



BOOK REVIEWS

Ringen um den einen Gott. Eine politische Geschichte des Antitrinitarismus in Siebenbürgen im 16. Jahrhundert. By Edit Szegedi. Refo500 Academic Studies 95. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023. 276 pp.

From the perspective of religion, early modern Transylvania was a diverse corner of Europe. Many of the most radical thinkers of the Reformation took refuge here for a time, and their ideas could be characterized as harbingers of some of the principles of the Enlightenment. It is therefore a bit surprising that no work has yet been written, in Hungarian or in any other language, that offers a comprehensive overview of the religious situation in early modern Transylvania. Comparatively detailed works have been written on the religious thought and debate in Transylvania in the 1560s and 1570s, however, at the moment there is nothing available that covers the whole period. The book under review here also does not promise anything this ambitious. Edit Szegedi (senior lecturer at the faculty of European Studies at Babeş-Bolyai University) is very clear about her intention. She has written a political history of early modern Transylvanian Antitrinitarianism, though admittedly what she means by this precisely remains a bit unclear throughout her discussion. The book is a compilation of essays that were written separately, but it is structured in thematically coherent chapters. The primary focus is the mutual relationship between the Antitrinitarians and the secular authorities and the church politics of the last four decades of the sixteenth century. Szegedi explores this relationship from a variety of perspectives, the most obvious of which is the relevant legal measures that were taken, but she also considers her subject from the viewpoints of urban history, and she includes biographical sections, discussion of theological issues, the history of certain trials, and issues involving church organization. She seems primarily interested in the impact of ideas and theological experimentation on social life, but she also touches on the paradoxes of the religious situation in Transylvania. She points out, for instance, that while the theological ideas espoused by the Transylvanian trinitarians completely upended the earlier traditions on which religious life rested and were more radical than the ideas put forward by Reformation thinkers in any other region of Europe, in everyday life, everything continued largely as usual, in the cities and in the villages. The religious changes brought about little in the way of visible change in people's lifestyles, and they did not subvert the social or

political order. The center of the Transylvanian Reformation, which was initially Brassó (or Kronstadt by its German name; today Braşov, Romania) and later became Kolozsvár (or Klausenburg by its German name; today Cluj-Napoca, Romania), was far from being a second Münster or even from being seen by later generations as a second Geneva. As one example of the adherence to old customs, one could mention the fact that witch trials continued uninterrupted even during the period when “rational theology” was in a position of power, a situation which seems paradoxical to Szegedi.

In the preface, Szegedi invites us to explore the world which has captured her interest, introducing us to the topic and unraveling her investigations.

The first chapter is a history of the Reformation from an urban history perspective. Szegedi guides her reader through the city of Brassó, explaining the power structures and the emergence and spread of Antitrinitarian ideas. She identifies the considerations and motives behind the arguably eclectic array of religious ideas that the Reformation brought to the city of Brassó and, more broadly, Transylvania. According to Szegedi, behind the delay in the emergence of distinct denominations lay an anxious desire to restore the unity of Christianity as a whole (and not just Western Christianity). The boundaries remained essentially undefined until the parties to the religious debate (of which the Antitrinitarians were the last) realized that denial of the Trinity was a red line that Trinitarian Christians would not cross in the interests of unity.

In the second chapter, Szegedi approaches the history of the Transylvanian Reformation through the life of a central figure, Ferenc Dávid. Dávid, who was the first bishop of the Antitrinitarians, was a believer in the notion of the continuous reform of the Church (or “*ecclesia semper reformanda*”). The theological changes and “innovations” that he introduced offer a kind of arc of the history of the Transylvanian Reformation. The perspective shifts over the course of the chapter, with the focus often changing from Dávid to Kolozsvár, which emerged as the new center of the Transylvanian Reformation, and the relationship among the Transylvanian nations (the Hungarian nobility, the Székelys, and the Saxons) in matters of church politics and power.

In the third chapter, Szegedi presents a more complex picture than those offered in the first two. She gives a sketch of the events that took place over the course of the two decades after Dávid’s death up to the turn of the century. The question she is addressing is the development or stagnation of Antitrinitarianism. Szegedi presents the relationship of the Antitrinitarian leaders to tradition, their view of history, and strategies they used in order to assert their legitimacy. She

also examines changes in the balance of power among the denominations and in the church policy of the court, and she considers the reasons for these changes until the return of the Jesuits to the stage of religious life in the region.

In the fourth chapter, Szegedi addresses the legal statuses of different denominations. She analyses the texts of the various resolutions of the Transylvanian Diet touching on religious matters between 1566 and 1595, and she considers not only the distinctive features of the wording but also the omissions and the failure to mention certain names. Building on this, she maps the place and legal weight of the unnamed and missing religious churches among the established churches in Transylvania. On the basis of her discussion of the sources, Szegedi concludes that the Antitrinitarians were not named or given the status of a “*recepta religio*” in the laws when they were at their strongest and had the most influence on the power in the principality, but rather precisely when they were suffering the most restrictive pressures (1594–95). She also explains that the familiar and often mentioned legislation of 1568–71 was not a celebration of diversity or was a proclamation of equality among the denominations. Rather, it was an attempt to create the necessary conditions for peaceful coexistence. This chapter is the second in the book which touches on the trial of Ferenc Dávid, not from a historical perspective, but rather with a detailed presentation of each side’s position. Szegedi notes that the outcome of the trial was not a favorable or desired outcome, neither for the prince nor for the Antitrinitarians who opposed Dávid. It was, rather, the result of the demands of the Calvinists in the region known as Partium, which lies roughly to the west of Transylvania. The prince, however, took advantage of the situation. In exchange for this gesture in support of the Calvinists and Dávid’s Antitrinitarian opponents, he invited the Jesuits to come to Transylvania.

