



Research Paper

The haban settlement in Slovakia from the perspective of Matthias Bel

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ABSTRACT: The paper deals with knowledge about the religious community of anabaptists, which can be found in the work of the Hungarian polymath, geographer and historian Matthias Bel. The territory of present-day western Slovakia was inhabited in the past by several German-speaking ethnographic groups. One of them was the members of this radical religious-social movement, who were also known under the ethnonymic name – habans. The primary goal of my study is a comprehensive analysis of the information contained in Bel's work *Historical and Geographical Knowledge of New Hungary – abb. Knowledge (Notitia Hungariae novae historico-geographica)*, which relate to the haban population and its settlement within the territory of Slovakia.

KEYWORDS: German population, anabaptism, haban community, Matthias Bel, Knowledge

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the past, the German-speaking minority was an integral part of the national and ethnically varied structure of the population of Slovakia. The influence of the German element is evident in the times of the rule of the first Hungarian monarchs in the 11th and 12th centuries. At that time, there were mainly persons from worldly (craftsmen, merchants, knights) and spiritual environment (priests, missionaries) from the German countries (Pöss, 2012). In general, however, it can be noted that the more massive settlement of Slovakia's territory by German population took place in a time-lag stages. These can be included into the period of 13th till 19th century (Horváthová, 2002).

Due to the different periods and at the same time, places from where the German colonists came, there was no creation of a continuous homogeneous community. Slovak Germans differed from each other culturally, religiously, linguistically (used various German dialects), economically and politically (Ďurkovská, 2007). Already in the Middle Ages, three larger German settlement areas were gradually formed, which also comprised by several smaller regional units. In the west there was a region extending approximately between Bratislava, Trnava and Little Carpathian Mountains. In the area of central Slovakia, near the mining towns, was the Kremnica-Nemecké Pravno language island (Kremnitz-Deutschprobenor Sprachinsel) also known as Hauerland. In the east, it is possible to denote for such a settlement area the Spiš (Zips) and its subparts: Upper Spiš (Oberzips) and Lower Spiš (Unterzips). The Spiš language area also included the mildly eccentrically located Bodva valley (Bodwatal) (Kárpáty, 2002).

In the past, the German-speaking population of Slovakia also included habans. It is an ethnonymic term for one of the anabaptist groups whose members came from different countries (Tyrol, Switzerland, etc.) (Horváthová, 2002; Krajčovič, 2022; Pöss, 2002). The aim of the paper is the analysis and interpretation of the information found in the work of the Hungarian author Matthias Bel (Matthias Belius; Matej Bel; Bél Mátyás). In his multi-volume work, in addition to data of historical-ethnographic character (historical development, way of everyday life, material culture), important information regarding the geographical delimitation of individual haban settlements can be found.

II. HABANS IN BEL'S KNOWLEDGE

During the 17th and 18th centuries, works began to be created in the Hungarian environment, which can be classified as historical topographies. One of the most important authors of this epoch was the Hungarian polyhistor, geographer and historian of Slovak origin, Matthias Bel. In the first, second and fourth volumes of the extensive work *Historical and Geographical Knowledge of New Hungary* – *abb. Knowledge* (*Notitia Hungariae novae historico-geographica*), which were published in 1735, 1736 and 1742, were descriptions of Bratislava, Turiec, Zvolen, Liptov, Novohrad, Tekov, Nitra and Hont counties. Knowledge has not only geographical but also historical and ethnographic character (Prikryl, 1994; Tibenský, 1984). In the natural scientific section and in the characteristics of individual settlements, for example, information about the country, spa, or the way of life of higher social strata (nobility), townsmen, but also the simple urban and rural people, can be found (Gregorová and Hronček, 2022).

