

URBAN IDENTIFICATION AGENTS AND HISTORICAL DISCOURSE IN A FRONTIER CITY. CASE STUDY: BRAȘOV DURING THE 16th AND 17th CENTURIES¹

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ABSTRACT

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The city of Brașov represents the prototype of a frontier urban settlement. Its geographical position of a border city created a particular environment with its specific life-style marked by conflict and symbiosis. The article focuses on three objectives: developing a terminological background of the frontier city, presenting the evolution of urban identification agents and tracing these elements in the historical discourse produced in Brașov.

The 16th century is the age of dissolution of medieval geographical frontiers, as a result of which new ones come to replace them. In the case of Brașov, after the Ottoman Empire erases the Kingdom of Hungary from the political map, the city seeks refuge in German identity, looking towards Ferdinand of Habsburg as a suitable sovereign. This dream, however, is short-lived and the Saxon city gives up on its long-distance relation with the Habsburg territories.

After the Reformation the city is powerful enough to assume its own identity, not a foreign one but an autochthonous one. Rather than being *hospites* in Transylvania, the Saxons try to prove that they had been there all along. This is the first step towards the integration of the local identity into a greater one: the national identity.

The cultural production of Brașov offers a variety of sources: diaries, mural inscriptions, notes and urban chronicles. They represent different types of historical writings concerning various aspects and moments in the evolution of the identity discourse. Most of them are a mixture of political, historical and confessional elements, thus revealing the complexity of urban identity at the Transylvanian border.

Keywords: Identification Agents, Alterity, Frontier/Borderland, Centre-periphery Relation, the Transylvanian Principality, Saxon Autonomy, Regionalism

Słowa kluczowe: tożsamość – czynniki, inność, granica/pogranicze, stosunki centrum-peryferia, Księstwo Siedmiogrodu, autonomia saska, regionalizm

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The medieval imaginary abounds with legends and myths concerning the origin of peoples and their perilous journey from the birth place to The Promised Land. The latter represents the current *Heimat*² of these peoples, a place where they would settle down forever and fulfill their destiny.³ Starting with the 19th century, German historians stressed the importance of the origin-destiny myths in the process of legitimating and building a national identity. However, the term of “national identity” must be used with extreme caution, when approaching the Middle Ages and the pre-modern times.

This article aims at determining the main elements which define the identity of the city of Braşov. Situated at the south-eastern border of Transylvania, the city allows the observation of specific identification agents, typical for a frontier environment. Restricting the research to city, instead of an extended area provides the study with an in-depth view on how the identification process occurs. By resorting to the micro-frontier as the object of study, the paper also analyzes the connections between urban, regional and “national” identity (in its pre-modern sense).

The subject of this paper is constantly under debate in current historiography, due to its complex nature and terminological ambiguity. Taking these aspects into consideration we resorted to structuring this study into three parts. The first segment focuses at establishing a rigorous terminological toolkit. Notions such as “identity,” “frontier” and “nation” represent complex areas of research. Moreover, their modern meaning does not correspond to the pre-modern one. Thus a detailed definition is required.

The second part of this study examines the identification agents which contribute to the self-image of the frontier city. This process involves various aspects: political, confessional, cultural and psychological. By encountering the “Other” the city of Braşov builds its identity. However, this identification process occurs in a particular environment, which is the frontier. In such a context, the actions and reactions of the city are distinct from the norm regulated by the centre. These differences constitute one of the main points of interest of this study.

The final section tracks the introduction and evolution of the identification agents within the historiographical discourse produced in Braşov during the 16th and the 17th century. This type of analysis emphasises the conceptualisation, dissemination and the political instrumentalisation of the above mentioned identification agents.

² The German notion of *Heimat* cannot be translated into English. The closest English equivalent is “natural habitat.”

³ P. Hoppenbrouwers, *Medieval Peoples Imagined*, “Working Papers European Studies” (Amsterdam) 2005, no. 3, p. 3–4.

1. "IDENTIFICATION," "FRONTIER" AND "NATION" IN PRE-MODERN TRANSYLVANIA

The first terminological issue consists in finding a valid definition for the notion of "identity." The English word originates in the Late Latin *identitas*, which stems from the Classical Latin term *idem*, meaning "the same." This, however, does not provide a proper answer to our question. "Identity" represents a complex notion, engaging various aspects, ranging from political to psychological. Psychologists Susan D. Clayton and Susan Opatow identified some common features of these identities. They are all somehow linked with a self-concept. Concomitantly, they represent a separation of what it (person, object, concept etc.) is from what it is not. In psychoanalytical terms, the identity represents a distinction between ourselves and the information we get from others.⁴

While the psychoanalysis may shed some light on the meaning of personal identity, applying these concepts to the historical context proves difficult. In his attempt to find the key uses of the notion of "identity," Roger Brubaker and Frederick Cooper underline the differences between the various uses of this complex notion. As far as the socio-political field is concerned, the authors define identity as "a processual and interactive development of a certain collective self-understanding solidarity or <groupness> resulting in collective action." Thus, the identity is a product of social and political action as well as the ground or basis of further action.⁵

Brubaker and Cooper's assertions render a wide and ambiguous frame for the current study. In order to provide a more precise terminological instrument we resort to the term of "identification," instead of "identity." "Identification" underlines better the dynamism of the process, raising questions about the agents that do the identifying. These are not necessarily institutions or persons, but rather reside in the discourse created around the newly discovered identity.⁶

Coming back to the initial issues, the other concept submitted to debate is "nation." The modern sense of the term is strongly connected to the state. However, this is not the case for the 16th and the 17th centuries. In this article, we will use the term, with its 16th century meaning. Deriving from the Late Latin *natio*, the pre-modern "nation" defined a political group, a privileged social stratum, and had little to no connection with ethnicity.

The explanation of this terminological choice resides in the fact that the existence of such privileged and autonomous groups gives way to a particular identification process. For example, in 16th century Transylvania, the identifying discourses reflect the political situation. The three political nations: *natio Hungarica* – the nobles, *natio Saxonica* and *natio Siculica*, are the only ones who emphasised their identity.

⁴ S.D. Clayton, S. Opatow, *Introduction. Identity and the Natural Environment* [in:] *Identity and the Natural Environment. The Psychological Significance of Nature*, eds. S.D. Clayton, S. Opatow, Cambridge (Massachusetts)–London 2003, p. 5.

⁵ R. Brubaker, F. Cooper, *Beyond 'identity'*, "Theory and Society" 2000, no. 29, pp. 7–8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 14–17.