The last chapter is also the epilogue of the book. In this chapter, Szegedi leaps roughly a decade forward and discusses church politics in Transylvania in the 1610s, focusing on the conflicts between Prince Gábor Báthory and the Antitrinitarian council of Kolozsvár. As in the first half of the book, she approaches the events from the perspective of urban history, and her research shows the connection between Báthory’s church politics and the ecclesiastical policies of the princes who followed him. Although Báthory failed in his efforts to limit the rights of the Antitrinitarians in Kolozsvár, he nonetheless offered a kind of a model for the princes who came in his wake. He showed how to dismantle religious order in Transylvania and how to use the accusation of Judaization as a means of suppressing the Antitrinitarians.

Regrettably, the book does not offer, as a conclusion, any summary of Szegedi's findings, much as it also does not offer any reflections concerning the research she has done or the questions answered or left open. Similarly, the book lacks structural and methodological coherence and consistency. It is not entirely clear, exactly how the chapters are intended to relate to one another, and in the individual chapters Szegedi alternates between descriptive and analytical approaches without much reflection on her methods. The Hungarian secondary literature on the history of ideas often interweaves historical narrative with biographical passages, textual analyses, urban history, and reflections on legal and theological issues. In the case of Szegedi's undertaking, this sometimes clouds her narrative and makes it difficult to follow the main question and line of argument.

One also cannot help but notice the lack of editing. I am thinking not of grammatical mistakes or stylistic issues, but rather of issues as mundane but significant as correcting typos and punctuation. More thorough editorial work should also have been done to address the inconsistencies in the uses of personal and place names. From a terminological point of view, Szegedi is cautious and reflective, but several important ambiguities remain unaddressed. What precisely does she mean, for instance, by the term "Protestant," and who belongs to this category? And why does she not consider the Sabbatarians to have been Antitrinitarians?

Szegedi has a thorough knowledge of the secondary literature, but she tends to rely on the works of older, more widely known authors and seems to be less familiar with or at least draws considerably less on the findings of more recent research (for example, she makes no mention of the works of Borbála Lovas or Dávid Molnár, and even Lech Szczucki, who represents the older generation on the international scene and wrote seminal works on the subject, is also missing from the bibliography).

These shortcomings, however, are outweighed by the book's many merits. Szegedi's academic interests (relations among national minorities and questions of identity construction) and her own cultural background as someone who arguably belongs to several minorities and has an intimate knowledge of several languages make her the perfect person to address this topic with adequate sensitivity and minimal bias. Her strengths as someone with the necessary linguistic and cultural knowledge is clear both in the superb use of language in the book and also, for instance, in her knowledge of the Romanian secondary literature and her decisions with regards to the language used in the case of

place names. Her insistence on subtle, penetrating reflection is also clear in her discussion of ecclesiastical issues, as she refuses merely to follow or echo the narrative of the Transylvanian Reformation as a history of salvation, which traces an allegedly “praiseworthy” path of ideological development and modernity from Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Antitrinitarianism to the Enlightenment. Her comments offer evidence of her impartiality. She notes, in the main text, that she supports neither the positions of the established churches, which condemned the “godless” heretics, nor the views of the opposing side, since both sides showed contempt and scorn for each other.

The book’s greatest merit is that it offers a highly readable presentation to an international readership of a topic on which there is relatively little secondary literature available in English or German. It clears up some of the confusion surrounding stereotypes that have lingered long in the public mind, such as notions of religious tolerance in Transylvania or ideas concerning the trial of Ferenc Dávid and draws attention to the findings in the secondary literature. Many sources are quoted at length and translated (except for those in Latin, which also should have been translated to ensure that the book remains accessible to the widest possible readership), thus helping historians and scholars who do not read Hungarian pursue further research.

Although Szegedi does not rely on her own primary research from a theological and intellectual-historical point of view, she is very much able to offer a long-term perspective and summarize the findings of the secondary literature. She is able to synthesize complex phenomena and connections without getting lost in the details. Moreover, with this book, she has shown that she is able to incorporate the results of her own primary research in the fields of church policy and law into the study of the religious situation in Transylvania and the history of Antitrinitarianism.

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Rendi ellenzék és kormánypárt az 1751. évi országgyűlésen
[The opposition and the governing party at the 1751 Diet]. By János Nagy. Budapest: Budapest Főváros Levéltára–Mika Sándor Egyesület, 2020. 584 pp.

The history of the 1751 Diet is hardly one of the least researched or most neglected topics in Hungarian historiography, the new monograph by János Nagy is nonetheless a unique undertaking. It is the first historical work since János Rozgonyi's mini-monograph published in 1944 to focus specifically on the 1751 Diet, but more importantly, it adopts a complex approach to the subject. Nagy sets out to reinterpret the history of this important eighteenth-century Diet in the context of a joint intersection of several historical sub-disciplines, each of which is complete in itself. Overall, the main virtue of the work—in addition to the thoroughness of the analyses, the detailed presentation of the contexts, and the extensive use of sources—is the consistent, simultaneous application of three main analytical perspectives.

One of the main approaches used by Nagy is political historical analysis (p.11), which is not, however, merely a reconstruction of the course of the debates on the issues discussed during the diet. Although the book also includes numerous new findings on this latter subject, perhaps more important is the identification of regionally specific patterns of political behavior that can be discerned during the *tractatus diaetalis*, the political bargaining process between the ruler and the estates, and the resulting sketch of a kind of political map of the country (chief counties, pro-government counties, swing counties, and opposition counties). Equally important parts of the analysis include the discussion of the relationship between the county deputies and other parliamentary groups (upper house, clergy, absentee envoys).