Matthias Bel used the initial historical methods, especially heuristic research in Knowledge, but also carried out a landscape survey of the country in the form of its roads to Hungary. Based on work in Knowledge, Bel can be described as a capable manager, or organizer of scientific work. This is evidenced by the creation of more extensive site of co-workers from various science fields or the towns of the then Hungary. At the same time, he can be considered as a composer, scientific editor or encyclopedist. In the management of planning scientific research, he was the first expert in the Hungarian environment to carry out such a complicated and extensive scientific activity in practice (Gregorová and Hronček, 2022; Prikryl, 1984).

Although the individual descriptions are processed at a diverse level, yet Knowledge is the first scientific experiment on a comprehensive view of the historical-geographical and ethnographic issues of the then Hungary. Bel and his collaborators have managed to gather a significant amount of information about individual Hungarian counties from the perspective of geography, history, economy, ethnography, sociology, etc. He took into account not only factual data, but also attainments of the everyday life of the Hungarian population, their customs and traditions (Tibenský, 1984; Turóci, 2019).

An important part of Knowledge is the ethnic identification and name of the inhabitants of individual counties as well as specific settlements. The most frequent ethnonyms are Hungari, Germani, Slavi, but besides them, Bel also identified members of other ethnic groups who lived in the examined territory - Bohemi, Moravi, Poloni, Croatae and others (Nagy, 2017). While the interpretation of ethnic names, such as the Bohemi (Czechs), Poloni (Poles), does not induce any doubts within the historical context, this is different for the most common. At first glance there are different alternatives to their interpretation: Hungari – Hungarians (Uhri) - Magyars, Germani – Germanic people (Germáni) - Germans, Slavi - Slavs - Slovaks. At Bel, however, other positions may also have a meaningful understanding of these terms (Nagy, 2017).

Information about habans, who are in the Knowledge labeled under the name anabaptists, are in chapters that relate to the content of Bratislava (II. volume of Knowledge), respectively Nitra county (IV. volume of Knowledge). A total of five sites are captured in Knowledge, describing the presence of haban population. These are the current villages Veľké Leváre, Sobotište, Dechtice, Košolná and also surroundings of Branč castle.

Dechtice are described in Knowledge as a municipality belonging to the Dobrá Voda estate, which took care of the protection of the individual privileges granted to it. It was known for her vineyards (*vineis*), grain fields (*agro frumentario*) and plenty of wood (*ubere lignatione praeditum*). As for the integration of the municipality in the framework of the county self-government, one part belonged to the Bratislava and the other under the Nitra county. They were divided from each other by the Blava watercourse, which flowed through Dechtice. In addition to the flow of Blava, there was also a drinkable sulfur (*sulphurosus*) in Dechtice. It was consumed not only by the domestic residents, but also by those who crossed the village. Thanks to its healing effects, it was also exported to other places within the country (Belius, 1736).

The presence of German population within Košolná is also documented by the aforementioned German name of the village of Kosselsdorff. In the Knowledge it is described as elegant (*elegans*), which was primarily related to the appealing dwellings (*atque in primis domo*) of the individual inhabitants of the village. A significant part of the municipal population was dedicated to agriculture (*student agriculturae*) and nationally they belonged to the Slovak ethnic group (*Slau*). In general, Košolná, according to Bel, had a suitable location, as there were many forests, meadows and fields in its surroundings. The stream flowing through the village (*accedens a montibus riuulus*) and stemmed in the nearby mountains was mild. In the past, Košolná waters also included ponds, which already not exist in the times of Matthias Bel. There were also two-storeyed mills in the village. One was spreading at the lower (*ora vici inferiori*) and the other in the upper part (*superiori altera*) (Belius, 1736).

The village of Veľké Leváre was by Slovaks (*Slau*) and Hungarians (*Hungaros*) called Léváry. Germans (*Germani*) knew it under the name Grosz-Schützen. In times of writing of Knowledge, village was the property of the Kolonič aristocratic family. At here, lived very much capable, respectively strong men (*a folertissimo hominum genere*). They are all Slovaks who have mixed up with the Germans (*Slau & hi sunt*,

quibus se Germani admiscuere). According to Bel, the soil of Veľké Leváre was so good that it did not need any fertilization. In addition, village had plenty of meadows and forests. In general, Veľké Leváre had rural character (*ruris ingenium*) (Belius, 1736).

