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Natural Resources and Society

Gábor Demeter and Beatrix F. Romhányi
Special Editors of the Thematic Issue

Contents

ARTICLES

- | | | |
|---|---|-----|
| ÉVA BODOVICS | Weather Anomalies and Their Economic Consequences: Penury in Northeastern Hungary in the Late 1870s | 179 |
| SÁNDOR RÓZSA | Evaluation of the Floodplain Farming of the Settlements of Nagykunság Based on the First Cadastral Survey | 213 |
| BEATRIX F. ROMHÁNYI,
ZSOLT PINKE,
AND JÓZSEF LASZLOVSKY | Environmental Impacts of Medieval Uses of Natural Resources in the Carpathian Basin | 241 |
| MIKLÓS KÁZMÉR
AND ERZSÉBET GYÓRI | Millennial Record of Earthquakes in the Carpathian-Pannonian Region: Historical and Archaeoseismology | 284 |
| ANDRÁS GRYNÆUS | Dendrochronology and Environmental History: The Difficulties of Interpretation | 302 |
| VIKTÓRIA KISS | Transformations of Metal Supply during the Bronze Age in the Carpathian Basin | 315 |
| ZOLTÁN CZAJLIK | Along the Danube and at the Foothills of the North-Eastern Hungarian Mountains: Some Data on the Distribution of Stone Raw Materials in the Late Iron Age | 331 |

BOOK REVIEWS

- Ottoman Law of War and Peace: The Ottoman Empire and its Tributaries from the North of the Danube. By Viorel Panaite. Reviewed by Gábor Kármán 343
- Tábori sebesültellátás Magyarországon a XVI–XVIII. században [Care for the wounded in the field in Hungary in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries]. By Katalin Mária Kincses. Reviewed by Katalin Simon 347
- Styrian Witches in European Perspectives: Ethnographic Fieldwork. By Mirjam Mencej. Reviewed by Gergely Brandl 350
- The Habsburg Civil Service and Beyond: Bureaucracy and Civil Servants from the Vormärz to the Inter-War Years. Edited by Franz Adlgasser and Fredrik Lindström. Reviewed by Máttyás Erdélyi 355
- Az uradalom elvesztése: Nemesi családok a 19. századi Békés megyében [The loss of the estate: Noble families in Békés County in the nineteenth century]. By Adrienn Szilágyi. Reviewed by Krisztián Horváth Gergely 358
- Deszkafalak és potyavacsorák: Választói magatartás Pesten a Tisza Kálmán-korszakban [Plank walls and freebee dinners: Voter behavior in Pest in the era of Kálmán Tisza]. By Péter Gerhard. Reviewed by Réka Matolcsi 362
- Men under Fire: Motivation, Morale and Masculinity among Czech Soldiers in the Great War, 1914–1918. By Jiří Hutečka. Reviewed by Tamás Révész 366
- The Fortress: The Great Siege of Przemyśl. By Alexander Watson. Reviewed by Kamil Ruszala 369
- Tiltott kapcsolat: A magyar–lengyel ellenzéki együttműködés 1976–1989 [A forbidden relationship: Oppositional cooperation between Hungarians and Poles, 1976–1989]. By Miklós Mitrovits. Reviewed by Ferenc Laczó 373
- Dissidents in Communist Central Europe: Human Rights and the Emergence of New Transnational Actors. By Kacper Szulecki. Reviewed by Una Blagojević 377
- Corn Crusade: Khrushchev’s Farming Revolution in the Post-Stalin Soviet Union. By Aaron Hale-Dorrell. Reviewed by Alexandra Bodnár 380

The Habsburg Civil Service and Beyond: Bureaucracy and Civil Servants from the Vormärz to the Inter-War Years. Edited by Franz Adlgasser and Fredrik Lindström. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2019. 300 pp.

The historiography on the Habsburg Monarchy has undergone significant shifts in recent decades, including a reevaluation of the role nationalism played in society and a revision of the economic, social, and political disintegration of the empire prior to the Great War. *The Habsburg Civil Service and Beyond*, the result of a workshop organized in 2015 in Vienna, contributes to an understanding of these shifts and proposes new perspectives on the history of the civil service. The empirical case studies in the volume, assembled in a more or less chronological order, reflect on two key issues identified in the two introductory chapters (by Fredrik Lindström and Gary B. Cohen). One goal is to overcome “the dominance of nation-state centred historiography in East-Central Europe,” which undermines “the foundation for a proper Habsburg historiography” (p.25). The problem of methodological nationalism is that national and nationalist historiography builds on an analytical category—the nation—that does not spring from scientific concerns but rather from ideological and political influence. Furthermore, the focus on the institutional framework of the Habsburg conglomerate state (multilayered both horizontally and vertically) allows the contributors to the volume to concentrate on the relationship between state and society. Three points stand out in this regard: governmental structures seem to have been more dynamic and adaptable than previously thought, there was a growing popular demand for new services on the part of the state, and the relationship between governmental authority and the citizenry fundamentally changed due to increasingly variegated civil society, political parties, and interest groups.