Nagy focuses his analysis on the group of county deputies. This choice of focus is well founded in social history, since in recent decades the secondary literature (first and foremost and in the greatest depth István M. Szigjártó) has thoroughly discussed the process that took place in the mid-eighteenth century, during which the prosperous landowning (*bene possessionatus*) gentry became a dominant power factor in the counties and then on the main stage of “national” politics, in the arena of the diet. In essence, this meant the emancipation of the lesser nobility from the aristocracy in the counties, i.e., the dissolution of the early modern system of patron-client relations and, within the institutional system of the diet, it resulted in the dominance of the lower house over the

upper house. Nagy's analysis convincingly demonstrates that these processes had already clearly determined the balance of political power in favor of the lower table and the prosperous landowning gentry by the diet of 1751.

The main thematic "densifications" of the diet, which are given particular attention (and in most cases a separate chapter) in the political historical sections of the volume, are the election of the palatine, the debates concerning the regulation of trade and customs, the question of taxation, the annexation of the new free royal cities, and the debate concerning the new indigenates. In reconstructing the history of the 1751 Diet and identifying the main stages, junctures, and turning points in the debates on these subjects, the volume presents a respectable body of research. Moreover, in several debates, Nagy succeeds in refining the findings in the literature to date by identifying the most active participants in the debates. This is a remarkable achievement, since the eighteenth-century parliamentary diaries are not, for the most part, verbatim records of the debates but rather only summaries of their contents, which rarely included the identity of the contributors.

Based on analyses of the history of the debates, Nagy modifies the findings of previous research in several cases. With regards to the debate on serfdom, Nagy corrects the narrative rooted in the literature according to which the demand for a general settlement of the serf question was almost exclusively linked to the government and its enlightened turn in the 1760s. As he shows, the issue of the *úrbér* had already been raised in the 1751 Diet, precisely by the opposition in the lower house, some of whom raised the possibility of a parliamentary settlement of the burdens of the serfs as a kind of "ultima ratio" in the debate on the tax increase in order to lighten the tax base, i.e., to make it easier to pay the higher taxes asked by the ruler (pp.158–160). In the case of other issues with modernizing aspects raised and/or supported at least partly by county deputies during the discussions at the Diet (such as river regulation, trade, and education), the analyses also illustrate that the rigid application of the binary model, which unilaterally links the conservative attitude to the estates and the modernizing attitude to the government, sometimes oversimplifies the real complexity and potential ambiguity of the past. Perhaps the most valuable parts of the volume in this regard are those that capture precisely this complexity through meticulous, "down-to-earth" analyses.

The other important approach of the book is a social-historical perspective. The chapters on typical trajectories and social strategies, which are representative of particular groups and individuals selected from the Diet, show that there

were long-term trends and patterns of public action not only at the regional and county levels, but also within the public action patterns of individual families and individuals.

Finally, the third approach, which is treated as equal to the others, is the discursive analysis of the parliamentary debates. By focusing on the use of concepts, modes of argumentation, and political languages, Nagy explores the linguistic-rhetorical toolbox used by the participants in the parliamentary debates. He shows that the main rhetorical weapon used by politicians linked to the government was the appeal to the common good and the needs of the ruler, while members of the opposition mainly used elements linked to classical republicanism and arguments of the rhetoric of grievances. He also places great emphasis on the analysis of the parliamentary pasquils, a group of sources that he uses primarily to reconstruct the self-image of the estates. In the course of his analyses, he also points out that political languages were usually used not in pure forms, but rather in mixed variants. In this respect, it should be noted that the metaphor of mixing, which is often used in recent Hungarian intellectual history in connection with the description of political languages and which can be traced back to John G. A. Pocock's methodological writings on political languages, is somewhat misleading, since it presupposes that the pure, consistent, therefore ideal forms of the political languages (primarily used by Pocock as heuristic tools of analysis) are observable on the level of real, existing political discourses.

The complex approach used in the book, i.e., the detailed examination of a given, well-defined "event" (in this case, the 1751 Diet) as an object of study from several perspectives, has the advantage of allowing the validation of several aspects at the same time, which gives us a complex picture of the object under study. This allows new contexts to emerge that have not been explored in previous research. Tangible examples of this can be found in the book, both at the level of the details and at the level of the overall picture and in terms of the interrelationships between aspects that have not been researched/discussed in such detail before. It is partly due to this complex approach that Nagy successfully carries out the task he undertook in his work, namely, to examine the diet not in its abstract institutional structure, but in operation, adopting the approach of István Szijártó's long-term project on the eighteenth-century history of the Diet.

In doing so, Nagy successfully eliminates the biases and normative elements of earlier interpretations and transcends traditional historical narratives built primarily on the national-independence *versus* Habsburg-imperial colonialism and privilege-fearing narrowness *versus* socially just, "progressivist" pairs of

opposites. Of course, this is obviously also possible because, first, he can build on the intellectual tools and findings of the more current research on the history of the diet (above all the research of István M. Szijártó) and, second, the issues related to the eighteenth-century diets and, more broadly, to the political struggles between the estates in Hungary and the Habsburg central power are no longer of direct relevance to the political and social debates of the present. This latter circumstance does not mean, however, that contemporary research on the early modern Diet is not at all motivated by tendencies in the present. One such international trend is to interpret early modern diets as the forerunners of modern parliamentarism and as the seeds of the modern representative system. János Nagy's monograph explicitly resonates with this trend, but at the same time, it seeks primarily to provide a picture of the parliament that is as close as possible to the interpretative framework of the contemporary actors and the interests and principles that drove them.

