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ARTICLE

A Contest for Priority: Nineteenth-Century Place-Name Etymologies of Transylvania at Large

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Abstract
The article identifies place-name etymologies as a powerful tool in constructing national spaces. Since place names derive from one language or another, often visibly so, competing nationalisms have used them to support territorial claims. This strategy may appear trivial, but it dates back no further than the Romantic period. The article traces the story of how, by the end of the nineteenth century, suggested place-name origins had become building blocks of two opposed visions of Romanian ethnogenesis. In a context of competing nation-building, these scholarly reconstructions were thinly disguised statements about whose ancestors had lived first in Transylvania—defined here in a broad sense as the eastern, Romanian- and Hungarian-speaking parts of the contemporary Kingdom of Hungary—and therefore who was entitled to political sovereignty. Place-name derivations had been little more than rhetorical ornaments until nationalist scholars seized on them following the 1848 revolutions. It was later still, in response to the questioning of Romance-speaking continuity in Dacia, that a positivist generation adjusted them to the principles of comparative linguistics and onomastics, the latter devised by German scholars for the study of national antiquities. With some refinements, the two views are still held today as the legitimate versions.

Keywords: historical priority; historic rights; national historiographies; onomastics; place names

On the sidelines of various territorial disputes over the last century and a half, antagonistic cadres of nationalist academics have devoted much effort and creativity to interpreting place-name origins so as to demonstrate the indigeneity of their peoples, or better, their priority in the land compared to others. This article focuses on the changing landscape of nineteenth-century etymological discourses about Transylvania at large, roughly corresponding to the area incorporated in Romania in the wake of the First World War. The manipulation of place names to nationalist ends has spawned a sizeable literature, but the role that this streak of antiquarian scholarship played in territorial disputes, so prominent in this and a couple of other cases, has all but escaped serious inquiry. I am not concerned here with the accuracy of place-name derivations, and will certainly not address the relation that one or the other historical vision bears to any actual state of affairs in prior centuries. What interests me here are the two, overlapping paradigm shifts between pre-national and nationalist and later between pre-scientific and positivist-comparative approaches to place-name origins, the ways practitioners of the discipline adjusted the evidence at hand to their opposed historical visions, the interrelated dynamics of nationalist strife and academic trends, and the autonomy of knowledge regimes from national ideologies.

Nineteenth-century nationalist scholars were at pains to present their national community as ancient, continuous, and deeply rooted in its homeland—a territory either currently under control or demanded in its name (Baár 2010, 65–69). They sought to construe the bond between the people and territory as a perennial one, projecting it back to the remotest past and making it uncontestable

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in the future. One should recall here the oft-encountered idea that since the people have transformed their environment in accordance with their way of life, contemplating the landscape gives a glimpse into the deeper collective self. A kindred notion is *ethnoscape,* in the sense of a terrain imbued by ethnic culture, under which Anthony D. Smith also grouped concrete memory sites such as the graves of ancestors (Smith 1999, 150–152). Artists and journalists frequently blended their own people into nature to the same effect, depicting it as dauntless pine trees perched on blowy mountaintops, or better still, as pebbles of a brook, resting firmly underneath the fickle flow of water.

However, place names should be considered the handiest and most common sites of memory, in which a land is thought to reveal its true identity. Linguistic practices, names and naming being chief among them, have always played an essential role in creating and sustaining places (Tuan 1991), but with the advent of Romantic nationalism, place names also appeared in a new, hitherto unknown light (Kühebacher 1996, 1802). They came to behave as property seals for the language from which they derived, either visibly for all to see or just for the initiated. In general, nationalizing intelligentsias found it more reassuring if the names of their (projected) homelands corresponded to the linguistic image of the nation. The danger was that alien place names would give away their original—and by extension, true and legitimate—masters and rob dwellers who spoke a different tongue of their lot.

Indigeneity claims are a common feature across nations, but not quite universal. Nations with charter myths revolving around conquest, frontiers, promised lands, and civilizing missions represent an obvious counterexample. In marked contrast to standard ethno-nationalist practices, white Anglo-Saxons in the nineteenth-century United States named new places in phoney Native American and (intended) Spanish by the hundreds and thousands to make them sound more authentic (Stewart 2008, 276, 302–303, 305–306, 341–354). Remarkably, German-speakers of the eastern provinces also embraced a historical immigrant self-image. Nineteenth-century research into the toponymy demonstrated that large swathes of lands, including the surroundings of Dresden and Leipzig, had once been inhabited by Slavic-speakers. This sat comfortably with a narrative that did not describe Eastern Germans as autochthonous, but rather as sturdy colonists bearing evidence of Germandom's superior civilization and demographic vigour.

Indigeneity-themed master narratives have thrived, especially about contested areas, with overlapping claims from multiple nationalisms. Indigeneity or "autochtony" has proven to be a particularly powerful concept there, able to establish rights to sovereignty and mark out ethnic others as immigrants. Its ideology constructs primordial and exclusive links between peoples (languages) and territories (Tacke 2015, 87–120). But such claims are in fact always relational (Brubaker 2015, 77). What matters is having arrived there earlier than others, an idea to which I will refer as historical priority. The early Romanian nationalist version of historical priority, for example, rested on a foundation story of immigration, Emperor Trajan's colonization of Dacia with veteran soldiers. Crucially, however, that event was situated prior to the arrival of Magyars and Transylvanian Saxons.

In historically contested locales, claims of historical priority have a pervasive presence in service of nation-state legitimacy, something painfully obvious to anyone growing up in Eastern Europe, especially as an ethnic minority citizen. Yet, their validity has never been a straightforward matter. At any point over the last two hundred years, historical priority could make the impression of being all but dead as a political argument. Writers on the early history of Transylvania—the British prefacer of the ominous Anonymous Chronicler and a German scholar of hydronyms among them—have ritually mocked the notion that it should bestow political legitimacy (see Martyn C. Rady's introduction to Anonymus, Bak, Rady and Veszprémy 2011, 33; Schramm 1981, 40). In a roundabout way, however, their embarrassment only testifies to the enduring spell of the idea. I find it indicative of such ambivalent perceptions that on the eve of the First World War, the Romanian historian Xenopol advanced his case for historic Romanian rights over the eastern part of Dualist Hungary with the rather hollow disclaimer that such title deeds had lost their value in international relations (Xenopol 1914, 8–13).

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Even societies based on frontier-myths will play the priority card against immigrants. Nation-states, on the other hand, often treat indigenous minorities as a separate type of cultural aliens within their borders, distinct from immigrants. Special status may be granted to them on condition that they are not too numerous and do not interfere with the ambitions of titular majorities. Politically troublesome ethnic minorities, on the other hand, risk being rhetorically redefined as immigrants. At the same time, arguments based on historical priority continue to underpin secessionist movements and fuel protracted political conflicts, witness the Holy Land, Artsakh/ Nagorno-Karabakh, Northern Ireland, and Kosovo (Brubaker 2015, 77). Sometimes gestures of guilt by less autochthonous majorities signal its validity; think of Native American rights in the United States and First Nations rights in Canada. And what better proof of the endurance of the idea than the fact that the two mainstream positions described in this article stand as wide apart today as they did a hundred years ago?

