**A Fragmentary Image**

Tibor Frank’s book covers a short yet important period in British/Austro-Hungarian relations. His focus is primarily on the British public (most of the sources are drawn from newspapers, journals and books of the period); however, rather, incongruously, the study is framed not in terms of cultural history but primarily in the field of international relations. Yet, since the papers of the British Foreign Office are not investigated in any depth, the link between public perceptions and British foreign policy is unfortunately never fully articulated. Frank instead concentrates on the deliberate attempts to influence the construction of an Austro-Hungarian image, leaning heavily on the concept of “political marketing” (Frank’s term).

The book is divided (roughly) into two parts: the first details the creation of the Austro-Hungarian image (with stress on the contributions of the Austrian government, Hungarian exiles and British journalists) and the second, presenting different facets of the image, often in brief, relatively self-contained sections. It is difficult to find an overarching thesis to bind the elements together. Thus in contrast to the prevailing trend of postulating sweeping conclusions from seemingly minor events, rituals or texts, Frank’s book presents a rather old-fashioned panorama of British observations on the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

The interaction of Frank’s work with the historiography on the topics he treats reveals both the interesting and the problematic qualities of his approach. The first of these intriguing but troubling moments emerges in his treatment of the interaction of foreign policy with public perceptions in Britain. In the book, three interrelated and contradictory factors emerge as central to mid-nineteenth-century British perceptions of Austria-Hungary. First, pragmatism, a sentiment articulated by Lord Palmerston in 1849 (but not quoted by Frank): “Austria stands in the centre of Europe…. The political independence and the liberties of Europe are bound up … with the maintenance and integrity of Austria as a great European power.”[1] Frank downplays these considerations and argues that by the late 1860s, the “balance of power” principle had lost its influence in the British Foreign Office and a policy of non-intervention predominated (pp. 3-8). Nevertheless, the book includes a great deal of consideration of Austria as a great power and as an important part of a peaceful, stable Europe. Second, idealism. Much of the British press—supremely confident in its government—judged other countries on the basis of constitutional rule, parliamentary power, the protection of civil liberties and economic strength. In these respects, Austria had a bad record. Thus the British press commented negatively on Clemens von Metternich’s reactionary system, the repression of the 1848 Hungarian revolution, the long tradition of absolutism and Austrian
Catholicism. Of all the countries in Europe, only Russia received as much bad press in England as the Habsburg monarchy. Frank does not spend much time investigating this point, though it was clearly of importance in forming British judgments, especially with respect to the 1867 Compromise. Third, indifference: for Frank, perhaps the most distinctive characteristic. Indeed, Neville Chamberlain’s infamous words of 1938, describing Czechoslovakia as “a small faraway country about which we know little,” cast a long shadow over the book, although Frank does not cite them. At the beginning of the book, Frank describes Britain’s reluctance to engage in continental affairs during the mid- to late 1860s. Here a more extensive discussion of British interests in the East, particularly in light of the Crimean War and the desire to control the Turkish straits, would have been welcome. Moreover, Frank is ambivalent about the extent of British indifference. While quoting M. E. Grant Duff’s despairing summation of 1869 (“What statesman inside or outside the Empire knows anything at all of the facts of Austria? It is a science in itself, maybe it is half a dozen sciences” [cited on p. 14]), he also praises the extensive coverage of the Austro-Prussian War (p. 101) and the 1867 Compromise (p. 163). Characteristically, Frank does not systematically investigate these three factors—pragmatism, idealism and indifference—nor does he pursue an explicit argument. Instead, he concludes that “the meagre information ... did not make a homogeneous picture” (p. 177).

It is no surprise that Frank places his work within the sphere of international relations and diplomacy. Nevertheless, given his resort to press reports, he makes surprisingly little investigation into the formation of British foreign policy and its link to public attitudes. Indeed, Frank’s emphasis on the British government’s indifference to the Habsburg monarchy almost precludes any statement on the role of public opinion in government decision-making. In other words, even if the public had been particularly interested, how could its attitudes have had any influence on a passive British Foreign Office?