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Remarriage and Stepfamilies in East Central Europe, 1600–1900. Edited by Gabriella Erdélyi and András Péter Szabó. (Routledge Research in Early Modern History. New York, NY: Routledge, 2023. 364 pp.

The final volume of the project of the “Integrated Families” Research Group, which was established over the course of the past five years and has resulted in the creation of an international network linked institutionally to the Institute of History in Budapest, is partly a summary of the findings so far and partly a synthesis with a macro-regional ambition. The research group analyzes two specific sub-themes of family history, remarriage, and the functioning of stepfamilies in the period between 1600 and 1900. The East Central European region (i.e., the pre-partition Kingdom of Poland, the Kingdom of Bohemia, the Kingdom of Hungary with Transylvania, and the Romanian principalities bordering the latter from the east, i.e., Moldova and the Lowlands of Havas) was chosen as the geographical framework of the investigation. The region is usually defined as a transitional space between Western Europe and the Eastern world, which is interesting for the community of historians in part because of its ethnic, linguistic, religious, social, and demographic features (especially in terms of early modern and modern immigration, emigration, and internal migration). With this in mind, the two editors, Gabriella Erdélyi and András Szabó, have made a claim for the international relevance of the volume, which consists of introductory essays and two case studies.

Gabriella Erdélyi’s introductory study provides a summary of the following chapters, highlighting the overlaps among the authors’ findings. Erdélyi also reflects on the dual nature of the volume. The first section uses the methods of historical demography and tackle broader structural questions. The second part focuses on historical anthropological issues and places much greater emphasis on the agency of individuals and small groups. Rather than expecting to find contradictions in this (p. 4), one can see a simple methodological peculiarity. The larger scale obscures subtle differences, i.e., transforms them into averages and thus “smooths” them out. Erdélyi’s introduction is obviously neither a conclusive nor an exhaustive synthesis, especially as the research team itself has also presented an array of findings and conclusions not cited in her summary. Since this volume is most likely to be read by researchers from a particular country, region, culture, ethnicity, etc., rather than offer a detailed description of each of the ten studies, I will summarize a few of the conclusions that I found

particularly fascinating, though obviously my choice of focus reflects my own interests.

The series of historical demographic studies opens with Alice Velková's "Inheritance and Stepfamilies in Bohemian Rural Society (1650–1800)." Velková draws on a database with information concerning 16,000 individuals compiled from records of parish registers. Her important findings point to both the elasticity of inheritance patterns and the higher proportion of stepchildren among landowning families. Underlying the demographic data, the family clearly functioned as an economic labor organization. It is thus no surprise that assets such as land and labor were, due to their limited nature, decisive in the family's considering cohabitation and inheritance, which were also structured by the larger economic framework in which they lived (in particular the organizational rules of manorial estates).

Marzena Liedke and Piotr Guzowski's study "Magnate and Noble Stepfamilies in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries" is a legal-historical and historical-demographic study. The data on the noble elite, compiled by genealogical processing, already places in the foreground the question (also raised in the introduction and later in the book) of the extent to which a stepparent's attitude towards a stepchild was (or was not) negative. Obviously, the functionality of the family structure, the efficiency of property management, the methods and aims of childrearing, and strategies of abandonment are not negligible issues when considering a family's approaches to defending its interests.

Árpád Tóth's study "Career Potentials of Stepchildren in the Lutheran Community of Pressburg (Bratislava, Slovakia) 1730–1850" focuses on how the limited resources available to the family were divided between stepchildren and non-stepchildren in a stepfamily. Tóth provides a tangible and measurable basis for differences in the ways in which children and stepchildren were treated, which may reflect different emotional aspects, while the different degrees of talent among the children in a family may also have been a factor, thus making it difficult to arrive at any general "rule." The study also shows that, even in the feudal world (with its many limitations on social mobility), there were families that, as ambitious, wealthy, well-educated elites, could pursue different career strategies.

Péter Őri's study "Orphans and Stepchildren: The Impact of Parental Loss and Parental Remarriage on Children's First Marriages in Zsámbék in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries" is one of the most complex analyses

of historical demographic studies in the volume, using the most curious methodological approach. Őri shows that there was a higher proportion of stepchildren among landowning families, a finding that can be linked to the fact that landowning families may have had an immediate need for stepchildren as a source of labor.

The study by Sándor Lakatos (“Marriage, Widowhood, and Remarriage in the Székely Land (1830–1939)”), which concludes the first section of the volume, is an important contribution to the previous studies but also to the previous research in that it examines the impact of divorce more closely and confirms that remarriage was motivated by both a desire to share the workload and a need to maintain socioeconomic status. Further research on the layers of family relations behind, underneath, or within these larger structures may yet shed light on attitudes towards the self and stepchildren.

In the second part of the volume, analyses on a smaller scale but with a greater density due to the use of ego-documents are presented. Gabriella Erdélyi’s “Mothering Half-Sisters: Maternal Love, Anger and Authority in Early Modern Hungary” explores the emotional games, manipulation, and love language within the family as defined in modern times through the correspondence of a noble woman with her two daughters. The analysis focuses on language, rhetoric, and prestige. The successful and failed attempts to use epistolary language to dominate another person makes this family story, which is almost four centuries old, unique and alive.

Ágnes Máté’s study “Remarriage and Stepfamilies among the Lutheran Urban Elite in Seventeenth-Century Hungary. Neo-Latin Wedding Poetry as Source” analyses the wedding poetry of German bourgeois families as one symptom of the deliberate social isolation of these communities and highlights the importance of keeping alive the memory of the former spouse after remarriage. The study, which is based on sources concerning three different urban communities in the Carpathian Basin (the cities of Lőcse, today Levoča, Brassó, today Braşov, and Sopron), examines the need to replace a lost spouse, while children from previous marriages were not mentioned. It was also a common practice that children from previous marriages did not wish their remarrying father to have children. This would presumably be perceived as an insincere gesture on their part.

