

**Ioan Bolovan, Rudolf Gräf (coordonatori), *O istorie a Banatului. Compendiu* [A history of Banat. Compendium], Cluj-Napoca, Editura Școala Ardeleană, 2023, 682 p.**

**Alexandra CIOBANU**

Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

Email: alexandrastefania00000@gmail.com

It seems that the most important works on the history of Banat tend, at least in recent years, to be published anywhere but in the Banat. Thus, two years before *The Banat of Temesvar* appeared in the USA, an equally important, but quite different work on Banat was published in Cluj-Napoca – namely, the collective volume *O istorie a Banatului: compendiu*, coordinated by historians Ioan Bolovan and Rudolf Gräf and published under the aegis of the Romanian Academy. The work, now in its second edition, is dedicated to historian Nicolae Bocșan and opens with a *word of appreciation* by Romanian Academy president Ioan-Aurel Pop, a preface signed by Dan Dubină, member of Romanian Academy, and a foreword by the coordinators of the volume. I said that it differs completely from Timothy Olin's work, and it does. While the latter is focused on a century and a half of the region's history and presents it through the focal point of colonization, *O istorie a Banatului*, as the title suggests, is a compendium intended to provide a coherent synthesis of the history of the region, from prehistoric times to the present day. The work brings together the efforts of researchers from Timișoara, Reșița and Arad, it approaches the history of the Banat in a chronological manner and briefly analyses and explains each significant historical fact, event or process.

The work is structured into nine chronological sections, except for the first and last two sections, which deal with the natural setting, Banat figures and chronological milestones in the history of the region. The first section, *The Natural Setting*, authored by Petru Urdea, presents the relief,

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climate, hydrography and vegetation of Banat, and anticipates the impression the reader will most likely have by the end – namely, that Banat is a distinctive region.

After locating Banat on the map and imagined himself in the wide expanse of the Banat Mountains or fishing on the Bega Canal, the reader is then introduced to the Banat's distant past. The section dedicated to prehistory and antiquity is authored by Florin Draşovean and Adrian Ardeţ and, as already mentioned, covers the history of the region from the Palaeolithic (which, on the plains between the Mureş, Danube and Tisza, began around 700 000 BC) to the end of antiquity, around 400 AD. The chapter covers the main archaeological discoveries made on the territory of the Banat and the cultures that left their archaeological traces, their way of life and their beliefs. It naturally includes sub-chapter on the Dacians and the Romans, illustrating the evolution of the region in that period, and the premises of the ethnogenesis of the Romanian people.

The Middle Ages is the historical epoch that receives the most attention in the compendium, with three sections and more than 200 pages. The Banat of the Middle Ages is chronologically divided into three periods: the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries, the 6<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries and the years 1000-1715. Historian Daniela Tănase divided the first six centuries of Banat's Middle Ages into the *Early Age of Migrations* and the *Period of Crystallization of Medieval society*. The first section focuses on the migratory peoples, especially the Huns, and the policies of the Byzantine Empire that influenced the history of the Banat. The migratory peoples also play an important role in the unfolding of the events recounted in the second section, the climax of which is the Hungarian settlement. The third and last section dedicated to the Middle Ages is written by historians Adrian and Livia Magina, who trace the political, military, administrative, demographic, social, economic, cultural and confessional course of Banat's history over the course of about seven centuries. It is a chapter that treats Banat from the perspectives of society, and is invaluable for understanding its within the Hungarian Kingdom and later on. The last sub-chapter of this section is atypical, dealing separately with the Ottoman period, seen in the same multi-perspectival manner, on a smaller scale.

Extremely important and well researched is the sixth section of the compendium, *Modern Banat*, authored by historians Rudolf Gräf and Sandra Hirsch. Modernity begins in the Banat with the Habsburg conquest in 1716,

following which the history of the region is captured passing from Ottoman to Austrian and then Hungarian administration. The section deals with the conquest of the Banat, the administrative system, demography, colonization policies, economy, education, religion, art and daily life, as well as the national movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the involvement of the Banat nations in the 1848-1849 Revolution and the labour movement in the region.

The last section, whose title includes a historical epoch, is *Contemporary Banat*, written by historians Vasile Rămneanu and Miodrag Milin. This chapter captures Banat's distinct position at the end of the First World War during the peace conferences, its administrative reorganization within Greater Romania, the evolution of inter-ethnic relations, the involvement of its inhabitants in politics, economy, society, culture and education in the inter-war period. The part devoted to the establishment of communism is rather brief and focuses on the attitude of society towards the changes and the tragedy of the deportation of the Swabians. The authors also shed light on the anti-communist resistance, the deportations to the Bărăgan, the influence of alternative culture on the outbreak of the 1989 Revolution and, finally, all the events of December 1989 that deeply marked the collective consciousness of the region's inhabitants.

The volume concludes with a section dedicated to the illustrious figures of Banat, a testament to the province's multiculturalism, followed by a section dedicated to chronological milestones.

The book is substantial in size, but makes up for it in its writing, making it a pleasant read for both the general public and specialists. The title page of each section includes an image representative of the historical period covered, and at the end of each chapter is a wealth of images of archaeological finds, historical monuments, archival documents and maps, which complement and solidify the information gained through reading. The Compendium does not exhaust any of the topics discussed, but it is a perfect starting point for any topic related to the history of the Banat through its synthesis, the classical structure of the information and the generous bibliography, with dozens of references to valuable works of Romanian, German and Hungarian historiography, which are found at the end of each chapter.

Reading the history of the Banat from beginning to end, the inquisitive reader will discover that administrative changes, the threat of war – whether on the border or within the territory – and population movements, whether voluntary or forced, premeditated or not, have been the constants in the history of this small province.