

An Empire within the Empire? Habsburg Hungary in the 19th Century and after the Dissolution

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Datum, Ort: 26.03.2018 - 27.03.2018, Bratislava

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There has been a great number of works dealing with the Habsburg Empire among which Pieter M. Judson's work is not only one of the most recent, but also one of the most outstanding ones. He offers an alternative reading of Habsburg history in the long 19th century which does not trace the inevitable fall of this European empire, but opens the perspective for the cohesive forces. Yet, in his assessment of the complex field of forces, Judson has to admit that nationalist strives for autonomy and self-determination posed a serious threat to state unity. He reaches the conclusion that the Czechs were probably the most successful in building up an „empire within an empire“, a conclusion which focusses on the Cisleithanian half of the dual monarchy. But how was the situation in Transleithania? Starting from different notions of empire and their implications on our analytical and historical understanding of Hungary within the monarchy, this conference sought to develop and gather new approaches towards the Hungarian parts and to find some answers to questions that Judson and other scholars have opened our eyes for.

After a welcome note by MARTIN SLOBODNÍK (Bratislava), Vice Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University, MILOSLAV SZABÓ (Bratislava) gave a brief introduction to the topic, opening the ground for the wide understanding of the term „empire“. After referring to a large extent to his recent book, PIETER M. JUDSON (Florence) elaborated on his ideas of empire and the question whether Hungary constituted an empire within an empire. He started from the question of what forces kept the

monarchy together beyond the loyalty to the Habsburg dynasty. Jana Osterkamp's concept of „cooperative empire“ seems to take this into account and can serve as a theoretical framework for the necessary case studies which serve as a basis for deepening the understanding not of the empire itself, but of the processes within the empire. With reference to the cooperation of liberals with the neo-absolutist elite, Judson illustrated the fruitfulness of such an approach. Focussing on the question posed in the title of this conference, he described the attempts of nation-building by the Hungarian elite as opposed to the empire to conclude that a deeper analysis of the interaction between state and society was necessary. Finally, Judson asked how many empires actually were founded in 1867, a question that goes beyond merely legal spheres and where political interests mingled with matters of identity.

Panel one „Empire/ Colony/ Periphery“ was opened by GÁBOR GYÁNI (Budapest) who presented the Hungarian reactions to the 1867 Settlement. Highlighting the discontent that the Compromise, a term which was coined afterwards, evoked among Hungarians, he illustrated how the different narratives were used up until the 1970s to polarize the historical consciousness in Hungary.

GÖRGY KÖVÉR (Budapest) continued the threat unrolled by Gyáni by reconstructing the shift of terms since the 1940s. The development from the Marxist concept of „semi-colony“ up to Andrea Komlosy's „sub-empire“ was paralleled by the extension of archival research. Focussing primarily on the struggles of Marxist historiography, Kövér connected the different approaches to known historians and embedded them into the broader political circumstances.

GÁBOR EGRY (Budapest) argued that the Hungarian half of the dual monarchy certainly displayed imperial features. Concentrating on the Transleithanian Saxons he showed how the centre-periphery relationship manifested over the decades around 1900 and highlighted how the distribution of power was negotiated among the central state and local elites. The Saxon-Hungarian Compromise from 1890 derived from this process. The longevity of the established structures

was briefly illustrated by hinting at their continuity beyond the events of the First World War and its aftermath.

The focus of DUŠAN KOVÁČ's (Bratislava) presentation was laid on the perception of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its emperor by elite members in both halves of the empire. He concluded that the loyalties were essentially different due to the diverging understandings of the position of the emperor, respectively king. Thus, the separation of the two parts of the Empire was irreversible and remained an unsurmountable obstacle for the implementation of plans for reform as e.g. envisioned by the Belvedere circle.

The following discussion took up the question regarding the definition of „empire“ and added an external dimension this term also carries. In the case of Hungary this brought the Cisleithanian half of the monarchy into play and emphasized the importance of recognition from the outside. As a second point the complementary aspects of periphery and centralization together with their ambiguities and impacts were discussed.