The village of Szabatistinum, which Slovaks called Sobotište (*quod Slaui Szobotistye vocant*) extended below the hills north of Senica. There were many houses that spread on both sides of the Chvojnica River. The terrain of village is a double kind. Partially hilly (*collini partim*), partly flat (*campestris*). The inhabitants are known to be working hard on fields. They grow hay, but the soil of village is also suitable for growing vine. However, the production of grain is increasingly more important for local people than wine production. The occurrence of floods was nothing special for Sobotište. They were due to the fact that the river flowing through the village due to intense rains or melting snow poured out of its trough and caused considerable damage to the village (*damnosus sit oppido*). In the collective memory of Sobotište villagers, mainly the memory of the flood of 1672 was preserved (Belius, 1742).

Branč castle (*Arx Berentsch*) was described as a mountain castle (*montanum castrum*), built on the sharp ridge of the local hills. It was an ancient monument (*vetustum opus*), which was created in ancient times due to numerous Hungarian-Czech military conflicts, and according to Bel, the castle was intended primarily for the protection of the surrounding region. Anyone who was threatened by the direct military danger could have been resorted to his walls. In the Knowledge, the military threat of 1663 is explicitly mentioned, when the surrounding population was hidden behind the castle walls from the incursions of Turks and Tatars (*Turcas Tartarosque*) (Belius, 1742).

Bel described two specific Záhorie sites: Veľké Leváre and Sobotište as the most important haban settlements. According to him, there were anabaptist colonies (*anabaptistarum coloniaea*) in these municipalities (Belius, 1736; Belius, 1742). According to Bel, the colony in Veľké Leváre was on the west side of the village. He described the chapel (*oratorium*) as a spiritual center of haban community, in which there was only one table and several chairs. An important historical monument of the anabaptists from Veľké Leváre was some kind of a column. This object (probably a whipping post) has used their community in the past to punish the offenders. It was not stated what a particular solecism was punished in this way. However, according to information from Knowledge to the place where the offender was placed (the column, or whipping post), his co-religionists spat. It was a sign of the resistance of the whole community to the crime, and at the same time it was to serve to offender to realize how much he was ashamed of (by wrongdoing) (Belius, 1736).

Interesting is the information about the determination of haban nationality. According to Bel, they were Czechs (*Bohemi*) and Germans (*Germani*). Their main character trait considered their great modesty (*magna modestiae*), which was also closely related to their diligence. When describing the professional focus of habans from Veľké Leváre, it is possible to feel the praise of their craft skills. There was no manual work that they would not control. Above all, however, they excelled in pottery (*fictilium*) and knife manufacturing (*cultrum*). Bel and his collaborators were also devoted to the time of the arrival of the first groups of anabaptists to the village. According to them, the royal decrees (*regni decreta*) were listed in 1554. Other anabaptists settled there in 1593 and 1595 (Belius, 1736).

The haban court in Sobotište is listed under the latin (*Aula Anabaptistica*), as well as the Slovak name (*Dwúr Habánsky*). It was located on the west side of the village and was founded by exiles from Moravia (*Pulsos ex Moravia*), who used the hospitality of the local estate. From their own resources, settled anabaptists built several modest, but comfortable houses (Belius, 1742). The historically known closure of the haban community is also emphasized. It is stated here that these houses (forming the haban court) were separated from the other inhabitants of Sobotište by the wall. In addition to the dwellings, the anabaptists were supposed to get a part of the field, which they then exploited (Belius, 1742).

