

Timothy Olin, *The Banat of Temesvar. Borderland Colonization in the Habsburg Monarchy*, California, Stanford University Press, 2025, 344 p.

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At the beginning of 2025, Banat – the region between the Danube, river Tisza, river Mureş and the Carpathian Mountains – became the subject of a new book published by Stanford University Press: *The Banat of Temesvar, Borderland Colonization in the Habsburg Monarchy*. The work, by American historian Timothy Olin, is the result of a diligent 13-year-long research project. The title evokes the eighteenth-century Banat, but the book, in its meticulous analysis, does not neglect the “century of nations” either, including Banat’s status as a border region, the colonization policies and their impact, as well as the region’s cultural diversity and inter-ethnic relations.

Timișoara’s Banat was a Habsburg creation. This is the author’s opening sentence, which sets the tone for the pages that follow. The historian sees the Banat, on the border between the Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire, and thus the frontier between West and East, as a meeting place of cultures, a contact zone, a cross-border region. In reading this book, we discover a land ravaged by wars and internal conflicts, but also its people of the past, as the author focuses on both the settler communities, and the indigenous population, as well as the relationship between the two.

The work is built around the idea that populating the Banat with predominantly German families was a deliberate act of colonization, characteristic of a newly conquered frontier area, which the Austrian authorities wanted to stabilize and legalize and whose profitability they wanted to maximize. The book is structured into nine chapters as follows: *Conquest and Construction*,

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Security and Loyalty, The Religious and Ethnic (Re-)Construction of the Banat, Expectations Fulfilled, Settler Culture, Local Responses to Habsburg Rule I and Local Responses to Habsburg Rule II. The topics covered in these nine chapters start with Banat's incorporation into the Habsburg Monarchy and then turn to colonization, examining its motivations, the importance of the religious and confessional dynamics in shaping the colonization policies, the living conditions of both the settlers and the indigenous population, and the impact of colonization on the relations between the natives and the authorities, as well as between the settlers and the authorities. There is also a closing epilogue that traces the fate of the Germans in the Banat, the inter-ethnic relations and the policies that affected ethnic minorities in the region, from the 1848-1849 Revolution to the end of the tumultuous twentieth century. The epilogue shows us the differences and similarities between the problems of a multi-ethnic borderland within an empire and within nation states.

Given the long period of time during which Timothy Olin has carried out his in-depth research on the colonization of Banat in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the substantial and thorough bibliography of the work comes as no surprise. The historian has left no stone unturned and has scoured the cities of Serbia, Austria, Romania and Hungary in search of archival documents to complete the often-ambiguous puzzle of eighteenth-century Banat. To these are added published primary sources and scholarly works, most of them by English- and German-language authors, but the names of Hungarian and Romanian historians are also well represented.

One of the merits of this work is its even-handed overview of the population of Banat, the cultures and ethnicities that lived – and continue to live – in this small region of Central and Eastern Europe divided between Romania, Serbia and Hungary. The subject of colonization and the state of Banat in the eighteenth century has been addressed in the historiographies of all four countries, but they tend to focus on their own nationals. This is not the case in Olin's work. The American historian approaches and analyses the topic with professional detachment, unaffected by local tensions or political positions. From this stance, Olin does not see the population movements that marked eighteenth-century Banat (and the later ones as well) as mere migration, but situates them within the global framework of colonialism, in this case orchestrated by the Habsburg Empire. In this context, perhaps a more in-depth discussion on what colonialism meant within a European empire as compared to the colonizing actions across the oceans might have been welcome.

To conclude, *The Banat of Temesvar* is a good read for those who want to understand Modern Banat and how it influences Contemporary Banat, and it earns its place among the essential readings for understanding the complexity of the processes of colonization and their impact on ethno-religious identities and relations between the communities of Central and Eastern Europe. This work is not only rigorously researched, but also well written and easy to follow, making it an enjoyable read not only for historians, but also for history buffs or readers who have been just made curious by the Banat and by its “Little Vienna” – Timișoara / Temeschwar / Temesvár / Темишвар. The American historian’s work, published in English, a modern-day *lingua franca*, is also a wonderful opportunity for readers from Banat and beyond, from all the nation states involved in the region’s history to meet each other through the pages of this book.