

From Semi-Colony to Sub-Empire

The Changeable Status of the Hungarian Kingdom in the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy*

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Abstract. This study analyses the historiographical application of two concepts (colony, and empire), the contemporary interpretations of which fundamentally determined judgements about the status of Hungary within the Habsburg Monarchy. Despite the fact that the concept of ‘colony’ as used in the eighteenth century was widely known, the category of the ‘semi-colony’ eventually proved to be unable to describe the conditions of the Austrian–Hungarian world in the second half of the nineteenth century. The term ‘Hungarian Empire’ clearly arose from the language of the nineteenth century. Various meanings of this were formulated: as a term for the one-time territory of Hungarian Kingdom (the Holy Crown of St. Stephen, meaning Hungary proper, Transylvania, Croatia, and Slavonia) on the one hand; and another one that included expansion beyond the Carpathian basin (mainly toward southeastern Europe). A third meaning also existed: a Hungarian-centered version that included all Habsburg provinces, which from time to time was hard to distinguish from the first and second meanings mentioned above. Reviewing the asymmetrical but parallel developments of the concepts of ‘colony’ and ‘empire,’ we must establish that in the long term the case for the usage of both terms has been undermined. Even more does this opinion seem to be valid in the case of derivative, retrospectively constructed concepts (such as semi-colony, and sub-empire) that are not rooted in the dictionary of the historical sources and conceptual history of political ideas.

Keywords: Marxist historiography, colony, ‘semi-colony,’ empire, ‘Hungarian empire,’ ‘sub-empire’

The historiographies of all nations must elaborate their relation to transnational concepts. Such an attempt has a chance to be effective only in the case when the terminology of the historian fits the discourse of the historical sources. In this study, I try to analyse the historiographical application of two concepts (colony, and empire),

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the contemporary interpretations of which fundamentally determined judgements about the status of Hungary in the Habsburg Monarchy. From a historiographical point of view, related derivative terms that are not rooted either in the dictionary of the historical sources, nor in discourses of the conceptual history of political ideas (semi-colony, sub-empire), are particularly noteworthy.

The historical relevance of the concept of the 'semi-colony'

In the 'Iron Age' of Marxist historiography in the 1950s, a leading Hungarian economic historian, Vilmos Sándor, self-critically interpreted the former use of the term 'semi-colony' as applied to the status of Hungary in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

"The introduction of this concept, the semi-colonial situation of Hungary, which proclaimed the dependent and submissive situation of Hungary, had the advantage of not only being simpler, better known and more comprehensible than any other likely theory, but also of having considerable propagandistic force. It was suitable for leaving a permanent record in public consciousness."¹

The self-critical comment quoted above from Vilmos Sándor essentially reflected on the fact that, as compared to post-1945 historians who branded Hungary's pre-1867 status 'colonial,' the former's own application of Lenin's concept of the 'semi-colony' to post-Compromise relations between Austria and Hungary was, relatively speaking, a progressive step. But before we put all the blame on the Marxists for even raising the question, we must clarify that the starting point—the thesis of Hungary's colonial dependence on Austria—was not something that communist historians came up with; in actual fact, it was deeply rooted in the traditions of Hungarian historiography—and it was not just embraced by the pro-independence *kuruc* school either. Even if we limit ourselves to merely staking out some of the more important stages of the proliferation of this idea, we must go all the way back to the very dawn of professional history writing in Hungary and point to Henrik Marczali's work on the era of Joseph II. This was the first historical work in Hungary to rely on the study of archival sources on file in Vienna. In this work, Marczali elaborated the thesis of Hungary's 'colonial dependence,' quoting the typology of Wilhelm Roscher, a prominent figure of the historical school of national economics.² In Marczali's usage, the concept of the 'colony' still preserved its original double meaning. On the one hand, the term was still used in reference to