András Péter Szabó’s study “Roads to Recomposed Families of the Nobility in Seventeenth-Century Transylvania” analyses widowhood and post-divorce remarriage strategies among the Transylvanian noble elite, a recurring theme in

the volume. On the one hand, the economic motive behind his conclusions is clearly evident: the wealth of someone who had been widowed was a far greater asset from the perspective of family and kinship interests than the (usually) comparatively limited wealth of a bride entering her first marriage.

Andrea Fehér's study "Stepfamily Relations in Autobiographical Writings in Eighteenth-Century Transylvania" counterbalances the more or less stereotypical image of the evil stepmother with the more aggressive, violent stepfather. Of course, the greater position of power may have given greater scope for abuse, but it may be worth considering that the narratives left by the people who wrote memoirs looked back on the whole of their own lives, since the image of the stepmother may have been influenced by self-rescue motives related to later problems in life.

In her study "Her Children to Have as Children of Ours": Stepfamilies in the Romanian Principalities in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," Constanța Vintilă builds on a varied and sizeable source material. In doing so, she introduces the reader to the world of the Romanian principalities of Moldavia and the Great Plain, administered by the Orthodox Church, in which stepfamilies of several social strata are examined. Her sources outline the greater attention paid to widows among the boyars, who had more family wealth. Her study of the normative and powerful role of the Orthodox Church in determining questions of custody of family members points to the narrow space for maneuver of widowed women, in which their modes of expression can be seen more as a survival strategy.

The micro-level studies in *Remarriage and Stepfamilies* explore the family life of culturally diverse peoples living in the Polish, Czech, Hungarian, and Romanian states of Central and Eastern Europe, largely along the lines of their social and economic stratification. The many studies provide a nuanced and rich picture of the stepfamilies of the region, while at the same time raising a number of exciting research questions. The book's inclusion in the international family history literature is to be expected, if only because it opens an under-explored region to global historiography.

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Making Sense of Dictatorship: Domination and Everyday Life in East Central Europe after 1945. Edited by Celia Donert, Ana Kladnik, and Martin Sabrow. Budapest: CEU Press, 2022. 296 pp.

On the cover of the book under review here we see children's chalk drawings on Alexanderplatz, East Berlin. This iconic square would remind us of the demonstration of the November 4, 1989, the largest in the history of the GDR. But for the children, the square had a meaning as a large concrete surface to draw on. *Making Sense of Dictatorship: Domination and Everyday Life in East Central Europe after 1945* joins the growing tide of the corpus of works reflecting on the social and cultural history of socialism. The history of everyday life under dictatorships has been widely studied, mainly by Alf Lüdtke and the cohort of scholars following him. According to their approach, the socialist regimes set the general parameters of life, but the strategies developed in everyday life enabled Soviet citizens to get by. The mutual relationship between the rulers and the ruled and the negotiation nature of the dictatorship have become the subject of a burgeoning secondary literature. The novelty of this volume is that it seeks to understand the individual actions and attitudes from the perspective of their meanings: the *Sinnwelt*. The authors seek to answer questions concerning how the citizens of socialist countries, like the children on Alexanderplatz, looked for meanings in the world around them.

Seeking to achieve a deeper understanding of perceptions of everyday life, the authors direct our attention to the “conceptual worlds” or “mental worlds” that existed alongside the official ideology, but not in isolation from it and even in interaction with it. To provide insight into the complexity of *Sinnwelts*, they devote substantial attention to the field of “pre-political acceptance.” With this term, they refer to a zone in which historical actors (re-)constructed the meaning of the existing social order and its legitimacy in everyday life. This mental conception shaped a series of social practices that were not always politically motivated. The essays in the book offer insights into the ways in which the worlds of meanings were revealed in different situations. The 13 chapters assembled in this volume are divided into four sections. In the introductory chapters, Martin Sabrow and Thomas Lindenberg elaborate on the concept of *Sinnwelt*. To understand everyday life, we need to examine how socialism's representation of reality interacted with individuals' representations of reality. In his brief overview, Lindenberg points out that the finding that *Eigen-Sinn* exists is only the first step in the research on the behavior of people living under

dictatorships, not a final answer to a question, but rather a finding that leads to a series of follow-up questions.

Following the theoretically oriented chapters, in the second part (“Authorities and Domination”), these questions are posed from the perspective of those in power. Ciprian Cîrnială shows the professional life of a policeman in state-socialist Romania. He focuses not so much on policeman Nicolae’s life but rather on its reconstruction. A joint examination of the “world of meaning” of the police and a policeman reveals Nicolae’s power-legitimizing and delegitimizing character. The main tool with which the system was legitimized was the creation of loyal worlds of meaning, for which purpose a whole reporting machinery was constructed. As Hedwig Richter points out in the next chapter, the broader layers of society were involved in report writing in East Germany, which became a bureaucratic practice of imitation. However, the reporting machinery was not able to stabilize the system. Regarding the debates that started in the 1980s, we can see the dangers that emerge if the rulers’ perceptions of reality do not match society’s perceptions of reality. Michal Pullmann’s study points out how the vision of the late Czechoslovak communist elite failed in the face of alternative interpretations that were unfavorable to the party.