The Romanians, in spite of being the majority in Transylvania, lacked a political voice. Thus, they left only a few discursive traces of their own identification process.

The current article focuses on the development of the identification process in Braşov, a Saxon city, at the Transylvanian border. This choice is not a random one. Pre-modern Transylvania is an intriguing area, due to its borderland characteristics. These aspects tend to fade towards the centre, but they become more intense towards the frontier.

Approaching the subject of an urban identity or identification process, especially in such a volatile environment as the frontier, raises a few theoretical debates. The frontier city represents a particular environment, characterised by a specific life-style marked by conflicts and symbiosis, separation and cohabitation. Thus, the following questions appear:

1. What is “urban identification process” and how does it apply to the frontier?
2. How do the central identification agents influence the frontier?
3. Which are the limits of the frontier city autonomy?

Considering that “identification” represents a more fortunate choice of words, rather than “identity,” this article aims at analyzing the internal self-identification process, which occurs during the 16th and early 17th century in the frontier city of Braşov. In other words, how do the inhabitants within the walls of Braşov see themselves and their city, as compared to the exterior environment? From this point of view, the urban identification process represents the birth and evolution of an anthropocentric collective construct, referring to the way the members of the town community perceive and relate to that particular city. The nature of the identification agents involved ranges from social, political or cultural to symbolical, emotional and psychological.

The particular element in this type of identification resides in the influence of the frontier position. Braşov was built as a defensive fortress, and was thus surrounded by strong walls. These walls were meant not only to keep foreigners out, but also to protect the citizens inside. The people who lived outside the city walls were not considered citizens and were thus excluded from the urban political life. The identification discourses analyzed in this study come exclusively from these citizens, who were so adamant to keep foreigners out of their town.

Nonetheless, the frontier is a place of paradox, both uniting and separating. As a frontier city, Braşov makes no exception to this rule. Despite the xenophobic tendencies of its inhabitants, the city was the biggest trading metropolis in Transylvania during the 16th and the 17th centuries. This means that the urban community was submitted to various influences ranging from the neighbouring Romanian community to Constantinople and Venice.

These contacts and confrontations contributed to defining the self-image of the people of Braşov. Situated at the Transylvanian border, the city faces various forms of “otherness.” The closest contacts with alterity occur right outside the city walls. The Saxon citizens inside the fortress come into contact with the Romanians inhabiting the Upper Suburb (germ. *Obere Vorstadt*, rom. *Şchei*). The Saxons see themselves as representatives of the Western, Catholic civilisation and life-style in Transylvania, while the Romanians are part of the Byzantine Orthodox area of influence. This type

of confrontation is not a particularly violent one. On the contrary, it is rather a result of daily cohabitation. Thus, the Romanians in Șchei do not represent an exotic, distant Other, but rather a familiar one.

This particular position of the Saxon city and the Romanian community outside its walls attracted the attention of major political and religious personalities. In his letter from December 15th 1399, Pope Bonifacius IX⁷ states his awareness of the difficult situation of *Corona* (Brașov), as a city “at the border of Christianity.” The Pontiff is concerned about a schismatic (Orthodox) community living near the city and stresses the importance of converting these elements to Catholicism.⁸ This document emphasise two fundamental identification agents for Brașov:

1. Its role as a Christian frontier fortress and the responsibility that comes with it.
2. Pope Bonifacius IX underlines the offensive role of the city within the Catholic plan of action. As a missionary stronghold, it is the city’s duty to convert the schismatics and expand the influence of the Holy See.

The letter also highlights the ambiguity of this frontier area. Part oriental, part occidental, it is the scene of a mirror-like process, resulting in a succession of images and counter-images on the background of the confrontation between West and East.⁹ The meaning of the latter dimension changes as the Ottoman Empire penetrates the European continent replacing the Byzantine state.

The Ottoman threat becomes a material reality for Transylvania starting with the 15th century. However, the contacts with this Islamic civilisation are rare during this time and concern mainly the economic sphere. The long lasting trading contacts between the Saxons and the Ottoman Empire do not imply a direct contact with Ottoman merchants. The explanation of this fact resides in the interpolation of the Levantine tradesmen, who replace the Romanians as intermediaries between the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe.¹⁰

The situation changes in the 16th century, when Süleyman I¹¹ conquers Central Hungary and converts Transylvania into an autonomous principality, under Ottoman sovereignty. As far as the south-eastern frontier is concerned, the political instability of the entire carpathian-danubian-pontic area, translates into an intensification of the direct contacts between the Saxon cities and the Ottoman armies.

Unlike the neighbourly encounters with Romanians, the confrontation of the Transylvanian frontier cities with the Ottomans is marked by violence. As the sultans push forward towards Central Europe and Vienna, the frontier cities of Transylvania find themselves in the position of Christian strongholds against the Islamic offensive.

⁷ Bonifacius (Boniface) IX – pope from 1389, until his death in 1404.

⁸ V. Oltean, *Școala românească din Șcheii Brașovului*, București 1989, pp. 11–13.

⁹ E.M. Szekely, *Depășirea stereotipurilor culturale. Imaginea celuiilalt în jurnale și note de călătorie*, “The Proceedings of the European Integration – Between Tradition and Modernity Congress” (Târgu Mureș) 2007, no. 2, p. 161.

¹⁰ See T. Stoianovich, *The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant*, “The Journal of Economic History” (Cambridge) 1960, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 234–313.

¹¹ Süleyman I – sultan of the Ottoman Empire (1520–1566). In 1521 he conquered Belgrade; on August 29th 1526 he won the battle of Mohács, thus eliminating the Kingdom of Hungary from the political map. On August 29th 1541, he conquered Buda and founded the Buda vilayet.