Irredentist texts would make use of place names to bolster their case, and internal audiences could be counted on to recognize the names as "theirs." According to a turn-of-the-century Serbian consul to Prishtina, for instance, "as far as the villages, hills, rivers and valleys carry Serbian names (. . .) there are no Arbanasi people or Albania" (Atanasovski 2019, 26). Of course, the place-name cover seldom offered such an unambiguous view that the national enemy could not contest. This is where scholars joined in and lined up historical documents, etymological speculations, and phonological reconstructions to contend that their name variants were older and therefore their group must have arrived first. Such etymological warfare has been waged over Transylvania, broadly defined, as it was between Germans and Slovenes over Carinthia before World War I, and across the Balkans in the twentieth century (Ogris 1976). In turn, etymological polemics fed into national historical imaginaries.

Etymological discourses are also intimately bound up with the desire of incumbent state elites—and even irredentist movements (Kramer 2008)—to align the names of their homelands with their historical narratives. Greece, the first new European state to draw its legitimacy from the national principle, bestowed names taken from the second-century geographer Pausanias on its communes. Then, in the following hundred years, local activists translated or tweaked the place names they found foreign into more Greek-sounding moulds (Liakos 2008, 232). In general, states that embarked on such renaming campaigns chose one out of these two options. They often tried to dig up extinct place names from medieval sources and reinstall them, or at least pretended to do so —from Lorraine and the majority Polish parts of the second German Empire (Mentz 1916; Pletzing 2006, 270–271, 274; Tims 1966, 139) to Dualist Hungary (Berecz 2020, 193–240) all the way to the newly annexed provinces of Poland after 1945 (Yoshioka 2007, 279, 284). The other possibility was to depart from existing forms and re-engineer them into supposed originals, the way Arabic names were turned into modern Jewish ones in Israel (Cohen and Kliot 1981, 232; Azaryahu and Golan 2001, 191).

In the period of chief interest for this article, Transylvania at large made up the eastern part of the Kingdom of Hungary, a polity enjoying wide-ranging autonomy within the Habsburg Empire after 1867. Depending on how one chooses to define it, the area was home to a relative or absolute Romanian ethno-linguistic majority. In a liberal age, however, when not even minority activists considered the unwashed masses to be sufficiently mature to vote, the numerical argument was rarely advanced alone in either internal or external propaganda. Since its inception, the Romanian nationalist movement in Hungary had staked the claim of historical priority as a political argument, in a bid to emancipate themselves and their constituency from their underdog position. The dispute, fought with a heavy deployment of etymological ammunition, broke out as these claims met with an elaborate denial of their factual basis. The two sides based their arguments on the toponymy to fill the gap in attested Romance-speaking presence in former Dacia between the third and the thirteenth centuries CE. The debate also marked an early test for the comparative philological prowess of the scholars involved.

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As the Romanian self-narrative struck its roots deeper into the soil by adopting Dacians, the earlier occupationist foundation story of Magyar nationalism developed a functionally equivalent autochthonist component merely by questioning the antiquity of others. Whilst radical strands of Romanian nationalist discourse wanted Magyar "intruders" to "return" to a downsized core-Hungary to the West of the Tisza/Tisa River, strident Magyar voices from the later decades utilized the motif of Romanians' "late" arrival as an argument for withholding political rights from them. In an exercise of mutual Orientalizing, both Romanian and Magyar nationalist discourses depicted the other as primitive, nomadic pastoralists, interlopers to a land that remained alien to them, and cast the ingroup as peaceful, civilized, and harmoniously at one with the land.

From Humanism through Romanticism

Prior to the nineteenth-century dawn of comparative linguistics, the pursuit of etymology remained grounded in the humanist tradition. Learned place-name etymologies of the time are notable for their cavalier handling of sounds and colourful origin stories of the just-so variety. Authors put forward etymologies largely as a form of stylistic embellishment, as well as proofs of their classical erudition. They would use them to ground places in the grand tradition drawn from ancient and modern authorities. In lands that fell outside of the civilized world of antiquity, such guesses came interspersed with others based on vernacular words, whimsical or convoluted by today's standards (Malkiel 1993, 1; Egli 1886, 19–24).

Regarding Transylvania, the Calvinist pastor and polymath József Benkő's *Transsilvania specialis* (1782–1784) represents a culmination effort in this vein (Benkő 1999). Inhabiting Benkő's ancient Transylvania were the venerable races of Dacians, Romans, Scythians, and Goths. They would leave traces in the form of place names, and the latter three would then give rise to modern Romanians, Magyars (including Hungarian-speaking Szeklers), and Saxons. Benkő exposed a slight bias for Hungarian etymologies, but he nonetheless saw a Roman military commander named Camillus behind the Hungarian place name *Komolló* and one supposed Ausonus behind *Uzon*. An abundant store of Roman bricks near the village even led him to attribute the origin of *Sárd* to the Sards of Sardinia (Benkő 1999, 1:197, 2: 124–125).

The waning of the late humanist paradigm cross-cut with the onset of nationalism, and early Romanian nationalists still followed in the humanist footsteps when devising place-name etymologies. A transition figure towards Romanian nationalism is the protopope Nicolae Stoica, author of a chronicle of the Banat from 1826–1827. Stoica was an amateur Roman archaeologist and numismatist himself and drew copiously on the groundbreaking nationalist intellectual Petru Maior to describe the Roman origins of Romanians in Dacia. Nonetheless, he failed to coalesce these threads into a consistently nationalist plot. *The History of Slavic Peoples* by Jovan Rajić equalled the influence that Maior exerted on him, and his Slavic etymologies were almost as numerous as his Latin ones (Stoica 1981).

The linguistic origins of the toponymy sparked vivid interest after the civil war of 1848–1849, simultaneously from Magyars and Romanians. A year and a half of turmoil had revealed the overlapping territorial claims of the two national movements, alarming both sides about the danger looming to what both envisioned as their space. First, in summer 1848, the liberal Magyar gentry hastened to annex Transylvania to Hungary. Then in February 1849, the Romanian Orthodox bishop Andrei Șaguna presented a petition to the monarch to carve out a Romanian principality from the Romanian-speaking parts of the Empire (Hitchins 1977, 70–71). Suggestively, after defeating the Hungarian uprising, Vienna rolled back the public use of Hungarian and imposed new, German place names on the administrative sphere.

When an embryonic Romanian intelligentsia had first put the idea of Latin–Romanian ethnic continuity in Dacia to political use, they gave at least as much weight to their noble ancestry as being the first settlers. Together, these two provided grounds for sovereignty claims and served as a capstone for the whole narrative construction of Romanian nationalism. Transylvania was not

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merely part of an ideal Romania, but it also featured as the ancestral homeland from whence Moldavians and Wallachians had once descended.

