

**Markus Koller.** *Eine Gesellschaft im Wandel: Die osmanische Herrschaft in Ungarn im 17. Jahrhundert (1606-1683)*. Stuttgart: Steiner, 2010. 226 pp. \$58.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-515-09663-8.



**Reviewed by** Graeme Murdock

**Published on** HABSBURG (October, 2012)

**Commissioned by** Jonathan Kwan (University of Nottingham)

Markus Koller's book will take most readers into terra incognita--Ottoman Hungary during the seventeenth century. While some attention has been paid to the governance and society of early modern Ottoman Hungary, research has tended to focus on the military and diplomatic history of this region. This is perhaps understandable given the momentous clashes between the Ottoman Empire and Habsburg monarchy toward the end of the seventeenth century. The politics and society of the region were transformed by the results of the siege of Vienna in 1683, the Habsburg conquest of Buda in 1686, the battle of Zenta in 1697, and the confirmation of Habsburg acquisition of Transylvania and lands of southern Hungary by the peace of Karlowitz in 1699. Koller first reflects on the achievements and limits of existing scholarship on Ottoman Hungary. He notes that interest in Ottoman Hungary has mostly been reserved to scholarship in the region itself, and that the sixteenth century has tended to attract more attention than the seventeenth century partly because of the better survival of some key records for the

earlier period. Early Hungarian historiography had some difficulty in coming to a balanced view of the legacy of Ottoman rule. Writing was often affected by nationalists' enthusiasm to construct a usable past for Hungary, and many authors presented this period as part of the fight for Hungarian liberty from the rule of alien oppressors. However, some writers, driven not least by their ambivalence toward the role played by the Habsburgs in Hungary, were prepared to acknowledge some positive features of the Ottoman period. More recent analysis of Ottoman Hungary has been marked by a number of debates. Historians have come to different conclusions about the social and economic consequences of Ottoman rule and about the extent, if any, of depopulation in Ottoman Hungary. Historians have also presented different views about the extent of the social and cultural divide between Christian and Ottoman parts of Hungary and about the degree of continuity between the pre-Ottoman and Ottoman periods. Koller's study is grounded not only on a clear command of this secondary literature but also on

a broad range of surviving sources from Hungarian, Turkish, Austrian, and German archives. He is certainly to be congratulated on this significant achievement given the formidable linguistic and technical demands of this research. The results are set out in chapters focusing on representations of Ottoman Hungary in both Christian and Ottoman travel writing, on the changing pattern of religious life, on the administration of towns, and on taxation and the developing social structure of Ottoman Hungary.

Western writers who traveled through Ottoman Hungary portrayed a land suffering from decay and decline. The medieval “bulwark of Christianity” had collapsed and what remained seemed to travellers to show obvious signs of social and economic backwardness. Travelers to Buda noted the survival of some imposing buildings from the pre-Ottoman period but remarked upon many neglected homes with broken windows and gates. This negative view was balanced by some commentary about the quality of construction of baths in Buda and other towns, with travelers showing some understanding of the ritual and social significance of these baths for Muslims. Edward Brown, an Englishman traveling through Hungary in 1669, also commented on the impressive bridges used to transport goods and troops across the region. Brown described the impressive “bridge of boats over the Danube” at Buda and the bridges across fenland and the river Drava at Osijek.[1] Koller notes that in these Western accounts, as in the texts of Ottoman travelers and geographers, the land seems almost depopulated and very little detail is given about the communities of the region.

Given the limited information available from these travelers’ accounts, Koller turns his attention to other sources and focuses first on the religious life of the region. The Muslim population of Hungary was mostly composed of southern Slavs, and their mosques and colleges were concentrated in towns and districts where Ottoman troops

were based. Christians in Hungary were divided between adherents of the Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Reformed, and anti-Trinitarian churches. Support for the Catholic Church had collapsed across Hungary during the sixteenth century. This was not least because Ottoman triumphs on the battlefield seemed to provide convincing evidence to many Hungarians of the failing spiritual credentials of the Roman Church. Reformed and anti-Trinitarian preaching made progress in Ottoman Hungary and we have some surviving evidence about the religious life of these communities. This is in part because the border between Ottoman and Christian Hungary seems to have been rather porous in the realm of religious life. Calvinists and anti-Trinitarians were in contact with coreligionists in the eastern Hungarian plain and in Transylvania. Non-Catholics in Habsburg Hungary were also able to seek refuge in Ottoman-occupied areas during periods of intense Catholic persecution.

