



BOOK REVIEWS

Erdélyi külpolitika a vesztfáliai béke után [Transylvania's Foreign Policy following the Peace of Westphalia]. By Gábor Kármán. Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2011. 484 pp.

The period following the Peace of Westphalia was an era of exciting and far-reaching structural change in the history of Europe. In this book Gábor Kármán, a prominent scholar of the history of the Transylvanian Principality and the diplomatic history of the early modern period, guides his reader through the first ten years following the conclusion of the treaties in 1648, a decade rich with decisive events. He examines the shift that took place in foreign policy over time as denominational elements gradually came to play a smaller and smaller role in the decisions of policy makers, not to mention the justifications given for these decisions, yielding gradually to simple reason of state, which used old sectarian arguments at most as a tool in order to mask other goals. For readers unfamiliar with the subject it may seem a bit odd that Kármán seeks to illustrate this process with the example of the Transylvanian Principality, which was one of the vassal states of the Ottoman Empire, but in the seventeenth century, its limited sovereignty notwithstanding, this successor state of the medieval Hungarian Kingdom, under the leadership of Calvinist rulers, sometimes pursued a remarkably independent foreign policy and appeared as an important actor on the stage of European politics.

The book essentially offers an overview of the foreign policy of Transylvanian Prince György Rákóczi II (1648–1660) up until his entry in the Second Northern War (the military campaign launched in 1657 in alliance with Sweden against King John II Casimir of Poland), which had disastrous consequences for Transylvania. However, since Kármán is most interested in the structural changes that took place, he also includes at the beginning of the book a brief overview of the campaign (1644–1645) led by the Prince's father, György Rákóczi I, against Ferdinand III, as well as the justification that was given for this campaign. He considers the role that the Transylvanian Principality played in the last stages of the Thirty Years' War among the Protestant countries and the place it was given in the Westphalia system. In the course of his analysis Gábor Kármán makes use of excellent source materials, including a number of historical syntheses published in Western Europe, publications of annotated sources by

nineteenth-century historian Sándor Szilágyi, and works by Ágnes R. Várkonyi, Katalin Péter and Sándor Gebei, twentieth-century historians from the postwar period. In 2010 a collection of essays on the period of György Rákóczi II's rule was published¹ (as it so happens a collection that Kármán and I edited together) that provided a firm foundation for further study of many important questions regarding the period. Kármán's book, however, differs from other studies of the era in Hungary in that he contextualizes his assessment of the events in a broader theoretical framework and scrutinizes the motivations and justifications behind the various foreign policy maneuvers with considerable skepticism.

The theoretical framework of Kármán's inquiry is comprised of three paradigms: Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhard's theory of confessionalization, which links the formation of denominations to the emergence of the modern territorial state, structural political history, which offers a new approach to the narration of political conflicts, and finally discourse theory, which provides new methods in the analysis of communication. Of these three pillars, the book rests perhaps most firmly on the second, structural political history, which is hardly surprising since the focus of Kármán's study is foreign policy. One of the virtues of the book is that Kármán only refers to the theoretical underpinnings when actually necessary. Moreover, he does not treat the theories as axioms, but rather as heuristic tools. He therefore offers not simply an array of examples, but an engaging and highly readable analysis which always strives to shed light on the actual motives that lay behind the official explanations of foreign policy decisions.

The main chapters of the book are arranged in chronological order. They address individual nodes of Transylvanian foreign policy. These attentive case studies are followed by a conclusion in which Kármán summarizes the transformation that took place in the strategies that were used to win legitimacy. The point of departure is the campaign launched in early 1644 by György Rákóczi I, in alliance with France and Sweden, against Ferdinand III, one of the conflicts of the Thirty Years' War that has been characterized with stubborn persistence in the secondary literature as a continuation of the earlier, similar military campaigns of Gábor Bethlen (1613–1629). (It is worth noting that this interpretation is not merely the work of later historians, rather it is implied by the rhetoric of the proclamation issued by Rákóczi, in which he alludes to

1 *Szerencsének elegendő forgása. II. Rákóczi György és kora* [Mixed Turns of Fate. Rákóczi György II and His Era], ed. Gábor Kármán and András Péter Szabó (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2009).

