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A CRITICAL

QUARTERLY

WOLF LEPENIES ON

A POLITICS OF MENTALITIES

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NEWS, LISTINGS

Gombrowicz is less interested in this demon's logic, in "the strongest, up until now, materialization of the intellect". "[In] my understanding, Communism is not so much a philosophical or ethical as a technical issue." If Communists maintain that in order for the spirit to function the right way the needs of the body must be satisfied, then they must also prove that their system assures a higher standard of living. But where is that proof? "Am I supposed to look for it in the Soviet Union, which, up to now, cannot feed itself without the labor of slaves, or in your reasoning, where you talk about everything except for the technical efficiency of the system?" Materialist philosophers want to influence the spirit through a change in material conditions. Still, they keep preaching about the spirit and have little to say about how that victory over matter will happen. "Until the technical possibility of Communism is elaborated upon, other reflections are only pipe dreams."

I must admit that the more bothersome aspects of these technical possibilities had little attraction for me even back when I had still thought of myself as a thoroughgoing Marxist, even a Communist. I felt I was free to consume coffee, and Heine poems, according to my needs. I was really only interested in the truth, that is, in the Law, which seemed so much more important to me than faltering Being. I believed that practical matters belonged in the realm of chance; it was a mere accident therefore that socialism happened not to work. At the same time, such things as a materialist world view, historical perspective, dialectical method were of primary importance, mainly because it helped one understand a host of disparate processes and phenomena. Even before reading *History and Class Consciousness*, I agreed with Lukács that "orthodoxy in Marxism

refers only to the method. [...] Let us assume for the sake of argument that the latest scholarship offered incontestable proof that each and every one of Marx's assertions was erroneous. If this were to happen, then every serious, 'orthodox' Marxist could accept these new findings and reject every single Marxist tenet without for a moment giving up his Marxist orthodoxy." Today I am horrified by the glaring disparity between the method and the results achieved by it, a disparity which, under existing socialist conditions, helped to adjust theory to the strategic interests of the moment. I, and of course many others, drew a different conclusion from the contradictions existing between the method and the assertions based on it. I realized that the method may be correct but those confident assertions were not derived from it. The kind of class society I was living in was not and could not be envisioned by Marx. As to the technical feasibility of socialism, in this practical yet philosophically crucial question I invariably deferred to the experts, and left it all to the uncertain future.

I could always say of course that when it comes to questions of technical feasibility, I am not competent to speak. Or I could take the artist's position, as does Gombrowicz, and argue that what interests me are not abstract ideas but concrete personalities. My job is not to explore the paths of the future but to focus on the forces that shape the individual human being. I may say this in all honesty, but can I then still consider myself a socialist? Do I have the right, after all my "anti" positions (anti-*Realsozialist*, anti-capitalist, etc.) to claim that deep down I am still "pro"? Will it help me any if—to go with all the concrete "antis"—I sneak in a few abstract "let it be's"?

Translated by Ivan Sanders

NOTICES

Bulwarks of Christendom

Lajos Hopp: *Az "antemurale" és "conformitas" humanista eszméje a magyar-lengyel hagyományban* (The Humanist Notions of *Antemurale* and *Conformitas* in Hungarian-Polish Tradition), *Humanizmus és reformáció* 19 (Humanism and Reformation Series 19), Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1992, 208 pp.

Taken from *Magyar Könyvszemle*, 1994/1, pp. 348–51.

Lajos Hopp's work constitutes an analysis of Hungarian and Polish self-perceptions based on a comparative study of Hungarian and Polish Renaissance literature. It also traces the fortunes of the notions *antemurale* and *conformitas* as they shaped Western views of the two kingdoms over a two-hundred-year period. The comparative approach is justified for several reasons. First, as both countries were obliged to fight against the Turks from the fourteenth century on, Hungarians and Poles developed a similar understanding of history. In addition, Hungary and Poland, in many ways similar in terms of political institutions and geographical location,

came to identify with one and the same role, the role expressed in the *antemurale* concept. Finally the two countries have a long-standing tradition of interdependence and of acknowledged mutual interests.

