

*Hungary Between Two Empires, 1526-1711*. Géza Pálffy. Trans. David Robert Evans. Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 2021. xxxi + 285 pp. \$39. Paperback ISBN: 9780253054654.

The two dates in the book's title bookend an especially crucial period in the history of Hungary. At one end, the Battle of Mohács in 1526 marks the end of an independent, unified Hungary as the Ottoman advance split the region into three territories: that of Habsburg control, Ottoman control, and Transylvania, an Ottoman vassal state. At the other end, the Treaty of Szatmár in 1711 marks the reunification of Hungary, the Ottomans having been defeated in 1699. This period is often seen as nearly two centuries of conflict in which Hungary was caught between east and west. Admittedly, this was sometimes, though rarely, the case. In this study, the author rightfully places Hungary back on center stage, rather than merely allowing it to play a supporting role.

Tradition, though not incorrect, focuses on the following: the Habsburgs claimed the territory through marriage and the Ottomans through conquest. Meanwhile, Transylvania became a pawn to be used by both the Ottomans as well as the French Bourbons against their Habsburg foes. Failure to capture Vienna after numerous sieges in 1529 and 1683 marked the extent to which the Ottoman military could proceed. In this study, with an eye to revisionism, rather than a period of continual economic hardships, the author demonstrates how this history was “a crash coming after a brief revival, then a gradual decline, culminating in a series of reorganizations resulting from the actions of interest groups responding in various ways to crisis phenomena” (177). During these periods of economic revival, Hungary's history became especially vibrant and influential.

An example of cultural influence took place during the economic upswing of the 1570s and 1580s, which also resulted in an increase in book publishing. With this, Latin slowly gave way to Hungarian as the official language. Poets and scholars proliferated, and Hungary produced necessary foodstuffs for the Austrian Empire, particularly cattle and wine. Thus, the economic upswing, so often ignored by traditional historians, comes to the foreground and the military and political events in Austria gets pushed to the back.

As noted, the economic upswings were separated by periods of economic crisis, such as the period following the economic growth leading up to the Long Turkish War of 1591-1606. An especially relevant discussion in this book involves the impoverishment of many nobles, often fleeing from the Ottoman advance and the immigration of Serbs, Croats, Vlachs, and Uskoks. This in turn relegated the major Hungarian or Magyar ethnicity to that of a minority status by the end of the period, turning the region into “a multiethnic, multi-confessional, and multicultural country” (193).

It is refreshing to read of this region being not merely a pawn used in the Religious Wars but one in which Hungarians actively sought to make their own decisions. With the Protestant Reformation, Hungary went from being a mostly Catholic to a mostly Protestant region. The author estimates that in the sixteenth century, half the population became Calvinist, a fourth Lutheran, and the remaining fourth Antitrinitarian, Catholic, and Orthodox. Following this came a period of

“Catholic Modernization” and a series of “Re-Catholicism Campaigns” leading to reconversion, particularly as the result of Jesuit efforts. By 1700, there would be nine Jesuit-run colleges, thirteen religious houses, and eighteen missionary stations (204). The Catholic school system, in turn, helped with the rise of both literature as well as literacy through efforts such as the standardization of spelling.

The seventeenth century closed with the ending of Ottoman control of Hungary. The prelude to the collapse of Ottoman rule was the Gran Vizier Kara Mustafa’s 1683 unsuccessful march to Vienna. This precipitated the Great Turkish War which only came to an end in 1699. With it, Ottoman power withdrew from the region. Shortly thereafter, Francis II Rákóczi attempted to rule Transylvania as an independent kingdom. With his failure and the Treaty of Szatmár in 1711, the Kingdom of Hungary was restored. This time, however, it would be ruled from Vienna.

This book was written for “university students and those less au fait with the history of the region especially in mind” (3). Footnotes, the author notes, were therefore omitted to ease readability. There are, however, two issues that might cause any but the most determined desist from making it through the pages. First, the translation into English comes across as awkward and cumbersome. For example, any given paragraph includes multiple parentheses, often with original terms in German, Latin, and/or Hungarian, which do not seem pertinent to the narrative. For the specialist, this may be relevant, but not for the stated audience.

Secondly, nearly every chapter seeks to revise or refute arguments without the reader truly understanding the context. “Unlike traditional historiography” is a frequent phrase throughout. While the traditional university student may know some of this, it should not be expected. Thus, the author would do wise to state what the traditional historiography is prior to refutation. But then again, this may lead to a more cumbersome presentation, so the option of merely presenting this new history and allowing the reader to learn from the author’s many years of expertise would push this agenda much further.

Still, there is something refreshing about looking at this period and local of history anew. Hungary is put back in its proper place and time. For example, the detailed woodcuts and engravings place this history in its proper timeline, something mere words would be at a challenge to do. And the detailed maps place the region in proper place. For the book itself, would I include it in my library? Absolutely. Would I recommend it to my students? No, for the main reason that I do not feel they would persevere to reach the end.

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