The Orthodox Romanians represent the near-by alterity: they are clearly different from the Saxon citizens of Braşov, yet not entirely foreign. Both Romanians and Saxons share a common Christian heritage, they relate to one of the Roman Empires and, most important, both communities have been sharing the same living space for a long period of time. This historical cohabitation allowed a mutual accommodation and acceptance. Despite a clear political domination of the Saxons over the Romanians, the community from Şchei also influenced the city. One of the most revealing examples is recorded in the Reformation Book (*Reformatio ecclesiae Coronensis ac totius Barcensis provinciae*) written by Johannes Honterus.¹² The Transylvanian reformer justifies the Magistrate's decision to introduce the Lutheran Reformation by underlining the Orthodox threat. As the Saxons have daily contacts with Romanians (from Şchei, Moldavia and Walachia) and other Orthodox peoples, they are submitted to their influence. In such a time of need, the Orthodox criticism towards the corruption and the luxury of the Catholic Church might confuse the "weak souls." Thus, a cleansing of the Church is necessary and the Reformation provides the means for it.¹³ In other words, converting to Lutheranism represents the urban authorities' (lay and clerical) reaction to the Orthodox challenge.¹⁴

The situation described above proves the strong influence of the frontier. Situated at the border between Latin and Greek Christianity, Braşov receives permanent information from the Orient and South-Eastern Europe. As long as the Catholic Church leads a militant policy, trying to expand into Byzantine territory, Braşov seems to be "protected" from Orthodox influence. However, the situation changes once the Ottoman armies breach the Greek barrier. After the resounding victories of Mehmed II¹⁵ and Süleyman I, produced a serious spiritual crisis among Catholics.

Alongside with a constant fear of falling under Ottoman rule, the Christians also started to lose faith in the Church's ability to provide solace and support. This resulted in a bitter critique of the luxury and corruption inside the Catholic institution. Luther's assertion that "The Great Turk" (Süleyman) was sent by God to punish the Catholic abuses, accentuated this state of anxiety. On this general background, the Orthodox critique in Braşov adds supplementary pressure on the Saxon citizens. As a consequence, Honterus and the Magistrate choose the Lutheran confession as a form of "crisis management."¹⁶ Assimilating the example of the German imperial cities, Braşov becomes the first Transylvanian city to adopt the Lutheran confession.

¹² Johannes Honterus (1498–1549) – humanist scholar, pastor and religious reformer. In 1543, with the accord of the urban Magistrate, he introduced the Lutheran Reformation in Braşov. He also organized the Gymnasium and grounded the Library in Braşov (considered the best endowed in the area, surpassed only by the one in Buda, grounded by King Matia).

¹³ *Johannes Honterus' ausgewaehlte Schriften*, ed. O. Netolicza, Wien–Hermannstadt 1898, pp. 12, 26.

¹⁴ E. Szegedi, *Die Reformation als "Krisenmanagement." Überlegungen zur Identität einer siebenbürgischen Stadt im Zeitalter der Reformation in Ethnicity and Religion in Central and Eastern Europe*, eds. M. Crăciun, O. Ghitta, Cluj-Napoca 1995, p. 68.

¹⁵ Mehmed II – Sultan of the Ottoman Empire (1444–1446, 1451–1481). Conquered Constantinople on May 29th 1453.

¹⁶ E. Szegedi, *Die Reformation...*, pp. 64–69.

As mentioned above, the impact of the Ottoman conquest in Europe causes a complex political, spiritual and identity crisis. The Ottoman culture represents the radical alterity¹⁷ for the Transylvanian frontier cities. Edward Said defines this encounter by tracing the evolution of the classic separation between East and West. The historian traces the evolution of the concept of “Us” and “Others” starting with the Greek and Roman identification system. As far as Christianity is concerned, Said asserts that this new religion contributed to establishing the familiar, “Levantine” Orient (the former Byzantine Empire and its neighbours) and a Far Orient, completely different from the Western Latin civilisation.¹⁸ The above mentioned crisis is more acute at the frontier. The cities here live in constant under-siege mind frame. Braşov, for example, is often attacked by Ottoman armies.

In conclusion, the neighbouring Romanians and the Ottomans represent crucial identification agents, as far as the frontier city of Braşov is concerned. In spite of the immense incomes that the city obtains from trading activities, its citizens are quite xenophobic. Enclosed within the strong walls, they are very little influenced by their neighbours. The contacts with the familiar “Other” only serve to further separate the city from the near-by Orthodox area (Şchei, Walachia, Moldavia and the Levant). The encounters with the radical alterity strengthen the medieval conception that the city represents a Christian stronghold against the pagan attacks. Furthermore, as the city converts to Lutheranism, the missionary purpose of the city is emphasised. Honterus, Luther, Melancton,¹⁹ stress the divine mission of the urban authorities, to defend and further spread the new confessional doctrine, especially among Romanians.

This brings us to the third important terminological issue of our research: the frontier and the frontier city.

The frontier is never linear, except when it is abstract; it is a zone. The frontier only appears to be static. It is always the result of movement and all it does is materialising in space a state of precarious balance [...] The movement that creates or includes a frontier implies the intervention of numerous components (demographic, economic, linguistic, religious, geopolitical etc.) [...] The frontier is never an obstacle or a simple closure, it is a living membrane [...] a periphery <organ>.²⁰

The peripheral dimension of the frontier produces a specific life style, guided by specific norms and mechanisms, other than the central ones, yet deeply connected to them. Robert Burns asserted the existence of the frontier institutions, as particular organisational forms for a borderland that is, figuratively speaking, to be conquered.²¹ These institutions are specific to frontier populations, those *locatores*, as

¹⁷ For a more elaborate definition of radical alterity see J. Baudrillard, M. Guillaume, *Figuri ale alterităţii*, Bucureşti–Piteşti 2002.

¹⁸ E.W. Said, *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London 2003, p. 59.

¹⁹ Philipp Melancton (1497–1560) – German philosopher, theologian and religious reformer. He befriended Martin Luther but they grew apart as the Reformation became a political issue.

²⁰ P. Toubert, *Frontière et frontières: un objet historique*, “Castrum” (Rome) 1992, no. 4, p. 9–17.

²¹ R. Burns, *The Parish as a Frontier Institution in Thirteenth-Century Valencia*, “Speculum” (Cambridge) April 1962, vol. 37, no. 2, p. 246.

Jacques Le Goff named the immigrants.²² This particular group is not held together by ethnic, confessional or social status similarity. The basic unifying factor consists in the members' awareness of their function as colonising population and of their defensive purpose. The latter also produces a form of anxiety and xenophobia for borderland populations. They are constantly under siege and thus, the suspicion towards any "Other" which they might come across.

