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**AN INSIGHT INTO RUSSIAN HISTORY FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE PRESENT****Знакомство с историей России от Средних веков до наших дней**

**Krausz Tamás – Radnóti Klára – Sashalmi Endre (ed.): *Apologia Historiographiae. Az orosz történelem évszázadai*. Budapest, Martin Opitz Kiadó, 2023. 557 pp. ISBN: 978-615-6388-37-7**

**Аннотация**

Представленный ниже сборник исследований является научно-познавательной подборкой, приуроченной ко дню рождения профессора Дьюлы Свака. В нем опубликованы новые результаты исследований венгерских ученых, связанные с историческим прошлым славянских народов Центральной и Восточной Европы и русских. Книга тематически богата краткими статьями, посвященными средневековому монгольскому владычеству, политическим амбициям Российской империи, истории Советского Союза и многим другим темам. Ценность сборника состоит в том, что редакторы ради создания полной научной картины представили анализы выдающихся представителей венгерской русистики.

**Ключевые слова:** *славянские народы Центральной Европы, хроникальная литература, историческое образование, марксистская историография, русофильство, русофобия, советская политика в области науки*

In 2023, a collection of studies entitled *Apologia Historiographiae* was published on the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of Professor Emeritus Gyula Szvák. The aim of the volume – in addition to paying tribute to the celebrated author – is to provide a comprehensive overview of Russian (and Central and East European) history from the Middle Ages to the present.

Professor Gyula Szvák began his research activities in the late 1970s, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the renewal of Russian Studies was due to his organizing activities [KRAUSZ ET AL. 2023: 11–16]. At Eötvös Loránd University he laid the foundations of the field of Post-Soviet studies; today he is a lecturer at the Department of Eastern and Central European History and Historical Russistics. His research focuses on the early modern Russian period, the history of Russian historiography, tsarism, and Russian–Hungarian relations. Although a detailed presentation of his oeuvre is beyond the scope of this review, I would like to mention one of Gyula Szvák’s latest achievements, the online platform and academic journal RussianStudiesHu, which was launched in 2021 [RUSSIANSTUDIESHU]. On the one hand, it is a scientific journal published twice a year; on the other hand, it ensures the availability of monographs and studies of high scholarly quality in Russian, English, and Hungarian.



The more than forty studies published in this volume are the works of Gyula Szvák's colleagues and students, Hungarian historians dealing with Russia and Central-Eastern Europe. The genres are highly varied, in addition to academic studies and studies of publicistic nature, personal writing and essays are included as well. The studies follow a chronological order, from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries up to the most recent period.

The overview of Russian history from the Middle Ages to the present is clearly indicated by the subtitle of the volume *Az orosz történelem évszázadai* (Centuries of Russian history). However, contrary to the word *Historiographiae* in the title of the volume, historiography is not the exclusive subject of this collection of studies. There are also studies on historiographical issues published in the volume, several of which I will also highlight. However, I am of the opinion that the word *historiography* – which is a separate discipline dealing with the history of historiography – does not fully cover the topics of the studies in this book [ERŐS 2000: 142–147].

The authors approach the past from different perspectives. For example, there are analyses of military and diplomatic history, genealogical research, and treatises on literary and cultural subject. Furthermore, the collection includes historiographical studies, analyses of Pan-Slavism, Russophilia, and Russophobia. Unfortunately, the space constraints of the present review do not allow me to write in detail about all the studies. Without wishing to be exhaustive, I would like to offer an insight into the analyses that appear in the volume.

A valuable German-language narrative source of medieval research is Ottokár Stájer's rhymed chronicle. The work, written in the vernacular, dates from the early 14<sup>th</sup> century and the author was a Styrian ministerial of Lichteinsein. The chronicle covers the history of Austria and Styria between 1246 and 1309. Dániel Bagi, a scholar of Central and East European history, in his study "The 'Vallachian Plain' captivity of Otto Wittelsbach in the Styrian Rhymed Chronicle" ("Wittelsbach Ottó «havasalföldi» fogsága a Stájer rimes krónikában") shows how Ottokar narrates the captivity of Otto Wittelsbach, a Bavarian. Then it discusses the reason why the prince was released by the prince of Halych Volhynia [KRAUSZ ET AL. 2023: 55–66]. A translation of the relevant parts of the chronicle is published in the article.

According to the chronicle, the Transylvanian Viceroy László Kán sent the imprisoned Otto to the Vlach ruler, who released him because he had fallen ill with an incurable disease. Dániel Bagi draws attention to that sickness as punishment is a frequently used topos in the chronicle. In narrating Otto's adventurous release, Ottokar did not seek to faithfully record historical events. Since he felt that Otto Bavarian's imprisonment was unjust, he told the story of his miraculous release in an anecdote-like narrative.