As Koller explains, the Catholic cause in Ottoman Hungary slowly recovered during the seventeenth century. This was partly thanks to mission efforts supported by the Habsburg court and the Roman authorities. The papacy declared the region a missionary territory under the supervision of the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*. This mission was led by Bosnian Franciscans who gained permission from the Ottoman authorities to move into Hungary. After 1625, an apostolic vicar was also appointed for Catholics living in Hungarian dioceses under Ottoman rule. Relations between Christian communities were sometimes marked by tension and confrontation. Koller highlights some Calvinist complaints to local Ottoman authorities about suffering harassment from Catholic priests. On the whole, the Ottoman authorities managed to maintain peace between their fractious Christian subjects. Provincial and district officials were mostly indifferent in their approach to the rival Christian churches. However, anti-Trinitarians attracted the interest of the governor of Pécs in 1641 to look into the ac-

tivities of Jesuits by portraying them as a political threat. The Jesuits were accused of acting as spies for the Habsburg regime and forced to pay a fine to avoid the threat of the death penalty. Overall, the provincial administration in Hungary was prepared to show considerable flexibility toward Christians. It proved possible, for example, in the 1660s for the Catholic authorities to gain permission to renovate and construct some church buildings. These were privileges routinely denied to Christian communities living elsewhere under Ottoman rule.

As Koller's attention turns toward questions of governance, he again sees a complex pattern of interaction between Ottoman power and local communities. The primary objective of the provincial authorities was to maintain political and social stability in their frontier province. Ottoman systems of government were adapted to encourage local interest groups to interact with Ottoman administrative and military structures. Koller's analysis of how Ottoman Hungary was governed challenges suggestions that an autonomous Hungarian pattern of local administration developed in towns that were not under immediate military administration. Christian judges (*bírók*) rather than Ottoman judges (*kadis*) were certainly appointed in many towns. Was this a sign of weakness in Ottoman administration? Koller stresses that Muslim officials were involved in the process of nomination and appointment of these judicial officers, who acted as buffers between the Christian population of towns and the Ottoman provincial authorities. Koller therefore sees the continuity of judicial structures in Hungary's towns as the result of a pragmatic policy that aimed to integrate local Christian elites within the Ottoman provincial administration.

How effective was the Ottoman administration at ensuring that the Hungarian provinces were self-sufficient? And, how effective were systems of tax farming, which levied dues from the harvest each year? The limitations of surviving

tax registers mean that these are difficult questions to answer fully. However, it seems clear that Ottoman Hungary proved unable to meet the costs of the troops stationed in its border fortresses. In attempting to overcome financial deficits, heavy burdens were placed on the local population in taxation and in duties on the wine trade and cattle trade. There were also extraordinary levies to sustain troops, including demands to provide provisions, horses, and equipment for a force of Tatars that wintered in Hungary in 1675. The difficulties of state finances in Ottoman Hungary were of course far from unique. Other border provinces in the Ottoman Empire experienced similar problems. Royal Hungary also required subsidies from other parts of the Habsburg monarchy to support the troops stationed in its border fortresses. Meanwhile, local groups pursued their own interests across the border. Hungarian nobles who had held land in Ottoman Hungary had quickly retreated to their estates further to the north. However, Hungarian nobles used troops stationed in Christian border fortresses to exact dues from villagers on their former estates inside Ottoman-held territory. Villagers were faced with a double burden of taxation, as they were also expected to pay the taxes due to their *sipahi* lords.

What conclusions emerge about the character of seventeenth-century Ottoman Hungary? Koller emphasizes the importance of recovering the history of this region as a whole. He argues that the fragmentation of study of Ottoman Hungary within national contexts in Hungary, Croatia, and Serbia has tended to obscure how this part of the medieval Hungarian monarchy became integrated into the Ottoman Empire. Koller also encourages readers to think about the history of Ottoman Hungary not as a unique frontier zone but in comparative perspective, taking into account parallel developments in other border zones of the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman Hungary lay on one side of a relatively stable border between the 1560s and 1680s, which was defended by chains

of fortresses and garrisons. At the same time, the Ottoman Empire in theory remained committed to the business of expansion, and only after the peace of Karlowitz was there at least implicit acknowledgement of a demarcated boundary to the Ottoman state and recognition of the territorial integrity of its northern neighbor. The border was seen from both sides as marking a profound cultural and religious divide. However, the analysis provided by Koller supports a view of this region as marked by complex patterns of exchange and interaction between Muslim authorities and Christian communities. Ottoman Hungary's governance and society forms part of a broader story of the development of the Ottoman Empire and, as Koller stresses, should also be seen in the context of other frontier zones across the Continent and in light of the emerging state system of the early modern period.

#### Note

[1]. Edward Brown, *A Brief Account of Some Travels in Hungaria ...* (London: 1673), 5.

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**Citation:** Graeme Murdock. Review of Koller, Markus. *Eine Gesellschaft im Wandel: Die osmanische Herrschaft in Ungarn im 17. Jahrhundert (1606-1683)*. HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. October, 2012.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=34499>



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