As an identification agent, the frontier separates the internal solidarity from the external alterity. Thus the frontier paradox: it divides and unites simultaneously. This paradox deepens, especially in pre-modern times, when the Reformation annihilates all hope of ever returning to Christian unity. The failure of institutions with universal claim, be it the empire of Charles V or the Catholic Church, cause a powerful identity crisis, which will strengthen old frontiers and build new ones. Consequently, the prior need of setting a fixed boundary between identity and alterity becomes urgent. Furthermore, the 16th century confessional pluralism increases the need to define and delineate space and collective identities.²³

2. FRONTIER AND MICRO-FRONTIER: BRAȘOV DURING THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES

Despite the important political changes from the first half of the 16th century: the Ottoman conquest of Central Hungary (*de facto* in 1526, *de iure* in 1541) and the establishing of the Transylvanian autonomous Principality (after 1541), Transylvania²⁴ continues to remain a fragmented entity. The medieval internal frontiers (political, social and cultural) deepen during the 16th century, especially after 1543, when the city of Brașov became the first Transylvanian settlement to embrace the Lutheran Reformation.

The complex connections between the medieval identification agents and the ones appearing during the 16th century reveal a new stage of the self-identification process of the city. Thus, the medieval self-image lives on but the city adjust to the new challenges of the 16th century. In other words, as new frontiers appear, the urban community requires new identification elements to set it apart from the new "Others."

For example, during the Middle Ages, the people of Brașov used the word "Christian" (meaning Catholic, belonging to the Latin Church community²⁵) in order to

²² *Dicționar tematic al Evului Mediu occidental*, coord. J. Le Goff, J.-C. Schmitt, Iași 2002, p. 139.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁴ By Transylvania we understand the territory belonging to the newly established Principality. This includes the medieval voivodship, the county east of the river Tisza and some possessions in the north-western part of the county Szatmár. The dimensions of this territory change during the 16th and 17th century, when the Transylvanian princes lose a series of cities and territories to the Ottoman or Habsburg armies. These variations, however do not affect the results of the current study.

²⁵ The words for the Orthodox community were "schismatic" or "Greek."

define their confession. This helped set them apart from their Orthodox neighbours and the Islamic new-comers. The Lutheran Reformation fragmented irrevocably the Western Christian World, thus challenging the old confessional identification agents. The city of Braşov responds to this change of paradigm according to its specific frontier environment. As previously mentioned, the Orthodox critique had a major contribution to the city's adherence to Lutheranism. However, the implications exceed the religious field: the urban Magistrate takes advantage of the weakness of the central authority and manages to introduce the Reformation, without the confirmation of the sovereign. This act has serious political implications, yet the city manages to elude retribution due to the military tensions caused by the presence of the Ottoman armies in Walachia and Moldavia.

The Lutheran confession becomes the new identification agent, replacing Catholicism. Nonetheless, the medieval self-image of the city as a Christian stronghold against the pagans is not erased, but merely transformed and reinterpreted. Thus, the defensive component continues into the 16th and 17th century. The missionary element is reinterpreted in the sense that Braşov takes upon itself the task of spreading the Reformation throughout Transylvania and, possibly, in the neighbouring countries of Walachia and Moldavia.

Adding this feature to the self-image of the city also triggered another feature, closely linked to the political particularities of Transylvania. By 1545, the entire *natio Saxonica* had converted to Lutheranism, by the official decision of the University.²⁶ This made the Saxons the only non-Catholics in the Principality. The consequences of this act are major since only Catholics had access to the decision making process. However, considering the external Ottoman threat and the internal civil war, the central authority had no choice but to acknowledge the Saxons desire to change their confession and include it in the legal ruling system of the Principality.

The diversification of the confessional landscape only encouraged the already existent tensions between the three political Transylvanian nations. The Saxon confessional identity reached its final form after the year 1613. The document issued by the *Universitas Saxonum* merged the Saxon nation with the Augustan Confession (the Orthodox Lutheran doctrine). Thus, any attempt to disregard this doctrine or any association with Calvinism represented an act of treason against the Saxon nation. This stipulation was a direct consequence of the growing conflict between the Saxons and the nobles/princely authority who tried to impose Calvinism.

Since the Habsburg occupation 1602–1604,²⁷ Catholicism became unpopular in Transylvania. People considered it an instrument of foreign domination; the only

²⁶ The Saxon University (*Universitas Saxonum*) – represents the highest juridical-administrative forum of the Transylvanian Saxons. Its decisions were valid only in the autonomous territory given to the Saxons by the kings of Hungary. This area was known as *fundus regius* (Land of the King). The University was submitted only to the authority of the King of Hungary during the Middle Ages and later on, to that of the Prince of Transylvania.

²⁷ The Habsburg occupation from 1602–1604 represents an important consequence of the Long War (1591–1606) between the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy. During this stage of the conflict, the Habsburg armies occupied Transylvania as a direct consequence of the unstable reign of Prince

ones who remained faithful to it were the Szeklers. Thus, the noble were Calvinists, the Szeklers were Catholic and the Saxons were Lutherans. Confessional identity overlaps the political status. In conclusion, the Saxons' option for Lutheranism became a political statement rather than a spiritual conviction.²⁸

In Braşov, politics influenced confession very little, in comparison to other Transylvanian cities. For example, the *iudex civitatis* (the equivalent of a mayor) Michael Weiss befriended the pastor Simon Massa, suspected of Crypto-Calvinism²⁹ and his successor Marcus Fuchs, an Orthodox Lutheran.³⁰ In the 17th century, the Lutheran Saxons rejected Calvinism because of the confessional policy of the central authority, which declared it the official religion of the Principality of Transylvania.³¹

The confessional configuration of the Principality is considerably influenced by its borderland status. Due to the ongoing conflicts between the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy, the Transylvanian authorities were compelled to compromise, rather than wage a war against the Protestant currents. This resulted into a climate of confessional tolerance.

From a geographical point of view, Transylvania is a double periphery: at the end of Latin Europe and at the beginning of the Orthodox world.³² Inside this area, the city of Braşov represents a micro-frontier, a miniature of the Principality. The Saxon geographer Georg Reicherstorffer describing the Braşov district considered it another Transylvania, since mountains encircled it.³³ The relief is only one aspect that Braşov and Transylvania have in common. The city housed all ethnic groups inhabiting the Principality and all the confessions.

The external political frontiers pass the city walls. The Saxons that lived inside them were the only full citizens (*cives*) who had access to public functions. The Saxons living outside the walls had the status of inhabitants (*incolae*) and the plebe (*plebs*).³⁴ The last two categories had no political rights. In conclusion, the city walls

Sigismund Báthory. The period was characterized by spoliations, violence and general chaos caused by the unruly occupation army. Moreover, the imperial general Basta, led an abusive policy against the political nations and tried to impose the Catholic confession in Transylvania.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 257–258.

