

The 1868 Croatian–Hungarian Settlement: Origin and Reality. Edited by Vlasta Švoger, Dénes Soksevits, András Cieger, and Branko Ostajmer. Zagreb–Budapest: Hrvatski institut za povijest–MTA BTK TTI, 2021. 304 pp.

Hungarian and Croatian historians have developed a productive routine of cooperation. One of the relatively new results of this cooperation is a reexamination of the settlements: the 1867 one between Hungary and Austria, and more emphatically, its “little sister,” the Croatian–Hungarian Settlement of 1868. The foundations of this common endeavor were laid during a conference in 2018, commemorating the 150th anniversary of the settlement between the two Transleithanian parts of the Habsburg state. This discussion revealed that East Central European research findings have had little impact on international dialogue about Austria–Hungary. The publication of these findings in English is thus a particularly welcome contribution to an already dynamically changing field.

Indeed, research on late Habsburg Central Europe was recently reinvigorated and enriched by new critical viewpoints of the so-called imperial turn, transnational and global perspectives, and new subdisciplines, such as the examination of knowledge transfer, environmental history, and new military history, just to mention a few. These fresh new outlooks may yield new findings related to Transleithania too. The book under review attempts first to offer a comprehensive description of the system called subdualism to lay the groundwork for new research and, second, to inform scholars the world over about new findings from the region.

To fulfill its first ambition, the book offers thorough descriptions of the political and legal antecedents of the Croatian–Hungarian Settlement and the political and economic history of the entire period until 1918 (in the chapters by Željko Holjevac, Stjepan Matković, and Mariann Nagy). As a neuralgic point in the long-lasting coexistence of the two nations and their only military clash over the course of eight centuries, the events of 1848 received an independent chapter (by Róbert Hermann).

In addition to the comprehensive writings, the book offers insights into more specific questions as well, such as the exciting analysis of the Croatian satirical press of the time by Jasna Turkalj and András Cieger’s chapter about the visual symbols of the subdualist system. Both studies ask questions about how the broader public interpreted visual signs used in the (pro-government

and oppositionist) propaganda. By zooming in on micro-historical details, Dénes Sokcsevits and Vlasta Švooger present personal stories and biographical additions about a fervent Hungarian opponent of the Settlement (Frigyes Pesty) and an enthusiastic Croatian proponent (Ignjat Brlić). A richer understanding of their standpoints helps further a more nuanced grasp of the tenacious national stereotypes concerning the Settlement's reception on both sides.

These more narrowly-focused investigations shed light on the importance of individual agency when it came to interpreting the Settlement, a treaty which in its legal terms was rather vague or, to put it differently, offered a flexible framework open to different readings. Several chapters deal with this flexibility, which gave room for maneuver to politicians, depending on their personal ambitions. This was particularly true in the case of the minister of Croatia–Slavonia–Dalmatia without portfolio in Budapest. The minister's competencies were never precisely defined, and as a result, he was sometimes a nearly invisible presence during negotiations in Vienna, Zagreb, and Budapest, and in other cases, he was the person who overrode decisions made by important figures, including even the ban (a figure somewhat like a viceroy), as one can read in the study by Ladislav (László) Heka. In his chapter, Ádám Schwarczwölder offers an even more penetrating study of some of the grey zones in the functioning of the Settlement system as he investigates the flows of money coming from Vienna or Budapest more or less openly aimed to influence Croatian political power relations. It was of course impossible to keep official accounts of these sums, so Schwarczwölder examines the various tricks used in the budgets to shed light on these machinations.

A closer look at political parties can tell just as much as it did in the case of ministries. Branko Ostajmer's analysis of the Croatian National Party, pejoratively dubbed the "magyarón" party by contemporaries and often imagined as a monolithic and anti-national unit, shows that this political community was in reality a heterogeneous group. Close cooperation with the Hungarian leading circles was motivated by an array of varying factors, from ideological convictions to realpolitik and the disillusionment caused by Austrian neo-absolutism. However, as Ostajmer observes, these considerations were never accompanied by a desire to strengthen Hungarian domination over Croatia, or in other words, to change the status quo. There are thus limits to any historiographical reassessment one could offer of this political party.

Reassessment is key, however, in the chapter by Imre Ress dealing with a widespread misconception that has been dominating the secondary literature

on Austria-Hungary since the 1910s. Robert William Seton-Watson offered an infamous and politically influential assessment of the Hungarian Kingdom as an aggressively nationalist country. His assessment became something of a historical commonplace and shaped the way in which Hungarian–Croatian relations at the end of the nineteenth century have usually been seen. Röss convincingly disproves a contention cited in most of the English-language and German-language secondary literature, according to which the Croatian–Slavonian ban was a simple executor of the Hungarian prime minister’s will. Röss meticulously reconstructed the procedures according to which bans were chosen and shows that, in general, the emperor appointed the ban personally, sometimes even specifically against the candidate recommended by Budapest.

The comprehensive, informative descriptions of the Settlement system, the well-chosen microhistories, and the long-needed reassessments make this volume a valuable contribution to the lively discussion about the late Habsburg state. As Imre Röss emphasizes in his chapter, the Croatian–Hungarian Settlement played a crucial legal and political role in the Dualist system, as it was an obstacle to any tripartite transformation and thus stabilized the status quo. It is therefore not only an interesting addition to the history of the multiethnic composite state but also a key to a more subtle understanding of its working.

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