

## CHAPTER TWELVE

# CONCLUSION: CHANGES AFTER 1526 IMPACTING THE CENTURIES TO FOLLOW

The years between 1526 and 1608 brought changes to the late medieval Kingdom of Hungary, the realm of St. Stephen, that could be still be felt in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These changes were partly due to the Ottoman conquests, to the continuous warfare, and to the frequent campaigns which produced irreversible consequences.<sup>1</sup> Of equal, if not greater, importance was the hitherto little-studied process whereby the remaining parts of the Kingdom of Hungary joined the evolving central European Habsburg Monarchy.

The appropriateness of calling the decades after the Battle of Mohács one of the most critical periods in the history of the Kingdom of Hungary is made more evident by contemporary Hungarian and other comments. Keen observers sensed the changes even in their own time. Let it suffice to cite the Hungarian historian and politician Miklós Istvánffy and the Venetian ambassador in Vienna, Giovanni Michiel. In his major historical work, Istvánffy described the post-Mohács changes as follows, “This memorable and lamentable Mohács disaster in which we lost the old glory of our nation, and the flowers of our nobility and knighthood,...which resulted, to our eternal disgrace, in servitude to foreign heathens [i.e. the Ottomans] and to continuing service to a foreign nation [i.e. the Habsburgs/the Germans].”<sup>2</sup> Similar comments were made, forty-five years after Mohács, by an unbiased foreign observer, Michiel: “So far as Hungary is concerned, the Virgilian line applies: ‘We have been Trojans, Ilium [Troy] has been.’<sup>3</sup> Hungary has been subjected to unheard of misfortune and misery. It sank into being a province, from having been not only a

kingdom, but one of the foremost kingdoms of Christianity, whose king was equal to the king of France.”<sup>4</sup>

The eyewitnesses exaggerated only very little. They could not know that the changes they observed would determine not only Hungary's but also central Europe's history for several centuries. The principal victims of the sixteenth century Ottoman conquests in central Europe were the southern and eastern parts of the Kingdom of Hungary. One of the prominent countries of Christian Europe of the late Middle Ages was torn into three parts and, until the reconquest of Temesköz in 1718, became an almost constant theater of war between the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy. By the second half of the sixteenth century, the Hungary's eastern part became the Principality of Transylvania, a vassal of the Porte. Transylvania, forced by the Ottomans to become a separate but carefully controlled state, did not become a part of the Kingdom of Hungary again until 1867. This was due, to a large extent, to the agreement reached at the end of the seventeenth century, by the Habsburg court in Vienna and the Transylvanian political elite.<sup>5</sup> Yet the basic conditions were the creation of Sultan Süleyman I and the Ottoman political and military leadership.

Without the Ottoman conquests there probably would have been no fusion of the Kingdom of Croatia with the Hungarian province of Slavonia, which had autonomy during the late medieval period. The evolution of the Dalmatian-Croatian-Slavonian kingdom, beginning in the second half of the sixteenth century, played a long-lasting role in the territorial extent of the present Republic of Croatia. The early modern history of central Europe would presumably be quite different if the Ottoman conquest would have stopped somewhere in the Balkans or even if their extension into Hungary had not reached in 1541 Buda, its capital. The Ottoman victory at Mohács in 1526, the occupation of parts of Hungary and Croatia, and creation of a vassal state in Transylvania made the Turks a major factor in the history of central Europe. Their conquest affected the map of the area permanently and had major and lasting effects on the conditions in the Balkans.

The advance of the Ottomans along the Danube also played an important role in the reduced Kingdom of Hungary becoming a part of the Habsburg Monarchy, the new great power in central Europe. This event had more long-lasting consequences than the Ottoman conquests and the rela-

ted tragic political, economic, and ethnic effects. Both Miklós Istvánffy and the Venetian ambassador realized the importance of this event. Their expressions, while not entirely objective, did indicate that the late medieval mid-size power, St. Stephen's state, became, though not a province, but a part of the monarchy of the Austrian House of the Habsburgs and was ruled from abroad, first from Vienna and then partly from Prague.

The critical importance of this change was that it did not come to an end for centuries and never reverted to the more favorable medieval conditions. The fundamental changes taking place during the fifty years after Mohács determined the fate of the Kingdom of Hungary and of the Habsburg Monarchy for centuries. First to the expulsion of the Ottomans from Hungary (1699), then to the fall of the Holy Roman Empire (1806), then to 1848 and 1867 and finally to the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918.