²⁹ Crypto-Calvinism defines the tendency of some members of the Lutheran Church to hide their inclinations towards Calvinism.

³⁰ E. Szegedi, *Naşterea și formarea identității confesionale luterane în Transilvania: între exigențe teologice și constrângeri politice*, "Studia Universitas Cibiniensis. Seria Historica" (Sibiu) 2009, Nr. 6, p. 138.

Orthodox Lutheranism defines the unifying current which began after 1580. The main purpose consisted in uniting the various interpretations of Luther's teaching and, especially, cleansing the doctrine of any Calvinist elements which might have penetrated due to the actions of the Crypto-Calvinists.

³¹ I.-A. Pop, Th. Năgler, A. Magyari, *Istoria Transilvaniei. Volumul II: (de la 1526 până la 1711)*, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, p. 250.

³² E. Szegedi, *Tradiție și inovație în istoriografia săsească între Baroc și Iluminism*, Cluj-Napoca 2006, p. 28.

³³ G. Reicherstorffer, *Chorographia Transilvaniae quae Dacia olim appellata aliarumque provinciarum et regionum succinta descriptio et explicatio in Călători străini despre Țările Române I*, ed. M. Holban, București 1968, p. 217.

³⁴ G. Nussbächer, *Caietele Corona. Contribuții la istoria Braşovului 5*, Braşov, 2006, p. 28–29.

represented a political frontier separating the full citizens from the rest of the population.

Seen from a social perspective, the fortification line separated the area occupied by the rich citizens from that inhabited by the poor. Furthermore, the walls represented an ethnic barrier, only Saxons could live inside the city. However, some Saxons lived in the *Altstadt* suburb as well. Orthodox Romanians lived in the Șchei suburb while Catholic Szeklers occupied the Blumăna neighbourhood. Considering this structure, Brașov resembles Transylvania once more; it hosts representatives of all three political nations, each residing within their own well established area and benefiting from a particular type of organisation. These groups are separated by territorial, political social, confessional and ethnic frontiers.

3. URBAN IDENTIFICATION AGENTS AND HISTORICAL DISCOURSE IN BRAȘOV DURING THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES

The cultural production of Brașov offers a variety of sources: diaries, mural inscriptions, notes, and urban chronicles. The number of historical renderings written in Brașov during the 16th and 17th century is impressive; consequently, only some relevant examples make the object of this study. They represent different types of historical writings concerning various identification agents at a certain stage of the city's self-definition evolution. Most of them are a mixture of political, historical and confessional elements thus, revealing the complexity of urban identification process at the Transylvanian border.

In spite of the diverse genres and the various approaches, the urban historiographical writings have in common a series of elements, where identification discourses are concerned. The most popular theme in such cases consists in elaborate demonstrations of the historical legitimacy of the Saxons' political privileges. In fact, the Saxon historiography emerges only when the Transylvanian nobles challenge the Saxon identity and its legitimacy. There are few Saxon chronicles dating back to the period of the Kingdom of Hungary. Their numbers increase, especially after the half of the 16th century, when Transylvania becomes a separate entity from the rest of the Hungarian territory. The political system of this new state is somewhat similar to a parliamentary monarchy where the Hungarian (noble), Szekler and Saxon political nations constituted the legislative forum.

The general context marked by internal instability and the external Ottoman pressure created tensions, which resulted in conflicts and confrontations among the actors of the Transylvanian political scene. The Principality of Transylvania failed to replace the geopolitical and institutional structures of the Kingdom of Hungary. Thus the new-born entity was deprived of a strong central institution, which could annihilate the centrifugal tendencies of some powerful nobles and of the three political nations. Its temporary status, as a compromise between the sultan and the Habsburg emperor, did not permit the development of a strong central authority. This increased

the political influence of the nations on the one hand and produced serious power struggles among them, on the other.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, the Saxons defined themselves as a nation (*natio Saxonica* – in its pre-modern acceptation) through three main elements. The first one was the *Universitas Saxonum*, the highest political forum, which included representatives of all the administrative divisions belonging to the *fundus regius* – the territory given to the Saxons by the kings of Hungary. Closely connected to this institution was the *Eigen Land-Recht*, the Saxon code of law. The final factor consisted in the collective adherence to the Augsburg Confession, the introduction of German as a cult language and the naming of a bishop of Transylvanian Saxons, starting 1572.³⁵

As this important identification agent is threatened by the other nations, the historiographical products become means of disseminating the legal, historical and symbolical arguments of the Saxon political leaders. The growing urgency to prove the legitimacy of their privileges reflects itself in the popularity of two themes: the origin of the Transylvanian Saxons and their contemporary importance. These two elements become a recurring theme in the Saxon historiography of the next 250 years.³⁶

Another element consists in the previously mentioned conception that the Saxon frontier cities (and the entire *natio Saxonica* by extrapolation) represent a barrier against the expansion of the Ottoman Empire. This element does not represent a Saxon, or even a Transylvanian particularity. This type of identification agent is common for all Christian frontier communities neighbouring the Ottoman possessions. Nonetheless, the Saxon cities considered that they represented the Western Christian area, completely different from the Orthodox area which fell under the authority of Constantinople (even after 1453).

The Transylvanian Saxons' connection to Western Europe represented a more complex feature. Its foundation was indeed the affiliation to the Catholic confession, yet the Saxon did not relate to all Western peoples in the same way. The medieval historical tradition preserved the idea that the Saxons came to Transylvania from the areas of the Rhine basin, Flanders and Saxony. Until the 16th century, the *natio Saxonica* looked up to these German-speaking territories as symbolical homelands or origin places. The change of paradigm occurred gradually, as the Ottoman Empire set itself as a barrier between the Habsburg Monarchy and Transylvania. For example Valentin Wagner, a 16th century scholar from Braşov, considered that the Saxon cities were colonies of the German Empire in Transylvania.

Alongside the Ottoman barrier, which separated the Saxons from the western German-speaking area, the Reformation represents a fundamental impulse to the change occurring in the self-image of the Transylvanian *natio Saxonica*. The scission of Christian unity and the zealous Counter-Reformation policy promoted by the Habsburgs produced a reorientation of the Saxon identification progress. Instead empha-

³⁵ M. Arens, *Habsburg und Siebenbürgen 1600–1605. Gewaltsame Eingliederungsversuche eines Osteuropäischen Fürstentums in eine Frühabsolutistischen Reichsverband*, Köln–Weimar–Wien 2001, p. 32.

