

Minta és felzárkózás [Role model and catching up]. By László Fazakas, Szilárd Ferenczi, János Fodor, and Zsófia Gál. Kolozsvár–Marosvásárhely: Iskola Alapítvány Kiadó–Lector Kiadó, 2021. 300 pp.

Transylvania, a multinational part of today's Romania, has its own vernacular culture, including a characteristic type of urban architecture. It also has its own traditional Hungarian academic community, the members of which pursue research in their mother tongue, Hungarian. Because of the troubled history of this region, it is particularly interesting to see how this community interprets its own historical heritage. The book under review aims to reconstruct the history of two main cities, the informal metropolitan center of the region, Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca, Klausenburg), and another historically relevant city, Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureș, Neumarkt), in the early twentieth century. To be more precise, its aim is to show “the history of the development of Kolozsvár and Marosvásárhely during the terms of mayors Géza Szvacsina and György Bernády” respectively. The authors are four young researchers (historians and art historians) who have already shown their lion's claws. Their decision to cooperate on a book about two of the most important cities of their region makes this an exceptional investigation. As it so happens, they embarked down this path without much institutional backing. True, they were all alumni of the same alma mater, the Department of History in Hungarian at the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj. Three of them are political and social historians, and one is an art historian. Yet only one of them has a position at the university. The others are less integrated into the academic community, and they apparently did not mind not having a formal research unit with an adequate budget. They realized that there was a striking lacuna in the secondary literature that needed to be addressed. Fazakas had published an article earlier in which he had observed that Kolozsvár had been largely neglected by historians when it came to the comparatively prosperous period in the city's history after the Austro-Hungarian Settlement (1867). They put together their individual research findings and created a grand, multi-layered narrative about this topic in this clearly structured and informative volume.

The volume, published by two publishing houses together, one in each of the two cities, offers a comparative narrative of the urban and architectural development of these urban centers under the two aforementioned mayors. The four authors combined their respective expertise, each contributing roughly 60

pages to the final work. The structure and methodology offer the reader a wide historical panorama: political history is backed up with social history, and glimpses of urban planning come with the art historian's detailed introduction of the major public buildings of the age in these two cities. Only the detailed account by Fazekas of the long and painful process of the construction of the water and sewerage networks seems to be somewhat exhaustive and disconnected. Szilárd Ferenczi covers the chapter on Kolozsvár during the time in office of Géza Szvacšina (1849–1917), and János Fodor describes Marosvásárhely's efforts to catch up with the metropolitan center in the days of its powerful mayor, György Bernády (1864–1938). Zsófia Gál gives a careful architectural *ekphrasis* of the main buildings built or planned in this era in both cities.

The major issue of the book is connected to the well-known fact that this province of the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had to some extent lagged behind compared to the development of some of the other parts of the empire. Yet this period brought with it an unprecedented amount of governmental and local investments here, too. This effort resulted in the construction of several public buildings that were of both practical and symbolic importance, and it also led to the reconstruction of the central urban fabric of these cities. True, there was a difference between the plans hatched by the government in the capital, Budapest, and the ideas and ideals cherished by the local actors, but the locals achieved a great deal thanks to their refined techniques of negotiations and bargaining. The authors provide meticulous readings of the political debates in the local press, thus giving their reader a clear idea of what the local elites regarded as their priorities. We are also given a clear sense of the risks of being a leading local magistrate, as often infrastructural and architectural developments had to be carried out on credit. Nevertheless, these political leaders were clearly bold and ambitious, despite their faults, and the period could very reasonably be characterized as an unparalleled golden age in the history of these cities.

Yet the self-perception of the two cities was rather different. After the establishment of its university in 1872 (as originally proposed by the senior minister of culture, József Eötvös) and also after having become home to many regional institutions, Kolozsvár took on the role of the provincial center, following the steps taken by Budapest, the booming capital of the country (on which see John Lukacs's marvelous classic, *Budapest 1900*). Marosvásárhely, on the other hand, had a more modest role even within Transylvania. It was destined to serve as the cultural and economic center of the Székely Land. So, for Marosvásárhely,

Kolozsvár became the local role model and rival in a competition in which the latter was destined to lose. In fact, the book calls attention to the fact that for a long time, the Saxon towns of Brassó (Braşov, Kronstadt) and Nagyszeben (Sibiu, Hermannstadt) outperformed Marosvásárhely.

A further point of the book is to show not only the difference in the characters of the two mayors who played the leading parts in the story, but also that the political culture of the two cities differed strikingly. In Kolozsvár, Szvacsina was heir to the brave policies of his predecessors, and while holding his office (1898–1913), he was participant in a vibrant political life characterized by internal struggles among the local representatives of the major national parties. Against this backdrop of political intrigue and machination, his own contributions turn out to be less decisive than those of Bernády, the mayor of Marosvásárhely (1902–1912). Once again, the book is careful to point out that local historians might have exaggerated Bernády's own initiatives, such as the launch of large-scale construction in his city.

As for the methodological differences between the two reconstructions, Ferenczi's narrative of Kolozsvár tries to paint the major political scandals of the day with vivid colors, thus offering an overview of the shifting lines between allies and enemies within the city's bodies and institutions. Fodor, on the other hand, offers a more detailed view of the institutional and social layers of Marosvásárhely. He provides detailed statistics about the demographic trends in the city from national and denominational perspectives. In the case of Bernády, he summarizes his protagonist's work in a somewhat less scrupulous manner.

A real merit of the book is the long chapter on the architecture and built environment of the two cities. Zsófia Gál, the author of this chapter, is an art historian, and she provides a detailed, comparative account of the planning processes and an architectural description of the new buildings that were actually constructed. Her introduction to the history (from the moment of inception as an idea) of some of the most prominent and symbolically important public buildings in Transylvania is fascinating, and the narrative is complemented by an excellent array of illustrations.

To summarize, Fazakas, Ferenczi, Fodor, and Gál have taken a brave step with this book project, which constitutes an effort to fill in the gaps in the historical scholarship on the comparative urban history, politics, and cultures of these two major cities. They have done their job in an exemplary manner, making use of the existing secondary literature, including the findings of Romanian colleagues, but also consulting primary sources in the archives and reports in the

daily press of the time. They felt no need to impose an ideological interpretation on the material. Their detached, neutral tone is commendable in an age of culture wars. On the other hand, however, sometimes the reader misses the historian's evaluative guidance. Overall, this is a welcome piece of academic history, which will acquaint readers with this understudied period in the history of urbanization in Transylvania.

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