The defeat at Mohács and the progressive occupation of Hungary by the Ottomans, between 1526 and 1566, then in some steps until 1663, brought about negative changes most of which were irreversible. Yet 1526 disaster was not the end of the medieval Hungarian state, like the Battle of Kosovo Polje was for Serbia in 1389. The Kingdom of Hungary did not dissolve even though 60 percent of its territory was occupied or lost, and it also lost its capital for many years. With the election of Ferdinand of Habsburg in 1526 and his coronation in 1527, the Kingdom of Hungary became a part of a new dynastic great power, the Habsburg Monarchy. It became part of a composite state, similar to the one ruled by Ferdinand's Hungarian king predecessors, Sigismund of Luxemburg and Albert of Habsburg and much like the one ruled by Matthias Corvinus and, until 1526, by the Jagiellos.

Contrary to the statement of the Venetian ambassador, the Kingdom of Hungary never became a province of the Habsburg composite state, or a hereditary province. As a consequence of the Ottoman advances and particularly after the loss of Buda in 1541, the country indubitably became a kingdom ruled from abroad. Its central administration and its court were located in Vienna, Hungary's secondary capital. Its primary capital, the center of its domestic policies and of the political life of its estates was Pozsony.

This process, the move of the court to a foreign country and the establishment of new central government structures, led to a significant

loss of position for the Hungarian political elite. This was true in the new joint Habsburg court, in the centralized administrative system and even partly on a countrywide and regional level. Foreign affairs, military matters, and fiscal administration became joint endeavors of the Habsburg Monarchy and the Kingdom of Hungary and remained so until 1918, albeit not in the firmly stated form as it was under the 1867 Compromise. Creation of the Aulic War Council in Vienna, in 1556, meant that the late medieval military sphere of activity of the estates was reduced to the level of local military administration. At this level it remained essential and necessary in spite of the vigorous centralization. Knowing this, it is anachronistic to speak of an independent Hungarian military leadership or of an independent Hungarian (national) army in the early modern era.

In a paradoxical way, the loss of position of the Hungarian political elite was due to the continuing importance of the Kingdom of Hungary. I do not wish to overestimate the value of the smaller Hungarian state (ca 120,000 square kilometers) to the Habsburg Monarchy, but I believe that I was able to show that in the sixteenth century the Kingdom of Hungary was of the greatest significance to the Monarchy in a number of areas.<sup>6</sup> The Kingdom of Hungary was the bulwark of the Habsburg Monarchy with its new frontier defense system against the Ottomans established during the second half of the century by the effective cooperation between the Viennese military leadership and the Hungarian political elite. Hungary was not a simple military buffer state, subject to armed coercion as Serbia and Bosnia had been for the medieval Hungarian state. After 1526, the Kingdom of Hungary became an organic component of the strongest military alliance in Europe. This was critical for its survival because the establishment of the new defense system, and financing and supplying it was possible only with regular annual financial assistance from neighboring Austrian and Bohemian lands and from the more distant Holy Roman Empire. It is no exaggeration to state that Hungary received the most significant military and financial assistance in sixteenth century Europe, in return for which Hungary guaranteed the Monarchy's protection and peaceful development. The interdependence of the Kingdom of Hungary and of the Habsburg Monarchy was evident and this was the reason why it was so successful and remained so for an extensive period of time. The new

defense system established by the 1570s, remained effective with many minor changes until the end of the seventeenth century.

The Habsburg dominions needed Hungary for reasons other than military as well. The export of live animals to the West, copper mining, and coining still produced substantial revenues. In spite of the continuous warfare, Hungary still contributed approximately one third of the entire revenue of the Monarchy and remained one of its principal sources of income. The flourishing live animal export made Hungary into the indispensable larder of the Austrian and German territories, the imperial residence city of Vienna, and the Habsburg court. At the same time the Hungarian-Croatian theater of war became a marketplace for military goods within the Monarchy. It offered enormous possibilities for the Austrian, German, and Bohemian merchant bankers and arms manufacturers. During the second half of the sixteenth century similar opportunities became available to almost every social group in Hungary: aristocrats, lesser nobles, citizens of the free royal cities, residents of the market towns, peasants, and frontier fortress garrisons. They participated in the live animal business as exporters, transporters or subcontractors. It is no exaggeration to call the twenty-five years after the Peace of Adrianople in 1568 as the flowering of Hungarian enterprise.