Transylvanian Romanians in the 1850s to 1870s inscribed their bid in the time-honoured tradition of humanist etymology and pulled out all the stops to prove the Latin pedigree of modern Romanian names. The Romanian intelligentsia set particular store by the few place names attested from the Roman period and matched them with present-day Romanian ones. In accordance with the then-dominant, radically purist Latinist paradigm, which sought to draw spoken and written Romanian closer to Latin, they would automatically adjust spelling to their attempted etymologies. Thus, the Romanian place name pronounced [siˈbiw] (modern-day *Sibiu*) was spelt *Sabiiu* between the 1850s and the 1870s, to advertise an etymology taken from the Sabins.

One obvious source to look for Latin etymologies was the Peutinger Map, the most detailed road map of the Roman Empire, surviving in a medieval copy. From the 27 place names it indicates in future Transylvania and the Banat, at least nine were claimed to have come down to us in modern Romanian garb. The idea of a continuity between Latin *Admediā* (Talbert 2010, point TP 6A4/1723) and modern *Mehadia* even survived the Latinist paradigm and remained a household reference in support of unbroken Romance settlement, as did *Tierva* (Talbert 2010, point TP 6A3/1731) and *Cerna*, despite the latter's transparent Slavic meaning.

Another popular method consisted of drawing analogies between modern Romanian place names and similar-sounding ones from across Romance-speaking regions of the former Roman Empire. The more informed and better equipped took—or at least claimed to take—clues from the eighth-century Ravenna Cosmography, Petar Katančić's epigraphical collection from Pannonia and Dacia and ancient geographers. They linked the name *Tuștea* to *Tuscia* (Popu 1869, 313), and *Ravna* to *Ravenna* (Maniu 1878, 81). For others, looking up the Latin dictionary on the right page seemed as good a method as any to establish the origin of a place name, and thus they derived Romanian *Logoj* from *locus* (place) (Teodori 1859) or *Peșteana* from *piscina* (fishpond) (OSzK Manuscript Collection, FM1 3814/A, reel no. 28). On the other hand, Latinists went to staggering lengths to ignore transparent vernacular meanings, including Romanian ones. One of them sought to explain the name of the Transylvanian town Brad by reference to the small Apulian river Bradano, instead of Romanian *brad* (fir) (Maniu 1884, 59).

It is worth noting that Latin-based etymologies were still popular with contemporary Magyars, who did not link them up with a collective self-narrative. The value of Latin as a language of erudition was too well embedded in society not to lend prestige to those who claimed to derive a place name from a Latin word. In 1864, the local (Magyar) leadership traced back Hungarian *Páké* to Latin *pace,* the ablative case of *pax* (peace), and the Calvinist pastor derived the Hungarian name *Magyarléta* from the Latin feminine *læta* (fertile) (Pesty 2012–2015, 1: 108, 4: 127). Latin etymologies could seem all the more plausible since in early modern times, with Latin still serving as the language of official record-keeping, towns and sometimes villages had often appeared in a Latin guise. Until late, most educated Magyars saw little reason to doubt their viability, regardless of their views about Romanian peasants' connections to Trajan's veterans. Apparently, the idea that Latin names required name givers speaking Latin in daily life took several generations to sink in.

Romantic Magyar nationalism inspired stranger derivations still, based on the belief that Hungarian was related to the languages of the Ancient Near East, and often on the so-called root theory (for the former without the latter, see Vida 1852). Root theory was a whimsical offshoot of the type of Romantic German *Sprachtheorie* that early nineteenth-century Hungarians read at Göttingen University. It held that lexical items owed their formation to synaesthetic links between concepts and syllables, harking back to the infancy of humankind (Békés 1997; C. Vladár 2013). These links had supposedly survived more intact in Hungarian and other "original" languages (a label encompassing all non-Indoeuropean languages). Root theory matched each high-frequency syllable with at least one and typically several "roots," associated with complex tangles of meanings. Gergely Czuczor and János Fogarasi created the most influential classificatory scheme of Hungarian "roots" in their etymological glosses to the first interpretive dictionary of the language (Czuczor and

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Fogarasi 1862–1874, in particular 1: 424–425). Seeking original roots also became a widespread hobby, giving rise to multiple systems, not easily reconcilable with one another.

Root theory reigned supreme in Hungary throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, but the place-name etymologies in this vein that I could locate date from the 1860s. For example, the Bârcea Mare respondent to Frigyes Pesty's toponymic survey identified the purported root *bar* (beautiful, fertile field girded by mountains) in *Barcsa,* the Hungarian name of the village. There is no such word in Hungarian, but he invoked Hebrew *bar*—in fact, *bri'a* (creation)—without elaborating on the resemblance he saw between the two meanings: "that much is certain that creation and beautiful, fertile field are two kindred notions."[1] He interpreted the second syllable as the diminutive suffix found in Hungarian female hypocoristics like *Julcsa* (Julie) , and went on to detect the same "root" in the Hungarian place names *Brassó*, *Bardoc*, *Barót,* and *Paros.*[2]

Around these years, the Romanian intelligentsia still took umbrage at allegations that Roman was mixed in their veins with Dacian blood (Mitu and Mitu 2014, 72, 79, 232). They also vehemently rejected any linguistic connection to Slavic as an insidious stigma that slanderers had put on Romanians (e. g., Maniu 1878, 67–71). The leading journalist George Bariț even suspected medieval Magyars of being the originators of unquestionably Slavic toponyms, in league with the Bulgarian Empire (Bariț 1872, 2). But more usual culprits were the Dacians, Slavic-speakers according to tradition (Tocilescu 1880: 174–82), since there was no dispute that Dacians could pass on their place names before being obliterated by the Romans.

If the two were to be dissociated, however, Dacians were a lesser evil than Slavs. This explains why some from the Latinist old guard engaged with Dacians as Latin etymologies increasingly came down to ridicule from all sides, more of which later. After sporadic appropriations in the 1850s, the young Romanian generation of the 1860s and 1870s emphatically rejected the old orthodoxy that ancient Dacians had died out with the Roman invasion, and assigned them a role in Romanian ethnogenesis (Boia 2001, 90–92). Around the same time, a new cadre of dilettantes from across Europe, intent to find Celtic originals behind every place name, identified Dacians as Celtic-speakers (Tocilescu 1880, 163; Roesler 1866, 29–34; Möckesch 1867). Contemptuously labelled "Celtomania" by the comparatists, their quest for underlying Celtic etymons was already fantasy dressed up as science in its mimicking of comparative-historical language and methodology (Egli 1886, 243).

