

Deuschsanktmichael – Local History

Zillasch through the ages - from Szilas - Sillas - Szivas - Sylhasch - Rauthendorf - Németszentmihály - Deuschsanktmichael - Sânmihaiu German

Reading in 1974 the novel "Der große Schwabenzug" by Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn awakened my interest in the history of the Banat and my hometown Zillasch. School lessons in communist Romania offered hardly any data, facts and background. Further literature as well as historical sources were not accessible to me at that time.

However, attentive listening and curious inquiries within the family and friends brought me further. Three generations of ancestors, with their empathy as well as their knowledge, experiences, and stories, had a significant influence on my childhood and youth. The stories told in the villages collective carpenter's workshop were an almost inexhaustible source. My grandfathers Bela Szanto and Dominik Wachter worked there as master wheelwrights and as saddler.

Not to forget: the stimulating conversations I had with Canon Dr. Johann Heber, be it to explore the common family roots, or to highlight historical facts or literature.

In the following I will focus - without claim to completeness and documentary accuracy - on milestones according to my knowledge and as I remember them from stories.

Middle Ages and Turkish occupation

In the Middle Ages there was a village called St. Michael with a parish priest Johann, who is mentioned in the papal tithe lists of **1333-1334**. The church of this village was probably located more in the Simiel district. The fate of this settlement is unknown. This was the time of Charles Robert of Anjou, who, as the Hungarian king, held court in the nearby fortress of Timisoara for several years during his reign.

The origin of Zillasch is rather the village of Szilas from the 15th century, which was owned by the Hagymás de Berekszó family in the 16th century. In **1610** the village belonged to Janos Kéméndi. (*Sources: Dumitru Teicu - Geografia Ecleziastica a Banatului Medieval / Borovszky Samu - Magyarország vármegyéi és városai*).

My great-grandfather Ludwig Holz spoke of the old, no longer existing place 'Silasch', and Canon Dr. Heber added that 'Magyars settled the place 500 years ago'. In our family there is talk of a settlement west of the present village. However, the field of 'Old'- and 'New'-Szillasch on the left side of the Old-Bega creek and on the road to Bobda indicates two settlements which no longer exist today.

The Ottoman conquests followed by the Turkish occupation (from **1552** onwards) caused political instability, repression and insecurity. The Hungarian population had fled and 'Raze' and 'Walache' populated the country. Even today, Serbs are casually called 'Raze' (Raizen) and Romanians 'Walache' (Walachians).

18th century

In **1716** Prince Eugene of Savoy expels the Turks from the Banat. The place is now documented as 'Sillas', 'Szivas', among others. It must have been a desolate region, inhabited by bandits and robbers. Canon Dr. Heber spoke of convicts and then of an 'uninhabited land' ('Predium Sylhasch'), which belonged to Freidorf.

After the end of the Turkish period, Szilas is recorded in **1717** in the Austrian directories as a village with 40 houses and on a map of **1761** as a village inhabited by 'Old Believers'. Later the village is abandoned due to poor soil conditions. Already the Josephinian Land Survey (1769-1772) shows the 'Predium Sylhasch', a meadow land, which was leased.

19th century

In **1807** Johannes Nepomuk Count of Rauth leases the land and founds in **1808** the German village 'Rauthendorf' by settling German families from Danube-Swabian communities of Banat. They are already the 2nd and 3rd generation descendants of the first German immigrants to the

Banat. Besides agriculture and cattle raising, the tenant promotes the cultivation of tobacco (see the seal of **1808** with 2 tobacco leaves). Soon, however, he lost interest based on low returns. In **1819** the village receives the name 'Deutsch Szent Michaly', the origin of the name 'Deutschsanktmichael'. The period is marked by hardship, misery, crop failures, flooding of the Bega River, malaria, swamp fever, cholera, and other plagues, so that many inhabitants die. Later on there was a new settlement and the village was enlarged and structured in a way which still characterizes today's appearance of the village. Politically, Hungary annexed the Banat, this was the start of the Magyarization.

20th century

Population growth and fragmentation of field property by inheritance threatened the social and economic balance of the village, so that about 20% of the inhabitants emigrated to America at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the new century to earn money to buy back land in the old country. Few returned.

World War 1: over 100 residents are recruited and called up, 34 are killed or missing. The turmoil of the war leads to the Banat falling to Romania, then under Serbian sovereignty, briefly without any assignment, then belonging to Romania again and being divided up in **1920** based on the Treaty of Trianon. Deutschsanktmichael is since then part of the Romanian Banat.

In **1928** the agrarian reform leads to a redistribution of a small part of the field to war victims as well as to the parish priest and the teacher.

The **2nd World War** provides for another 39 missing and fallen but also for the most lasting fragmentation of the village community.

23 August 1944: Romania politically changes fronts and sides with the Soviet Union. With the approaching front, some families escaped to the 'German Reich', returned from there with the westward advancing warfront back to the Banat homeland or remained in Austria or in Germany or could exit Europe in the direction of America.

In **1945** the deportation of Banat Swabians to forced labor in the coal mines of Russia begins for those who remain in the Banat. More than 70 people from Zillasch worked there based on their German ethnicity for almost 5 years after the end of the 2nd World War - they atoned for what they have not committed. 9 compatriots lost their lives.

1951: Order by the communist government of forced deportation of 3 families to the Bărăgan for drudgery for 5 years.

The agricultural land reform of **1949** leads to the final expropriation of the inhabitants and in **1954** to collectivization according to the Soviet model.

In **1977**, thermal water resources were discovered while drilling for oil at the entrance to the village from Simjel. In **1985**, villagers opened a small spa on their own initiative. Later, local private investors leased the bath for 49 years and after the fall of communism in **1989** developed it into a local spa and health resort.

Due to the unstable social and cultural conditions at the time of the Ceausescu regime, a wave of emigration of the Banat German population to Germany occurs. From **1970** onwards this happened in the context of 'family reunification'. Thus, within a very short period, what had already begun at the end of World War 2 continued: the decline of the Danube-Swabian community in the Banat area.

21st century

Today only a few villagers have German roots. The village has lost its Danube-Swabian face and has become a Romanian village. Nevertheless, Deutschsanktmichael has managed to gain regional importance. Due to the thermal bath, the spa activities and the recreational value for Timisoara, the village is experiencing a renaissance in terms of new buildings and renovation of houses, as well as the settlement of new residents. It is regrettable that the thermal bath remained closed with the beginning of the **2014** season. New drilling activities were undertaken and the bath reopened in June **2015**.

Life goes on!