Grossrumaenien* (Association of Germans in Greater Romania), the Transylvanian Saxon organizations, especially the "Volksrat", played the dominant role. They shaped the policy of the *Verband* due to their better established organizational structures.

This brings Roth to a standard question of all studies on German minority organizations in Eastern Europe, their logistical and financial support from Germany. Regarding the cultural wing of the *Verband*, the *Kulturamt der Deutschen in Rumaenien* (Cultural Council of Ger-

mans in Romania), Roth indicates this support was comparatively meager. During the early 1920s, it consisted only of various scholarships for Germans from Romania, and only in the late 1920s was there substantial financial support from the German Foreign Office. But this support could not fend off the financial collapse of the *Kulturamt* in 1931 and its restructuring a year later. On the other hand, the finances of the Lutheran church suffered a substantial setback in the early 1920s and the German state provided financial support to it already at this time.

Roth labels the political culture of the Saxons *Gefolgschaftsdemokratie* (democracy of allegiance) with a high degree of ethnized behavior at the ballot. Political unity enabled the Saxon representatives to act more coherently toward outsiders and to become useful cooperation partners for Romanian parties. Cartell-like alliances with the Romanians were frequent, despite the fact that the elected members of parliament normally saw themselves only as German representatives, and not responsible to the entire electorate of a district. In contrast to this, rhetoric within the Saxon community was characterized by a high degree of mutually accepted conformity in the interest of national defense. That made it easy for the political establishment of the Saxons to argue that any criticism of paternalistic ruling methods undermined the position of the Saxons as a whole.

Internal debates often seem to have reflected generational conflict. Roth gives a detailed, yet too isolated picture of oppositional movements within Saxon society. Economic and social changes are dealt with only briefly. The effects of the 1924 land reform and developments within the educational system of the Saxons are described very briefly, and the relevance of the Great Depression, which hit Romania with full force in 1930/31, is hardly ever raised. The reader who lacks knowledge of general developments within Romania will have difficulty following Roth's analysis of competing political forces and movements, which makes up the second part of the book and says too little about the general context. The Social Democrats receive only minor attention although at times they had some success. Instead, Roth focuses on the so called *Unzufriedenenbewegung* (movement of malcontents) and the *Selbsthilfe* (self-aid), which developed from a kind of cooperative movement. Its leading personality, Fritz Fabritius, had always had open sympathies for National Socialist ideology. The *Selbsthilfe* developed into a full-fledged support organization for the Nazis, establishing party-like structures already by 1932.

This leads Roth to the question of timing and intensity of the acceptance of Nazi ideology among Saxons. He sees a sudden but sweeping success between 1930 and 1933, resulting in the alteration of the "Volksprogramm" carried out in October 1933. In his conclusion, Roth argues very convincingly that there was a discursive compatibility between the new ideology and the traditional self-image of the Saxons without, however, speaking of any kind of automatism. It rather seems to Roth that the adoption of National Socialist ideology also served as a powerful means to destabilize the political structures of the Saxon community, which had its origins in the 1870s. He supports his thesis first of all by referring to a paradox: that structural democratization was a by-product of a programmatic shift towards National Socialist ideology. This shift led to the incorporation of anti-Semitism as well as *Rassenhygiene* and *Lebensraum* topoi into the general political agenda of the Saxon community. According to Roth the Saxons neglected to consider whether the shift would function as a phase in the takeover of all relevant Saxon positions by the Nazis.

Roth's interpretation is critical yet careful and outlines for us a chronology of the breakthrough of National Socialist ideology among the Germans of Transylvania in the early 1930s. Roth states in his introductory remarks that an overall analysis of the Romanian minority policy would have gone far beyond the scope of the topic of this work. Even so, it must be mentioned as part of a general conclusion that more links with general developments in Romania during the 1920s and early 1930s would have been useful. This would have helped readers less experienced with Romanian history to understand

the context better, and would have confronted those representing some kind more complex synthesis of Saxon and Romanian history. Although Roth adopts an overwhelmingly internal perspective, his analysis of the political structures of Saxon society, the aims of its political leadership, and the motivation of the opposition are succinct and penetrating. His structural approach to the case of the Saxons of Transylvania will be of interest to all concerned with the problems of minority representation.

Notes:

[1]. Marilyn McArthur, *Zum Identitätswandel der Siebenbuenger Sachsen: Eine kulturanthropologische Studie*. *Studia Transylvanica* 16 (Koeln, Wien: Boehlau, 1990); Johann Boehm: *Die Deutschen in Rumänien und die Weimarer Republik 1919-1933*. Publikationen des Arbeitskreises fuer Geschichte und Kultur der deutschen Siedlungsgebiete im Suedosten Europas I/3 (Ippenheim: AGK-Verlag, 1993); Walter Koenig, ed., *Siebenbuergen zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen*. *Siebenbuergisches Archiv* 28 (Koeln, Weimar, Wien: Boehlau Verlag, 1994).

[2]. Karl M. Reinert, *Zur politischen Entwicklung der Deutschen in Rumänien 1918-1928: Aus einer siebenbuergisch-saechsischen Sicht* (Bad Toelz: Wort und Welt Verlag, 1993); Annemarie Schenk, *Deutsche in Siebenbuergen: Ihre Geschichte und Kultur* (Muenchen: Beck, 1992).

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