St. Stephen's state carried substantial political weight and prestige within the Monarchy. The Venetian ambassador did not exaggerate when he said in 1571 that in the late medieval period the Hungarian rulers of the composite Hungarian, Croatian, and Bohemian state were of equal standing with kings of France. The respect in which the Kingdom of Hungary was held during the Middle Ages did not disappear when it lost a significant part of its territory to the Ottomans. The Hungarian political elite and the leaders of the Habsburg court cooperated in this area attempting to preserve as much of the traditions of St. Stephen's Hungarian state as possible. They focused specifically on the territorial aspects of the old composite Kingdom and on the symbols which reflected, in reality and nominally, countries and provinces which belonged to it and which were reflected in the long Hungarian royal titles of the Habsburgs. This cooperation lasted for centuries. Starting with the Pozsony coronation of Rudolf in 1572 until the last Hungarian coronation in 1916, the realm of St. Stephen was symbolized by the ten country banners which were introduced by the Hunga-

rian political elite in cooperation with the Habsburg court in the 1560s and 1570s.

The Hungarian royal regalia and symbols of power displayed at the sixteenth century imperial funeral ceremonies in Vienna or Prague indicated that within the Habsburg Monarchy the Kingdom of Hungary ranked in second place after the Holy Roman Empire, ahead of the lands of the Bohemian crown. Within the framework of the Monarchy, Hungary even had a certain, detailed external sovereignty. Even though it had a joint ruler, emperor and king, and joint administrative affairs, the Kingdom of Hungary was a component of the Monarchy but not of the Holy Roman Empire. Thus we cannot speak of any imperial authority or legal matters. Stating it more emphatically this meant that the countries of the Hungarian crown, which had no formal relationship with the Holy Roman Empire, really made the central European, Austrian-German-Bohemian dominions of the Habsburgs into a true composite state.

The Kingdom of Hungary became a strongly centralized area of the Habsburg Monarchy in military and financial matters, but remained, nevertheless, an influential state of the estates with a large and strong political elite. Even though the possibility of strong centralization, without the accoutrements of absolutism, combined with a strong estate system has been underestimated in historiography, this work indicates that in sixteenth century Hungary they did coexist. During the decades after 1526 both the Habsburg leadership and the estates realized that in order to defend the central areas of the Monarchy, the capital city of Vienna, and the Kingdom of Hungary bilateral compromises and sacrifices were necessary. The interdependence made mutual concessions mandatory. It was also true that in the late medieval period the Hungarian estates were already much stronger than their Austrian and Bohemian counterparts.

During the sixteenth century Ferdinand I and his successors made numerous compromises with the Hungarian political elite. In spite of all the efforts of the dynasty and of the Habsburg political leadership Hungary remained an elective monarchy. The Habsburgs could not even make the estates accept the right of dynastic primogeniture. The estate structure suffered little or no damage and the organization of the Hungarian diet became firm during the century when Hungary joined the

Monarchy. The high Hungarian royal court dignities were preserved and survived until 1918 even though their duties became nominal and they became active only at Hungarian coronations and at the meetings of the diet. The domestic political influence of these titleholders remained strong in Hungary.

The bastions of the Hungarian lesser nobility's self-government, the counties, continued to perform their functions without problems and with an increased administrative organization and strengthened self-government. Hungarian legal practice and the delivery of justice were also not under any Austrian or German influence. The direction of the domestic life of the country and the delivery of justice were fully preserved as the prerogative of the estates. All these were the most important pledges of the internal sovereignty of the Kingdom of Hungary within the Habsburg Monarchy. The strong Hungarian elite vigorously defended its special sovereignty and the ancient rights and customs of the St. Stephen's realm within the framework of the Habsburg Monarchy. In its political consciousness the peculiar sovereignty of Hungary was preserved throughout the existence of the Habsburg Monarchy.

During a few decades after 1526 the Habsburg leadership in Vienna was forced to accept the fact that from the perspective of the Monarchy, preserving the border defense, financial, and food supplier role of the Kingdom of Hungary was much more important than the assumption of potentially serious political conflicts. Thus, in certain matters the Habsburg rulers could achieve substantial results only if they worked with an influential subset of the Hungarian estates. They inherited the methodology from their Jagiello predecessors and applied them successfully. They also used appointments to high Hungarian dignities, to military and financial management positions, to baronies and counsellorships, as well as the donation of estates, to shape the Hungarian aristocracy.