Many Latinists and lapsed Latinists joined in this pursuit (Heufler 1854–1856, 5/28; Popu 1869; Borovszky 1883, 9). It did not always entail a belief in Dacian ancestry; not only could Dacians very well disappear while leaving abundant toponymy behind, but there had also been Celts in the Roman army (Boia 2001, 90). Atanasie Marian Marienescu, however, who latched onto "Celtomania" at the age of 52 to become its most devoted practitioner, attributed what he considered a Celtic legacy to the Dacians and included them into the lineage of modern-day Romanians.

Almost any name, Romanian or otherwise, could be parsed effortlessly into such infinitely malleable, monosyllabic "Celtic" stems as were suggested by the Viennese Wilhelm Obermüller, whose handbook (Obermüller 1868–1872) Marienescu chose as his source and guideline (Marienescu 1895). This is one similarity that the "Celtomaniac" approach shared with root theory, along with much of their epistemology and the common ground that both seemed to create between toponyms across languages. In addition, "Celtomaniacs" also loved to appeal to folk etymology, allowing Marienescu to propose multiple etymologies for names with transparent meanings in Hungarian. Thus, Romanian *Nadăș* was said to be related to both Hungarian *nádas* (reed marsh) and, at a further remove, Celtic *nad* (elevated place) (Marienescu 1891, 234).

Place Name Studies as an Ancillary of History-Writing and a Bone of Contention

The years around the 1848 revolutions also marked the debut of onomastics on the world stage, bound up with the ascent of comparative-historical linguistics; in 1846, the Berlin Academy put out a contest for collecting Old German names (Haubrichs 1995, 63). The new methodology of place-

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name research pared down the notion of etymology to the reconstruction of previous meanings and forms, to be carried out from historical sources by way of deduction (Malkiel 1993, 2). According to the new understanding, place names always depart from a distinct original meaning and rarely commemorate famous historical figures. Only the earliest archival forms are relevant for comparative analysis. In the absence of such early attestations, the researcher can ferret out the original form through analogies from the same language and preferably from the same time interval, paying due respect to the regular sound changes and sound substitutions of the given dialect (Egli 1886; Cramer 1914; Haubrichs 1995).

These methodological principles became the touchstone of objective scholarship, defining what counted as legitimate reasoning and separating the wheat of true scholars from the chaff of dilettantes. They demanded expert knowledge, which spelled an end to the times when large circles could partake in the fabrication of etymologies. One consequence of bowing to the new standards was that scholars would repudiate popular unscientific beliefs and jettison core elements of their Romantic nationalist mythologies. Such gestures were also meant to confirm the author's scholarly integrity for the eyes of fellow scholars.

Historical onomastics was not envisioned as a self-serving pursuit, but an ancillary to historical linguistics and historiography, since place names were thought to yield precious information both on the history of languages and language varieties and on the former expansion of their speakers. Significantly, the linguistic analysis of place names was used to determine the former settlement area of peoples, some of them extinct, others not quite so. The first studies of this paradigm sought to map out where Germanic tribes had lived in the past, while a typical research endeavour was to trace the historical shifts in the "language border" between Germanic and Romance (Egli 1886; Haubrichs 1995; Jottrand 2017, 387).

Such historico-linguistic geography was in itself a legitimate line of inquiry as long as the languages in point were discretely contrasting. The problem began with the political accents of the so-called "linguistic areas" (*Sprachgebiet*) that it delineated and the "language borders" (*Sprachgrenze*) whose evolution it followed. Some endeavours came with clear nationalist overtones and were used to support overt political claims. A historical reconstruction of this kind already influenced the tracing of the new boundary line between France and Germany in Lorraine in 1870 (Haubrichs 1995, 66; Dunlop 2015, 31–32, 80). Worse still, journalistic renditions of such research regularly lapsed into the use of military metaphors—contact zones were depicted as fronts, language use as a battle, and language shifts as inroads into enemy territory.

Thanks to scholarly interest in the pre-Germanic Slavic place names of the German lands, Slavic place name studies got a relatively early start, and its results became incorporated into the stock and trade of the discipline. The influential Austrian (Slovene) philologist Franc Miklošič described the patterns of Slavic name formation in minute details. By the time the debate on Romanian ethnogenesis broke out, all participants had come to terms with the fact that the Slavic toponymic imprint had been greater than previously thought, and there had been relatively little disagreement as to which names derived from Slavic (Pastrnek 1892, 123–126; Egli 1886, 180–181).

A key figure of Hungarian toponymic scholarship in the post-1848 era, Frigyes Pesty echoed many of the new ideas in a programme article from 1857. However, he remained oblivious to the newly-discovered power of folk etymology and argued that the transparent meaning of a place name marked out the language in which it had evolved, since common people rarely translated place names for their own use. On this basis, the Banat-based Pesty contended that tracing back the region's place names to their original forms pointed to an overwhelmingly Hungarian-speaking population prior to the Ottoman conquest. Later inhabitants would appropriate these place names and remodel them according to the sound patterns of their languages. The break of vowel harmony, for instance, had made originally Hungarian names sound alien to Hungarian ears (Pesty 1857). He undertook a massive survey into the existing microtoponymy, which he hoped would deliver clues on the ethnic make-up before the Ottomans, but he gave up on publishing his data after these had failed to confirm his expectations.

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Pesty's programme article presented the first traces of the nostalgia for lost Hungarian toponymy, which went into full bloom after 1867, when it became a metonym for the golden-age myth of a Hungarian-speaking Hungary. In reaction to skeptical voices, Pesty later insisted that the over-abundance of transparent Hungarian forms in medieval sources could not result from the Magyarizing zeal of royal scribes, because these had not always been ethnically Magyar and had not kept track of places (Pesty 1878, 58–59). The Magyar elite found an ally in medieval documents to reaffirm its title deeds over the land. Such representative handbooks emerged from this line of inquiry as the two-volume "Historical hydrography of Hungary until the late thirteenth century" by the similarly Banat-based Tivadar Ortvay (Ortvay 1882) and the five-volume "Historical geography of Hungary under the Hunyadis" by Dezső Csánki (Csánki 1890–1913). In keeping with the international vanguard, they moored their etymologies to the comparative study of historical documents, and they made a case for state nationalism out of the medieval Hungarian nomenclature of the peripheries.

Thus far, the Romanian and Magyar etymological discourses had been, as it were, parallel soliloquies about the cognate Romanian and Hungarian versions of the same place-name cover. With the formation of an independent Romania, the demise of Latinism and the rehabilitation of Dacians, the theme of Romanians' longevity compared to Magyars and Saxons had come further to the fore. As this idea came under attack, the two historical visions entered an open collision course, with the consequence that neither side could escape taking notice of the names and arguments of the other.