1 Sándor, "Magyarország függőségének jellege," 94.

2 Roscher, *Kolonien*; Marczali, *Magyarország*, 108, 134, 142.

the actual ‘coloni’ (*colonus* meaning ‘settler’); on the other hand, it was also understood as referring to the colonial relationship between the United Kingdom and its colonies in the sense of global economics and politics. Applying both meanings to Hungary simultaneously seemed to be possible: on the one hand, the central parts of the country taken back from the Ottomans—namely, the Great Hungarian Plain, which Marczali identified as one of the country’s economic systems—were characterized by intensive resettlement throughout the entire eighteenth century; on the other hand, the northwestern part of Hungary—which Marczali understood as the vehicle of another, more Western type of economic system within Hungary—was very much subject to the influence of the hereditary provinces that made every effort to monopolize their markets and reinforce Hungary’s dependence.³ In his analysis, Marczali used careful, nuanced language:

“Then again, our homeland was not entirely a colony; it did have its own industry even if much oppressed by that of the mother country. And as far as colonization itself is concerned, the old Hungary played at least as much of a role as the hereditary provinces.”⁴

In this respect Marczali reflected on the so-called ‘old Hungary’ itself as a colonizer, still in a sense not the developed national viewpoint.

It was Ferenc Eckhart’s work on Hungary’s colonial status that laid the foundations of writing history based on archival sources available in Vienna. Having exploited nearly all the relevant documentation, Eckhart was fully aware both of the novelty of his work as far as his treatment of the historical sources was concerned and of the topicality of his concept.

“Time and time again, our recent historical literature echoes the acrid accusations that Vienna’s economic policy treated Hungary as if it were a colony and that its objective was to keep the country in permanent dependence on Austria. Thus far, no systematic work based on archival research has been done to verify whether this accusation is justified, although the issue merits thorough and complete analysis in the light of the important consequences it has had to date.”⁵

In writing about industrial policy, he further expounded this link by placing it into an international context.

3 Marczali, *Magyarország*, 113. “Hungary, which is a colony in [an] economic respect, still must pay for the fact that [s]he is not quite a colony in political regard.”

4 Marczali, *Magyarország*, 143.

5 Eckhart, *A bécsi udvar*, 4. In this respect, his work does not contain direct historiographical references. On Eckhart, see recently Törő, *A szellemtörténet*.

“In Vienna, the Monarchy was seen not only as a political but also as an economic unit; it is only self-explanatory that the efforts to gain industrial independence for the Monarchy from foreign nations were concentrated in those parts of the Monarchy that had most industrial potential to begin with, which were, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the hereditary provinces. Within this economic unit, Hungary was meant to play the same role as, in the eyes of Colbert, all of Central Europe played vis-à-vis France, or as his follower, Frederick the Great expected Poland to play vis-à-vis Prussia: that of a supplier of raw materials and a market for manufactured goods; in other words, as a target of economic exploitation.”⁶

This language makes it very clear—and it also follows from the basic concept of his entire book—that for Eckhart, the terminology used by Vienna’s contemporary economic policy consultants is an accurate reflection of the actual economic impact that those policies had.

“Vienna’s mercantilist industrial policy in Hungary was in fact a colonial policy. If we read the views of Justi—the »cameralist« widely read by Vienna councillors—on what economic treatment he recommends in dealing with colonies, and then compare those partly with the policies we have detailed above and partly with the express views of the economic council, it is impossible not to agree with the Hungarian historians blaming the Queen on account of the fact that, under her rule, the country’s economic exploitation reached levels normally seen in how other European countries treat their colonies.”⁷

In his grand synthesis, Gyula Szekfű essentially shared the same views about Hungary’s ‘colonial status.’ Writing about the absolutism of Leopold I, he spoke of the “original sin” of Austrian absolutism and the “whole Austrian state-idea.” “Hungary is the colonial territory of the Austrian provinces having highly developed industry, this concept in the bud exists in the texts of Austrian cameralists when they first imagine the politically so different lands of the Monarchy as a unified economic area.”⁸ Even concerning Maria Theresa—notwithstanding all his respect and empathy for her—he