Dániel Bagi notes that the chronicler used oral memories of the Styrian and Austrian nobility, as well as narrative sources of Austrian, Bavarian and Czech origin. He supplemented his existing knowledge with fictional elements. As a result, he described the past according to the expectations of the era.

Besides a brief insight into the medieval chronicle literature, this collection of studies also includes a treatise on the Marxist approach to medieval research



[KRAUSZ ET AL. 2023: 433–445]. Attila Pók in his study entitled “Marxism in Hungarian Medieval Research” (“Marxizmus a Magyar középkor kutatásban”) writes that it was not primarily Marxist social theory that had a negative impact on history as a science, but rather communist political practice.

Authors interested in historical issues have reacted differently to historical materialism. For example, in the works of Erik Molnár (1894–1966) and Pál Zsigmond Pach (1919–2001) the representation of science based on Marxist theory and sympathy for political ideology were present together. According to Attila Pók, the influence of this theory on the research of István Hajnal (1892–1956) and László Makkai (1914–1989) differs significantly from this, because although they considered certain elements of this theory useful, they did not engage in communist political activity.

In Hungary, historians, social scientists and politicians were concerned with the question (often posed by Marxists) of how feudal structures disintegrated. For example, the research of László Makkai and Pál Zsigmond Pach focused on the specificities of the path from feudalism to capitalism in Central and Eastern Europe.

According to Pál Zsigmond Pach, while in Western Europe flourishing feudalism was followed by a decline, in Central-Eastern Europe “late” feudalism took a particular form. The conversion of feudal labour and product rents into cash rents was slower to develop, and the fact that the regions of Central and Eastern Europe were excluded from colonialism was seen as a significant difference.

The author of the study briefly praises István Hajnal as an innovative representative of Hungarian medieval research. In contrast to the Marxist tradition, he did not emphasize the opposition between socialism and capitalism but the opposition between medieval structures and capitalism. He was more positive about the medieval system. In the Middle Ages, craftsmen were engaged in creative activity in a community, an organization based on trust, not on contractual relations. This is different from the capitalist organization of the factory, in which profit becomes the primary objective [GLATZ 1993: XI–XLII; HAJNAL 1993: 421–444].

Attila Pók concludes that the Marxist approach was linked to the main trends in European historiography. The role of historical works based on Marxism is significant in the Hungarian historiographical literature, even if in certain cases (for example, in the comparison of the Hungarian economy, politics and society with those of Europe) they sometimes reached dogmatic and simplistic conclusions.

In her study “Soviet historians at the Hungarian historians’ congress” (“Szovjet történészek a magyar történész kongresszuson”) Magdolna Baráth analyses, similarly to Attila Pók, the impact of Marxist ideology and Soviet scientific organization activities on Hungarian historiography [KRAUSZ ET AL. 2023: 419–431]. He considers 1948 as a turning point, because it was the year when the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the universities started to reorganize, and the Scientific Council was established. In that year, the vicepresident of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union, academic B.D. Grekov, gave a lecture on three topics of global history during his visit to Hungary. In 1950, he also published a study entitled “Stalin and historical scholarship” (“Sztálin és a történettudomány”) in the Hungarian journal *Századok*. The presentation of the works of Soviet historians in the journal became increasingly



common, and translations of their works were incorporated into Hungarian higher education. In June 1953, the Soviet–Hungarian Congress of Historians was held. Its aim was to establish contacts and cooperation and to agree on a specific program. They undertook to prepare a volume of studies on the international impact of the Russian Revolution of 1905–1907, in which Péter Hanák represented Hungary.

The relationship between Russia and other European countries has been constantly changing, and the subject is explored by several authors in this collection of studies. Endre Sashalmi, for example, discusses the presence of Russophobia in the English media in the late 18th century [KRAUSZ ET AL. 2023: 207–220], conducting an iconographic analysis of English caricatures depicting the Ochakov crisis of 1791 (named after a northern port on the Black Sea) and regarding it as the beginning of English Russophobia. The Russians captured the port in 1788 during the Russo–Turkish War of 1788–1792, and this Russian military success provoked the resentment of British foreign policy, which sought a balance of power. In 1791 Prime Minister William Pitt Jr. demanded that Tsarina Catherine the Great return areas acquired earlier from the Ottoman Empire. Caricatures humorously present Russia’s conquering intentions mocking Tsarina Catherine the Great’s “greedy” territorial ambitions. Russophobia has shaped politics and public discourse from the 18th century to the present, and contemporary “anti-Russianism” is explored in the studies of Tamás Krausz and László Kemény.