Compared to multilingual regions of contemporary Austria, with a higher share of semantically equivalent and unrelated name pairs across languages, the Romanian, Hungarian, and German names of the same places were disproportionately akin to one another in their form in the area (Kranzmayer 1934, 114, 125, 141 and 143). One major stumbling block for Romanian intellectuals was notably that—in the assessment of a prominent Romanian activist—at least half of all Romanian-inhabited places in contemporary Hungary bore names of visibly Hungarian origins (Russu Șirianu 1904, 145). If anything, the same percentage was higher still in medieval sources. The Middle Ages had already figured as a dark interlude on the time map of the Romanian intelligentsia northwest of the Carpathians, and they grew doubly distrustful of medieval chancelleries once Magyar scholars began to pump out their records. As a solution to this quandary, some Romanians hatched the idea of supposed original, Romance place names, which had fallen prey to a nationalizing medieval Hungary and had been forcibly replaced by new, Hungarian ones: "thousands of pure Romanian names disappeared without a trace," Bariț estimated (Bariț 1872, 1; cf. Cipariu 1869, 429). It lent credence to this story when the nationalizing Hungarian state that it projected back into the past took shape in the present and in fact began to Magyarize its place names (Berecz 2020, 193–234). The story moved to become a rhetorical trump card, which implicitly denied the full applicability of comparative-historical methods to the expanse of medieval Hungary. In this view, historical written forms do not reflect contemporary spoken usage, but only attest to power relations (e.g., Șimon 2007, 218).

This story co-existed with the seemingly contradictory view that the extant Romanian names were the true ones, and Romanian peasants their custodians. The two conflicting *topoi* shared the motive of Magyars as an eternally lurking threat and ingrained assimilationists, and to some degree, they could even appear intertwined. For example, a small number of etymologies were advanced as key evidence, implying that the names under discussion were the fortunate few that had escaped Magyarization. Time and again, this theme spurted out into scholarly accounts.

Scholars from independent Romania who joined the fray in the 1870s had often received German education, just like their Magyar peers (Ornea 1998, 18, 32). Since German universities were the engines of comparative philology at the time, the two parties had trained themselves in the same cutting-edge weapons. They fought out their battles on the German and French book markets, with their faces turned towards Western onlookers and awaiting applause from sympathetic audiences. While statements on the matter did address counterarguments, they did not give the

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impression of trying to convince the rival community of scholars. Rather, they traded barbs in a tone ranging from the condescending to the sarcastic.

The New Magyar Vision

Magyar authors had always liked to contest the pure Roman origins of modern-day Romanians. The idea, however, that their ancestors were Southern arrivals in the Middle Ages, rather than a homebred population, had not enjoyed much recognition until the 1860s (Mitu and Mitu 2014, 58–79). Since the idea was not itself new—in fact, various ancient historians had asserted that Romans had evacuated Dacia in the third century—this is best explained by the authority of the Anonymous. The anonymous medieval chronicle (*gesta*) describing the ninth to tenth-century Magyar conquest of the Hungarian Kingdom was discovered in the eighteenth century, soon to become a revered scripture of noble Hungarian proto-nationalism. It so happened that the Anonymous identified Gelou, one in a series of rulers that pagan Magyars were said to have defeated, as the duke (*dux*) of the Vlachs (the traditional exonym denoting Romanians) living along the borders of Transylvania and Hungary (Anonymus, Bak, Rady and Veszprémy 2011, 62–65; on the Anonymous as a chronicler of tenth-century Transylvania, see Deletant 1992). In that way, the same text that bestowed legitimacy on Magyar gentry rule also warranted the acceptance of what later became a foundational story for Romanian nationalism. This hardly gave headaches to the Magyar elite as long as they were confident they could govern by the right of conquest alone.

Thus, it is no surprise that the two men who laid the groundwork for the vision of Magyar historical priority had a track record of puncturing myths dear to educated Magyars. The Vienna professor Robert Rösler's studies stirred up the waters just around the years when the united principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia took the name *Romania* and Hungary gained far-reaching autonomy within the Habsburg Empire. Before turning to Romanian prehistory, Rösler had already blasted the credibility of the Anonymous as a source on the Magyar conquest, earning a bad name for himself among Magyar nationalists.

A founding figure of comparative linguistics in Hungary, Pál Hunfalvy popularized and elaborated on Rösler's views about early Romanian history. Earlier, Hunfalvy had not only berated Czuczor and Fogarasi for espousing root theory, but he had also led the iconoclastic "Ugric" camp in the so-called "Ugro–Turkic War," waged over the linguistic kinship of Hungarian. His *Ethnographie von Ungarn*, aside from outraging Romanian nationalists, also sparked controversy for its views on Magyar ethnogenesis (Domokos and Paládi-Kovács 1986). Offended by his dismissal of the Anonymous, supporters of Szeklers' Hunnic ancestry suspected a German plot behind the scenes (Nagy 1879, 33; Orbán 1888, 3–4). By the turn of the century, however, Hunfalvy's version of Romanian ethnogenesis had found its way into canonical accounts of Hungarian history (Marczali in Frőhlich, Kuzsinszky, Nagy and Marczali 1895, footnote 653; Pauler 1899, vol. 1, 376).

Rösler's contention that early Romanians (Vlachs) had not descended from the Roman colonists of Dacia and had not lived in medieval Hungary prior to the arrival of Magyars rested on several bundles of arguments. Apart from the late emergence of Romanian toponyms, there were others taken from linguistics—the Balkan linguistic area described by Miklošič, the features that Romanian shares with Albanian, and an early layer of Greek loanwords in Romanian—as well as historical ones, like the Roman evacuation of Dacia, the wide attestation of Romance-speakers in the medieval Balkans, and the fact that references to Vlachs, often as new settlers, only took off in the fourteenth century inside the Carpathians.

Rösler concluded that none of the Roman place names of Dacia seemed to have survived in folk usage. What is more, all larger settlements bore names of Hungarian origin. Had Saxon colonists encountered Romance settlement names when they arrived in Transylvania in the early thirteenth century, they should have adopted at least some of them. To him, all this seemed to prove the late expansion of Romanian to the lands where it was spoken in modern times. It was late compared to

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Slavic, too, whose toponymic imprint was evident throughout the land, despite being extinct (Roesler 1871, 129–131).

The debate flared up after Rösler had died in 1874 and it reached its highest pitch in the 1880s, with seven books in German and French. Although it had simmered down by the turn of the century, neither party gave up on its positions.

Hunfalvy restated all of Rösler's arguments, supporting them with his familiarity with the medieval toponymy of Hungary. He was among the first scholars to exploit historical sources for establishing Hungarian place-name etymologies that met comparative standards. In his last decade, he published at least six titles on early Romanian history (some of them in multiple versions) and two specifically on place names.

He, too, found that the Migration Period had broken the continuity of Roman settlement names in former Dacia (Hunfalvy 1881, 104). Slavs became the first people whose place names were to persist. Significantly, wherever a Slavic name was overlaid on an earlier Roman site, Romanians adopted it instead of the Latin name; for example *Grădişte* instead of *Ulpia Traiana* (Hunfalvy 1878, 40). Hunfalvy established the opposite course about hydronyms. Everywhere in the Carpathian Basin, he argued, the pre-Roman names of larger rivers had survived, and Dacia was by no means unique in this respect. He tried to show through a comparison between variants that early Magyars had received these names via Slavs (Hunfalvy 1877, 247, 289; 1881, 104). Hunfalvy and other Magyar authors in his wake assumed that, for the most part, Slavic name-givers had assimilated into Magyars. By showing that the same Slavic settlement names had undergone the same changes wherever Hungarian was spoken, Magyar authors could also de-emphasize their foreignness.