The third section (“Everyday Social Practices and *Sinnwelt*”) pays particular attention to the meanings of living standards. Ana Kladnik uncovers local practices of *Sinnwelts* in Velenje in the context of Yugoslav self-management. The autonomy and decision-making given to the local government and the voluntary work of the inhabitants not only led to the construction of a new city but also fostered solidarity among local urban and rural communities. It is a good example of *Eigen-Sinn* practices that do not evolve against the official will but in harmony with it. However, this does not mean small tactics were not developed in order to shape and navigate meanings within the spaces of everyday life. The legitimacy of the socialist project was based on improved living standards in post-1956 Hungary. The mechanization of households was implemented as an important measure in the modernization campaign. Annina Gagyiova explains that, due to centralized distribution and the shortage of goods, access to washing machines required women to develop individual tactics. In the reality of everyday household life, *Eigen-sinn* was mostly about finding loopholes.

We come closer to understanding everyday worlds not only by looking at what the official *Sinnwelt* contained but also by finding what is omitted. Barbara Klich-Kluczevska examines how non-married single mothers in the People’s Republic of Poland were excluded from the official discourse of the 1970s. The

indifference of the social network and the stigma of public opinion also strongly limited these women's social coping strategies. Like unmarried women, a small group of parents in the GDR did not fit into the vision of a socialist modern world. These residents established an unofficial kindergarten in East Berlin by implementing an alternative vision of raising future generations. The short-lived initiative, as Celia Donert explains, reveals several layers of *Sinnwelt*, including the overlaps and the incongruities between the *Sinnwelt* of dissidents and the *Sinnwelt* of the East German state.

In addition to the modernization of the household and the transformation of the ground floor of dwellings into kindergartens, various other ideas have been able to dislodge cities from their traditional places. In the fourth section ("Intellectual and Expert Worlds (and (De)Legitimization"), Matěj Spurný illustrates how the project of industrial modernity and the idea of demolishing the whole historical heritage of the town of Most (in northern Czechoslovakia) became a "crime against culture" in the changed perception of reality of the local people and urban development experts. It was not only the image of the city that changed in the context of a more sensitive, European-level thinking about the relationship between people and their environment, but also the image of authentic communities. The next chapter underpins this observation with the example of Orfeo. The art group, which was linked to the new left, built a commune to create a "socialist way of life". Péter Apor's study shows that the commune, like the performances, expressed a sharp social critique. In this context, the artists saw alienation not exclusively as a problem of capitalist consumer society but also as a problem of late socialist Hungary.

Alongside the creation of countercultural worlds, the preservation of these worlds is also part of the history of alternative perceptions of reality. Jonathan Larson argues that the political role of samizdats and their relationships to identity determine the kinds of Czech samizdat we find in collections today. This study, which would make a fitting conclusion to the volume, is followed by a final chapter: an analysis by Michal Kopeček of the discourse of legalism in Czechoslovak and Polish opposition. For the regime, the party was the basis of socialism's legitimation, not questions of legality. For the dissidents, in contrast, legalism was used as a political tool not to address questions concerning the existing regime but rather as a means of positing the expected and desired rule of law.

The major strengths of the book lie in its thematic diversity. The diversity of historical actors who parade across the pages of this book offers a glimpse into

various perspectives and experiences. To uncover the practices associated with meanings, scholars map the regions, towns, blocks, flats, and sometimes even bathrooms of socialist Romania, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Poland. The case studies draw upon a heterogeneous body of sources (party documents, interviews, printed publications, and samizdats). The systems and worlds of meaning discovered provide a tool with which we can examine the dynamics, practices, discourses, and memories unfolding in very different interactions and relationships. Despite the wide range of topics, one area is missing from the analysis. The inclusion of rural areas and the transformations they underwent as a theme would have been justified in terms of the *Sinnwelt*. For most of these countries, the creation of a so-called socialist society included a transformation from largely rural societies into increasingly urban societies. The world and its meanings changed profoundly for the people from the countryside who migrated to the cities and for those who remained in the villages alike. Furthermore, the editors have arranged the book to provide access to different perspectives on *Sinnwelt*. However, not all attempts to integrate the case studies into the *Sinnwelt* concept have been entirely successful. The chapters in which the authors have explain how they relate to the main idea of meaning-making strengthen the coherence of the volume.

A *Sinnwelt* is the world as perceived by the historical actors who inhabit it. For the children playing on Alexanderplatz, the huge concrete surface on which they could draw gave meaning and significance to the square. The world of meaning in socialist countries was every bit as colorful as these drawings. As tempting as it may have been in the past to divide the actors in these narratives into victims and perpetrators, this simplistic division hardly does justice to the complexity of the histories in question. Sometimes, an individual could be both victim and perpetrator at the same time. The volume will be thought-provoking for anyone interested in the history of Eastern Europe and everyday life under dictatorships, and it will be useful for historians, social scientists, and their students alike.

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A történeti tudás [Historical knowledge]. By Gábor Gyáni. Budapest: Osiris, 2020. 460 pp.

Two decades ago, when I was a university student, one of my professors said that it is not the historians' job to think and write about the theory or philosophy of history. Let's leave that to philosophers, he said, since our task is only to study what happened in the past and write down the historical reality. I think, or at least hope, that few historians today consider their task this simple or have any faith in the notion of studying and writing history without some philosophically, sociologically, and ideologically determined viewpoints. And yet, historians often write their narratives with few if any reflections on their theoretical framework, and theorists or philosophers of history usually only read and criticize historiographical works without actually practicing this science themselves.

