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Ágnes Deák. *From Habsburg Neo-Absolutism to the Compromise, 1849-1867.* Boulder: Columbia University Press, 2008. vii + 647 pp. $60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-88033-635-2.

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The Difficult Path of Reform: The Habsburg Monarchy, Hungary and the Making of a Modern State, 1849-1867

In the historiography of the Habsburg monarchy the 1850s and 1860s have been overshadowed by more dramatic eras.[1] For example, there have been a number of recent publications on the 1848-49 revolutions, with their street violence, governmental upheaval, and civil war. Similarly the period from the 1890s up to the outbreak of WWI with the frenzied breakdown of politics and dualist institutions has attracted much recent research. Yet, in the two decades after 1848-49, political and administrative traditions were put in place (most notably the 1867 Compromise) and the monarchy's particular path of modernization was definitively shaped. Ãgnes DeÃ¡k's book is a welcome addition to the slim historiography on the period. The focus of her book is Vienna's policies towards Hungary and reflects her fruitful work in Vienna's Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv.

Traditionally, the neo-absolutist years from 1849 to 1859 have been judged harshly as a period when reform was stymied, censorship oppressive, and freedoms restricted. However Ãgnes DeÃ¡k argues, following other recent researchers in the field, that significant and lasting administrative, economic, and educational reforms were implemented in the 1850s. Despite the importance of the era there has been no comprehensive work on the neo-absolutist decade since Heinrich Friedjung's work of a century ago.[2] DeÃ¡k's book provides an important step towards any future synthesis and reveals much about the era. As for the years from 1861 to 1867, there are two historiographical traditions. The Austrian view stresses the period as one of constitutional experiments, while the Hungarian view focuses on continued Viennese absolutism, Hungarian passive resistance, and the lead-up to the 1867 Compromise. DeÃ¡k is less detailed on this period and, in any case, it is more extensively covered in the historiography.

At the outset, DeÃ¡k states that there is a dual purpose for her book. First, to make her own research on nationality policies, state police, and political programs available in a western European language, and second, to summarize the last thirty years of scholarship on neo-absolutism and the 1867 Compromise (much of which is in Hungarian). Her book is therefore an awkward mix of a monograph on her research fields and a more general coverage of population statistics, economic policy, religion, education, culture, and civic society. There is no explicit, overarching thesis, though the overall impression from reading the book is of a conservative empire grappling with change in a haphazard, hesitant, but determined manner.

The book is curiously structured. The first section gives a general overview of the period from 1849 to 1867 from a *Gesamtmonarchie* perspective with some background information about Hungary. This section follows the standard accounts emphasizing constitutional, administrative and–from 1859–parliamentary developments. The second section focuses on Hungary during

the neo-absolutist years. This is the heart of the book and is the most valuable and longest section. The third section plots the complicated twists and turns from the end of neo-absolutism to the 1867 Compromise concluded between Franz Joseph and the Hungarian parliament.

DeÃ¡k takes a thematic approach when looking at Hungary in the neo-absolutist era. She provides a good summation of Franz Joseph's method of governance in the first decade of his reign; a posture he never quite discarded. The influence of a politician primarily depended not on his position, but rather on how much weight he carried with the emperor at any given moment, but that too was dependent on the situation and subject.

Her chapters on the new administrative structure of the state and its civil servants–the crucial foundations of neo-absolutism along with the Imperial Army–are admirably comprehensive and detailed. She is particularly good on Transylvania and Serbian Voivodina since they are both multinational and multiconfessional regions and thus accord with the author's own research. Her assessments of the neo-absolutist state are balanced. So while she acknowledges that many German officials were transferred from the west–Interior Minister Alexander von Bach's Hussars–she also makes clear that, nevertheless, the majority of officials were from Hungary. The chapter on language use is very good and, as throughout the book, makes use of the recently published ministerial protocols. She concludes that there was a great heterogeneity in language policy and practice. Similarly, with respect to religious matters, DeÃ¡k argues that religious policy was complex and differentiated. For education–subject to Leo Thun's famous reforms–while the quality improved and a broadening of education among nationalities occurred, there was an emphasis on German (and Italian) as "cultured" languages. Like other policies, the implementation of German as the standard language of instruction was, in fact, flexible. This chapter on education forms a key component in the book and illustrates well the seemingly contradictory themes of modern reforms, absolutist policies, variable implementation, local difference, and ambiguous public attitudes. Thus the image of Bach's unitary imperial state being directed from Vienna needs to be adjusted to reflect this variegated implementation. In fact, far from being an "oppressed" and "subjugated" nation after 1849, Hungary progressed economically, culturally, and socially. The Hungarian liberal leader Ferenc DeÃ¡k wrote in a letter to the great reformer IstvÃ¡n SzÃ©chenyi that, "Everywhere there is life and movement, and it seems that we do not sleep; in the areas of literature, nationality, industry and economy something is happening everywhere, even if trifling; it is a sign of life and vitality" (pp. 421-422).