Many of the case studies adopt a social history perspective and describe recruitment patterns and professionalization tendencies in the civil service as well as the social origin, social status, and prestige of the bureaucrats themselves. The common rationale is to provide “biographical and collective biographical research on individuals and groups of civil servants,” which is missing from the works of pioneers such as Waltraud Heindl and Karl Megner (p.7). The micro-level analysis of civil servants outlines considerable cultural and social commonalities in both parts of the Habsburg Monarchy in a manner that helps establish the Habsburg perspective beyond the currently dominant national frameworks. For

instance, in terms of the connection between educational qualification, title of nobility, and career perspectives, legally trained civil servants (*Konzeptsbeamter*) in Moravia and Silesia (the chapter by Andrea Pokludová) produced patterns similar to the patterns which prevailed in the high civil service corps of the Hungarian ministries (the chapter by Julia Bavouzet). Accordingly, noble or aristocratic origin represented a valuable asset at the beginning of one's career, but the influence of social origin faded in senior positions, and work performance mattered more in career advancement. The relative importance of family background, family ties, and networks also made possible the survival of the pre-1848 elite in the era of the Dualist Monarchy, as Judit Pál points out in the case of Transylvania. The list of attributes attached to the impending nomination of a lord-lieutenant in Arad sums up the qualities associated with civil servants: "practical knowledge of public administration, excellent personal abilities, distinguished family and social ties, independent financial status, complete trustworthiness in politics and good sense in leading and handling public life" (p.162). Social expectations, nonetheless, put an often unbearable financial burden on the rank and file in the civil service (appropriate housing, clothing, keeping a servant, and so forth) and could create a financial barrier to entry into the profession, much as in the case of independent judges in the Austrian administration.

There were considerable non-bureaucratic actors at play in the evolution of the civil service on the micro-level. One, of course, was politics. For instance, the Young Czech party regularly tried to intervene to ensure favorable decisions concerning the president and higher officials of the supreme court in Bohemia. According to Martin Klečáček, the financial difficulties faced by lower level judges made them seek help wherever possible, and political parties welcomed these demands. Because of the rather vague promotion procedures, "judges became, more or less voluntarily, the hostages of political parties, their deputies, and ministers" (p.127). Non-state experts also interfered with the administrative apparatus, as Peter Becker observes. The complex interdependence among the government, the provinces, political parties, interest groups, and the populace made the administration seek expert opinions from non-state actors in a bid to fill gaps in the state's knowledge of itself. The debate on who the "lay persons" were according to civil servants reveals a great deal about the functioning of the state administration itself: the problem with technical experts was their assumed permeation of subjectivity in decision making and the perception that they lacked a sense of responsibility. This view rested on the notion of a strong link between objectivity and non-partisanship, each of which were reserved

solely for legally trained bureaucrats. Becker's conclusion is relevant for the whole volume: "The growing interdependence of social, economic and state stakeholders was a consequence of technological changes, the complexity of supply systems, the expansion of participation in the educational sector and the overall challenge of balancing a plethora of competing interests in the provision of public good." (p.256). Although civil servants pledged to be non-partisan and neutral bureaucrats, they remained part of the social and political networks.

The only shortcoming of *The Habsburg Civil Service and Beyond* is that it fails to provide a comprehensive account of developments in the Habsburg Monarchy. Some of the case studies are firmly embedded in their own national historiography and provide glimpses into the history of the civil service in a given region. Thus, the individual contributions together form a mere comparative history of state bureaucracy, an inapt approach given the theoretical standards set in the introductory chapter by Lindström. Still, the volume is a welcome contribution to Habsburg historiography. It provides a fresh look into the scholarship on the civil service in Austria-Hungary and successfully sets the agenda for further research.

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THE

Hungarian Historical Review

Aims and Scope

The Hungarian Historical Review is a peer-reviewed international journal of the social sciences and humanities with a focus on Hungarian history. The journal's geographical scope—Hungary and East-Central Europe—makes it unique: the Hungarian Historical Review explores historical events in Hungary, but also raises broader questions in a transnational context. The articles and book reviews cover topics regarding Hungarian and East-Central European History. The journal aims to stimulate dialogue on Hungarian and East-Central European History in a transnational context. The journal fills lacuna, as it provides a forum for articles and reviews in English on Hungarian and East-Central European history, making Hungarian historiography accessible to the international reading public and part of the larger international scholarly discourse.

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CONTENTS

<i>Weather Anomalies and Their Economic Consequences</i>	ÉVA BODOVICS	179
<i>Evaluation of the Floodplain Farming</i>	SÁNDOR RÓZSA	213
<i>Environmental Impacts of Medieval Uses of Natural Resources</i>	BEATRIX F. ROMHÁNYI, ZSOLT PINKE, JÓZSEF LASZLOVSZKY	241
<i>Millennial Record of Earthquakes</i>	MIKLÓS KÁZMÉR, ERZSÉBET GYŐRI	284
<i>Dendrochronology and Environmental History: The Difficulties of Interpretation</i>	ANDRÁS GRYNÆUS	302
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