Bethlen.) The two enemies in the conflict, György Rákóczi I and Palatine Miklós Esterházy (the representative of the royal Estates), had their proclamations published in printed form. Since there were no regularly appearing organs of the press in Hungary in the seventeenth century, Kármán consulted personal correspondence. He makes no mention of the circular letters (which had the tone of manifestos) written by the Prince, the Palatine, and other officials as a separate kind of source, but he makes use of them in his inquiry as well. The Transylvanian Prince presented himself as the defender of the royal Estates in a manner that had been customary since the uprising led by István Bocskai in 1606, but Kármán persuasively demonstrates that Rákóczi quite deliberately placed less emphasis on denominational considerations in his justification of the campaign than his predecessors had, and he presents these considerations more as affronts to the Estates. In contrast, the Palatine's characterization of the conflict implied that the Prince represented not the Estates, but only Protestant interests, and he consistently added that Rákóczi was motivated by little more than personal avarice.² Esterházy was not entirely wrong, for alongside the concerns of the Protestant denominations and the Estates, often condemned self-interest also played a role in the launch of the campaign. In the end it was seen as a sectarian enterprise, the Prince's intentions notwithstanding. As he clarifies this point, Kármán also persuasively refutes two widespread but (at least in my assessment) mistaken views. First, he notes that Transylvania cannot be considered to have been a denominationally neutral state in the seventeenth century. The frequently alleged notion of the multi-confessional nature of the Principality is undermined by the power position of the Calvinist Church over the other denominations (first and foremost the Unitarians and the Catholics). Thus Transylvania should be regarded more as a distinctive example of unfinished confessionalization. Second, Kármán alludes briefly to the fact that the campaign led by Rákóczi

2 It is worth noting one detail not mentioned in the book. On November 6, 1644 at one of the sittings of the peace negotiations in Nagyszombat (today Trnava in Slovakia) the emissary of Bártfa (today Bardejov in Slovakia), who was a supporter of Rákóczi, thus recounted Miklós Esterházy's words: "Nu, vos domini conjicitis culpam huius mali in nos, cum tamen vos estis autores, vos praetenditis speciosum titulum religionis et libertatis, sed falsa sunt, ut etiam Betlehemus fecit, ad quae haec tria potissimum ipsum appulerant: 1. Cupido habendi. 2. Libido dominandi. 3. Ambitio ulciscendi. Ita et vester princeps non aliis rationibus motus, quam his, et pretiosum vel speciosum titulum, et hac ratione vult vos subjugare, immo jam colla vestra subjugavit, privabit vos libertatibus, devastabit regnum. – et alia plurima incompetentia dixit." Štátny archív v Prešove, pobočka Bardejov, Archív mesta Bardejova, Mestské knihy, Nr. 690, Acta diaetalia 1644–1655. f. 47r.

should not be linked to the idea of the “national kingdom,” a somewhat vague notion that was given too much weight in postwar Hungarian historiography.

In the subsequent chapter Kármán examines the place occupied by the Transylvanian Principality in the hierarchical international system before the Peace of Westphalia, and his examination rests not on representations of power, but on concrete political acts and the reactions of the great powers. Basing his depiction on the negotiations that took place in 1644–1645 between Transylvania and Sweden and Transylvania and France, the reception of the separate peace concluded by the Prince in Linz in 1645, and the trifling role of Transylvania at the Westphalia peace negotiations, Kármán offers a very disillusioning portrayal of the prestige of the Principality, if nonetheless more precise than any portrait so far. The Protestant powers reckoned with Transylvania, but they hardly considered it an ally or partner of equal rank. As a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire, Transylvania was regularly regarded with palpable suspicion, and this became something of a self-fulfilling prophecy when it came to decisions such as Rákóczi’s arbitrary withdrawal from the war. In the end neither Transylvania nor the Protestant powers of Europe showed much mutual trust. Transylvania did not even send an emissary to the Westphalia negotiations, though the Principality did manage to obtain the modest achievement of being included in the Treaty of Osnabrück as one of the allies of Sweden (and at the same time of the emperor!).