Gábor Gyáni is one of the few historians who has been doing a lot to introduce the Hungarian readership to recent Western theories of history, interpreting them from the perspective of a researcher with broad interdisciplinary knowledge. In *Történelmi tudás*, he offers a comprehensive survey of central questions and viewpoints of some current philosophical and methodological trends in the study of history. Thus, this book can be seen not only as a reference work on some theoretical problems concerning history but also as Gyáni's interpretation of his own practice and an inquiry into the main components of the type of knowledge we call "historical."

Ten chapters of the book focus on specific problems or aspects of the concept of historical knowledge from varying perspectives. The first chapter touches on the very notion of historical fact and different interpretations concerning the notion of "being factual". The following essays analyze the debates in Anglo-Saxon philosophy of history in the 1960s and 1970s, which broached questions concerning historical explanation and the role of narrative language. Some of the chapters are more oriented around questions discussed in the French and German theoretical literature, such as concepts of structure oriented historical inquiries and long-durée, while others consider approaches that have appeared more recently, like historical experience and role of (personal and social) memory in historical writing. It seems natural to start with the concept of "fact," since professional historians and "outsiders" tend to view facts as the elementary components of history. Facts, however, do not speak for themselves, or more precisely, there are no pure facts. Rather, the viewpoint and interests

of the historian determine the kinds of past events that need to be considered as facts. Moreover, following Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy, Gyáni points out that one can even consider facts as elementary units, not of the actual happenings but rather of the narrative construction created by the historian about these happenings. Thus, as the second chapter convincingly demonstrates, the notion of historical knowledge has been changed fundamentally by the approach introduced in the 1960s, when some theorists wanted to merge the explanatory method of analytical philosophy with a narrative model, and radicalized some years later with the application of structuralist narrative theory to historiography. Perhaps the narrative and linguistically determined character of historical writing are the central components of Gyáni's standpoint, signified by the fact that essays in his first theoretical book concentrated on problems of the narrative philosophy of history and its connection with collective memory theories.¹ He returned to the narrative construction of the past in the study of history in each of his books, or, more precisely, to the issue that the past can be mediated via narrative language.

The next chapter analyzes the relations between historical event and structure. According to Gyáni, a past occurrence is usually interpreted as an event due to its perceived or alleged consequences, which caused some change within a given structural system. His two examples are the siege of Bastille and the Hungarian revolution on March 15, 1848, since neither was understood as historically significant for the contemporary agents, but both became meaningful soon, because they set in motion another chain of events to transform the given structure. Thus, like facts, events are not given entities which the historian simply finds. They are, rather, construed later by culturally and socially defined actors.

The subsequent chapters study issues that are perhaps only rarely of interest to historians in their everyday work but which are nevertheless central to the historical approach as hidden preconceptions. Analyzing these themes, e. g. historical determination, the possibility of prediction, the various functions of time (for instance, the question of periodization, the use of grammatical verb tenses in writing about the past, and the temporality of any given viewpoint), and changes of scale in historiography, Gyáni not only summarizes the most influential recent theoretical debates but also specifies some significant factors with which historians have often been confronted (at times perhaps without

1 *Emlékezés, emlékezet és a történelem elbeszélése* [Remembrance, memory, and the narration of history], (Budapest: Napvilág, 2000).

realizing it) in their research and, more importantly, in the writing process. Perhaps the topics of the following two chapters are more familiar and seem of more immediate relevance, at least for contemporary theory: the problem of historical experience and the relations between historiography and social memory. It is not easy to summarize the numerous questions raised in these chapters due to the diversity of approaches connected with the problem of historical experience, from the hermeneutic-oriented viewpoint of Wilhelm Dilthey through theory of historical experience according to the contemporary Dutch philosopher of history, Frank Ankersmit to some current problems, including the viewpoints (or specific experiences) of women and postcolonial experiences. Here and in the entire book, Gyáni's main aim was not to analyze each topic exhaustively but to give a comprehensive synthesis with a synoptic presentation of some major problems. On some questions, Gyáni has already written more essays or a whole book. For example, almost parallel with *Történelmi tudás*, he published a volume about women's perspectives and experiences in history.²

Another aspect of historical experience discussed by Gyáni connects this chapter with the next one, underlining some oft-returning questions in his theoretical studies. The problem of collective historical traumas, memories of these traumas, and adequate ways of transforming trauma into any representation (whether historical or otherwise) appeared in the field of historical theory in the mid-1980s and has become one of the subjects where the practice of professional historians can touch public interests and ideological debates most visibly. In Gyáni's view, there are three interconnected factors of collective trauma: a historical factor, touching upon the genealogy of trauma as a modern phenomenon; an aesthetic or poetic factor, focusing on the possibilities of its representation; and a cultural factor, reflecting on the aspect of collective memory of trauma and strategies of memorialization. Gyáni argues that the traumatic historical event is essentially modern not because catastrophic happenings of the distant past would not have been similarly terrible for a given community but since people in the distant past had some (mostly ritual and religion-based) methods of working through these events as soon as possible, and they found appropriate (or at least usefully applicable) interpretational patterns with which to understand them. The prototype of modern historical trauma is the Holocaust. However, as sociologist Jeffrey C. Alexander has pointed out, it was

2 *A nő élete – történelmi perspektívában* [The lives of women in historical perspective], (Budapest: Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, 2021).

not a par excellence traumatic event from the beginning, or, more precisely, it could be traumatic only for individual victim survivors, whereas the Holocaust as a collective trauma was constructed later as a consequence of historical processes.³ That drives us to the next question, the problems which inevitably arise when experience or “past” is transformed into narrative and, connected closely with these problems, the social and cultural roles of historical writing.

