



Research Paper

Origin of huncokar people through the view of old German ethnography

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ABSTRACT: The ethnographic research of German speaking lumberjacks – huncokars took place from the 1920s to the 1940s and was conducted by researchers working in German and Sudeten German ethnographic organizations. At that time, the lay and expert public were increasingly interested in the living conditions, customs and traditions and culture of the German population that lived beyond the borders of the Weimar Republic and later the Third Reich. The huncokars were particularly interesting for researchers because of the fact that they lived apart from the majority (Slovak) population in forested regions of western Slovakia. They were an endogamous and ethnically closed community. The main goal of my study is to analyze the issue of origin related to huncokar population.

KEYWORDS: lumberjacks, huncokars, German-speaking minority, history, ethnography

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I. INTRODUCTION

The national minorities and ethnic groups living in the First Czechoslovak Republic included the three million-strong German minority. The German population living in Slovakia had its own features which were different from those of the Germans living in Czechia, Moravia and Silesia. They even differed from each other culturally, confessionally, linguistically (they spoke different dialects), economically and politically (Ďurková, 2009). The research articles mention three main areas populated by Germans: 1. Bratislava (Pressburg) and its vicinity 2. the Kremnica-Pravno region (Hauerland) situated in the surroundings of the mining towns 3. Spiš (Zips), which was divided into Upper Spiš (Ober Zips) and Lower Spiš (Unter Zips). The detached basin of the Bodva River (Bodwatal) is also part of the Spiš region (Kárpáty, 2002). The German minority in Czechoslovakia had numerous possibilities related to cultural development, education in their mother tongue and community activities. Members of several Sudeten German national-educational institutes were the main protagonists of cultural and educational activities from the early 1920s (Horváthová, 2002). They also continuously visited Slovakia, specifically the regions with German populations. Their main activities included historical and ethnographic research and organizing lectures devoted to the history of the German nation, customs and folk traditions. In addition to research, these trips also served to politically influence the Slovak Germans (Zückert, 2008).

The Sudeten German Homeland Research Institute (Anstalt für Sudetendeutsche Heimatforschung) and the Sudeten German Institute for Research of the Land and People (Sudetendeutsche Anstalt für Landes- und Volksforschung) were among the most famous Sudeten German institutions which also had a significant impact on the Slovak territory. The events of the 1930s marked a significant milestone in the activities of all Sudeten German associations and institutions, as they were strongly influenced by the Nazi ideology from the Third Reich (1933 – 1945) (Josefovičová, 2014).

Experts in the Weimar Republic (1918 – 1933) were keenly aware of the importance of the cultural and educational development of the German diaspora and they established several cultural and national organizations. The German Foreign Institute (Deutsches Ausland Institut – DAI), whose primary role was to collect and compile information concerning the German population living abroad, was founded in Stuttgart in 1917 (Kováč, 1991).

In the early 1930s, German Research Foundations (Volksdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaften) were among the leading institutions focusing on the research of the German diaspora. Two their subordinate

organizations, the Southeast German Research Foundation (Südostdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft - SOFG) in Vienna and the Northeast Research Foundation (Nord- und Ostdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft - NOFG) in Berlin gradually launched their activities in Czechoslovakia. The SOFG was responsible for Slovakia, Moravia and southern Bohemia and the NOFG covered the rest of the Czech lands (Konrád, 2011).

The Kursell Office, an unofficial and secret section of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was established in 1935. Its principal role was to transfer the influence of the Nazi party and SS into activities related to the German diaspora. In addition to others, this office directly managed the political activities of the Sudeten German Party (Sudetendeutsche Partei – SdP) (Kováč, 1991). However, it was later transformed into the Center for the Support of Ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle – VoMi). VoMi's task was to centralize and supervise all of the institutions and associations related to the German minority abroad within the German sphere of influence. The management of this organization included members of the Nazi party (the NSDAP) and the protection squadron (Schutzstaffel -SS) (Schmaltz, 2008).

The Institute for Homeland Research (Institut für Heimatforschung – IHF) was established to fulfill the tasks established by VoMi in Slovakia and Kežmarok (Käsmark), which is situated in northeast Slovakia, was its official seat. This institute was designed as an instrument for the cultural and political centralization of Slovak Germans. Some of its basic tasks included the creation of archives and a collection of photographic materials, the publication of ethnographic works (journals, monographs) and establishing cooperation with organizations with a similar orientation (Fahlbusch, 2017; Schvarc, 2013).

The systematic ethnographic research of the German speaking community of lumberjacks – huncokars was also launched in the 1920s. They arrived in the territory of present-day Slovakia in the first half of the 18th century and established their settlements in the Little Carpathian Mountain Range (Botfk, 2007; Kantek, 2008; Rainer, 1985; Jedlicska, 1882). Their arrival was primarily related to the private colonization of the Hungarian aristocratic Pálffy family, the largest landowner in what was then Bratislava (Pressburg) county in the 18th century (Slobodová Nováková, 2017; Pospechová, 2013). Some huncokars moved to different mountain regions in the first half of the 19th century primarily due to the overpopulation of the settlements in the Little Carpathians. According to current academic research, these lumberjack families gradually settled in the Strážovské Hills and the Považský Inovec, Tribeč and Pohronský Inovec mountain ranges (Krajčovič, 2020; Mrva, 1996). Most of the studies and articles dedicated to this specific group were carried out by Sudeten German and German authors. The main goal of my study is to analyze the one of the most interesting topics of their research related to the huncokar population – the issue of origin. The methodological process for acquiring and classifying historical sources and information, their subsequent critical analysis and interpretation is primarily heuristic. Critical analysis is crucial in studying objective historical reality within my research. The majority of work was carried out by Sudeten German and German authors and was distinctively colored by Nazi ideology elements.