Functionally speaking, the expression, "the bulwark of Christendom" is a metaphor; passed on from one generation to the next, it has become a byword. The role the term played and the use to which it was put was a function of social and political factors and of the particular context in which it occurred, and changed constantly. Hopp's analysis of these transformations has a number of methodological precedents: Vilmos Tolnai's study on the byword *ele-*

fántcsonttorony (ivory tower), and Andor Tarnai's book on *Extra Hungariam non est vita*. The concept *antemurale* itself is a recurring theme in Hungarian historiography and cultural and literary history. Gyula Székfű, in his volume of *Magyar Történet* (Hungarian History, 1943) dealing with the sixteenth century, provides a detailed description of the Hungarian reality that formed the historical background to this expression. Subsequent research, however, has tended to disprove his statement that "In the sixteenth century, the notion of Hungary as the bulwark of Christendom existed only in Italy and in territories inhabited by Germans" (III, p. 146). For example, János Győry found evidence of the notion of Hungary as the "bulwark of Christendom" in sixteenth-century French literature (*Minerva*, 1933); while Lajos Terbe was able to trace the antecedents, transformations, and occurrences of *antemurale* in a wide variety of Western diplomatic and political writings and literary works (*EPhK*, 1936). In 1939, Imre Lukinich, relying on the results of the above-mentioned studies, concluded there were no historical facts or sincere sentiments behind the byword, nor could it have served as a basis of some lasting cooperation. As used in the West, it was primarily a catchword to sway Hungarian public opinion; as used in Hungary, it was a call for help from the West (*Magyar Művelődéstörténet* III, 64–64). In line with this tradition, it is by tracing the contemporary occurrences of the term throughout Europe that Lajos Hopp illustrates its various functions.

Proceeding chronologically from 1410 (the year the word *propugnaculum* first occurs in the sources) to the death of István Bocskai in 1606, Hopp traces the Hungarian and Polish history of the concept, better known later by the synonym *antemurale*, introduced by Aeneas Sylvius in 1458. We learn that the notion originated in the Neoplatonist philosophy of the papal courts and expressed the need to join forces against the Ottoman Empire. It was taken up by the Humanists in the royal and

imperial chanceries, and was later reinforced by the successes of János Hunyadi, whose victory at Belgrade halted Ottoman advances for nearly a century. Political writings dispatched from the Jagiellonian court also helped to give currency to the notion, as did the vicissitudes of the Islamic-Christian conflict. The two neighboring countries' sense of their historical calling, and their feeling that they had only each other to rely on as they faced the Turks had, by the fifteenth century, reached other countries through dispatches sent by Humanist diplomats and ambassadors to the papal court.

Discussing the period preceding Mohács, Lajos Hopp mentions the use of the Vergilian metaphor ("When our neighbors' walls are burning...") and speaks of the invectives heaped in both countries on a nobility that had become indifferent to its historical obligation to defend the common weal. His conclusions are in keeping with the latest findings on the subject: neither the calls for unified opposition to the Turks nor the concept of *antemurale* as a tool of diplomacy sufficed to rally the *Respublica Christiana* to concerted action. Nor did it succeed in getting the Polish and Hungarian nobility to set aside their petty, selfish interests.

After 1526, Hungary became the battleground for the struggle between the Habsburgs and the Ottoman Empire, and the Habsburg Empire assumed the role of bulwark of Christendom. This brought about significant changes in the history of the concept. In a parallel development, religious conflicts came to cast their shadow on the concept of *antemurale*. The Catholic associations of the Humanist metaphor became problematic for the Protestant nobility, who had come up with their own very different interpretation. But the notion remained a timely one even after the fall of Buda, as witnessed by various political tracts, elegies, as well as some lesser-known works of Hungarian and Polish "Turcica." Its enduring timeliness is illustrated also by its occurrence in various literary and other artistic works dating from

after 1567, the siege on Szigetvár, and by the depictions of Hungarian-Turkish confrontations in the art of the Ottoman Turks. The concept continued to be popular during the last third of the sixteenth century, a versatile manifestation of the conflicting interests of the divided Western powers.

With the birth of the Principality of Transylvania, and the revival of the Polish-Hungarian dynastic union with István Báthory's accession to the Polish throne, the *antemurale* notion gained new potency. This is reflected in Polish political poetry and ambassadorial letters and addresses. That the Jesuits also took up the notion can be seen in certain literary works of the counter-Reformation, István Szántó's (Arator) account of the year 1594, and Piotr Skarga's political essay of 1597. During the decades following Báthory, the *antemurale* notion acquired yet further connotations, as evidenced by the extensive Catholic and Protestant writings dealing with the Turkish threat, which then found their way into the Hungarian and Polish traditions. Political pamphlets and ambassadorial addresses from the time of Bocskai's War for Independence illustrate how Bocskai manipulated the notion for his own purposes. As a catchword, it was at this time that *antemurale* came to acquire the connotations usually associated with the expressions *Pax Christiana* and *bona vicinitas*.