MARK CORNWALL (Southampton) opened the second panel dedicated to the topic of „Loyalties“ with a revisit of the Hungarian Constitutional Crisis of 1904-06. Concentrating on narratives about high treason and disloyalty, he captured the different views (imperial and nationalist) on the situation and positioned the responsible elite within these discourses. Incorporating a variety of sources into his analysis, Cornwall came to the conclusion that no side was able to win in this conflict, but that due to losses on moral grounds the involved parties had to give in.

BÁLINT VARGA (Budapest) concentrated on the narratives of the official Hungarian history as they were staged around the Millennial Celebrations in 1896. He showed how the Magyar nationalist understanding of the Hungarian past which was based on ethnic grounds was used flexibly in order to meet the needs of local and culturally often heterogeneous communities with the aim to endorse their loyalty to the state. However, this process remained highly selective and in the end also visualized the conflict potential between different narratives of the past.

ONDREJ FICERI (Košice) presented his micro-study of political loyalties in Košice/ Kassa/ Kaschau. Instead of a thorough Magyarized population, he identified non-national patterns of loyalty which led to unexpected voting results in the Czechoslovak successor state and thus also highlighted the continuity of imperial loyalties.

The subsequent discussion focused on the questions what the opponent entity to Hungary was, the Austrian half of the empire or the empire state as such. Besides, ways of representation and interpretation within the Millennial Celebration and its different sections and exhibitions have been addressed.

Panel three „Nationalizing the Periphery“ was opened by PETER ŠOLTÉS (Bratislava) who shared his analysis of the transformation of state administration in Hungary during the period of neo-Absolutism. Focussing on the Slovak lands he underlined the importance of Banská Bystrica/ Neusohl as centre of the Slovak national movement. Even here, he summed up, a replacement of the elite could only be observed partially, which led to tensions between the old and new officials.

LÁSZLÓ VÖRÖS (Bratislava) focused on middle-level officials like chief county administrators who played a major role in the surveillance system. As partisans of a Hungarian nationalist doctrine they did not only report from the periphery, but also interpreted their observations and recommended measures to be taken. Thus, they occupied a central position within this system.

The discussion focused on the means of surveillance and legal as well as practical questions it entailed. It remained an open point whether the surveillance system as such was working in the way the centre had envisioned it.

The topic of Antisemitism, the first within the fourth panel „Illiberal Liberalism?“, was analysed by MILOSLAV SZABÓ (Bratislava) who analyzed at political cartoons. He showed the visualization of images Antisemites created of their „enemies“ and how these ideas differed according to the group which produced it. A central position within this comparative study took the figure of the „Judeo-Magyar“. Szabó raised the question whether this discourse may be considered as

an attempt to build an „alternative“ illiberal empire.

Within her comparative analysis, GABRIELA DUDEKOVÁ KOVÁČOVÁ (Bratislava) laid the focus on women's movements around 1900. Differences between national variations crystallized not only according to socio-political and group specific lines, but also due to nationalist tensions within Cis- and Transleithanian „sub-empires“. Dudeková Kováčová exemplified her findings at the case of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance Congress in 1913 in Budapest.

Starting from some general reflection on how the „social question“ was handled in a European perspective, ZSOMBOR BÓDY (Budapest) scrutinized the Hungarian discourse around the first and second worker's insurance act (1891 and 1907). These case studies served to illustrate the continuities of Hungarian liberalism and the long term effects such legislation had on society.

ELENA MANNOVÁ (Bratislava) closed the panel with her presentation on „Voluntary Associations“. She came to the conclusion that due to the different institutional conditions of either half of the empire two different approaches developed which resulted in different roles such associations played. In a long run this contributed to the creation of distinct „mental universes“.

Within the discussion the term „liberalism“ with its various meanings that changed over time was scrutinized. Further, it was asked to what extent the empire constituted a single space of communication. Other questions turned around the availability of historical sources about associations and how to deal with statistic blurs.