This approach presents a notable contrast to two monographs on British foreign policy and Central Europe during the turbulent years of World War I and its immediate aftermath. Harry Hanak and Gábor Bátónyi have postulated a strong British engagement in the area and an intimate link between perceptions and policy.[2] Closest in range and chronology to Frank’s work is Darwin Bostick’s thirty-five-year-old unpublished dissertation, which deals with the period 1846-78. Bostick asserted that there was “simply stupendous concern” for developments in Austria-Hungary.[3] Bostick argues that the negative image stemming from the suppression of the 1848-49 Hungarian Revolution shifted to a milder view after 1867-68 due to the implementation of a constitutional government. The traditional negative attitude nevertheless contributed to Britain’s reluctance to pursue an alliance with its “natural ally” on the continent throughout the whole period. Frank, however, does not make such wide-ranging claims. He does acknowledge the impact of Hungarian “political marketing,” especially Louis Kossuth’s potent linkage of freedom with the glorious language of William Shakespeare. Yet by the 1850s, Frank argues, Kossuth’s popularity was on the wane, preparing the path for a positive reassessment of the monarchy in 1867.

Thus for both Bostick and Frank, the years 1866-67 witnessed a fundamental change in British attitudes towards the Habsburg monarchy. In these crucial years, two events dominated the international scene and forced Britain to reconsider its position in Europe: the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 and the 1867 Compromise. According to Frank, the British government observed strict neutrality during the Austro-Prussian War while the British press, like that of most of Europe, predicted success for Austria. After Austria’s defeat, the British press presented the outcome in moral terms. Prussia embodied a “natural state body” and the future of the German nation (pp. 150-157). Yet fears persisted of collapse and potential chaos on the continent. Most British commentators believed the monarchy (or at least some form of Danube Confederation) should continue. They also espoused a general desire for Austria to combat Russia in the East (pp. 171-175). As ever, the British government and public were perched between pragmatism and idealism.

The 1867 Compromise is of particular interest to Frank, describing his book as the “study [of] ... structural change and its British perception ... first and foremost in the perception of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise” (p. xv). It is here that a second problematic moment emerges: Frank’s unwillingness to locate his discussion within the context of the international situation of the time and the existing scholarship on the 1867 Compromise. Indeed, the book’s analysis is tangential to the mainstream of the Compromise’s historiography, which has focused mostly on assessing its long-term viability and role in the collapse of the monarchy.

For such an important milestone in European history, the 1867 Compromise has not attracted much recent scholarship, suffering a double neglect due to its...
perceived failure and a general scholarly tendency to forget or denigrate Austria-Hungary when considering it in comparison to other European powers. In fact, the two monographs that dominate the Compromise’s historiography appeared shortly before and after the collapse of the monarchy itself. Louis Eisenmann’s *Le Compro-
mis Austro-Hongrois de 1867* (originally published in 1904 with a new edition in 1968) recounts the historical ba-
is of the Compromise over seven hundred pages of cool prose and wonderfully terse judgments. Similarly, Josef Redlich’s detailed exposition of the day-to-day machina-
tions leading to the 1867 Compromise (1920-26) remains unsurpassed to this day. Eisenmann’s and Redlich’s as-
sessments of the Compromise as a rigid and largely re-
pressive measure have been enormously influential.[4] This view has been challenged recently. In particular, the ongoing series *Die Habsburger Monarchie* has ques-
tioned the old, pessimistic judgments found in the works of Eisenmann, Redlich, Oscar Jasi, Robert Kann and Pe-
ter Sugar.[5] The best recent discussions of the Compro-
mise have appeared in the context of this series. As a
necessary supplement, two studies are essential: John Boyer’s two-volume work on Christian Socialism in Vi-
enna, which argues for a relatively flexible political sys-
tem and Pieter Judson’s work on Austro-German liberals, which illuminates their considerable achievements, par-
ticularly in constructing a constitutional state in difficult circumstances.[6]

