

Ferenc Szakaly. *Lodovico Gritti in Hungary 1529-1534: A Historical Insight into the Beginnings of Turco-Habsburgian Rivalry.* Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1995. 143 pp. \$23.00, cloth, ISBN 978-963-05-6815-9.

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There can be little question that Hungary played a pivotal role in the geopolitics of Ottoman expansion in the mid-sixteenth century. I doubt that any scholar of Central or Southeastern European history would debate this point, though it is true that, in the United States at least, Hungarian scholarship is not at the center of early modern historical discourse—but perhaps this can be attributed to the vagaries of the linguistic training available to graduate students in our research institutions, where French, German, and Italian are preferred languages of study. Most secondary scholarship from Hungary, and some of the primary material, have remained, alas, unavailable to non-Hungarians. And thus it is to fill this lacuna in Western scholarship that Ferenc Szakaly presents his slim volume. The author notes (p. 9) that one of his stated purposes is "to convince ... interested foreign scholars that ... it is at least just as worthwhile an effort to be immersed in studying the cobweb of Hungarian politics of the time, as has been done in the case ... of Venice."

This straw man constructed, Szakaly then endeavors to show how Hungarian sources can be used to tie together the various threads in the complicated and cloudy history of the Venetian Lodovico Gritti's brief but undoubtedly central role in brokering Ottoman-Hungarian diplomacy from 1529 to 1534. However, while one cannot deny that the author is thoroughly "immersed in studying the cobweb" of sixteenth-century Hun-

garian politics and diplomacy, this book does not really go very far in advancing the noble and worthwhile cause of furthering Hungarian historiography in the West.

Much of this failure is not the fault of the author or of his scholarship. From the beginning, it must be said clearly that Szakaly's work has been seriously undermined by a translation of appalling quality. Convoluted, ungrammatical, curiously and awkwardly phrased, the text reads consistently like a poorly constructed grammar-school essay or, at very least, a parody of English as written by non-native speakers. No less than three translators were employed to render Szakaly's work from Hungarian into English, and the resulting text is not worthy of Szakaly's reputation as an early modern historian of some merit or even of the possible enlightenment this work itself might afford. An example (p. 111):

Those to whom it perhaps occurred that the Turks were remarkably helped by the ruling class in Serbia and Bosnia in accomplishing the annexation of those countries to the Ottoman Empire (and there must have been such persons in Hungary), obviously tended to brush aside their uneasy feelings by asserting that Hungary was quite another matter. It is too large and much more respected to be in the same boat with those countries.

Similar awkward passages can be found on nearly every page.

However, if we are to put aside the matter of comprehensibility, we are left with the question of the book's scholarly achievements, and its stated attempt to illuminate the subject of Gritti's role as diplomat. The crux of Szakaly's larger argument is that most of those who have examined Gritti before--most notably Heinrich Kretschmayr at the end of the last century, who wrote a monograph, *Lodovico Gritti* (Vienna, 1896), translated into Hungarian in 1901; and Kenneth Setton, who wrote of Gritti as "an extraordinary figure" in his *Papacy and the Levant (1204-1571)*--have been scholars with preoccupations with Venice and Venetian sources, who have thus ignored the Hungarian side of the story. This really isn't too surprising: Kretschmayr and Setton were two of the finest Venetian historians of their respective generations and the Gritti family was one of the most eminent of the Republic. Indeed, Lodovico's own father, Andrea Gritti, had been doge of Venice.

This leaves us then with the question: Do the new sources used by Szakaly shed new light on Gritti and on the diplomatic history of the period? On this score, there is some doubt. There can be no question that some of the published Hungarian sources used by Szakaly, such as the *Magyar Tortenelmi Tar* and the *Monumenta Hungariae Historica* or the writings of Hungarian court chaplain Gyorgy Szeremi, add a certain intimate and allegorical flavor to the narrative. But Szakaly uses many of these sources, notably Szeremi, rather uncritically to relate anecdotal material about Gritti in Hungary, with little real scholarly effect. The narrative line supplied by Setton and Kretschmayr is not really advanced at all and, in fact, Szakaly uses a large number of the same Venetian sources (often from Hungarian editions or translations) used by the earlier scholars to give his monograph its narrative line.

While it is clearly to be hoped that a full integration of Hungarian, Venetian, and Ottoman

source material could be transformed into a comprehensive history of Southeastern and Central Europe in the first third of the sixteenth century, Szakaly's purpose, despite his claims, seems, rather, to be something else entirely. As his conclusion remarks, he desires to highlight Hungarian exceptionalism within the "Eastern European" context and to suggest Hungary's reintegration into the purview of "western" European history and historiography. Yet, if Hungarian scholarship and source material are to be given their full due in the broader scholarly world, they must be rendered accessible to other scholars in a form that does not make readers cringe in embarrassment.

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