Ãgnes DeÃ¡k's portrayal of the neo-absolutist state is, ultimately, focused on the center and its response to the need for reform while maintaining order and legitimacy. There is, nonetheless, an acute awareness of local difference. Other perspectives–from Max VÃ¶gler and Thomas GÃ¶tz–have viewed the era "from below," particularly the interaction between municipal government and local administration.[3] DeÃ¡k's book reinforces the need to reconceptualize this period and provide an overarching assessment of its place in the monarchy's history.

The third section, which begins in 1859 and follows a generally chronological trajectory to 1867, is a valuable supplement to the standard accounts of Josef Redlich, Louis Eisenmann, Ãva Somogyi, and GyÃ¶rgy Szabad.[4] After DeÃ¡k's description of a progressive, vibrant civil society in Hungary it is no surprise that upon the monarchyâs defeat in northern Italy in 1859, there was an outburst of energy in the form of pamphlets, articles, plans, programs, and commentary on the monarchy and Hungary's place within it. The uncertainty and fluidity of this crucial period is well portrayed. For example Zsigmond KemÃ©ny, a leading Hungarian liberal and novelist, stated rather pragmatically that, "I shall defend the legality of the 1847-48 laws, but revision by Parliament I likewise do not oppose" (p. 481). Another example was Ferenc DeÃ¡k, who led the liberals through strength of will and legal argument, but was so aware of the complexities and contingencies that he was frequently unsure about the best path forward and would hesitate before making important decisions. The book is particularly strong on the administrative aspects of Schmerling's Provisorium when Hungary was again governed by administrative decree, though now with a working parliament in Cisleithania, a more open press, and a general expectation that fundamental change would occur in the near future. The narrative as the 1867 Compromise approached and slowly became more probable is rather rushed and is, in any case, well known.

It is a pity that DeÃ¡k has not written a longer and fuller conclusion, since she restricts herself to some general comments on the 1867 Compromise itself. Her final assessment of the 1867 Compromise tends more to the camp which argued it was a realistic constitutional agreement allowing economic consolidation, the development of a bourgeois society, and the retention of Great Power status. The opposing camp, inspired by Lajos Kossuth's condemnation of the Compromise, regarded the Com-

promise as a betrayal of the Hungarian nation's rights.

AgnÃ¨s DeÃ¡k has written a solid, detailed book on an important but neglected period. The section on neo-absolutism, which occupies the majority of the book, is an excellent introduction to the system, especially its operation in Hungary. Despite the book being somewhat awkwardly perched between a focused monograph and a general history it has many obvious merits and should be of use to specialists and general readers alike.

Notes

[1]. Recent work on the 1850s includes Harm Hinrich Brandt, *Der Ã¶sterreichische Neoabsolutismus: Staatsfinanzen und Politik 1848-1860,* 2 vols. (GÃ¶ttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1978); Peter Wozniak, "Count Leo Thun: A Conservative Savior of Educational Reform in the Decade of Neoabsolutism," *Austrian History Yearbook* 26 (1995): 61-81; Jeffrey Leigh, "Public Opinion, Public Order, and Press Policy in the Neo-absolutist State: Bohemia, 1849-1852," *Austrian History Yearbook* 35 (2004): 81-99; and R. J. W. Evans, "From Confederation to Compromise: The Austrian Experiment, 1849-1867," in *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs: Central Europe c. 1683-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 266-292.

[2]. Heinrich Friedjung, *Ã sterreich von 1848 bis 1860*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1908-1912). Friedjung's work is far from comprehensive, especially for domestic matters which he really only looks at until 1851.

[3]. Max VÃ¶gler, "Illness and Death in the Era of Neoabsolutism: New Perspectives on Liberal-Catholic Conflict from 1850s Upper Austria," *Austrian History Yearbook* 38 (2007): 122-143; and Thomas GÃ¶tz, *BÃ¼rgertum und Liberalismus in Tirol 1840-1873. Zwischen Staat und 'Region', Staat und Nation* (Cologne: SHâVerlag, 2001).

[4]. Josef Redlich, *Das Ã¶sterreichische Staats- und Reichsproblem,* 2 vols. (Leipzig: Der Neue-Geist Verlag, 1920-1926); Louis Eisenmann, *Le Compromis Austro-Hongrois de 1867: Ã tude sur le dualism* (Paris: Ã ditions Cujas, 1968 [1904]); Ã va Somogyi, *Vom Zentralismus zum Dualismus: Der Weg der deutschÃ¶sterreichischen Liberalen zum Ausgleich von 1867* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1983); and GyÃ¶rgy Szabad, *Hungarian Political Trends between the Revolution and the Compromise (1849-1867)* (Budapest: AkadÃ©miai KiadÃ³, 1977).