³⁶ A. Armbruster, *Vorarbeiten zu einer Geschichte der siebenbürgisch-sächsisch Historiographie*, "Südostdeutsches Archiv" (München) 1976/1977, No. XIX/XX, p. 22.

sising the German heritage and the connections with the German-speaking dynasty of Habsburg, the Saxon historians turn Transylvania into identification agent for their *natio*. This results into an explosion of identification discourses stating various myths concerning the Transylvanian origin of the Saxons and their precedence in front of the other two political nations.

*Oratio de origines et merites Saxonum*³⁷ represents the manifest of this new identity. It represents the speech uttered by Albert Huet, the *iudex Saxonum*,³⁸ during the Transylvanian Diet from 1591. Combining legal and historical argumentation, this exhortation defined the Saxon identity for more than a century.

The second section dedicated to the definition of the Saxon nation is particularly revealing. The historical facts become political instruments in order to prove the righteousness of the Saxon freedom and privileges. Thus, Huet is the first Transylvanian to assert the Daco-Geto-Gothic origin of the German population living in Transylvania. This theory belonged to Philip Melanchton and Gaspar Peucer and it stated that the Transylvanian Saxons were actually natives, descending from Goths/Getae (Jordanes' confusion). They continued to inhabit this land until the Hungarian King Geza II brought here other Saxons from the German countries in the West. The local origin proved that Transylvania was the Saxons' natural home. This argument was a direct answer to the nobles' claim that the Saxons were guests (*hospites*) and foreigners in this country and thus, they should not benefit from privileges and autonomy.

Huet underlines the importance of maintaining the Saxon nation as a political force, since its existence guarantees the balance between the princely and noble authorities. The annihilation of this crucial factor would lead to the disintegration of the country. Therefore, any attack directed at the Saxons' privileges represents an aggression against the state.³⁹ This concept dominates the 17th century Saxon identity discourse as well.

Being a part of the *Universitas Saxonum*, the city of Braşov adhered to the above stated principles. Nevertheless, along with its integration into the Saxon collective identity, this city developed a separate individual perception of its role as a frontier stronghold. This image dominated the urban historiography, especially after the first decade of the 17th century.

The implication of the urban authorities in the identification process of the city represents an obvious fact. The 16th century official history reflects the Magistrate's intention to build a local consciousness – a strong connection between the citizens and the city. However, this policy does not imply a separation of Braşov from the rest of Transylvania. The urban historiographical productions include information concerning the city's hinterland, its neighbours and, the central government. However,

³⁷ A. Huet, *Oratio de origines et merites Saxonum* as quoted in *Siebenbürgischer Würg-Engel*, Mathias Miles, Köln–Wien 1984, p. 152–163.

³⁸ *Iudex Saxonum* represented the supreme function within the Saxon University.

³⁹ E. Szegedi, *Tradiție și inovație*, p. 107.

the Saxons from Braşov identified themselves professionally and affectively with the local community.⁴⁰

The memorial plaque, *Scheda memorialis*,⁴¹ constitutes a sample of the historical conception promoted by the urban Magistrate. Placed on the city hall tower, it presented the main events between 1526 and 1528. Besides its obvious purpose, this plaque constituted both a public justification of the Magistrate's political decisions and a means of promoting civic awareness. In 1527, during the civil war for the Hungarian crown, Braşov was the first Transylvanian city to swear loyalty to Ferdinand of Habsburg as King of Hungary.⁴² This decision put the city in a difficult position since it was surrounded by the adherents of John Zápolya. He was Ferdinand's rival, since the nobles crowned him as King of Hungary as well.⁴³ The Latin words *sed et toti Hungariae adversati sumus* (and all Hungarians are against us) do not refer to the ethnic group, but to the nobles (most of them sustained Zápolya). The Magistrate explains that the city did not only plead allegiance to the rightful monarch, but also defended the Saxon freedom against those who contested it.

This short record reveals that the city did not yet develop a distinct Transylvanian identity and still wished to serve the legitimate king of Hungary. This conception changed after 1543, when, through the public decision of the urban Magistrate, the city converted to Lutheranism. Consequently, Ferdinand of Habsburg could no longer be the guardian of the Saxons' privileged status because of his aggressive Catholicisation policy and his failure to redeem the medieval Kingdom of Hungary and eliminate the Ottoman threat.

Another example of official urban history is the *Annales templi Coronensis*,⁴⁴ a mural chronicle placed inside the parish church, near the altar. The first records reveal the purpose of this unusual historical work. It asserts that the Transylvanian Saxons are descendants of the Dacians/Getae/Goths. This misinterpretation began with Jordanes⁴⁵ who confused the three different ancient peoples and merged their history. In the 16th century this conception became extremely popular among German and eventually Saxon scholars. The mural chronicle from Braşov is actually the first Transylvanian historical rendering that mentions this myth.⁴⁶ This is a clear identity

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 125.

⁴¹ L. Grüngras, *Scheda memorialis anno 1528 scripta cippoque sine primaculo turris in foro Coronensis imposita* edited in *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Brassó*, Band 4: *Chroniken und Tagebücher*, eds. J. Gross, F.W. Seraphin, Brassó 1903, p. 523–528.

⁴² Ferdinand of Habsburg was crowned King of Hungary (1526–1564) in Pressburg (Bratislava), on December 16th 1526, through the decision of the status' of north-western Hungary.

⁴³ John Zápolya (Voivode of Transylvania 1511–1526, King of Hungary 1526–1540) was crowned King of Hungary on November 10th 1526, in Székesfehérvár, through the decision of the nobility from Central Hungary and Transylvania.

⁴⁴ *Brevis chronicon Daciae sau Annales Templi Coronensis* edited in *Quellen zur Geschichte...*, Band 4, p. 1–10.

⁴⁵ Jordanes is a 6th century Roman historian. His best known work is *Gaetica*, where the above mentioned confusion can be found.

⁴⁶ A. Armbruster, op.cit., p. 22.

statement placed inside the church, the most important public place in the city. It is an answer to the nobles' attacks against the Saxon rights and privileges.

In addition to its commemorative function, the chronicle aimed to educate the citizens and promote the local patriotism. The majority of the records concern the urban history and less that of the country. The community received the basic information about their origin, their rightfully earned privileges and their duty towards the city they lived in. From this point of view, the chronicle is a means of civic education.