Hunfalvy sprinkled his studies on Romanians with place names taken from medieval sources, to index Magyar priority (Hunfalvy 1878; 1883; 1886; 1894). He refused to consider the presence of Romanians wherever a place emerged under a transparent Hungarian name, even if the place had no documented Western Christian population and the name was a nonce occurrence contradicted by others. He had to concede that Romanian had been spoken in Transylvania by 1222 at the latest, but he took pains to interpret his data through the prism of progressive Magyar ethnic retreat in the face of a Romanian thrust. He tended to imagine that process as taking the form of Hungarian-speakers being assimilated into a Romanian mass (Hunfalvy 1890). Several historical studies, county and regional monographs would expand on this narrative, making use of toponymic references (Szabó T. 1944, 229–231).

Hunfalvy ostensibly distanced himself from the logic that based political rights on historical priority. His first book about Romanians for an international readership, however, already fashioned itself as an antidote to the ignorance and deceit that he saw behind the Romanian irredenta (Hunfalvy 1883). As performative acts, writings about early Vlachs inevitably highlighted the legitimating role of historical priority claims, even if their authors denied that. Through the repeated retelling of ethnic Romanians' slow infiltration into medieval Hungary, the being-there-before-them displaced the conquest of the land as the central argument for Magyar political and cultural supremacy.

Contributions to the debate between Hunfalvy's 1891 death and the First World War added little to his panoply of toponymic arguments. Only the Romanian-born Kolozsvár/Cluj professor Gergely Moldován presented an original case for Magyar priority based on place names. He compared the timeline and spatial distribution of the toponymy, to conclude that after Magyars had occupied the river valleys of Transylvania, medieval Vlachs had to settle for the mountains and thus assimilated the Slavic names they encountered there. The geographical contrast here did not contradict the revamped Romanian vision, which however interpreted it precisely as evidence for Romanian seniority, since the highlands appeared for it as the safe haven where Romanians had toughed out the waves of migration. The parallels that Moldován established between the toponymy on the two sides of the Carpathians suggested to him that Vlachs had replicated the same names and suffixes in wandering to the North, although the time sequence was unclear

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(Moldován 1899, 743–752). Again, for Moldován's adversaries, his parallels likely signalled a migration, just in the opposite direction.

The New Romanian Vision

Latinism was still alive and kicking at the time of Rösler's assault, and the first Romanian reactions to it came from Latinist quarters. Latinists were on familiar ground here, since the apology of their pure Latin ancestry against foreign "detractors" had always been their most cultivated genre (Mitu 2001, 16–17, 21–24, 182–183, 190–191). For that reason, Rösler and Hunfalvy did not deal such an unforeseen, crippling blow to Romanian self-image as happened with the Greek intelligentsia's hang-ups over Jakob Fallmerayer's dismissal of Hellenic ethnic continuity, also partly based on toponymic arguments (Weithmann 1994, 94–99).

While the rearguard efforts of Latinist scholarship northwest of the Carpathians were sinking into irrelevance, it was in independent Romania that the vision of early Romanian history underwent a facelift, in the hands of intellectuals who came of age in the 1860s and 1870s. Headed by the *Junimea* group, this generation turned its back on the "fake" culture Latinists had created. Instead, they promoted slow, organic catching up with Europe. They discarded the radical purism advocated by Latinists in exchange for a moderate organicism that cherished popular language. They fully acknowledged the Slavic influence on Romanian vocabulary and let Dacians enter the pantheon of ancestors (on the linguistic ideology of the *Junimea* generation, see Doina 1980 and Iordan 1978). But Romanian comparatists gave a wide berth to Celtic derivations. Dacians stood to become an enduring fixture of Romanian history, but before long, Celtic etymologies lost their credibility as most available evidence pointed to their Thracian parentage.

The Bessarabian exile and Slavist Bogdan Petriceicu-Hașdeu was particularly influential in normalizing the mixed origins of the Romanian vocabulary, and with it, much of the toponymy. He noted, for example, that just three out of the thirty contemporary counties of Romania sported meaningful names, implying that this, by itself, did not make them any less Romanian (Petriceicu-Hasdeu 1972–1976, 1: 40). He brought Romanian philology in line with the new standards, in part by relieving it of eccentric Latinist etymologies. At the same time, owning up to the old Slavic ingredient of Romanian linguistic heritage came with incorporating Slavs into Romanian ethnogenesis. The Slavic arrivals of the Early Middle Ages, it was asserted, had been absorbed into the Latinized population of the Carpathians, but not until they had reshaped the toponymy. In turn, this allowed Romanian comparatists to lay claim on the Slavic toponymy. Thus, they went one step further than their Magyar colleagues in the symbolic appropriation of Slavic place names, at one fell swoop reinterpreting them as "Romano-Slavic."

Defenders of Roman–Romanian continuity in ancient Dacia adopted the argument from Habsburg Slavists that the early Romance-speaking population must have taken refuge high up in the Carpathians from the successive waves of the Migration Period, from where they later descended once more to populate the lowlands. This adjustment strategically shifted the emphasis from the names on the plains to those of mountains and rivers.

Just as with Rösler and Hunfalvy, toponymic arguments made up only one element in the new intellectual edifice of Romanian priority. In presenting them, I limit myself to the works of the leading historian Xenopol, whose pugnacious apology of Romanian ethno-linguistic continuity proved the most influential on later historical memory, and whose coverage of toponymy was the most comprehensive. He did his studies in Germany, and as a young man, he stood close to the *Junimea* group. His insistence on sedentary origins and his willingness to include Dacians and Slavs into the Romanian gene pool place him between the Latinist rearguard and those who sought a compromise between continuity and immigration and expanded Romanian ethnogenesis to both sides of the Danube (Dimitrie Onciul, Ovid Densușianu, Alexandru Philippide).

Xenopol termed Rösler's story as one about "re-immigration," to create the comic impression that the Austrian scholar had made the selfsame Roman-Romanians shuttle back and forth between

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Dacia and Moesia. But his narrative also included back-migration on a smaller scale. He had Dacians adopt the language of the conquering Romans, take refuge in the mountains as Romans withdrew from the province and later amalgamate with Slavs to produce early Romanians.

Xenopol devoted one chapter to toponymy out of the nine in his fullest exposition of anti-Röslerian arguments, in Romanian (Xenopol 1884). He admitted that the lack of continuous place names would deal a fatal blow to the idea of Romance continuity in Dacia but, to account for their scarcity, he also invoked the already familiar thesis about the medieval Magyarization of toponymy. He supported this idea by noting that the villages specified as "Vlach" (*olachalis*) appeared with transparent Hungarian names in medieval documents. Of course, this was a point that the opposite vision could just as easily subvert to its own ends.