The question of relations with Poland was an issue in 1648, when György Rákóczi II succeeded his father, and it remained an issue throughout his rule. Influenced by the (admittedly somewhat distant) example set by Transylvanian Prince István Báthory (1571–1586), the Rákóczi house also sought to obtain the Polish royal title. They had perhaps the best chance of doing so in the fall of 1648, immediately before the death of the elder György Rákóczi, when the Polish elite suddenly found itself in need of military assistance because of a Cossack attack. However, the fact that no one was even named indicates the haphazard nature of the plans. The Transylvanian emissaries sometimes strove to win support for the older Prince and sometimes endeavored to curry favor for his younger son, Zsigmond Rákóczi (1622–1652). (The book has perhaps only one structural flaw, namely that this fact is only mentioned in the middle of the chapter.) The supporters of the Rákóczi house in Poland, however, were almost exclusively either Protestants or Orthodox, and the possible support of the Cossacks, who were also Orthodox, meant more of a disadvantage than an advantage in Polish politics. Furthermore, the efforts of the Transylvanian

Principality did not have the support of the European Protestant Powers. György Rákóczi II used the Polish–Cossack war to continue his father's efforts up until the summer of 1651, though with decreasing chances of success. In 1653 Transylvanian–Polish relations warmed as a consequence of the Cossacks' armed intervention in Moldova, but this proved only transitional.

György Rákóczi II was able to pursue a relatively independent foreign policy in part because at the beginning of his rule he managed to secure his position with regards to the Ottoman Empire (which was gradually weakening) and Ferdinand III. He came into conflict with the Turks over a threatened (and in the end accepted) rise in taxes and with the Habsburgs over the official expulsion of the Jesuits from Transylvania in 1652. The Viennese court also regarded the marriage of the Prince's younger brother Zsigmond Rákóczi to Henrietta Maria von der Pfalz (the daughter of Frederick V of Pfalz, who for a short time had been King of Bohemia) in 1651 as a hostile move, though Kármán persuasively argues that the alliance was not based on any concrete political plan, but rather simply on considerations of prestige.

The two chapters on the complex relationship between the Transylvanian Principality and the aristocracy of the Hungarian Kingdom (which at this time for the most part was Catholic) are particularly interesting. Building on the work of Katalin Péter and making small changes to her model, Kármán examines the process whereby, following the ratification of the Peace Treaty of Linz at the 1646–1647 National Assembly (in other words the relatively enduring resolution of debates between the denominations), the traditional coalitions in domestic politics, which were essentially divided on the basis of denominational differences, fell apart and a relationship based on mutually beneficial cooperation developed between the Catholic Palatine Pál Pálffy and the Calvinist Prince György Rákóczi II. Kármán considers the role of the Prince's brother Zsigmond (who resided in the Hungarian Kingdom) to have been significant only in the maintenance of relationships in the early 1650s, and he contradicts the widely familiar view of Ágnes R. Várkonyi with his assertion that there is no trace in the politics of the younger György Rákóczi of any thought of going to war with the Ottoman Empire until the crisis of power in Transylvania after 1657. At the same time this would have meant that the two sides, having set aside denominational differences, must have profoundly misunderstood each other, since the elite of the Hungarian Kingdom had always sought to expel the Turks from the region. (The presence of anti-Turk nobiliary nationalism in the letters of György Rákóczi II does seem to suggest that he entertained the idea of a

struggle against the Turks before 1657.) With the death of Pál Pálffy in 1653 the relationship between the Principality and the Hungarian Kingdom weakened, and in the subsequent political life of the Kingdom, which was dominated by Archbishop of Esztergom György Lippay and was rife with personal and rekindled denominational strife, the Transylvanian Prince could only count on individual members of the aristocracy, such as Miklós Zrínyi (also a famous poet) or Ferenc Nádasdy. (His close relationship with Ádám Batthyány did not begin then, as Kármán suggests, but rather in the early 1650s.)