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Johannes Honterus was the scholar who introduced the Lutheran confession to the city of Braşov. His works helped build the identity of this East-European Wittenberg.⁴⁷ In 1530, during his stay in Basel, Honterus deplores the Transylvanian destiny, to be the war zone of greater powers. Two years later, he devised a map named *Chorographia Transylvaniae. Sybembürgen*. The title itself sheds light on the identification mechanism of the Saxons. The first toponym, *Transylvania* designates the medieval homonymous province, encompassing roughly the seven counties within the Carpathian Mountains. The meaning of *Siebenbürgen* is more controversial. Today, this German word is synonymous to the notion of "Transylvania" corresponding to the above mentioned area. This fact mislead many historians, especially during the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, into believing that Honterus chose to translate the Latin notion into German in order to emphasise the equal importance of the two languages as means of scientific and cultural expression.

Nonetheless, the conception is false. In medieval and pre-modern times *Siebenbürgen* designated only a part of the Transylvanian territory: the *fundus regius*, the land inhabited by the Saxons. The toponym is formed by the agglutination of the numeral *sieben* (seven) and the noun *bürgen* (fortified settlement or, later on, city surrounded by walls). Thus, when Honterus resorts to this notion he refers to the land of the seven Saxon cities (Braşov, Sibiu, Bistriţa, Orăştie, Sebeş, Sighişoara, Mediaş),⁴⁸ which fell under the royal Charta of Privileges, known as the *Andreanum*.⁴⁹ Honterus follows the tradition of the 14th and 15th century officials from Braşov, who denominated their neighbours with the term of *siebenbürger*.

Apart from previous documents which sustain the fact that *Siebenbürgen* refers to the Saxon Land, Honterus' map also constitutes an argument in this direction. Instead

⁴⁷ Melancthon used to use this expression when referring to the progress of the Reformation in Braşov and Transylvania.

⁴⁸ P. Binder, *Johannes Honterus' Karten und Beschreibungen der Rumänischen Länder*, "Revue romaine d'histoire" (Bucureşti) 1973, No. XII, p. 1051.

⁴⁹ The *Andreanum* represents a collection of privileges offered by King Andreas II, to the Saxons colonists settling in south-eastern Transylvania. Alongside the actual donation of the land, the king endowed the Saxon communities with autonomy, economical and religious privileges. Issued in 1224, the document represents the basis of the Saxons' political and economical privileges.

of rendering a complete image of the entire Transylvanian area, Honterus focuses on the seven Saxon counties. The remaining areas are depicted in a careless and less detailed manner.⁵⁰

Even though he dedicated his work to the Senate of Sibiu, Honterus did not hesitate to insert a few marks indicating the attachment for his hometown in his design. In the left upper corner he placed the Sibiu coat of arms, and on the left the one of Braşov, representing roots growing out of a crown. Besides paying homage to his hometown, Honterus underlined the common opinion of the time that, after Sibiu, the Saxon capital, the city of Braşov was the most important Saxon centre in Transylvania.

Two stanzas accompany the map. They assert the German origin of the Transylvanian Saxons presenting their historical evolution in this territory and the deplorable current state of the country. Some historians consider that these verses were an advice directed at the University in Sibiu that had succumbed to Zápolya's power. Braşov, on the other hand remained loyal to Ferdinand, who, from Honterus' perspective, was the legitimate sovereign. Other historians see these verses as a reproach towards Braşov, while praising the city of Sibiu.⁵¹ Whatever the true purpose of these verses was, they reveal a triple identification of the author: with the country, its people and, finally himself, Johannes Honterus. This map is a special source. It is the first map of Transylvania and it represents a unique visual source on how a person from Braşov showed respect to his hometown.

Braşov has a special place in Honterus' description. As Luther reinterpreted the Catholic imagery, Honterus transformed the medieval urban identity. His vision of his hometown maintained the Christian stronghold identity factor, but reinterpreted it in the spirit of the Reformation. The city represented the eastern border of Lutheranism.⁵² The city Magistrate incorporated this concept into its confessional policy. The outpost identity implied Braşov had the obligation to defend its population, but also the duty to expand the Lutheran territory. This aspect determined an official attempt to convert the Orthodox Romanians living in the suburbs. The action failed, yet it provided a favourable impulse for the Romanian printed literature.

Association of the medieval identification agent with the confessional aspect becomes even more obvious in Honterus' school regulation, elaborated for the well-being of the *Vaterland*.⁵³ This document clearly states the equivalence between the adherence to Augsburg Confession and the citizenship.⁵⁴ Braşov was the first Transylvanian Saxon city to introduce such a condition. In the 17th century, all Saxon cities will incorporate the Lutheran confession into their urban identities.

Honterus' diverse works could easily make up a good citizen's guide. Most of his writings influenced one aspect or the other of the urban identity. From geographi-

⁵⁰ L. Binder, *Johannes Honterus: Schriften, Briefe, Zeugnisse*, Bukarest 1996, p. 51.

⁵¹ J. Honterus, *Rudimenta cosmografica* edited in L. Binder, *Johannes Honterus: Schriften...*, p. 120.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁵³ J. Honterus, *Constitutio Scholae Coronensis* edited in L. Binder, *Johannes Honterus: Schriften...*, p. 182.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 168–169.

cal and historical argumentation to confessional identification, Johannes Honterus touched every aspect in the life of the city of Braşov.

The self-identification process goes through important changes during the 17th century. The political crisis during the second half of this period characterised by internal instability and external military pressure, causes a reorientation of the identification process. The medieval and pre-modern regional autonomies are challenged by phenomena threatening the very existence of the Principality of Transylvania as a political entity. Thus, a new type of identification is required: the three political nations give up their isolation policy in order to defend the survival of the Principality. The result is the emergence of a Transylvanian identification frame.

Another particularity of the 17th century consists in the amplification of the confessional issues. The Calvinist monopole on the princely position and their attempt to impose this confession in the detriment of the other ones produces a powerful reaction among the other Transylvanian political nations. As far as the Saxons are concerned, after 1613, Lutheranism became part of their political identity. Thus, any attack against this confession challenged the entire position of the *natio Saxonica* within the Principality of Transylvania. The fight for confessional freedom becomes a political survival struggle.⁵⁵

The growing power of the nobles and the weakening of the central authority set the Saxon cities in a difficult situation. The numerous attacks directed at their privileges and the military occupation of Sibiu in 1610, mark the 17th century Saxon discourse. History plays a key role in the Saxon defence. Invoking their function as frontier people and the medieval privileges, they try to delimitate themselves from the other political nations. The Saxon society slowly isolates itself from all innovations that might endanger its existence.⁵⁶ The resulting discourse becomes obsolete in the 18th century, when the Habsburg monarchy incorporates the Principality of Transylvania. The unifying Austrian policy and its intolerance towards local autonomies demands a new identity definition.