Xenopol salvaged a hand-picked ten Latin etymologies from the Kingdom of Hungary, later reducing their number to five for the sake of the French version (Xenopol 1896, 107–108.) To his mind, however, the names of mountains and rivers carried vital evidence (Xenopol 1885, 152). He could argue from a strong position regarding mountains, since outside the Szeklerland, the modern nomenclature of the Eastern Carpathians mostly reflects Romanian or Slavic naming. Whenever it does not, he claimed that Hungarian or German cultural hegemony had effaced the original Romanian names.

Xenopol concurred with Hunfalvy about the longevity of river names, but presented it as evidence of continuous Romance-speaking settlement (Xenopol 1888–1893, 1: 299–305). Dismissive of the documentary record between the Roman Era and his own time, he invited his sympathetic readers to marvel at the similarity that modern Romanian names bear to the ancient ones. Only in the case of the Timiș/Temes and Ampoi/Ompoly Rivers did he bother with the Hungarian names and attempted to show that they had derived from the Romanian ones. He concluded that one single major watercourse bore a name of Hungarian origin in Romanian, *Arieș* (from Hun. *Aranyos*, meaning "golden"), but added the proviso that this, too, had probably replaced an unattested **Aurar.*

He treated his Romanian readers to a highly selective, ten-page-long litany of Romanian hydronyms from Transylvania, mostly names of visible Slavic or Romanian pedigree and belonging to small brooks (Xenopol 1888–1893, 369–78). Although he collected these from the map, half of them are unidentifiable, either because of the minute size of their referents or because he quoted them mistakenly. He left out many more significant ones and followed Hunfalvy's example in keeping silent about his reasons for considering as Romanian formations the names of the middle-sized ones that he did include.

Updating Romantic historical narratives to new standards of credibility did create internal divisions, and in particular, the new Romanian version of Romanian ethnogenesis left the Latinist generation dumbfounded and scandalized. But the core tenet of ethnic continuity on the soil of former Dacia emerged unscathed from this makeover. Rejecting it remained taboo and apostasy, which even such a political *enfant terrible* as the socialist Ioan Nădejde saw fit to avoid in his harsh critiques of Xenopol's works (e. g., Nădejde 1884–1885). Magyar academia had similarly closed ranks by the turn of the century, with Rösler and Hunfalvy's narrative being forged into a weapon against anti-state Romanian nationalism. The Transylvanian-born historian Elek Jakab went so far as to reproach the Transylvanian Saxon Johann Wolff for his lack of loyalty, after Wolff, a civil servant, had dared to derive the Hungarian name of Transylvania from Celtic via Romanian (Jakab 1888, 66).

The two emerging, antagonistic versions of ethnic priority bolstered storylines about ethnic decay similar to the topos of *Slavia submersa*, in which the Slavic place names of German-speaking lands were interpreted as the "ossuary of Slavdom" (Marti 2015, 3). The label referred to the erstwhile Slavic-speaking dwellers who were mourned jointly with the land they had once inhabited, now lost to the national community. Both the Magyar and Romanian narratives blamed the opposite group for rolling back its ethnic constituency, quoting (real or assumed) historical changes in the toponymy as evidence. In the Magyar version, the "degradation" of the original Hungarian

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place names accompanied the supposed Romanianization of the dwellers, sometimes presented as a piecemeal process spanning over seven centuries and sometimes collapsed into the space of a few generations. In the analogous Romanian story, Hungarian state power had always worked at erasing the linguistic traces of Romanian as part of a scheme to rob indigenous people of their identity (Berecz 2020, 9–10, 92–97, 214–215). The dearth of Romanian linguistic forms in medieval documents spoke to the fraudulence and unreliability of the sources, and by no means to the lack of Romanian-speakers.

The suggestive power of the toponymy never ceased to fascinate historical imagination on either side. By the turn of the century, however, it had taken a back seat in the polemic. This may be illustrated by the German-trained Bucharest university professor Ovid Densușianu, whose 1898 study in Romanian still expanded the hunting ground for early Romanian toponyms to Western Hungary. Three years later, however, his French history of the Romanian language already dismissed both the toponymic argument marshalled against Romance continuity and the place-name derivations advanced in support of it. He explained the lack of continuous settlement names by the political disintegration of early medieval Romanians. How could people living under Slavic or Magyar rule be expected to name their home places? All the same, he entertained the hope that future research might still turn up missing links (Densusianu 1901–1938, 1: 292–293).

There can be no doubt, on the other hand, that the fascination with place-name origins influenced in no small way the toponymic engineering that ensued first under Hungarian and later under Romanian rule, with each state power replacing somewhere between 650 and 750 settlement names of the area on ideological grounds. While the Budapest government vociferously claimed in the 1890s that it was to restore the medieval names to these places (and in fact did so in around one-third of cases), the same theme was injected in a more muted and informal fashion into public discourse during twentieth-century campaigns of name Romanianization (Berecz 2020, 193–240).

Conclusions

After the Romanian-speaking parts of Hungary were annexed to Romania in 1918–20, the history of place names was given a new urgency. Preoccupations with the lost territories were overtly couched in revanchist terms in Hungary. At the same stroke, Romanian antiquarian scholars received a tacit mandate to normalize the inclusion of these lands into Greater Romania. In the interwar period, all this ushered in a quick succession of studies focussed on the area's place names on both sides, as well as by a couple of German scholars. In contrast to prior literature, these studies were mostly written in the authors' national languages. This interest even picked up steam during World World II, when the territory was divided between the two allied states, and the ideological war between them reached fever pitch (Petrovici 1942; 1943; Kniezsa 1943).

In general lines, these studies reproduced the narratives passed down since Hunfalvy and Xenopol and elaborated on the details. Romanian linguists rediscovered the medieval record but insisted that the modern Romanian names were just as important for reconstructing the original forms. Polemical exchanges between the two camps centred on the line of transmission of river names since antiquity, to be inferred from the phonological minutiae of borrowing. Romanian writers had Slavs cohabit with autochthonous Romance-speakers for centuries and eventually be engulfed by them, while their Magyar adversaries only allowed for short-lived contact between Slavic and Romanian in late medieval Southern Transylvania. Romanian scholarship had now permanently lowered its expectations about surviving Latin place names. Instead, it emphasized how Slavs and then Magyars had been able to impose new place names on the Romanian population through their prestige and power.