The final discussion took up some central terms that accompanied the papers and discussions throughout the conference. László Vörörs addressed „Liberalism“ as the first of these terms and the common position was reached that beside a historicizing approach towards this concept, the significance given to it by the empire itself must be assessed as well. Underlining the difference between liberalism and democracy, several participants clarified that Hungary was no exception in a European trend of stagnating liberalism

which seemed outdated by changing realities around 1900. The arguments listed during the conference both for and against the term „empire“ were summed up. Pieter M. Judson and Mark Cornwall expanded the question whether the monarchy or Hungary fostered any policy of internal colonialism, however it must remain open at this point. Rather, the self-perception of the state elite must be taken into consideration when dealing with this question. The narratives of other historical traditions, such as Serbian, might help to reach a balanced conclusion as well. The final remarks highlighted the importance of micro and case studies to avoid the „trap of terminology“ and to analyse how, irrespective of terms, processes found their manifestations *in loco*.

This conference brought together renowned scholars in the field of Austro-Hungarian history. Their different approaches and expertise allowed cross-fertilization beyond the limits of individual focus and geographical scope. Thus, the presentations and discussions gave important impulses for studies to be conducted and to widen the perspective. How necessary further research on the topic is, became repeatedly obvious when connections, terms and processes were questioned, new perspectives added and continuities highlighted. In conclusion, this event did not only pay an important contribution to Austro-Hungarian history, but also to broader terminological and methodological discussion within the history of the long 19th century.

Conference Overview:

Welcome

Martin Slobodník (Bratislava)

Introduction

Miloslav Szabó (Bratislava)

Keynote

Pieter M. Judson (Florence)

Panel 1: Empire/Colony/Periphery

Chair: Mark Cornwall (Southampton)

Gábor Gyáni (Budapest): The 1867 Settlement and its Hungarian Discontents

György Kövér (Budapest): From Semi-Colony to Sub-Empire: The changeable status of the Hungarian Kingdom in the Austro-

Hungarian Monarchy

Gábor Egry (Budapest): Peripheries Caught between Rival Empires? Imperial Centre-Periphery Relations and Ethnic Borderlands in Dualist Hungary

Dušan Kováč (Bratislava): Limits of Cohesion in Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Relationship between centripetal and centrifugal potencies

Panel 2: Loyalties

Chair: Gábor Egry (Budapest)

Mark Cornwall (Southampton): Rethinking the Hungarian constitutional crisis of 1903-6: imperial and nationalist views of disloyalty

Bálint Varga (Budapest): Enforcing National Loyalty through the Past: The Millennial Celebrations in Hungary in 1896

Ondrej Ficeri (Košice): Loyalty to the Kingdom and National Indifference: Legacy of Hungarian-Magyar Identitarian Concept among urban populace in Upper Hungary/Slovakia in Imperial and Post-Imperial Era

Panel 3: Nationalizing the Periphery

Chair: Gabriela Dudeková Kováčová (Bratislava)

Peter Šoltés (Bratislava): The Transformation of State Administration in Hungary in the Period of Neoabsolutism: The Rise of Counter-Elites? (The Case of Slovak Nationalists)

László Vörös (Bratislava): County Officials as Surveillance Agents of the Hungarian Governments in the „struggle against Panslavism“

Panel 4: Illiberal Liberalism?

Chair: Pieter M. Judson (Florence)

Miloslav Szabó (Bratislava): Between Co-operation and Competition: Antisemitism in the Habsburg monarchy as seen through Political Cartoons

Gabriela Dudeková Kováčová (Bratislava): Women's movement on the threshold of the 20th century – a challenge for cooperation within the Habsburg monarchy

Zsombor Bódy (Budapest): Social policy of the Hungarian liberalism in the last three

decades of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy

Elena Mannová (Bratislava): One Empire or Two? Different Universes of Voluntary Associations in Austria-Hungary

Final Discussion

Chair: László Vörös (Bratislava)

Tagungsbericht *An Empire within the Empire? Habsburg Hungary in the 19th Century and after the Dissolution*. 26.03.2018 - 27.03.2018, Bratislava, in: H-Soz-Kult 08.06.2018.