The city of Braşov maintains its individual identity during the 17th century. Between 1610 and 1612, the city witnesses the height of its political evolution, when it becomes the stronghold of all who opposed the authoritarian prince, Gabriel Báthory. The leader of this rebellion, the *iudex* Michael Weiss, left a diary behind,⁵⁷ describing the motivations behind his actions. As identity is born during crisis, this source is vital in understanding when and how did the Transylvanian patriotism replace the individual identity of the city.

Weiss' discourse is aggressive towards the nobles. He complains about their ingratitude and asserts that only the Saxons' efforts kept Transylvania safe, since the nobles always fled in front of danger.⁵⁸ Even though the frontier aspect continues

⁵⁵ A. Armbruster, op.cit., p. 29.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 31.

⁵⁷ M. Weiss, *Liber annalium raptim scriptus per Michaelem Veys* edited in *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Brassó*, Band 5: *Chroniken und Tagebücher*, ed. J. Gross, Brassó 1915, p. 140–263.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 145.

to play an important role in the identity discourse, the urban and regional patriotism expands giving way to a new awareness, that of being Transylvanian.

Weiss's speech from June 1611⁵⁹ proves that the process of integrating local identities into wider, national ones had already begun. The politician urges the city officials to oppose the princely abuses, since they did not only threaten the existence of the city or of the Saxon nation, but that of the principality itself. Thus, Braşov had an important duty to fulfil towards its people, towards the Saxons and, most importantly, towards Transylvania. In a letter addressed to Prince Báthory,⁶⁰ the *iudex* Michael Weiss presents the principles of this new identity. The rebels gathered behind the walls of Braşov understood that any abuse against their privileges and their freedom endangers the country. Thus, they had the legal right and the moral obligation to oppose tyranny.

The city of Braşov considered itself a stronghold for the oppressed even after the end of Báthory's reign. The new Prince, Gabriel Bethlen, did not get a warm welcome from this city. The senator Andreas Hegyes records in this diary⁶¹ that the urban Magistrate took great offence when Bethlen brought his Ottoman allies into the city and demanded special ceremonies in order to impress his guests. They made peace with the Prince later but not before obtaining a guarantee that there will be no more abuses.

The *Album Oltardianum (1526–1659)*⁶² represents one of the most extensive family chronicles written in Braşov. It covers two centuries and renders the slow evolution of the urban identity within the political context. *Album Oltardianum* contains mostly the history of the Oltard family written by five of its members. However, there are external historical records, most of them connected to the political events in Braşov and Transylvania. The chronicle focuses on the history of the Saxon cities and their surroundings.

Each author presents his own opinion concerning the Saxon and the urban identity. Andreas Oltard describes the history of Braşov, between 1526 and 1552. His perspective is a pro-imperial one, similar to that of the *Scheda memorialis*. Oltard considers that the loyalty that the city pledged to the legitimate king, Ferdinand, is sacred and breaking it would be madness.⁶³ As for the Reformation, Andreas Oltard considers it a cultural event, a restoration of the Catholic Church, and, by no means, a form of rebellion. He represents the urban identity in the first half of the 16th century.

Andreas' son, Paul Oltard recorded the history of Braşov starting with 1552 until 1576. Initially Paul shares his father's political opinion; however, towards the end he shifts towards the pro-Ottoman prince, Stephen Báthory. This part of the *Album* reveals the transition period, when the Saxons give up their attempts to seek help

⁵⁹ M. Philippi, *Michael Weiss, sein Leben und Wirken in Wort und Bild*, Bucureşti 1982, p. 116–118.

⁶⁰ M. Weiss, op.cit., p. 240–263.

⁶¹ A. Hegyes, *Diarium*, edited in *Quellen zur Geschichte...*, Band 5, p. 449–594.

⁶² *Album Oltardianum* edited in *Deutsche Fundgruben zur Geschichte Siebenbürgen*, ed. E. von Trauschenfels, Kronstadt 1860.

⁶³ *Album Oltardianum*, p. 13, 18.

from the Habsburg dynasty. Instead of trying to establish a form of kinship with Ferdinand and his brother Charles V, by emphasising the common Germanic origins, the Saxons focus on proving that they are not new-comers in Transylvania. The historical discourse approaches the theme of the autochthonous origin of the Transylvanian Saxons.

The first Oltard to emphasise the addition of the Lutheran element to the Saxon identity, was Johann. He recorded the events between 1591 and 1630, a time when the Habsburg rule threatened the very existence of the *natio Saxonica*. Furthermore, the civil war between Braşov and Prince Gabriel Báthory provoked a deep crisis. The outcome was an inseparable bond between the Augsburg Confession to the Saxon identity. Furthermore, the emergence of Braşov as a refuge for the ones who defended the country's laws helped build the Transylvanian identity, which surpassed and local or regional form of self-representation.

At the end of the 17th century, the Saxon territorial barrier disintegrates under the Habsburg occupation. The House of Austria promoted a uniformity and Catholicising policy. In this new context the medieval privileges, which needed constant confirmation from the sovereign, the local autonomies and the Saxons' resistance to change found little, if any favour with the emperors. The Austrians considered Transylvania's federative structure as centrifuge and obsolete. Thus, the identities formed here had to find different means of surviving and expressing themselves.

CONCLUSIONS

Starting from the Middle Ages, the city of Braşov represented a multiple frontier: geographical, economic, confessional, social, ethnic, etc. Its life-style was a mixture of conflict and symbiosis, permeability and isolation, unity and segregation. Placed at the frontier of the frontier, the city slowly developed a particular self-image, different from that of other central urban communities.

In the 16th century, this particular identity receives a voice through the historic works produced in Braşov. The age of the dissolution of the medieval geographical frontiers gave birth to new ones, certainly more complex. Nonetheless, this identity never overcame the Saxon element. The city always acted within the lines promoted by the *Universitas Saxonum*, save a few moments when Braşov acts against other Transylvanian German cities.

The 17th century, with its pre-modern traits, marked the mentality of the Saxons from Braşov as well. They shifted from an identification system based on regionalism and focused mostly on their own city towards one grounded on Transylvaniam. This process of evolution is actually the city's historical progress from medieval to modern times.

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