



Research Paper

Ethnographic groups of past - handelci

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ABSTRACT: The presented study deals with the topic of a now almost forgotten population group called *handelci*. This specific ethnographic group, which in the past belonged to the German-speaking minority, came to the territory of present-day central Slovakia in the 16th century. In ethnographic works is most often emphasized the Alpine origin of the *handelci*, who were professionally focused on work in forestry. The central goal of my paper is to give a brief description of the historical development of the studied population through the analysis of available written materials.

KEYWORDS: forest workers, *handelci*, German-speaking population, central Slovakia, ethnographic group

Received 25 Apr., 2025; Revised 01 May., 2025; Accepted 03 May., 2025 © The author(s) 2025.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of the German-speaking population, professionally focused on forestry work, is considered to be the historical specificity of several montane areas of Slovakia. In particular, the following three ethnographic groups are worth mentioning: *huncokars*, *šajtars* and *handelci*. The arrival of the first group of the population falls into the 18th century. The areas of their origin were namely the mountain areas of contemporary Austria and Germany (Bavaria, Tyrol, Styria, Upper and Lower Austria) and last but not least the Czech lands (Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia) (Beranek, 1941; Grothe, 1943; Krajčovič, 2021). The majority population of the Little Carpathian foothill villages called them *huncokars*. This exoetnonymic name, which is also used in the current historical and ethnological writings, has been created by the devote of the most common profession - *holzhacker* and *holzfäller*. Members of the *huncokar* community themselves considered this designation derogatory. They called themselves mainly for mountain (*Gebirgeleute*) or forest people (*Waldleute*) (Botík, 2007; Habáňová, 1991; Slobodová Nováková, 2014). Their history is significantly marked by the events that occurred after the end of World War II. A significant part of *huncokars* had to leave their homes involuntarily and to settle in Austria or Germany due to their German nationality. Those who stayed in Slovakia were forced to adapt to the new societal conditions. Since the second half of the 40s of the 20th century, there was a rapid extinction of most mountain settlements.

To some extent, the genesis of the *šajtar* population was also related to *huncokars*. The historical circumstances of the arrival of the German-speaking population on the territory of Považský Inovec, dedicated to forest work, fall into the turn of the first and second half of the 19th century. Their presence in the territory of Považský Inovec mountain range was related to the industrialization of the local area (Gratz, 1917; Krajčovič, 2024; Lendl, 1943). In addition to immigrants from the Little Carpathian *huncokar* families, the *šajtar* population also formed persons from the Czech lands and the domestic population (Krajčovič, 2024). The name *šajtar* itself is based on a contemporary designation for meter wood, reach - *šajta*, which these forest workers prepared for further use (Marek, 2009). In German language, the word *das Scheit* refers to the log (Mrva, 1996).

In my paper I focus on the topic of German-speaking *handelci*. The beginnings of the settlement of this group of population fall into the early modern period, when its members came to the territory of specific mountain areas of central Slovakia from their Alpine homeland (Botík, 2007; Krajčovič, 2023). The aim of the study is by the correlation of selected written materials to plastically describe the historical genesis of *handelci* population in Slovakia.

II. BRIEF HISTORY OF HANDELCI

In the 16th century, German-speaking groups of forest workers from the Alpine areas of Salzburg and Styria inhabited the valley of the Black and White Hron. The central motive of their invitation was to remedy the dismal conditions of the local forestry, which was caused by colonization of montane areas, as a more intensive exploitation of wood mass in the development of mining and metallurgical industry (Botík, 2007). One of the legends informs that the first settler in the local area was a lumberjack named Schwandtner, the father of a numerous offspring, who founded his dwelling at a place where a bright valley flowing into Black Hron. As there was gradually the warehouse of wood mass, it was named Krám. In German, this word (Krám, Kram) refers to a shop, warehouse point (Stránsky, 1969).

For the German settlement in the area, the year 1607 is important. On 11 June of that year, Emperor Rudolf II. Habsburg, rendered instructions for the establishment of the Office of Forest Fieldman (šafár) based in Brezno. The bearer of this function was superior to all Comorian foresters and in charge of supervision of the Comorian forests. His duty was to control the management of the four woodcutters of the Brezno region, namely in Beňuš (Benusch), Black Hron (Schwartz Ronitz), Kamenistá (Steinwasser) and Osrbľí (Zernpach) to make the end of lies and disputes over paying wages of forest workers. (deutsche khnecht und guete arbeiter) (Stockmann, 2016; Tagányi, 1896).

The permanent forest worker was entitled to a grazing of a certain number of cattle. It depended on his job. Already in the first half of the 17th century, however, the individual mountain settlements grew to such an extent that the settlers with their feasting of domestic animals caused relatively great damage to the forest. Since forest management has not always been ideal, the Mining Chamber broadcasted the commission to eliminate the shortcomings in the billing of the woodworking masters (in 1635, 1638, 1653), which submitted reports and proposals (Faško, 2020). However, in a given state of functioning and the number of forest staff, they were only negligible success. In this situation (poor forest condition in the central Slovak mining region) Ferdinand III. Habsburg issued on September 10, 1653 a six-point order for the rescue of the Royal Forests (Stockmann, 2016; Tagányi, 1896).

By the surrounding domestic population, these forest workers were called as handelci (hangyelec). Based on which area of Hron (Black or White) these immigrants lived, they were distinguished into Black handelci and White handelci. The name handelec itself originates in the German names of the production forest system (Holzhandlung, Ortshandlung). In addition, the territorial designation of Handle, which was related to the correct organization of the area that was divided into wood circuits (Holz-Handlungen), could be based on the territorial designation. Sporadically, the name dingovníci, which is derived from the designation of the professional groups of woodcutters (ein wirkliche Geding Holzarbeiter, Gedingsarbeiter, Vorgedinger, Ding (Botík, 2007). Typical family names of forest workers living around Black Hron were: Auxt, Dekret, Friedrich, Gürtl, Pepich Schön, Stulreiter, Taxner (Dachsner) or Thurn. In the White Hron area, it was: Czitrberg, Graus, Gruber, Laubert, Laurintz, Libitz, Nickel, Schawold, Schwandtner, Zibrin and others (Stránsky, 1969).

In addition to immigrants from German-speaking countries, Slovaks from the surrounding villages were also employed in the Hron area. It is worth mentioning that, according to the surnames of the woodcutting masters, which can be identified in documents from the 16th century, the heads of individual working groups (dings) were the Germans. The Slovak workers subsequently incorporated into the system of forest works (Stránsky, 1969). In the later period, many German families left Handle as a result of anti-Habsburg uprisings during the 17th century. The new German colonists who would fill the place, did not come and therefore began the assimilation of the rest of German population (Stránsky, 1969; Ťažký, 1980).

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 - handelci, inhabiting the montane area of the Black and White Hron. They were able to maintain their ethnic and cultural peculiarity for about a century, as they gradually merged with the local, mostly Slovak population.

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