Apart from these works a handful of books from the Compromise’s centenary treat this material, including three useful edited volumes and a short monograph that bears a striking resemblance to Frank’s.[7] André Lor-
ant’s monograph focuses on the Compromise from the perspective of French public opinion. Like Frank, Lor-
ant places his study in the field of international relations, but with a number of notable differences. First of all, France’s central position in continental affairs and its response to the growing power of Prussia allow Lorant to make broader points on the interaction between pub-
lic opinion and government policy. Despite a number of diplomatic overtures towards Austria (including a much-
publicized meeting between Franz Joseph and Napoleon III in Salzburg from on August 18-22, 1867) and solid pub-
lic support for deeper relations, no lasting alliance devel-
oped between the two countries—because, Lorant argues, Napoleon III fundamentally misread the new arrange-
ment in the monarchy. His traditional concentration on Vienna as the center of governmental decision-making and the consequent neglect of Hungary’s resurgent influ-
ence prevented a possible alliance between Austria and

France, eventually leading to the latter’s isolation in the
Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. Second, Lorant’s ac-
count of the French press places more emphasis on the
French government’s active role as a censor and partic-
ipant while also better clarifying the political stance of
each newspaper or journal. Frank, by contrast, high-
lights individual articles but typically does not provide
an overall framework for the British press within which
to place such articles. The political affiliations of each
newspaper and journal are only given in the comprehen-
sive bibliography. Instead, Frank uses the term “politi-
cal marketing” to describe various Austrian and Hungar-
ian attempts to influence British public opinion. There
were two main sides to this political marketing: the Aus-
trian government’s attempts to cultivate British support
(led by Count Friedrich Ferdinand von Beust and Am-
bassador Rudolf Apponyi) and Kossuth’s attempts (with
help from Seb Vukovics and Ferenc Pulszky) to perpet-
uate the memory of Hungary’s noble fight for freedom
and independence against the oppressive Habsburgs.

Thus on the positive side, Frank demonstrates an ad-
mirable grasp of the Austrian (later Austro-Hungarian)
ambassador’s role in London, with copious descriptions
of London’s high society and Apponyi’s connections in it
(pp. 20-32). It is interesting to note that Ernst von Plener
(the later leader of the Austro-German liberals and Fi-
inance Minister of Cisleithania) and Gustav Kálnoky (For-
eign Minister, 1881-95) both worked for an extended pe-
riod of time at the London Embassy. The effect on Plener
was profound, and he was later often described by con-
temporaries as a cold, stiff Englishman.

But Frank’s choice of the term “political marketing”
has less effective features as well. Frank’s assiduous work
uncovers many articles and travel accounts of the time,
yet his discussion of the contents is rather perfunctory.
Often useful background information for an article and
author is given, while its actual contents are only cur-
orarily summarized. So the emphasis often falls on the
person or institution producing the article rather than
on its contents and possible impact. For example, Frank
mentions William Howell Russell, the famous war cor-
respondent for the *Times*, but Russell’s reports on the
Austro-Prussian War are not analyzed. Frank’s discus-
sion of Arthur Patterson’s *The Magyars* (1869), on the
other hand, is detailed and informative, although Patter-
son’s book was arguably less influential than Howell’s
reports.

Understandably, Frank is skeptical about the success
of political marketing. The all-important *Times* remained

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relatively independent and the various Beust-sponsored pamphlets had limited influence. The press’s interpretation of the 1867 Compromise demonstrates the play of different factors in creating a more general perception. The press generally recognized that through the Compromise, Austria-Hungary had rescued its great power status. It also praised the Compromise as a realization of the moderate 1848 ideals (and equated them with the ideal of British reform within a legal framework). On the other hand, Kossuth’s 1849 actions were now viewed as too radical, even dictatorial (pp. 162-167).