The need arose in connection with the plans regarding Poland in the early 1650s for the Principality to develop a more detailed and denominationally neutral strategy of legitimation in order to justify any aggressive steps, and Kármán discerns a similar effort in connection with the 1653 Moldovan crisis. When György Rákóczi II removed Vasile Lupu, the inimical Voivode of Moldova, after launching a military campaign in 1653 he characterized his actions as a preventive measure.³ As a consequence of the 1653 military campaign in Moldova and the 1655 campaign in Wallachia, the Romanian Voivodships, which were also among the vassals of the Ottoman Empire but which were in a considerably weaker position, became subordinate to the Transylvanian Principality.

In 1655, following Sweden's attack on the Polish Kingdom, György Rákóczi II, having gained greater scope for action and increased self-assurance, revived his plans for the Polish lands, and in 1657, in an alliance with Sweden and the Cossacks, he attacked the Rzeczpospolita Polska. Kármán disputes the view of Sándor Gebei and makes a persuasive case in support of the following points: 1) the Prince initiated the relationship with Sweden, 2) in the period of rapid advance, the Swedes did not intent to divide the Rzeczpospolita, and 3) in the course of negotiations with the Transylvanian Prince Swedish King Charles Gustave X conducted himself in good faith. Indeed it was György Rákóczi II who did not ratify the Radnót treaty and throughout the military campaign against Poland he continuously maintained ties with the Poles.⁴

3 Kármán presents the justification given for the war on the basis of a letter that the Prince wrote to the Polish King John II Casimir, though one finds other signs of the legitimation strategy in Transylvanian sources as well, such as in the unpublished chronicle of the notary of Beszterce (today Bistrița in Romania): "Ob supra memoratas procul dubio nefandas practicas per Basiliū Moldaviae despotam ac vaivodam in Porta Othomanica motas, quamobrem jure merito insurrectio publica contra eundem facta est." *Serviciul Județean al Arhivelor Naționale Cluj-Napoca*. Primăria orașului Bistrița, a. III, p. 3, 329.

4 Kármán recently published an engaging article on the diplomat steps taken during the Polish campaign of György Rákóczi II. Kármán Gábor, "II. Rákóczi György 1657. évi lengyelországi hadjáratának

In the last chapters of the book Kármán offers a kind of summary characterization of the foreign policy of György Rákóczi II and the role of denominational considerations in foreign policy decisions. First he refutes the misconception, prevalent in Swedish historiography, according to which György Rákóczi II was a religious fanatic. Although Comenius and his circle did everything they could to pull the Transylvanian Prince into their political plans, György Rákóczi II himself showed little interest. While he may have taken advantage, from time to time, of the Moravian fugitive scholar's vast network of connections, he did not share his views, and the Polish military campaign was not prompted by Comenius' ideas. Kármán provides a detailed explanation as to why he doesn't accept earlier hypotheses of Hungarian historians regarding the reasons for the campaign and then presents the Prince's official justification. In his manifesto, Rákóczi emphasizes the earlier offer of the Polish throne, Christian mercy, and the restoration of the rights (first and foremost freedom of conscience) that had been violated in the course of the fighting. He also makes strong appeals, stronger than in his earlier proclamations, to the concept of the just war (*bellum iustum*). Finally, Kármán endeavors to answer the question regarding the true reason for the military campaign. In his view, it lies primarily in dynastic considerations. Through his conquests (which were presented as peaceful occupations), György Rákóczi II sought to strengthen his family's reputation and power. If one finds credible the detailed account of György Horváth-Kissevith, an emissary of the Hungarian Kingdom who sought an audience with the Prince before the military campaign was launched, Rákóczi himself alluded to this motive in confidential conversations.⁵

In his conclusion, Kármán again traces the shift from a foreign policy that was based on denominational interests (or at least derived its legitimacy from denominational considerations) to the autocracy of the reason of state, which

diplomáciai háttere" [The Diplomatic Background of the 1657 Military Campaign in Poland of György Rákóczi II], *Századok* 146, no. 5 (2012): 1049–84.