At the same time the members of the Hungarian political elite realized that the lack of information about Hungary and Hungarian geography, language, and legal matters made them indispensable to the Habsburg court. Successful governance of the Kingdom of Hungary and the maintenance of its contributions were impossible without them. Within a few decades they also realized that their loss of position, due

to the court moving abroad and the Hungarian royal capital being occupied, could be minimized best by assuming major roles in the new, strongly centralized fiscal and military management controlled from Vienna. Tamás Pálffy, the Hungarian Court Chancellor expressed this succinctly in 1674 when he said, "Between two evils the lesser evil must be chosen and it is wise to adapt to the times. Otherwise, the rejection of the imperial and royal favors caused great displeasure here at court."<sup>7</sup>

After the middle of the sixteenth century, the leaders of the political elite and of the estates assumed an imperishable role in both sectors of the new dualistic governance of the Kingdom of Hungary (fig. 15). Because of the interdependence of the parties, the leaders of the Habsburg court were willing to engage in an impressive system of compromises. To cite just a few examples: this development was clearly illustrated by the dual system which was established, by the second half of the century, in the Hungarian and Croatian defense system against the Ottomans. The dual system consisted of border fortress and district captain generalcies. In the latter the Hungarian estates assumed a major role. Not only because the district captain general positions could be held only by Hungarian aristocrats but also because these persons frequently were the captain generals for both the district area and the border fortresses. Furthermore, the magnates participating in the military administration were simultaneously the highest leaders of the Hungarian estates, the holders of the highest country dignities, and the members of the Hungarian Council. They simultaneously participated in the centralized military administration of the Kingdom of Hungary and in the political life of the estates.

The same was also frequently true for the prelates. In the sixteenth century the two local organizations of the Hungarian fiscal administration, the Hungarian Chamber in Pozsony and the Szepes Chamber in Kassa, were directed in most cases by bishops. They also had a leading role in the administration of justice and in the direction of the Hungarian Court Chancellery which was estate-oriented even though in form it was a centralized office. Lastly, in the second half of the century, at least half of the aristocrats, holding the highest country and estate dignities, served as youths for some time in the joint Habsburg household, the most effective integrating and centralizing organization in the entire Monarchy. Service in one of the minor but real offices at the joint

Habsburg court became a stepping stone for the Hungarian aristocrats toward the highest, now nominal, dignities of the former royal Hungarian court, and toward the leadership positions in the Hungarian domestic policy-estate policy system.

Consequently the sixteenth century Kingdom of Hungary functioned very differently than what had been reconstructed to date. The dominant traits in international historiography, namely “the rebellious and always resisting Hungarians” or the “Hungarians constantly fighting for independence” are just as mythical as the romantic Hungarian nationalist view of history which speaks of “Habsburgs oppressing the Hungarians,” or of the “anti-Hungarian Vienna court.” Maintaining the interests of the estates and their resistance in Hungary went along smoothly and reached compromises with the Habsburg court and with the central administrative agencies and resulted in excellent cooperation in some areas. The highest representatives of the estates were the same people who were implementing the centralizing programs of the Habsburgs. This explains why in Hungary successful centralization and the strong estates marched side by side. Participation in the two structures of the dualistic governance did not mean relinquishing the statehood of St. Stephen’s realm, the traditions of the Kingdom of Hungary, or the interests of the estates. In a paradoxical fashion it actually strengthened them. Being loyal to the dynasty and to the court did not mean, at the beginning of the modern era, that the interests and sovereignty of Hungary had to be given up. Loyalty to the Habsburgs and Hungarian patriotism were not mutually exclusive.

It was not only a narrow segment of the Hungarian political elite which participated in the central and estate administration of the Kingdom of Hungary. At the Hungarian diets, along with the prelates and the magnates, the third estate, consisting of the lesser nobility, and the fourth estate, consisting of the citizens of the free royal cities, all participated. They served in the military as captains and officers of fortresses, in the fiscal administration as officials of the chambers and the “one-thirtieth” tax collection, and manorial treasury employees. The extensive connections as noble retainer linked the lesser nobility with the politically active Hungarian aristocrats and prelates.

All of this had long-range consequences. Because of interdependence and in spite of mutual sacrifices, a solid system of compromises

evolved in the sixteenth century between the Habsburg court and the Hungarian elite. This could be eliminated only if a very significant portion of the Hungarian political elite were willing to upset the equilibrium established between Vienna and Pozsony. Or, if the Habsburg court would institute forceful absolutistic actions with armed forces as in the 1670s. Because of the strength of the estates this would have been extremely dangerous. While the Hungarian political elite adapted to the times and found in the Kingdom of Hungary, integrated into the Habsburg Monarchy, a satisfactory position, those who tried to upset this arrangement encountered a practically impossible situation, at least until the end of the Ottoman wars in the second half of the eighteenth century. The system of compromises was so effective that the majority of the Hungarian political elite and of the Hungarian estates refused to side with István Bocskai, the vassal of the Porte, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, with Gábor Bethlen, the Prince of Transylvania, or even with Ferenc II Rákóczi, who did in fact lead an independence movement in 1703–1711. The fundamental changes taking place during the decades after 1526 determined the symbiosis of the Kingdom of Hungary and of the Habsburg Monarchy for a very long time.