Ultimately, the diffuse quality of the different sentiments Frank presents prevails. The final section of Frank’s book is a kaleidoscope of images, mostly based on the same sources as the marketing section, without any attempt at an overarching argument. Thus British perceptions of Austro-Hungary’s domestic politics and its role in international affairs—so intimately linked—are divided into separate sub-sections entitled “Nationality Question in Hungary,” “Problems of Internal Settlement: Austro-Hungarian Relations,” “The German Question,” “The Austro-Hungarian Compromise,” “The Multi-National State” and “Austria and the Balance of Power.” Here, Frank has uncovered much material on the individual issues and presents a good summary of British attitudes. Amongst the sub-sections is an interesting discussion on “A Parallel for Ireland,” comparing Hungary’s position to that of Ireland’s. Regrettably, Frank makes no comparison of this material to Karel Havlicek’s pre-1848 coded articles on Ireland as a surrogate Bohemia.

These decisions may partly be explained by the book’s origin as a revised version of Frank’s earlier book The British Image of Hungary. Frank has broadened the scope of the book to cover the whole Habsburg monarchy, yet the structure remains the same, as does the emphasis on Hungary. Consequently, important sources that might have been evocative of a larger picture are omitted. Frank includes only a limited discussion of the British ambassador in Vienna, even though he could be regarded as the most important shaper of government opinion, and makes hardly any reference to Bohemia or Galicia. For example, the translations of Hungarian authors such as Sandor Petöfi, Mor Jokai and Pal Gyulai are commented upon, but George Eliot’s attempt to evoke the atmosphere of Prague in her novella The Lifted Veil, first published in Blackwood’s in 1859 and undoubtedly drawing a considerable readership, is not mentioned. Indeed, the great cities of the Habsburg monarchy (Vienna, Prague, Budapest, Krakow)—so prominent and richly described in travel literature—are barely touched upon.

While Baron Bloomfield’s dispatches from Vienna are not discussed, an invaluable appendix contains the full reports from Budapest written by his gifted subordinate, Robert Morier. In over a hundred pages of text, the reader is plunged deep into the crucial months from January to April 1866, when the Hungarians were drafting the Compromise and the Austro-Prussian War was fast approaching. Morier first provides a lengthy historical analysis of the present state of affairs between Austria and Hungary before describing the various political parties within Hungary. In a conversation with Franz Joseph, Morier made the following perspicacious assessment: “[T]here was a certain local narrowness in the political opinions I found prevalent amongst all parties here which prevented their seeing the bearings of the present important crisis not only on the interests of the Empire but those of Europe at large, and that at a moment when all eyes ought to be fixed on the future the regard of Hungarian politicians seemed to me too exclusively concentrated on the past” (cited on p. 240).

Frank’s conclusion sums up the difficulties of his argument. He insists on the lack of a homogeneous picture and the primacy of “individual views” (p. 177). He also reiterates the general British lack of interest in Austria-Hungary. Nevertheless, he notes “factors in opinions” (namely, underlying common attitudes)—such as Europe’s balance of power and the support for the 1867 Compromise—as a moderate solution. Thus, he stresses the variety and uniqueness of different viewpoints, but does not deny the existence of certain shared assumptions. Frank’s emphasis is on the former but any bolder conclusions must surely be based on the latter. Moreover, any connections between conscious attempts at “political marketing,” their lack of success with the British public and the possible effect on official British policy are not fully explored.

Given these considerations, a larger question emerges as to the purpose of the book. If there was only general indifference coupled with a number of varying, individual views in Britain, then what effect on affairs could any attitudes have had? Not much, according to Frank. But then what were the determining factors for British foreign policy towards Austria-Hungary? Frank barely touches on this fundamental question in his first chapter.

The study of Anglo-Austria/Hungarian relations constitutes a fascinating topic, yet it remains relatively under-researched. Frank’s book is a small window through which we glimpse a potentially rich field.
For example, the importance of England in the imagination of Austro-Hungarian politicians was immense. Plener, Jozsef Eötvös and Istvan Szechenyi, among others, looked to England as a model for Austria-Hungary’s development. Indeed, Anglophilia remained strong into the interwar period, as Eric Hobsbawm has recounted in his recent autobiography (2002). Similarly, scholarship on the 1867 Compromise is thin on the ground, particularly on its practical administrative effects (Gerald Stourzh’s work on Article 19—the nationalities article—presents an admirable model).[9] Frank’s meticulous survey of the British material suggests much without ever attempting a compelling synthesis.

Notes


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