5 György Horváth-Kissevith's report to the King on his visit to the Transylvanian Prince in early December. At the end of the last meeting the emissary, at the suggestion of chancellor György Szelepcsényi, praised Transylvania and Rákóczi, who had conquered Wallachia and Moldova and even had control over part of Hungary and therefore could be quite satisfied with his attainments: "Respondit princeps: eam esse naturam principum et quorumvis aliorum, ut modum, quo familiam suam ad altiora evehere, et dignitatibus maximis ampliari et condecorare possint, studeant adinvenire, sic et se dictus princeps, si – ita inquit – Deo visum foret, eiusmodi occasionibus merito parere posse." Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára, A 98, Magyar Kancellária, gyűjteményes fondok – Transylvanica, b. 12, f. 16 (1650–1658), no. 47 (cs. 13, f. 1117.) Kármán makes use of the source in his discussion of the standpoint of Zsuzsanna Lorántffy, but does not refer to it with regards to this.

served both the interests of the ruler and the welfare of the public and was always able to incorporate other kinds of reasoning. In his view Rákóczi's Polish military campaign might well have served both his own personal interests and the interests of the Transylvanian state, but given the Prince's failure to prevail it is assessed as a blunder from the perspective of reason of state.

One should make some mention of the book's flaws, as well as the underlying concept. It contains an almost trivial number of factual errors. Ever since the publication of János Heltai's monograph on the subject few historians would claim that the *Querela Hungaria* was compiled by Alvinczi Péter (p.46),⁶ the 1645 Colloquium Charitativum (referred to in the book as the *Collegium charitativum*) was not the initiative of Comenius, but rather King Ladislaus IV of Poland (p.121),⁷ and the wife of Palatine Ferenc Wesselényi, who visited Zsuzsanna Lorántffy in 1655, was not Zsófia Bosnyák but Mária Széchy (p.289). But these are essentially the only mistakes. Kármán's analysis of the foreign policy of the Transylvania Principality is a work of unparalleled cogency and precision. However, one may nonetheless entertain doubts concerning the thesis of the work, according to which denominational concerns were gradually relegated to the background. The comparison drawn between the legitimization of György Rákóczi I's military campaign against the Hungarian Kingdom in 1644–1645 and the theoretical justifications given for the Transylvanian foreign policy of the 1650s is misleadingly simple. Given the strong mental and material connections between the two countries and György Rákóczi I's expansive estates in Hungary, the first cannot really be considered simply as a foreign policy decision. Its legitimization reminds us far more of the propaganda of a civil war, and the Prince's attempt to disguise his denominationally motivated statements as non-denominational is suspicious at best. György Rákóczi II's military campaigns of the 1650s had no real "antecedent," since no Transylvanian prince had ever interfered so directly in the affairs of a neighboring state, with the exception of the Hungarian Kingdom, which was regarded as part of the Hungarian "homeland." (Had György Rákóczi I actually helped Wallachia in the conflict with Moldova in the 1630s, there might be some comparison.) In 1653 György Rákóczi II could hardly cite the defense of Protestantism as an explanation for

6 János Heltai, *Alvinczi Péter és a heidelbergi peregrinusok* [Péter Alvinczi and the Heidelberg Pilgrims] (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1994), 129–54.

7 Milada Blekestad, *Comenius. Versuch eines Umrisses von Leben, Werk und Schicksal des Jan Amos Komenský* (Oslo–Prague: Universitetsforlaget–Academia, 1969), 398–407.

the campaign against Moldova. Drawing distinctions between various strategies of legitimation is also problematic. In the case of conflicts for which we have plentiful sources it is clear that the Prince used a variety of different kinds of justifications, depending on the audience. (Kármán emphasizes this in connection with the campaign of 1644–1645.) However, there is a dearth of sources on the legitimation strategies used in the 1650s, and we have only a small slice of the communications on which to base tentative conclusions.

Whatever we may think of the shift towards reason of state (depicted on the cover of the book with a two-headed figure), Gábor Kármán's eloquently written, clearly structured book is a milestone in the study of Transylvanian foreign policy and more broadly Hungarian politics of the early Modern Era. It offers new methodological approaches and corrects many misunderstandings found in earlier secondary literature. In its theoretical sophistication, its use of sources, and the equipoise of its analyses it sets an admirably high standard.

Translated by Thomas Cooper

András Péter Szabó