

Erdélyi országgyűlések a 16–17. században [Transylvanian Assemblies in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries]. By Teréz Oborni. Budapest: Országház Kiadó, 2018. 424 pp.

Teréz Oborni's work on the assemblies which were held during the period of the independent Transylvanian principality, published as the latest addition to the series on parliamentary history by Országház Publishers, provides a detailed summary of the findings of the secondary literature, along with maps and valuable source and textual illustrations, as well as contributions from her own archival research. Oborni has done a broadly conceived study of the history of the Transylvanian assemblies using methods and sources relevant to institutional, legal, and political history. She pays special attention to shifts in the complex relationships between the two great powers, the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire, which to a large extent determined the fate of the principality. According to her, the balance of power between the princes and the estates of Transylvania was subject to change in response to shifts in diplomatic relations between Transylvania and the two great powers.

In the first chapter, Oborni offers an overview of the distinctive conditions of constitutional law and social structure in Transylvania, which determined the state of affairs in the principality, situated in the eastern part of the Kingdom of Hungary, beginning with the end of the Middle Ages. She points out that the so-called "voivodes" (chief officers appointed by the Hungarian king) obtained power over the three Transylvanian estates, the so-called "natio" (the nobility, most of which was Hungarian, the Székelys, and the Saxons). The estates were united by their shared need to protect their privileges from the voivodes and the necessity of defending the region from the Turks, which became one of the foundation stones of the Transylvanian principality's future. Oborni deals with the diplomatic aspirations of 1530–1540 in depth, which were aimed at reconstituting the country, which had been split into two and then three parts (after 1541) due to the so-called dual royal election, which took place after the Battle of Mohács (1526). These aspirations were doomed to failure owing to the political and military situation. The state which came into being on the soil of the historical Transylvania and the surrounding eastern Hungarian counties (the so-called Parts, or Partium), which could be seen as a sort of "Eastern Hungarian Kingdom," arose under the governance of the son of John Szapolyai, Queen Izabella, and, mainly, the governor, György Fráter, the Bishop of Várad.

In the 1540s and 1550s, the Transylvanian parliaments played a vital role in the creation of the state and in passing legislation and writing the new constitution of the principality. During this process, the estates and Queen Isabella attempted, by and large successfully, to preserve the traditional Hungarian institutional structure. The constitutional legal status and the borders of Transylvania and Partium remained uncertain until the Treaty of Speyer, which was signed in 1571 by Maximilian II and John Sigismund Szapolyai, when John Sigismund assumed the title of “reigning prince of Transylvania and Parts of Hungary” and renounced the title of “elected king.”

The second chapter gives a chronological overview of the legislative work leading to the Treaty of Speyer and the creation of the necessary diplomatic preconditions. However, the Ottoman Empire, which had officially recognized the Transylvanian estates’ right to elect the prince without restriction (*libera electio*) in 1567, still treated Transylvania’s rulers as vassals of the Porte and always required negotiations regarding the person of the future prince beforehand. The Habsburg kings went on to consider the Transylvanian territory as an inseparable part of the Holy Crown of Hungary, and they referred to its leaders as voivodes, thus expressing its subordination to the Habsburg House.

In the third chapter, Oborni explains the problem of strong princely power as opposed to the weak estates, considering the period between the symbolic date of 1571 and 1690, the end of the independent Transylvanian Principality and the beginning of its the integration into the Habsburg Monarchy. She notes that the Transylvanian Principality could be considered a constitutional monarchy led by a prince, within the framework of which the orders possessed certain political rights in theory, though in practice they could not assert them sufficiently, especially during the princely elections or in times of political crisis.

The huge fiscal and familial landed properties and other fiscal incomes contributed to the overwhelming superiority of the power of the rulers. The unicameral Transylvanian parliament represented an undeveloped system, which was typical of the easternmost parts of the continent. The three *natios* sent their delegates to the diets, and some higher officials of the government, the members of the Princely Council and the High Court, certain bishops, and church vicars participated on invitation (they were the so-called *regalists*). The Catholic clergy, which lost its significance due to the Reformation, did not form an independent order in Transylvania, in contrast with developments in Hungary and Western Europe. The first list on the parliamentary presence of towns situated in the

Székely Land and in the Hungarian counties dates back to 1658, but at that time, in contrast with the towns in Hungary, the Transylvanian towns did not join forces to protect their interests. The essentially horizontal division of the estates at the diet was shattered by the strengthening of the princely power in the government and legislative sphere through the so-called council order (*tanácsí rend*), consisting of the chief officers of the prince and the high-ranking members of the Princely Council. Though the latter could have evolved into an upper house following the bicameral system's pattern of development, it was never institutionalized. Oborni refutes the widespread view in Romanian historiography according to which Romanians were deliberately excluded from the exercise of political rights. They did not form a separate order, as Romanians appeared in Transylvania sporadically and slowly, and they settled down only later and thus could not obtain the same privileges as Saxons or Székelys. Furthermore, the secular Romanian elite integrated into the Hungarian nobility, which was open both from a social and an ethnical point of view.

In the fourth chapter, Oborni states that the estates occasionally concluded or renewed the so-called unions to preserve Transylvanian unity and protect their privileges against the princes. In doing so, the three orders mutually guaranteed the preservation of one another's prerogatives and privileges, and for the first time in 1588, they set the conditions on the basis of which the ruler was to be elected.

The fifth chapter offers an analysis of the day-to-day operation of the diet and its legislative work, even though no detailed minutes or verbatim records of the meetings were drawn up. A diet was convoked once or twice a year in peacetime and four or five times during moments of political crisis. The reigning prince's role as legislator was far greater than that of the estates, who used these occasions to remedy local grievances, since, due to the lack of information and without authorization, they could not intervene in more serious political issues. Financial, military, and foreign affairs were almost entirely within the sovereign's competence. The strongest trump card in the hands of the estates in Western and Central Europe was voting the tax in opposition to the interests of the ruler, however, the Transylvanian diet voted the different taxes obediently throughout the era with only a few exceptions.

Oborni's new volume analyzes the institution of the Transylvanian assemblies from a multifold perspective, drawing on sources from political, diplomatic, and legal history. She dispels several misconceptions and offers more subtle understandings of particular aspects of this history with a

source-based approach. She also draws on new findings in the secondary literature on Transylvanian social history, mostly prosopography, which, in the future, may open new paths for the study of the Transylvanian social history of politics.

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