6 Eckhart, *A bécsi udvar*, 120.

7 Eckhart, *A bécsi udvar*, 124. The German résumé expresses more sharply the essence of this statement: “Ungarn blieb infolge der Industriepolitik Maria Theresias in der Entwicklung zurück und nahm an dem sich allgemein durch die kapitalistischen Unternehmungen hebenden Wohlstand nicht teil; es wurde einer fremden Industrie ausgeliefert und wie eine Kolonie behandelt.” Eckhart, *A bécsi udvar*, 360.

8 Szekfű, *Magyar történet. A tizenhetedik század*, 346. In the references he relies on works of O. Redlich and H. Srbik, but—as he writes—in regard to economics, he had to “turn away” from their concepts. Szekfű, *Magyar történet. A tizenhetedik század*, 422.

had to point out that “the queen had been convinced in her heart of hearts [...] that she had acted properly when she had sunk one country of her monarchy into such a colonial status.”⁹ During World War II even Domokos Kosáry in his article on Lajos Kossuth’s nationalism could not break away from this dominant discourse, but his formulation concerning the age of reforms—“we were almost in colonial dependence”—contained some effort to interpret more cautiously.¹⁰

We consider it important to give these aspects proper emphasis, partly in order to highlight the fact that Hungary’s colonial status within the Habsburg Empire was part of the dominant discourse even before the communists took over, and partly because we believe it worthwhile to point out the fact that this position admittedly and consciously confronted the views proposed by Austrian historians to the opposite effect.

After 1945, in the new political environment, this familiar old discourse re-emerged once again, this time with renewed content. In this context, it seems quite significant that József Révai, one of the regime’s chief ideologists at the time, had praised Eckhart in a book he had written back in 1932 when he was still in prison, and published only much later. As he wrote, “the tax exemption enjoyed by the Hungarian nobility was undoubtedly one of the reasons—although not a primary reason—behind Austria’s colonial customs policy. In fact, on many occasions, this tax exemption protected Hungarian manufactories against the Vienna government’s colonial policies....”¹¹ Révai, however, was eventually able to reverse his earlier evaluation of Hungary’s semi-colonial status. As he wrote in 1948, the Compromise “made Hungary dependent on Austria. In economic terms, this meant maintaining the country’s semi-colonial status, slowing down Hungary’s independent economic development, and impeding Hungarian industrial development....”¹² Erzsébet Andics, coming home from Moscow as a leading historian, formulated the sharpest ideological signal of the decisive year in her inaugural address for the reorganized Hungarian Historical Association in the spring of 1949:

“[H]ardly disputable is that the second terrible distress of Hungarian people was the [its] century old colonial fate. We could not completely overcome its serious economic, political and cultural consequences [until now]

9 Szekfű, *Magyar történet. A tizennyolcadik század*, 320. In the bibliography he declared the following: concerning modern descriptions “of the economic, customs- and commercial policy relations,” he had exclusively taken his bearing from Eckhart’s work. Szekfű, *Magyar történet. A tizennyolcadik század*, 484.

10 Kosáry, “A Pesti Hírlap nacionalizmusa,” 374.

11 Révai, “Marx és a magyar forradalom,” 111. On the origin of this text and its later variants, see Lackó’s masterful analysis: Lackó “Révai-problémák,” 229–63.

12 Révai, *48 útján*, 71–72. On the frequent changes in the views of Révai, see Hanák, “Historizálás és történetiség,” 176–77, 214.

and we have a lot of task[s] in this field for the future. At the same time [,] Hungarian historiography glorified the Habsburg [...] dynasty and its colonizer politics.”¹³

The concept—which, as we have seen, was nothing new to begin with—underwent yet another metamorphosis in which it was equipped with all the bells and whistles of academic argumentation—this, however, did not happen at the hands of the honorary president (Révai) or the president (Andics) of the Hungarian Historical Association, even though they were frequently quoted on the issue.