Hopp's work is significant in that he analyzes occurrences of the word *antemurale* in the literary, historical, and iconographical sources in the context of political history and the history of ideas. Today, many more of the relevant primary sources are available in print than in the 1930s, but even so, Lajos Hopp has managed to introduce a significant number of scarcely-known, unpublished sources into his work, both less accessible manuscripts and printed matter. The correspondence of the Humanists, chronicles, literary works, and diplomatic and political writings are his major sources, although he also cites religious literature, political verses, and lyrical poetry.

Hopp is well aware of the subjective nature of his sources—ideological treatises, Humanist writings, diplomatic jargon and “historical” accounts—and of the fact that the social groups mainly responsible for spreading the notion were the feudal orders of the two countries, the institutions of the court, and the students at Cracow University. In tracing the changes in the byword’s form and function, Hopp examines how this related to views of the feudal state and to the nobility’s sense of responsibility to its country. He also compares *antemurale* to other concepts serving similar functions. We learn that the notion was used in a wide variety of ways during this two-hundred-year period: it was used to express a sense of Christian solidarity; it was used by the Protestant sects to declare their viability; and it was used by diplomats to argue the importance of a defense zone against the Turks.

Dedicated to the memory of Tibor Klaniczay, Hopp’s work is a significant contribution to the history of Polish and Hungarian self-perceptions and the two countries’ images in the West during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The subsequent history of the concept of *antemurale* during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has yet to be examined. As there are a large number of sources in German, the changing use of the notion in the German-speaking territories would also deserve study.

With an abstract in French and a table of contents in Polish, the volume reflects the exacting standards of the new publishing house, standards worthy of the old *Humanism and Reformation* series.

GÁBOR TÜSKÉS

A Ho-Hum History

Aladár Urbán: *Köztársaság az Újvilágban: Az Egyesült Államok születése, 1763–1789* (Republic in the New World: The Birth of the United States, 1763–1789), Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 1994, 378 pp.

Taken from *Budapesti Könyvszemle*—*BUKSZ*, 1995/1, pp. 94–96.

The French Revolution has always loomed larger in the minds of Hungarian historians, politicians and educators than the American Revolution, whose contemporary impact on Hungary was less immediate for reasons of geographical distance, if nothing else. To this day, little has appeared in Hungarian that reflects developments in the international literature on the subject, whereas the growing tendency to examine the French Revolution in its broader context has meant particular emphasis on comparison with its American antecedent.

Aladár Urbán is the first Hungarian historian to take a comprehensive approach to the American Revolution. But political, diplomatic and military affairs are what really interest him. So for the first time ever, Hungarian readers can learn the reasons for the lack of coordination among the various British forces in the campaign of 1777, for instance, and why it was that Washington decided to besiege the British in Yorktown rather than in New York in 1781. We hear in detail about the colonial powers’ competition for North America; about the latitude the young American nation enjoyed in matters of foreign policy; about the Treaty of Alliance between France and the newly constituted United States; about the diplomatic background of the Treaty of Paris recognizing the independence of the United States in 1783; about the relative strength of the various political groupings at the Constitutional Convention that met in Philadelphia in 1787; and about how the Constitu-

tion was finally ratified by each of the thirteen states. As political history the book is accurate, well-proportioned and fills a definite need. For all that, one cannot help finding it somewhat disappointing in specific respects.

The ideological heritage of the Revolution, or the ideals of the individual revolutionaries themselves, are hardly mentioned. Not even in discussing the framing of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution does Urbán tell us anything about the principles which led the Founding Fathers to take a stand. All the intellectual background we get to the former is a fleeting reference to Locke and the social contract (p. 117–18); while in connection with the latter, the author only tells us: “The American Constitution is a product of the Enlightenment” (p. 286). There is no mention either of the English or continental republican traditions, or of the English “Real Whig” opposition of the 1720s and ‘30s, which provided so much of the ideological ammunition of the American Revolution. It is as if Urbán were unfamiliar with the research results of the last three decades—which have shown both ideologies to be integral sources of revolutionary theory—and the arguments that received so much attention from American historians in the 1970s and ‘80s. Urbán says just as little about the role that religion played in the Revolution, and in shaping the Revolution’s ideology. There are only three references to the subject: the guarantees of freedom of religion (p. 164–65), the constitutional separation of Church and State (p. 292), and the fact that the Bill of Rights did not ban taxation by certain privileged churches in certain states (p. 310). Thus it is that Tom Paine’s inflammatory pamphlet, *Common Sense* (1776), is as far back as Urbán traces the idea that the revolutionary cause—the American cause—is the cause of all mankind. Yet, the notion of this mission had a history of at least a century and a half among the Puritans of New England (as among other colonists elsewhere), and it was a relatively small step from that to