II. ORIGIN OF HUNCOKAR PEOPLE

Research of the huncokar population frequently focused on their origin. Eugen Lemberg, a Sudeten German historian and sociologist, was the first to express his opinion concerning this issue in 1926. In his short article entitled *Ethnographic Overview* (Volkskundliche Übersicht) he stated that the group of lumberjacks and rangers who lived in the forest environment of the Little Carpathians originally came from northern Moravia, Silesia and central Germany. Lemberg also indicated that some researchers believed that this community could have been related to the German speaking Heanzens (Hienzen, Hüenzen). However, he did not concur (Lemberg, 1926). Gustav Fochler-Hauke, the Sudeten German geographer, shared Lemberg's opinion regarding the Moravian and Silesian origin of the huncokars (Fochler-Hauke, 1937).

During a short trip to Slovakia, in 1929, Austrian historian Wilhelm Bier visited some huncokars settlements in the Little Carpathians. When conversing with members of these communities he was told that their predecessors were from the Alpine regions of Styria and Upper Austria. They also spoke about the individual colonization phases. According to them, the first newcomers were so impressed by the living conditions in the Little Carpathians that they reported it to their relatives. However, since Bier lacked access to the vital records of the relevant parishes and the Pálffy family archives, he could not confirm this information (Bier, 1930; Bier, 1930).

German historian and ethnographer Walter Kuhn had a different hypothesis concerning the huncokars' origin; however, his study from 1933 was strongly influenced by Nazi ideology. He claimed that the German tribes of Baiuvarii or Bavarians and Alamanni were the predecessors of the huncokars. According to Kuhn, their Germanism was preserved thanks to the influence of the forest environment (Kuhn, 1933).

However, in his later work of 1941, Kuhn presented a more realistic explanation for the origin of huncokars, according to which, they came from the borderline mountain regions of Bohemia such as Cheb and Šumava (Egerland und Böhmerwald) while some colonists also came from the Eastern Alps (Ostalpen), specifically Styria and Salzkammergut (Kuhn, 1941). The Styrian origin of individual huncokar families was

also mentioned by German historian Hans Kaser and Austrian cartographer, Walter Neunteufl (Kaser, 1934; Neunteufl, 1944).

Sudeten German linguist Franz Josef Beranek carried out the most extensive research of the huncokar community. In 1930, he published a second article entitled German Lumberjacks in the Little Carpathians (*Deutsche Holzhacker in den Kleinen Karpathen*), which included information concerning their origin (Beranek, 1930). This research included the study of family names in order to identify the origin of individual families. For example, in his opinion the Langer family was probably of Silesian origin. The Reisenauer family came from Moravia, and the Hirners and Hofers came from Tyrol. Beranek also wrote about the huncokar tradition which was preserved by most of the members of their community. They believed that their predecessors had fled from Styria due to the conflicts between Austro-Hungarian Empress Maria Theresa and the King Frederick Great of Prussia (Beranek, 1930). However, in his later works, Beranek issued a retraction of this hypothesis; he also thought that some huncokar families came from the Lower Austria regions (Beranek, 1937; Beranek, 1941).

Hertha Wolf-Beranek, Beranek's wife and a Sudeten German folklorist, also studied the huncokar community in the 1940s. In the periodical entitled German Voices (*Deutsche Stimmen*) she published an article in which she claimed that the huncokars in Slovakia were primarily from the Lower Danube-Styria border region (*niederdonauisch-steirischen Grenzgebiete*) and the Sudetenland with a few members from Bavarian-Austrian families (*bairisch-österreichischen Stammes*) (Wolf-Beranek, 1943).

III. CONCLUSION

Since ancient times, the territory of contemporary Slovakia has been a place of collision of several cultures and ethnicities, which has been significantly reflected in its multiethnic character. They also included the German-speaking population. Its members have created several special diasporas over the individual decades and centuries, which differs from each other by professional, confessional and dialectal aspect. Part of the German-speaking population were also members of an ethnographic group, closely focused on forestry work - huncokars, inhabiting the Little Carpathian mountain range. They were able to maintain their ethnic and cultural peculiarity for about a century, as they gradually merged with the local, mostly Slovak population. Through my research, it is evident that individual researchers lacked clear agreement on the origin of these German speaking lumberjacks. However, in his article of 1930, Franz J. Beranek's conclusion that the origin of individual huncokar families differed due to the origin of their predecessors appears to be logical. He implied that huncokar identity was not derived from a single specific homeland, but from their profession (lumberjacks), mother tongue and life in a forest environment.

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