In this respect, we could highlight Zsigmond Pál Pach’s work, published in 1949 under the title *Az eredeti tőkefelhalmozás gyarmati korlátai Magyarországon 1848 előtt* (Colonial Impediments to the Primitive Accumulation of Capital in Hungary Prior to 1848), first in the relaunched historical review *Századok*, and one year later in a separate pamphlet.¹⁴ The paper listed all previous literature from Adolf Beer to Heinrich Srbik, from Marczali through Eckhart to Szekfű, and even quoted a number of titles by Soviet historians in the bibliography, while also profusely quoting Marx, Lenin, and Stalin.¹⁵ In Pach’s interpretation, “the colonial system of the Habsburgs” had gone through various stages in Hungary, with the initial stage of the process taking place during the early eighteenth century.¹⁶ The second stage was “the development of a fully-fledged system of colonialism and protectionism [...] under the rule of Maria Theresa and Joseph II.”¹⁷ The third stage started at the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁸ Of course, portraying this process as a class struggle that reached well into the first half of the nineteenth century primarily served the purpose of creating historical justification for the 1848/49 bourgeois revolution and war of independence.

13 Andics, “Elnöki székfoglaló,” 7. *Századok* had a huge delay in publication: Andics’s inaugural address of 27 March 1949 appeared in the volume of 1948.

14 Pach, *Az eredeti tőkefelhalmozás*. This study originally constituted the second part of the work: P. Zsigmond, “Szempontok az eredeti tőkefelhalmozás vizsgálatához Magyarországon;” P. Zsigmond, “Szempontok az eredeti tőkefelhalmozás vizsgálatához Magyarországon, II.” Later, however, it was also published as an offprint under another title: Pach, *Az eredeti tőkefelhalmozás*. I quote this latter version of the paper.

15 Among the references we can find Aladár Mód’s (1908–1973) comment as well, who, as the chief editor of the ideological periodical published by the communist party, criticized the 1948 volume of *Századok*, including the first part of the Pach paper on primitive accumulation. Mód in his book *Mód, 400 év küzdelem*, first published in 1943 but then also in several revised and enlarged editions, contributed to the temporal extension of the colonial discourse to nineteenth-century Hungarian history, but in his narrative the accent was not put on this terminology. Mód, *400 év küzdelem*, 98, 273. On Mód see Romsics, *Clio* bűvöletében, 352–55, 381–82.

16 Pach, *Az eredeti tőkefelhalmozás*, 14.

17 Pach, *Az eredeti tőkefelhalmozás*, 30.

18 Pach, *Az eredeti tőkefelhalmozás*, 35.

The complete range of the renewed terminology was canonized during the years of the writing of the new university textbooks on the era. Concerning the pre-1848 Vormärz period, there was no need for terminological innovation, but with regard to the relations to the Habsburgs after 1849 some new explanation was to be invented. The colony discourse was given, ready for reinterpretation. The relevant volume had a preface written by Zsigmond Pál Pach and Péter Hanák.

“After the failed revolution and war of independence, the ensuing absolutism introduced severe colonial oppression while the feudal system also survived in vestigial forms. Under such conditions, no complete harmony could arise between the relations of production and the productive forces. After the achievements of the revolution of 1848–49 and the counter-revolutionary system of absolutism, the final balance of the era of the bourgeois revolution was drawn in 1867. [...A] after the Compromise, bourgeois development lagged behind, dragged down by the heavy heritage of the Middle Ages: the development of capitalism followed the Prussian model with all its failures and frustrations; vestiges of the feudal past survived throughout the entire era, strong as ever; the dependence and oppression that had weighed the country down in the era of the Habsburg Empire lived on in the form of the semi-colonial relations linking the country to Austria; as far as the methods of governance were concerned, many of their absolutistic characteristics stayed around to haunt; and, finally, a multiethnic Hungary preserved and in fact strengthened its state systems for the oppression of its national minorities.”¹⁹

However, the terminology related to Hungary’s ‘semi-colonial’ status still needed to be elaborated by the various specialty areas.

