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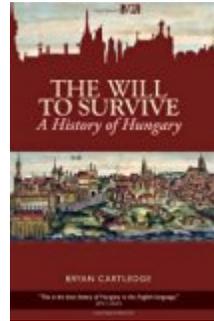
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Bryan Cartledge. *The Will to Survive: A History of Hungary*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. 600 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-70224-9.

Reviewed by Gabor Vermes (Rutgers)

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How Hungary Survived Centuries of Adversity

Sir Bryan Cartledge studied history at Cambridge and Oxford. After joining the British Foreign Service in 1960, he enjoyed a spectacularly successful diplomatic career, serving as private secretary for Overseas Affairs to two prime ministers and as ambassador to Hungary (1980-83) and the Soviet Union (1985-88). He was knighted in 1985. Cartledge became captivated by Hungarian history. His book, *The Will to Survive*, is not only a labor of love but also a thoroughly scholarly work that should be on the shelves of experts and interested readers alike. It is organized chronologically and it covers all major themes in Hungarian history: social and economic developments as well as religious transformations and policies pursued by monarchs and various feudal institutions, such as the feudal diets. The relationship between Hungarians and the Habsburg dynasty is a central feature in chapters spanning the centuries from the sixteenth century through 1918.

Nevertheless, although exquisitely written, the quality of this work is somewhat uneven. Cartledge is most at home in writing chapters that cover the mid-late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His coverage of these later periods is outstanding, but that is not uniformly the case in chapters that deal with earlier periods. It is, for instance, an exaggeration to say that “only a hundred years after the arrival to the Carpathian Basin ... the Hungarians had become Europeans,” when in fact that was a drawn-out and painfully slow process (p. 12). Yet his claim that Istvan Werboczy’s influence was malignant is accurate, as is his depiction of the devastating impact of

the battle of Mohacs in 1526, his perception of a divided Hungary in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and his evaluation of the Rakoczi Rebellion in the eighteenth century.

Unfortunately, the chapters that cover the period from 1711, the year when the Rakoczi Rebellion was defeated, through the Revolution of 1848 and subsequent War of Independence in 1848/1849 are weak in certain places. They contain both factual errors and errors of interpretation. For example, the relationship between Queen Maria Theresia and the Hungarians was more nuanced than the somewhat one-sided characterization offered by the author. True, the queen was grateful to the Hungarians for having rescued her reign in 1741. Although the author does mention that “her patience [was] exhausted by the Hungarian Estates,” he underplays this sentiment (p. 131). Upon the completion of the 1764 Diet, Maria Theresia virtually exploded with anger at the Hungarians. It is also true that “she was a bigoted woman,” but, at times, reason of state prevailed (p. 132). Her famous Hungarian Royal Guard had a few Protestant members, and she banned the virulently anti-Protestant book by Bishop Marton Biro Padanyi.

Cartledge’s evaluation of the colonization debate and the portrait of Joseph II are very good, as are the narratives on Austro-Hungarian relations, Hungarian agrarian society, Count Istvan Szechenyi, Lajos Kossuth, and the language issue. Ferenc Kazinczy, the leader of the Hungarian language reform, however, was not an intol-

erant Hungarian nationalist, as Cartledge describes him—indeed, he was the contrary. And the centralists of the 1840s should not be equated with the intelligentsia as a whole, because they were only part of it. The liberal nobility, led by Kossuth, had its own intellectual supporters, such as Ferenc Pulszky, as did the young Hungarian democrats in Pest, grouped around the poet Sandor Petofi, who were oriented toward France, hoping to transform Hungary into a democratic republic.

Errors of interpretation are not solely the author's fault; the secondary sources on which he relies have nearly uniformly distorted, to varying degrees, the situation in Hungary in the late eighteenth and early-mid nineteenth centuries. It has become an axiom in modern Hungarian historiography to magnify the importance of the Enlightenment in the late eighteenth century, and emphasize the advance of liberalism, long before it actually happened from the mid-late 1830s through the 1840s. In fact, Hungarian society and political thinking were primarily influenced during those periods by traditionalist conservatism and by the leading estate in feudal Hungary. This was the case, to a large extent, even after liberalism had become popular among certain segments of the Hungarian nobility.

Unfortunately, the author uncritically rehashes the conventional interpretation, at times to the point of absurdity, writing that “burghers used French ideas to support their demands for the abolition of the nobility” (p. 151). In reality, most burghers, if they had sufficient funds, were extremely keen on buying their way into the nobility. Nor is it generally true that even literate peasants read the translation of Montesquieu's *The Spirits of*

the Laws. Nor did the Enlightenment, a universalist set of ideas, awaken, in any major fashion, nationalism, as Cartledge notes. Although leaders of the Enlightenment in Hungary, such as Gyorgy Bessenyei, were supporters of Hungarian culture, it was romanticism that was much more responsible for fostering nationalism in the early-mid nineteenth century, not only among Hungarians but among the country's ethnic minorities as well. The author also exaggerates the progress of liberalism which is represented as a triumphant forward march. Although he does mention the Conservative Party, he gives it insufficient credit as a political force that, in fact, equaled the strength of its liberal adversaries.

The chapters covering the period from 1849 through the present are truly outstanding, both in their fluid narratives and in their analysis. I slightly disagree only on minor points. The period of 1945-48 could indeed be distinguished as an “illusion of democracy,” as Cartledge states, but in hindsight more than at the time (p. 414). Immediately after the war, hopes were still high in Hungary that a genuine democracy could be established. The feudal structure was destroyed, but not the feudal spirit: it still exists today. Finally, Mihaly Farkas, one of the Stalinist leaders, came from Slovakia but was not a Slovak. As British ambassador to Hungary between 1980 and 1983, Cartledge gained personal insight into the Kadar regime. He brilliantly characterizes the mood of the Hungarian population as “passive fatalism” (p. 467).

All in all, I finished reading this book with genuine appreciation and respect for its author and for what he has accomplished.

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