

INTRODUCTION

THE BATTLE OF MOHÁCS IN 1526 WAS A genuine turning point in the history both of the Kingdom of Hungary and of Central Europe as a whole. From the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, the Hungarian state was consistently the defining middle power of the region, and Europe's eminent dynasties (the Anjous, Luxembourgers, Habsburgs, and Jagiellonians) competed for its throne, but after the rout at Mohács this role was fundamentally changed. Hungary stepped into one of the most difficult periods of its history. It faced serious choices and challenges, while it had to experience on a daily basis the terribly destructive consequences of constant military engagement. In a quarter of a century, its territory was broken into three parts: its central regions fell under Ottoman Turkish occupation, while what remained of the kingdom became part of the nascent Habsburg Monarchy in Central Europe, and its eastern territories became the Ottoman vassal state of Transylvania. What is more, these were by no means temporary phenomena.

After 1526, for almost two centuries, Hungary became the periphery and battleground of two empires, the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy. For the former, it remained merely the most northern inland frontier region, but for the latter, in the space of fifty years, it became one of the most important and cherished areas—and for this reason one that was under considerable scrutiny. All of this left a lasting mark on the country's network of settlements and institutions, fundamentally altering its ethnic composition and crucially influencing the development of its economy and society. Indeed, these changes led to Transylvania's long-term breaking away from Hungary. For centuries, these same changes would also restrict the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Hungary, which enjoyed special status within the Habsburg Monarchy, even if its only means of survival was integration into the monarchy. The leading Hungarian politicians of the day had to bitterly recognize that the fate of the three parts of their previously unified country would principally be determined in Istanbul, Vienna, and Gyulafehérvár in Transylvania, and, on occasion, even at the royal Polish court.

Amid the entirely new circumstances in the “short” sixteenth century after Mohács (1526–1606), everyone tried to find new directions. This was true not only in a political and social sense but also in terms of religion, language, and education. This search for new directions, despite the difficulties, brought significant results; the first part of this book deals with these in detail. Thanks to its particular union with the Habsburg Monarchy, the Kingdom of Hungary, fast becoming the “bulwark of Central Europe,” was in political and military terms more closely connected to its Western neighbors than it had been in the last decades of the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, given the beneficial opportunities of the age, the parts of the territorially split country would in economic terms continue to be closely connected to one another; indeed, the country played a crucial role in Europe's commercial mechanism. And, thanks to humanism, the Renaissance, and the Reformation, Hungary and Transylvania played a defining role in the intellectual system of the “old continent.” Indeed, the turn of the century would prove a golden age for Hungarian culture. The Hungarian language

blossomed for the first time, making continual inroads both in literacy and in publishing, thereby producing the first treasures of Hungarian poetry and prose.

However, the Long Turkish War of 1591–1606 heralded a period of long-lasting destruction. Chances for recovery in the first half of the seventeenth century were then marred by the repeated military campaigns of the princes of Transylvania against the Habsburgs in Hungary, which were instigated as part of the Thirty Years' War and without exception turned into civil wars. In the kingdom ravaged by Turkish-Crimean Tatar, Transylvanian, Hungarian, and imperial-royal German forces, from 1619 onward and for the best part of a century, more and more people would be uprooted from normal everyday existence. This brought about a widespread ruination of society and the economy, while cultural and intellectual life also suffered monumental damage. These processes are explored in the second part of the book. At the time of the uprising led by Imre Thököly, if for the briefest of periods (1682–1685), Hungary had now been split into four parts. This represented the nadir of early modern Hungarian history.

The desire for renewal was nevertheless constantly present in the people of the seventeenth century (1606–1711)—a century described, because of its swings between decay and rebirth, as two-faced or Janus-like. Hungarian estate politics was rejuvenated, while the noble counties enjoyed their first flourish; every social class desired privileges and autonomy, and a revived Catholic Church regained a good part of its late medieval authority. In addition, the Hungarian language became further unified, and its literature developed new genres while the education system accrued new institutions. Book publishing and communication underwent radical transformation, and art and culture would blossom anew, albeit briefly. Yet these tendencies toward renewal would be severely constrained by a permanent war footing often akin to a war of religion, by a decay in public life, and by the large-scale militarization of society.

In the light of all these developments, it is less than apt to label the era from the Battle of Mohács in 1526 to the Treaty of Szatmár in 1711 simply as the “Ottoman period” or the first part of “Habsburg rule” in Hungary and even less so to refer to it as the period lived in the grip of the “two pagans,” as has so often been done until now in Hungarian historiography. It is also worth disposing with the interpretation that has achieved mythical status in Hungary, according to which the seventeenth century brought a series of Hungarian national independence or national unity movements instigated from Transylvania. For all the achievements of Hungarian culture, no national unity movement can have been set into motion from Transylvania, which was under the constant watch of the Ottoman Porte, but neither were the areas of the royal kingdom individually capable of this. New research findings reveal that the expulsion of the Ottomans and the reintegration of the three parts of Hungary were possible only with the financial and military assistance of the Habsburg Monarchy and within the framework of that monarchy, even if there was a high price to pay for this. That the Kingdom of Hungary would remain in the eighteenth-century Habsburg Monarchy with such special status was ensured by the dogged persistence of its estates and by the various armed movements they employed. And although, after the liberation from the Ottomans in 1699, a small part of the Hungarian political élite led by Francis II Rákóczi attempted to pursue the path of independence from 1703 to 1711—with the assistance of the

masses downtrodden by the wars of the seventeenth century—there was no realistic opportunity for this in the given domestic and international circumstances.

It makes more sense to investigate the history of the three parts of Hungary from 1526 to 1711 less with the lens of the various national and romantic narratives of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and more within the framework of and along the boundaries of the two empires of the period, the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy, combined with a knowledge of the international processes at work and the aforementioned basic challenges, inevitabilities, and positive and negative changes. It is only in this fashion that we can comprehend and judge one of the most critical periods in Hungarian history more realistically than our predecessors have. This volume is an attempt to present a summary of these processes.

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This book covers two centuries of history of the Hungary, a middling power, half a millennium old, that the crushing defeat of the Battle of Mohács in 1526 had broken into three parts. The writing of this book was primarily necessitated by the lack of any comprehensive work in English on the realm of St. Stephen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thus, this volume deliberately follows on from Pál Engel's 2005 monograph, *The Realm of St. Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary, 895–1526*. My first objective in this enterprise was to provide, in a single volume, a wide-ranging survey of events in the Carpathian Basin between 1526 and 1711, with university students and those less au fait with the history of the region especially in mind. For this reason, footnotes accompany only quotations, less well-known concepts, and most recent research achievements and debated subjects. The reader is pointed toward further study, however, by a select bibliography (circa 470 items—monographs and collected studies).