Contrasting the two mainstream reference books available in their respective markets shows the enduring gap between Romanian and Hungarian views of place names in today's Western Romania (Kiss 1988; Toma 2015). While the Hungarian etymological dictionary of geographical names

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attributes roughly two-thirds of modern Romanian names to borrowing from Hungarian, its Romanian counterpart only categorizes one-quarter of its more parsimonious selection as such. As far as the ultimate etymons are concerned, the Slavic contingent is proportionally roughly the same in the two, despite their conflicting opinions about the routes these Slavic originals took until becoming modern Hungarian and Romanian names. The two traditions also agree that a high percentage of toponyms derived from personal names. Hungarian scholarship, however, attributes all unsuffixed personal names turned into place names to Hungarian naming.

A rare example of full candour may demonstrate the otherwise mostly implicit political framing of toponymic origins. In an academically profiled journal on minority issues, an ethnic Magyar author from Romania comforts his like-minded readers that "Romanian culture cannot lay a valid, historical claim on this basis on the territory of Transylvania, including the Szeklerland" (Szabadi 2020, 95). This should be balanced against a wider Romanian context where, as a recurrent feature, toponymic studies like to point out how the current names bear witness to the great age and autochthony of local ethnic Romanians (Toma 2015, 77–85). In some cases, entire papers are geared towards this single conclusion (e.g., Mureşianu 2002).

Since the nineteenth century, the purported origins of place names have articulated the link between place names on the one hand and the corresponding linguistic self-images and historical visions on the other. Via this link, both Romanian and Magyar nationalists have asserted symbolic ownership over the same territory. The two discourses clashed openly in the 1870s and got caught up in the protracted grand dispute over Romanian ethnogenesis. Political innuendos by scholars and comments made on the margins of the debate make it clear that the central question was which *ethnie* had historical priority in the intra-Carpathian space. Should Romanians' direct-line ancestors be proven to have inhabited it prior to the arrival of Magyars, that would have lent them the firm footing of an uncontested autochthonous status from which to challenge the constitutional status quo and demand some form of political autonomy. Conversely, if the place-name cover was originally Hungarian and early Romanians had only adopted it, that would be understood as substantiating the doctrine that as a historically immigrant minority group, the Romanians of then-Hungary must resign to their imposed status as a subspecies of Hungarians and sever their ties with their kin state.

The logic of territoriality informed the debate to a great extent, through the idea that the homeland must be contiguous and compact. Therefore, although the first documented mention of the Vlachs (Romanians) in the border region of the Land of Făgăraş/Fogaras roughly coincided with the colonization of Szeklers into the modern-day Szeklerland, this did not make the advocates of Magyar ethnic priority any more inclined to accept the Romanians of the Făgăraş area as indigenous on a par with Szeklers. Likewise, there were Magyar participants to the debate who did not contest that Romanians had been the first occupants in the mountains, and some from the opposite camp were ready to admit that the conquering Magyars had found few if any Romanians along the main rivers. These concessions, however, did not qualify their views of Transylvania and the neighbouring areas of Hungary as being inherently Magyar or Romanian, the presence of ethnic others as purely accidental, and the debate as a zero-sum game. Ultimately, the historic rights deduced from a supposed priority also painted the Hungarian-speaking Szeklerland in Romanian, and vice versa, the Romanian-speaking Apuseni Mountains in Hungarian colours.

As positivist historiography took a serious interest in place names, comparative philology came to its aid by developing methods for their study. It did not, however, endow the field with epistemological autonomy. History and linguistics ideally worked here in tandem and complemented each other. Historical sources would loosely delimit the terrain for linguistic analysis, and linguistic data would then either bear out or correct these spatial and chronological terms, to reconstruct past linguistic areas. For this collaboration to produce consensual knowledge, however, it was necessary to accept shared working assumptions as to what languages could be spoken in a given area at a given time. Otherwise, the fact that the new linguistic methods were designed to overcome the problem of bad or ambiguous data by casting a wide interpretive net could help

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convince researchers that they were moving on familiar terrain when they were really out of their depth.

Toponymic research logically proceeded from the study of uncontested core areas, where patterns and chronologies were easier to establish, to that of multilingual borderlands. At the confluence of lesser-studied toponymies, then, problems were compounded. Since participants in the debate were applying comparative-historical philology to new material, they had unusual latitude in marshalling their evidence and emphasizing their strong suits via biased case selection. As far as foreign readers were concerned, scholars could to a surprising degree reduce their derivations to their language of choice and get on with circular reasoning between linguistics and history, while seemingly complying with the methodological principles of both trades. Traces of other languages could be conveniently glossed over or swept out of sight, absent recognized nodes of knowledge that could be used as benchmarks. To make matters worse, linguists expected toponymic research to help locate forgotten words and forms. With some ingenuity, this drive for new data could turn an enigmatic (and by definition grammatically isolated) place name into a bonus for fellow-academics who understood the place at issue as their turf.

Suggestive in this regard is the Gymnasium headmaster Johann Wolff's formally flawless analysis of compound Transylvanian Saxon settlement names and his portrayal of the land as almost an onomastic blank slate at the arrival of Saxons in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries. He explained away any meaningful non-German name variant as folk etymology, but his Magyar and Romanian colleagues likely passed the same judgment on many of his German names (Wolff 1879–1880; 1890/1891). His results were hard to reconcile with either Romanian or Magyar accounts of the same subject. What he did was simply to implement the classificatory methods of German place-name research in the study of Transylvanian material. The vast and flexible inventory of Middle German word stems then certainly gave him enough leeway to squeeze a wide array of unusual name forms into their moulds. This was the reason that his analysis had a blind spot for assimilated other-language elements.

Of course, lay nationalists could also gloat gleefully about otherwise opaque, impenetrable place names that sounded harmonious in their language, and took these as a reassurance of their property rights over the respective places. But double standards operated even among philologists. They cared little about how naturally the other variant of the same name sounded in the other language. Resourcefulness in attributing meanings in one's own language contrasted with the reluctance to accept etymologies in the other. Ultimately, even the opacity of current names could command authenticity and evoke a hoary antiquity.

Underlying these evils was a constitutive tension between the universalist ideals and the national scaffolding of the new science of history, which placed the historian in the position of a detached observer, but at the same time compartmentalized its subject matter along national lines and drew its legitimacy as a national discipline. New nation-states and national movements sought to build well-bounded communities of humanists, who received their mandate in the first place to write histories from a national point of view. Of course, this could easily enclose their constituencies in self-referential isolation. The construction sites and building materials for national histories were often still up for grabs, with the majority of European national movements being either stateless or embroiled in irredentas. Although the ethos of positive science theoretically encouraged cross-national dialogue between practitioners of the same discipline, it was understood that antagonistic national vanguards could not engage with each other in genuine debate on matters of national orthodoxy. It is not so much that the standards of objective, parsimonious reasoning failed to apply across national camps, but that the epistemological grounding of their disciplines allowed national scholarships to dilute standards out of loyalty and a vested interest as ideological auxiliaries.

Disclosures. None.

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Notes

1 Országos Széchényi Könyvtár (OszK) Manuscript Collection, FM1 3814/A, reel no. 28.
2 OSzK Manuscript Collection, FM1 3814/A, reel no. 28

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