



THE

# Hungarian Historical Review

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ACADEMIÆ SCIENTIARUM HUNGARICÆ  
*Natural Resources and Society*

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# The Hungarian Historical Review

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## *Natural Resources and Society*

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

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Ottoman Law of War and Peace: The Ottoman Empire and its Tributaries from the North of the Danube. By Viorel Panaite. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2019. xxiii+470 pp.

The first edition was a disaster. Diacritical marks were wrongly placed, the numbering of endnotes went so awry that it was almost impossible to couple the statements with their references, and the text badly needed proper editing. Nevertheless, we were using it since it was the only serious attempt available in English to define the status of the tributary states of the Ottoman Empire, and it offered many important insights into the ideological vocabulary used by the sultans in their communication with the outside world, not to mention the logic that shaped their thinking. Now, with the second edition, the content has finally found adequate form.

Viorel Panaite wrote his book for a Romanian public, and this was fortunate from some perspectives for the English version and unfortunate from others. Sometimes the non-Romanian reader wonders why some questions which seem commonplace to anyone familiar with the international secondary literature have to be discussed in detail and (the reader must remind himself that sometimes he also cannot avoid entering debates with his national historiography when writing for broader audiences) or why the Romanian version of specific terms in Ottoman political thought also has to be provided (some of the sources Panaite used were written in Romanian, which explains this detail). Nevertheless, the fact that the work was written for a non-Ottomanist public makes it a very thorough and clear introduction into how research on the Ottoman law of war and peace should be done. The book is also a useful handbook on the sources available on Ottoman political language.

The question Panaite aims to answer is not primarily concerned with an assessment of the Ottoman system of making politics in the international scene or, more specifically, creating and maintaining the tributary status from the present perspective of long-term “development of the nation” (which generations before him saw as their task). Rather, he wants to understand the attitude of the sultans on their own terms. His chapters offer a meticulous analysis of documents by focusing on their terminology, contrasting the notions found in the religious sources of Islamic thought and legal treatises with ideas found in the sultans’ correspondence, and identifying the logic according to

which the Ottoman state explained the legitimacy of its deeds. Thus, the image presented here is built on an admirable array of sources representing the various facets of the Ottoman way of understanding international power relations and the empire's place within them. At the same time, with his keen interest in the question of tributary states, Panaite also gives a voice to them and listens to how the tributary states reacted to the ideology of the the Ottoman state. This double perspective makes his survey even more intriguing.

The structure of the book by and large follows that of the first edition, but much has happened in the research concerning the Ottoman Empire and its tributaries in the more than twenty years since its first publication in 1997, so the second edition offers more not only in its form, but also in its content. The material used in the second edition highly exceeds the number of sources used for the previous version. Consequently, thanks in part to additional documentation, Panaite's theses become even more convincing, especially when it comes to controversies in Romanian historiography. For instance, Panaite offers a detailed discussion concerning the establishment of the two voivodates' tributary status and a lengthier explanation of why they should be seen as part of the empire. These debates offer an intriguing read and important lessons even for the readers who are not familiar with the works Panaite refutes. Panaite has written an excellent survey about Ottoman legal thought concerning war and peace, with particular emphasis on the status of the tributary principalities, even more specifically of Moldavia and Wallachia.

The question is whether Panaite's results can also be extrapolated to other Ottoman tributaries. In the chapter that promises a chronological survey of the process by which the tributary states submitted and accepted their status as tributary states, Panaite gives accounts of a number of events in other states and territories, discussing the various Greek and Balkan principalities, the Khanate of Crimea, Ragusa, and Transylvania. Later short-lived attempts to establish tributary states, such as the case of Cossack Ukraine, appear in other chapters in footnotes, while some territories, such as the Upper Hungarian Principality (or in its Turkish name, Middle Hungary) of Imre Thököly are given no attention at all. This is less of a problem, since the book does not promise a comprehensive analysis (although the last example is definitely north of the Danube, thus it is implied by the title). Throughout the book, Ragusa remains the most often cited example. Documents related to the city state are mentioned frequently as contrastive material or illustration for general statements concerning the use of legal terminology. For such a bulky volume, it would perhaps have been too

much to ask for even more, although Ragusa could have been a useful case to show how local interpretations could diverge from the Ottoman perspective concerning their status. The examples Panaite cites from the Moldavian and Wallachian cases are less suitable to show the potential of research on the double-faced self-representation of the Ottoman tributaries in two different international societies, both of which they claimed loyalty to.