As the theoretical works which Gyáni has written over the course of the past two decades reveal, the roles and responsibilities of historians have been among his central topics since the 2010s, undoubtedly due to the present-day historical situation. One of the main goals of his theoretical approach seems to have been to make the profession more self-reflexive and to dislodge it from the naïve, positivistic kind of approach based on the optimistic notion that facts and sources speak for themselves, and the historian’s task is to present what happened in the past. In his earlier essays and books, Gyáni analyzes the history and genealogy of this viewpoint and the connections between the rise of the nation state and modern professional historiography. He argues convincingly that this nineteenth-century style history of writing is anachronistic, and he exhorts historians to reflect on the assumptions, methods, and roles of their discipline.⁴ Nowadays, however, the increasingly pressing problem is to clarify the relationship between the alleged relativism of postmodern theory and the new contemporary phenomena that emerged not from but in opposition to the science of history. From his earliest theoretical studies, Gyáni has constantly analyzed academic history in parallel with the structure and functioning of collective memory. Later, in his collections of essays,⁵ he added another central topic, the phenomenon of public history. The emergence and increasing popularity of this historical tendency can be challenging for the discipline, because public history mediates historical knowledge in more consumable and necessarily simplified ways. There are many forms and modes of public history, including historical documentaries and non-fictional books written by authors outside the academic sphere, historical reenactments, and semi-historical webpages and blogs. According to Gyáni, because public history is closely related to collective

3 Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Holocaust and Trauma: Moral Universalism in the West,” in *Trauma: A Social Theory*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 31–96.

4 See, for example, essays in *Nép, nemzet, zsidó* [People, nation, Jew] (Pozsony: Kalligram, 2013) and *Nemzeti vagy transznacionális történelem* [National or transnational history] (Budapest: Pesti Kalligram, 2018).

5 *Az elveszített múlt* [The past that could be lost] (Budapest: Nyitott Könyvműhely, 2010); *A történelem mint emléke(mű)* [History as memory (and memorial)] (Budapest: Pesti Kalligram, 2016).

memory, its topics, attitudes to the past, and narratives serve the interests of the larger society and its need to construct an identity for itself.

In an essay about the connections between history and memory, Peter Burke called the historian a kind of “remembrancer,” a term which was used as a euphemism for debt collectors. The task of historians as remembrancers is “to remind people of what they would like to forget”: to find and present the metaphorical skeletons in closets and to establish and meet scientific standards for the revision of myths and legends on which collective memory often rests.⁶ From Gyáni’s viewpoint, the main problem is that it is more difficult for contemporary historians to be “remembrancers,” because the borders between scientific discourse and other kinds of discourses have been blurred in the eyes of the public. Some tendencies present at the moment, such as the idea of alternative facts and post-truth or populist political trends (which use their interpretations of history to underpin nationalist myths and legends), challenge the social role of history and historiography by giving simplified explanations which fit smoothly into the identity construction of a given community. According to Gyáni, the role of the historian is not just to correct the false narratives like a kind of “myth-buster” and to point out “what actually happened in the past.” This approach, after all, remains anchored in the notion of a clear opposition between fact versus fiction, which seems anachronistic now that philosophical studies have pointed out the narrative, rhetorical, and ideological implications of historical writing. Gyáni is not a radical constructivist propagating a postmodernist “anything goes” interpretation of history, as some of his conservative critics have claimed. As a historian, he wants to be a “remembrancer” of the historical discipline itself by detecting some preconceptions in the historiography, studying their roots and genealogy, and raising awareness of the significance of self-reflectiveness in the making of history.

This concept is expressed most spectacularly in the appendix of the book, which focuses on how the personality of the historian influences research. This should not be mistaken for some kind of psychological explanation of the historian’s persona. Rather, it is an acknowledgement of the relevance, in the construction of any narrative of history, of the individual and social conditions that affected a given scholar and influenced his or her viewpoint. In the case studies, examining the careers of György Szabad and Iván T. Berend (two

6 Peter Burke, “History as Social Memory,” In: Burke: *Varieties of Cultural History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 59.

leading Hungarian historians in the second half of the twentieth century), Gyáni interprets their social backgrounds and ventures claims concerning the ways in which their personal historical experiences influenced their approaches to the past. Thus, to sum up again one of Gyáni's cardinal thesis statements, there is no objective historiography because the historical knowledge (or the historian's knowledge) is necessarily affected by personal aspects (the background, the life story, and experiences of the historian), the social and cultural circumstances surrounding the actual production of history as textual narrative, and, more generally, the poetic and rhetorical conventions of the given language. The impossibility of total objectivity does not mean that discipline of history would inevitably be subjective, of course, and nor does it imply that all historical interpretations are equally legitimate. Gyáni stands for a kind of history which openly addresses the circumstances of its own production as affected by the factors noted above but which still aims to give an original, verifiable, and authentic interpretation of the past.

It would be very interesting to read a detailed ego history of Gyáni's professional career and personal background, on which he touched in his answer to the question "How did I become a historian?" in the journal *Korall*.⁷ Perhaps another historian will someday write about the history of Hungarian historiography in the 2000s. This narrative would have to feature a chapter on the start of a more reflexive, philosophically well-informed trend in the discipline, in which Gyáni will be a central character. Drawing on his account of his career, so far, as a historian and on his oeuvre, one perhaps could venture a kind of commentary similar to the commentary he offered on the careers of Szabad and Berend. And, if this historical inquiry were to be written, *Történeti tudás* could be interpreted not just as a handbook reviewing theoretical and methodological questions in the recent historical science and as a summary of more than two decades of Gyáni's theoretical thinking but as an overview by a historian on how he himself has detected and diagnosed some disciplinary questions and challenges in his profession.

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7 Gyáni Gábor, "Utam a társadalomtörténehez" [My path to social history], *Korall* 21–22 (2005), 193–96.