Economic historians studying the era following 1867 had an important role to play in the application of the concept of the ‘semi-colony.’ In addition to Pach, we must mention Vilmos Sándor, whose self-critical comment from his later work we have quoted in our introduction. A footnote to the very first chapter of his monograph on industrial development in the period between 1867 and 1900 offers a more elaborate definition:

“During the period between 1849 and 1867, Hungary’s colonial status implied that the country lost its independence, it became a part of the Austrian empire, while from 1867 its semi-colonial situation allowed the country to recuperate its independent statehood in a restricted way with foreign affairs, military affairs, and any related financial affairs remaining common imperial affairs. At the same time, as far as the country’s

19 Pach and Hanák, “Bevezetés,” 1–2.

economic reality was concerned, its colonial dependence on Austria lived on essentially without any change.”²⁰

During the discussions on the new university textbook (1954), it became clear that the editors themselves had different interpretations for the term ‘colony.’ Péter Hanák for example, quoting texts from Marx, suggested a more precise definition for this colonial status. Instead of term ‘agrarian capitalism,’ he suggested speaking about developing capitalism in circumstances of colonial relations.²¹

Other warnings arrived from outside as well. During a debate in the editorial office of *Századok*, Nyina Mickun (1907–1987) said “I do not agree with the proposition that Hungary was a colony. This is an issue we have not yet resolved even though resolving it would be of utmost importance.”²² While her field of expertise was Spanish history, her comment could not be merely shrugged off: she was the sister-in-law of communist party leader Mátyás Rákosi.

Moving onto the international scene, the Czechoslovak Institute of Party History organized a conference in Prague in 1955. They invited delegations from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Austria to discuss the history of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy and to contrast—and, if possible, reconcile—all the diverging views on it. The successor states of the Habsburg Empire were only represented by Marxist participants, although not just party historians, but also academics and university professors. The topics were arranged ahead of time. The participants gave presentations and comments. As a by-product of the proceedings, harsh debates arose concerning both the concepts of ‘colony’ and ‘semi-colony’ and the Hungarian positions related to them. Hungary delegated Zsigmond Pál Pach, Vilmos Sándor, and Tibor Erényi, the latter representing the Hungarian Institute of Party History. The two scholars most noted for their unflinching positions on the issue were Pavel Reinmann (1902–1976) from Prague and Július Mésároš (1923–2006) from Bratislava. Even though the two did not agree on all aspects, they shared the opinion that the terminology that “certain Hungarian historians” had been using widely “for a number of years now” “to describe Hungary’s situation during the era of Dualism as ‘colonial’ or ‘semi-colonial’ was unacceptable.”²³ Both Pach and Sándor challenged this position, but since the Austrian delegation was also inclined to accept the position of the Czech and Slovak historians, a surprisingly wide platform—one reaching beyond the bounds of Cisleithania—seemed to be forming; the Hungarian historians must have found themselves in quite a difficult

20 Sándor, *Nagyipari fejlődés*, 13.

21 Balázs, “Beszámoló,” 205. Hanák’s critical remarks mostly concerned Révai.

22 Andics, “A *Századok* szerkesztőbizottságának vitaülése,” 662.

23 Zsigmond Pál Pach, Report, 7 October 1955. MTAL II. Osztály, 86. d. 12. For published reports on the conference, see Sándor and Erényi, “Beszámoló.” The volume later published in Czech modestly called the conference in its subtitle a ‘consultation’: Staněk, ed., *Otázky vývoje kapitalismu*.

situation. So much so that at the end of his report on the conference submitted to an in-camera meeting of the Main Committee of Historiography—which, as far as I know, he never published—Pach exploded:

“My comrades will be fully aware of the fact that the terms ‘colonial’ and ‘semi-colonial’ have been proposed time and again in various forms for several years now, but there has been no study, or even a mere attempt at a study, that would have defined the concepts ‘colony’ and ‘semi-colony’ from one aspect or another, but based on the classics of Marxism-Leninism and, as I have said, would have tried to tackle the issue on that basis. I believe there is a need for a study designed with this theoretical objective to contribute to the clarification of the issue.”²⁴

Finally, the “general staff” of the conference accepted resolutions for future cooperation and decided to meet again in 1957.

