

Transylvania in the Second Half of the Thirteenth Century. The Rise of the Congregational System. By Tudor Salagean. East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450, Vol. 37. Brill: Leiden, 2016. vi, 292 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Maps. \$162.00, hard bound.
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The legacies of nineteenth-century Transylvanian historiography, namely the national division of the heterogeneous past, bequeathed numerous controversies. Romanian, Transylvanian Saxon, and Hungarian narratives construed the image of early medieval Transylvanian polity and the place of its composite population often in antagonistic terms. A case in point has been the “individual” or “separate” status of the province in the Medieval Hungarian Kingdom between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. Hungarian historians considered regional tendencies as symptoms of the weakness of the Kingdom in the wake of invasion from the pagan southeast. Romanian historiography saw in the same tendencies the promise of Transylvanian autonomy, a stepping stone towards future unification.

There have been signs of rapprochement in more recent historiography. Tudor Salagean's book offers a subtle interpretation of Transylvania's status on the fringes of the Christian world. It employs Hungarian, Romanian, German, and English literature and archival material about roughly fifty years of Transylvanian history during the Mongol invasions of 1241–42 and 1285, and their effects on local politics until the beginnings of Angevine rule.

The book discusses the circumstances in which provincial interests articulated themselves in contradistinction to Hungarian royal centralizing power. Did local nobles participate in making military, fiscal, and administrative decisions in the campaigns and afterwards? How was the Transylvanian military defense, what were its weak spots and how were these remedied? Which were the institutions and strategies that channeled local military and economic interests into politics? According to Salagean, after the first devastating Mongol invasion the rulers of the province sought to increase regional administrative autarchy to increase military self-defense. The evidence is to be found in the restructuring of the counties to integrate those rich in natural resources, the donation of royal fiefs to loyal supporters, and the marriage politics that sought mighty patrons who were all employed by the Arpad princes.

This was the case with Prince Stephen, fighting his father, King Béla IV (1235–70), naming Transylvania a duchy, which meant limited autonomy under princely jurisdiction. The failure to integrate the Saxon military province of Hermannstadt / Sibiu into the ducal system led to an alternative form of provincial governance, “based on the balance of aristocratic parties” (129) under Ladislaus the Cuman (King Ladislaus IV). Salagean considers this “legal community” the basis for the future Transylvanian regional governing body, the noble congregation. The adverted second Mongol invasion in 1285 further strengthened solidarity between the king and the lesser local nobility. This politics endorsed Cumans and Romanians to the detriment of aristocrats and it even came to a breach with the Holy See. The reign of Ladislaus IV ended, however, with his assassination, which put an end to nascent Transylvanian autarky. That the designation of the province changed into “regnum” under the next ruler, Ladislas Kan, should not be taken at face value, argues Salagean. The Transylvanian polity did not metamorphose into an autonomous state, as older Romanian historiography had it, but signified a “community of the privileged” that possessed some geographic and cultural individuality within the Hungarian Kingdom.

The book is an intriguing read, full of adventurous and dramatic turns. The author narrates the consecutive princely policies pursued by the princes and Ladislaus Kan, *voievode* of Transylvania, with great erudition. The reader plunges into medieval Transylvanian politics caught between the Christian and Mongol worlds, and nothing embodies this conflict better than the troubled reign of the half-Cuman, half-Christian King, Ladislas IV. The book describes in vivid details the military ambushes, the papal and European imperial schemes targeting Transylvania and Hungary, and renders impressively the volatile status of contemporary border regions in Christian Europe. What one party builds up is undone by the successors. The historical details assemble into short narratives about alternating patterns of local and royal control that mutually neutralized each other. This factuality itself is a contestation of the thesis of contemporary autonomous Transylvanian statehood, which Salagean rejects.

The impressive rendering of events has the disadvantage that it allows little space for reflection on the central topic of the book, the congregational system. More comparative analysis into the concept of the “duchy,” “regnum,” and the reality of the congregational system in the east-central and southeastern European context could

have also been helpful. These shortcomings notwithstanding, the monograph is a fascinating study about medieval Christian border regions and their political dynamics.

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