At another place of the text is stated that this modest people (*genus*) were strictly disciplined. This feature was to be based on their religious regulations (Belius, 1742). In the mention of their craft skills, pottery and ceramics are the first. They were able to produce neat ceramics of all kinds (*fictilia omnis generis*). In addition, they were also devoted to blacksmithing and knife production. They seem to have been in demand, as the text states that they were sold across the whole country (then Hungary). Shaving and the art of bread production (bakery) are also mentioned among other haban crafts (Belius, 1742).

Relations with the population outside the haban community seem to have been quite correct based on information from Knowledge. The good opinion of fellow citizens should have increased with affordable and quality products. Interesting is also the mention of haban wine. It was supposed to be even tastier and cheaper than the wine from other Sobotište residents. The haban religious life is mentioned only within the retrospective. At the past they were supposed to celebrate their faith together with their co-religionists around Trenčín. It was when the anabaptist community flourished. This was probably the meant of the period before the departure of a large part of the habans from Hungary. During the concelebrations, Sabotište's habans were to perform a rather unknown ritual that was also known to the anabaptists from Veľké Leváre (Belius, 1742).

In Knowledge are also mentioned the haban settlements, which no longer existed at the time of Bel's writing, or there were only a small number of members of this community. They were located in the villages of Dechtice, Košolná and the surroundings of Branč castle. In the section of the text dedicated to Dechtice, it is recorded that pottery (figuli) was made by local habans. For their typically white ceramics, they used white clay (candida humo). With using of an elegant technique (elegantio technico), these habans were able to produce diverse (varioque) pottery products (Belius, 1736).

At the mention of Košolná, it is stated, that in this elegant village (vicus elegans), which was once inhabited by the habans at that time (the first half of the 18th century) was kept their art of pottery craft. Despite its austerity, the report about habans from Košolná is very praise. The anabaptists were said to be remarkable in every direction (Insignes sunt Anabaptista, in omni genere). Especially in pottery (figuli in primis) (Belius, 1736). In this part of the text of the Knowledge, one relatively curious information is also written. It states that habans made their ceramic products by imitating the Indian people (ad Indorum imitationem facta) (Belius, 1736).

According to Bel, the habans living around the Branč castle (Arx Berentsch) came here in an indefinite year, which fell into the Turkish raids (16th to 17th century) to the territory of contemporary Slovakia. During one of these invasions, when the situation in the country was not safe, several refugees from the surrounding villages settled outside the walls of Branč castle. A kind of camp was built for them, which was fortified by two palisades and a water ditch. Inside such a fortified camp, there were also several simple dwellings, which were partly inhabited by habans (Anabaptiste partim) (Belius, 1742).

III. CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that the most extensive information about habans in Slovakia can be found primarily in a professional writings from the 20th century, to some extent the authors writing in earlier periods were also devoted to them. At the 17th to 19th centuries, a whole number of content of extensive historical-geographical and ethnographic works was created, which have largely devoted to individual nationalities, ethnic groups and ethnographic groups living in the territory of the then Hungary. The person of Matthias Bel was also an integral part of the then Hungarian professional writings. In his multi-volume work, there is also interesting information about the haban population.

Bel's reports on habans mostly concerned the description of their craft focus. According to him, they excelled especially in pottery and knife manufacturing. They were able to produce several types of ceramics and haban knives were supposed to be so appreciated that they were traded throughout the whole country. At overall, Bel described five haban sites. He considered the most famous haban colonies (anabaptistarum coloniae) those, that were located in Sobotište and Veľké Leváre. Explicitly here, in times of writing of Knowledge (the first half of the 18th century), lived several habans. In addition to these localities, Bel mentioned the no longer existing settlements in Košolná, Dechtice or surroundings of Branč castle. In general, it can be stated that information base about the habans in Knowledge was quite austere. However, this was probably due to the Protestant religion of Matthias Bel. He could be afraid of inconvenience and for this reason about the Protestants and other offshoots of Protestantism (for example, habans) he hardly wrote at all (Prikrýl, 1994).

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