*Apologia Historiographiae* includes studies both on Russophobia and Russophilia. Iván Halász, in his paper “A sketch of Slovak Russophilia before 1918” (“Az 1918 előtti szlovák ruszofilizmus «oroszbarátság» vázlat”) deals with the Slovak national movement’s sympathy for Russians [KRAUSZ ET AL. 2023: 321–330]. Modern Slovak national identity, like European traditions, began in the late 18th century and developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Before 1848, Slovaks represented an Austro-Slavic concept within the Habsburg Empire, which began to change after the revolutions and reform efforts. The Slavic sense of belongingness was transformed into Russophilia by Ľudovít Štúr, who published a work on his political concept, *Slavism and World of the Future*, originally in German, in 1853/1854. After its translation into Russian, it became popular in the Russian Empire, especially among Slavophiles, conservatives and nationalists.

In his work, Ľudovít Štúr assessed the history of ideas and political situation in Europe and the future prospects of the Central European Slavs. He did not consider the democratic unification of the Central European Slavs to be a realistic concept for the future, as Slavic peoples are heterogeneous in religious, cultural, mentality and political composition. He did, however, see joining forces with the Russian Empire, the representative of Slavic great power status, as feasible. He believed that Slavs should be open to the Russian language and Orthodoxy.

In his study, Halász also points out that the Hungarian nationalist turn after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 was of particular importance in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1870s and 1880s, this led to the rise of voices among Slovak intellectuals who valued “Russian friendship” and were dissatisfied with Hungary’s national minority policy.



As the studies presented briefly show so far, the volume edited in honor of Gyula Szvák provides a diverse overview of Slavic, Russian and Central and Eastern European history. Some authors, including Beáta Varga, Sándor Gebei, László V. Molnár and Patrik Dinnyés, were also interested in the figure of Tsar Peter the Great, which is obviously due to the fact that Gyula Szvák is one of the most important Hungarian researchers of the tsar's activities. In the collection *Apologia Historiographiae* we can also read about the tsar's governmental activities and his relationship with a marginal social group, the Dnieper Cossacks. Patrik Dinnyés, however, goes beyond the official framework of academic discourse to seek an answer to the question of how the figure of Peter the Great was present in Hungarian history education. He reports that in Hungarian history textbooks of Austria-Hungary, Tsar Peter the Great was presented as a positive character [KRAUSZ ET AL. 2023: 311–320]. One of the textbook authors was Kolos Vaszary, who strove for a nuanced portrayal of the tsar's activities. His book published in 1892 acknowledges the reform-minded tsar's effective innovations in the economic sphere. At the same time, in an attempt to present a nuanced picture, he does not overlook the radical action taken by the tsar against the rebels during the Second Streltsy Uprising.

The aim of this study is not to give a general presentation of history education after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise. However, in my opinion, an interesting additional aspect that may arise is how the interpretation of Russian history in general was part of the so-called global teaching of history after the Compromise. This question may be relevant because after the Compromise, during the period of Austria-Hungary, the practice of separating the teaching of world history and national history in the school curriculum began to develop [GYÁNI 2018: 89–98].

In addition to Patrik Dinnyés, Bálint Mezei also describes how the scholarly findings on different periods of Russian history have been communicated in Hungarian education. Bálint Mezei's study "The crisis and disintegration of the Soviet Union in Hungarian secondary school history textbooks published after 1990" ("A Szovjetunió válsága és felbomlása az 1990 után megjelent magyarországi középiskolai történelem tankönyvekben") shows how the interpretation of the economic and political system of the Soviet era changed in public education after the regime change [KRAUSZ ET AL. 2023: 487–501].

*Apologia Historiographiae* provides readers interested in the past, culture and political system of the Slavic, Russian and Central and East European peoples with a view of various historical periods. On the one hand, the value of the volume lies in the fact that it records relevant new research findings of scholars in the field of Russian studies. On the other hand, it also accomplishes a popularization of the aspect of scholarship. The volume is of high quality and thematically rich. Unfortunately, the scope of the review did not allow me to write in detail about all the forty studies, but I have tried to present as many of the topics covered in the book as possible. The structure of the collection of studies is logical, the articles follow each other in chronological order, thus guiding the reader through Russian history from the Middle Ages to the present day. I recommend *Apologia Historiographiae* to those with a professional interest in scholarly articles and an openness to Russian culture.



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