In any case, the Ottoman attitude towards the tributaries was based on the same assumptions everywhere, and thus the legal vocabulary that Panaite examines in his analyses of the sources related to any of these specific territories enriches our knowledge and validates his point, even if the dissimilarities between the positions occupied by the specific states, mirrored by political practice, are left in the shadows, as he only addresses the terminology of the official documents. When it comes to the discussion of specific territories, however, we reach a weak point in Panaite's reconstruction. The most frustrating aspect of this for me, with my background in the research on Transylvania, is how little Panaite seems to know or, perhaps, care about this territory and its history. There have been long-running controversies in the Hungarian and Romanian secondary literature on Transylvania, plagued with mutual accusations of nationalist bias, but I can assure my reader that my objection here has nothing to do with this. Panaite fails to take into consideration some of the important findings from the Hungarian historiography, but he also does this with some of the relevant conclusions found in the Romanian secondary literature on Transylvania. Throughout the book, he mostly quotes the same five or six documents from the Transylvanian material, and although Sándor Papp's bulky collection of Transylvanian inauguration documents from the sixteenth century was published after the first edition of Panaite's monograph, it is remarkable that no single document is ever cited from it in the revised version. Whereas, as noted above, Panaite made liberal use of the sources of local origin related to Moldavia and Wallachia, in the case of Transylvania, he seems to have ignored both the Hungarian and the Latin sources (more accessible to a Romanian scholar). While he devotes considerable attention to Moldavia and Wallachia, it is hard to escape the impression that Panaite was simply less interested in Transylvania, a state with social, political, and cultural structures very different from the other two.

To mention but a few problematic cases, there might be points at which one could argue with Papp's conclusions in the abovementioned source publication (and various later papers), but to state that, after Süleyman I's rule, the princes were appointed only with sultanic *berats* (pp.268–69) is to show disregard for

the facts and extrapolate from the Moldavian and Wallachian cases. In the last two decades, a number of Hungarian and German historians have repeatedly pointed out at various conferences and in publications that in the first period of the Transylvanian principality, the members of the Szapolyai/Zápolya family saw themselves and were treated by the Ottomans as kings of Hungary and not as princes of Transylvania, a fact that is altogether disregarded in this survey (cf. pp.125–27). Cristina Feneşan's very thorough account of the changes in the sum of the Transylvanian tribute in the seventeenth century also seems to have escaped Viorel Panaite's attention, thus he claims that after István Báthory's rule, the sum remained the same until the principality was incorporated into the Habsburg Empire in 1699 (p.300). Of course, everyone has blind spots, and one cannot explore every minor segment of a question with equal thoroughness. The problem is that Viorel Panaite claims that his book is about the three states, and he suggests in more than half of the cases that his statements are valid for each of the three, while in most instances, his analysis focuses on Moldavia and Wallachia.

This is sad, especially because the monograph will serve as a handbook for students of the Ottoman Empire's tributary states, a function otherwise well deserved. The analyses Panaite offers on the Ottoman chancellery's vocabulary and legitimation techniques, the role of customs in the Empire's political system, the framework of the tributaries' legal status (including the privileges they enjoyed and the obligations they had to fulfil), and the turning points in the tributary status of Moldavia and Wallachia are new and convincing, and they will certainly provide a springboard for further in-depth research. I can only hope that readers will concentrate on these chapters and look for information concerning Transylvanian history elsewhere. If so, this monograph will be of great benefit for historians of southeastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire.

Gábor Kármán  
Research Centre for the Humanities



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.

## The Hungarian Historical Reviews

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