

**István Lakatos. 2017. *Siculia*.
Translation, Epilogue and notes by Levente Pap.
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Review by

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By the courtesy of Levente Pap, readers now have the opportunity to hold a primary work of historical and cultural-historical significance in their hands. The author of the Latin text is István Lakatos, the vicar from Csíkközmás, whose work entitled *Siculia delineata et descripta accuratius quam hactenus* survived as a manuscript from 1702. The beautifully implemented bilingual book contains the text in original, its Hungarian translation, a 22-page evaluation and explanatory epilogue, a bibliography, and an appendix. The latter embraces a copy of the pages in which Lakatos introduces the Szekler script and two maps edited by him: one representing Hunnia with the supposed Hun coat of arms and the other one showing Szeklerland with the old sun-moon coat of arms as well as the newer version of it with the hand holding a sword. The only objection to the otherwise demanding edition is against the size of the attached maps. Due to the interesting and up-to-date topic, both maps would have deserved at least a full-page representation, especially since they also show meridians and longitudes at the level of today's scientific standards.

The bilingual edition can be regarded as a positive element that may even help language acquisition, for when teaching modern European languages a Latin-based system has always established the pattern used. As far as vocabulary is concerned, one can easily recognize in each modern language – in our case, the Hungarian language – the cultural contents borrowed from Latin.

The text came into being in a highly controversial period of the Hungarian statehood, namely at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries. When the Turkish occupation ended and the Principality of Transylvania became part of the Habsburg Empire, a new political and cultural situation was created; it was the

Counter-Reformation in the first place to gain power again. In order to sort out possession relationships, both secular and clerical organizations were interested in looking up old documents that proved property rights. Therefore, one considers this period as the beginning of the Hungarian scientific history writing.

“It is true, though, that Jesuit history writers in the 16th and 17th centuries were almost always only interested in the history of the order/society, and it was the aspect of salvation that they were mainly concerned with, and not source criticism. The *Litterae Annuae* (yearbooks of the Jesuit order) mostly served as a propaganda of the order/society and to strengthen internal cohesion.” – as stated by the publisher in the study at the end of the book (Pap: 164), István Lakatos’s dissertation belongs to these types of works. According to its title, it promises to unfold the history of the Szeklers starting from the early beginnings, from the Hun descent up to the author’s present. Yet, the study turns out to be far more about Reformation and Counter-Reformation in Transylvania with a special eye on recent Jesuit history.

The text contains valuable literacy materials. The *annales* was introduced by the Roman *auctors* and was the most beloved genre for writing history in the Middle Ages too:

The events were listed in chronological order, yet the main goal was not to render the historical facts accurately and unbiased but to prove and show the continuous ascension of God’s folk, the *civitas Dei*. (...) The great figures of Transylvanian Humanist historiography felt it was more important for the writer to explain things and make a judgment about historical events and people than just render mere facts. At the same time, it was important to them to highlight the fact that committing a sin was always to be followed by some sort of punishment. (Pap 166)

In the Baroque era, historiography was regarded as an assistant branch of the science of oration and polemics. Counter-Reformation took great advantage of the tools of persuasion. Historical works that are born under such circumstances can be seen as the late fruits of Humanism, which go back to the Middle Ages. Translator-publisher Levente Pap also underlines the fact that István Lakatos’s concept of writing history is rather eclectic. We find traces of the moralizing view that has its roots in the historiography of the Middle Ages throughout the text, good and bad examples follow each other, into which the writer interweaves the history of the Transylvanian religious conflicts up to his present. There are also instances of the baroque quest for effect and mystification that can be noticed in the words used. According to Lakatos, the Battle of Mohács in 1526 had fatal consequences as far as the Church was concerned because several dozens of high priests lost their lives, which resulted in “the monsters of the various heretics

attacking Hungary and Transylvania right away as boars and bears would” (Lakatos: 35). The negative examples are of course provided by the Protestant missionaries and princes who filled people’s souls with *the poison of heresy*. In the old priest’s work, the ideological hints are sometimes hidden, sometimes open. The heretics only feared Cardinal György Martinuzzi – Lakatos writes –, but he “died in Alvinc, near Gyulafehérvár in 1551 as a consequence of Castaldo’s – the leader of Ferdinand’s army – machinations” (Lakatos: 37). As Lakatos wrote in the period of the Habsburg restoration, he handled the obvious fact – the murder had been carried out at the order of the Emperor – very carefully. The funniest utterance for today’s readers is that Péter Petrovics had ordered the torturing of the Catholic priests, which resulted in many of them getting married: “the priests had not only their crown/hair removed but were also stripped off their skin and flesh. Terrified by such cruelty, many rather chose to get married and change religion” (Lakatos: 41).

Levente Pap’s explanation is as follows:

The Catholic clergy was in a disadvantageous situation indeed, yet to state that it was because of Petrovics that Catholic priests who had got bored of celibacy chose to get married, is a white lie. It was not due to the pressure of the Protestants that the marriage of priests became widespread, especially in Szeklerland, where because there was no bishop, discipline had become loose, and thus priests decided to try the adventurous reality of married life themselves. (Pap: 170)

It is the dialectics of sinning and punishment that prevails in the narrative of banning the Jesuits from the 24th of December 1588:

Therefore, God did not endure to see the many sins and unjust laws without punishment. When on the fifth day of the celebrations around Saint John the Apostle the Fathers were ordered to withdraw to Kolozsvár, there was a tempest of such magnitude that it threw off the roof of the church in which the exiles’ decree had been proclaimed, and it also destroyed the chimney of the principle’s house and part of the bridge in Gyulafehérvár. (Lakatos: 53)

Governor János Géczi, who banned the Jesuits from this region on the 3rd of January 1589, “surrendered his wretched soul, moaning and sighing: Alas, I who swore loyalty to my King, István, I betrayed him!” (Lakatos: 55). And, finally, not only the chancellor but all the other opponents of the Catholic faith got punished as deserved. The chancellor’s wife, who “had madly raised her husband” against the Catholics and had been one of the masterminds behind his misdeeds, was

found guilty of adultery and thus “transposed her wretched life for an even more miserable death” (Lakatos: 55). The Prince of Transylvania, István Bocskai, who had exiled the monks from the country, received his well-deserved punishment: *terrible edema* caused his death at the age of fifty.

There are also positive examples to be found in the argumentative text, naming those who protected and spread Catholic belief. The general view of humanist history writing is also to be traced in the text, especially when placing historical and geographical facts into temporal and spatial context. Beyond the didactic intent, we can find the same humanist and thus ancient view on history. Knowing the ancient authors and using them as source is yet another feature of humanist writing. In the study at the end of the book, Levente Pap draws our attention to the fact that we should by no means skip stately knowledge features in the *Siculia*. Next to rendering events concerning the Church, Lakatos highlights other fields of science too, since in order to get to know Szeklerland well one needs to present its natural and climatic characteristics as well. Lakatos’s description of geographical, mineral, vegetal and zoological, and ethnographic phenomena became a criterion of academic history writing in the 18th century. The work ends with a presentation of imagological value: “Szeklerland bears sharp-minded people, who get accustomed to everything quite easily, especially if they are driven into the right direction. They are inherently brave and strong, mostly of high stature, work-loving and strict in terms of morality (...)” (Lakatos: 93).

The colourfulness in the style praises both the author and the translator as well. Thus, the volume can not only be read by specialists in the field but also by laypeople who are interested in ancient history.