The planned conference was eventually hosted in Budapest in 1958. The topic of the conference changed, however, because Pach could not give the second presentation on the capitalist development of agriculture; instead, Vilmos Sándor was assigned to give a presentation on the nature of the relationship between Austria and Hungary.²⁵ The first version of his paper was published in Hungarian, but he informed the reader that the text had been written in the second half of 1957 and the final more fully elaborated version was presented at the conference in December 1958. He asked the would-be discussion partners to take into account this final German version of his text.²⁶ This is the reason why the German version of the conference proceedings did include a chapter on Hungary’s ‘semi-colonial situation’—the sentence we quoted at the beginning of this paper is certainly nowhere to be found in print.²⁷ The study unambiguously emphasized the importance of the 1955 conference held in Prague insofar as the Hungarian historians had revised their position.²⁸ The job that Pach outlined in his report on the Prague conference was thus undertaken by Vilmos Sándor inasmuch as he filtered through the relevant views of the classical authors of Marxism (first and foremost, Lenin) and came to the following conclusion: “In view of the facts explained in detail above, neither nation [...] forming part of the multiethnic state of the Austrian–Hungarian Monarchy can be considered either a colonist or a colony

24 Zsigmond Pál Pach, Report, 7 October 1955. MTAL II. Osztály, 86. d. 12.

25 “A kapitalizmus fejlődése az egykori osztrák–magyar monarchia országaiban” munkakonferencia tudományos programtervezetének módosítása. [Modification of the program of workshop ‘The Development of the Capitalism in the Countries of the former Austro–Hungarian Monarchy’] n. d. MTAL II. Osztály, 223. d. 5.

26 Sándor, “Magyarország függőségének jellege,” 111.

27 Sándor, “Der Character der Abhängigkeit,” 307.

28 Sándor, “Magyarország függőségének jellege,” 95.

either from the perspective of economics or politics.”²⁹ Pach, who had chaired the panel of the first section on the comparative analysis of economic and social structures, spoke in favor of the revised position during the debate regarding the second topic, but by then only as a contributor. First and foremost, he referenced the earlier statement of his own made back in December 1957 during the debate about the university textbook, by which time he had already publicly revised his own views:

“The volume—which has been in use as a university textbook for years now—describes Hungary’s status as ‘colonial’ during the era of absolutism and as ‘semi-colonial’ during the era of Dualism. This terminology is in line with the position that Hungarian Marxist historiography held back in 1952–53. Since then, we have seen that this terminology was exaggerated and one-sided. Hungary cannot be called a colony even during the era of absolutism and it can certainly not be simply considered a semi-colony after the Compromise. Within the dualist state organisation of the multi-ethnic Monarchy, Hungary was certainly in a dependent situation both politically and economically, yet at the same time the Hungarian nation was also in the role of the ruling nation at least in respect of the non-Hungarian peoples of the country.”³⁰

During the discussion, György Ránki and Tibor Kolossa also supported the revisionist efforts of Vilmos Sándor, although they made some critical remarks as well. International consensus was also formed about the issue eventually: Polish historian Józef Buszko (1925–2003) stated clearly that the terms ‘colony’ and ‘semi-colony’ were useless as far as their applicability to East Europe was concerned, while Slovak historian Július Mésároš, who had already played an active role back in 1955, explained his conviction that specific research work was much more important than terminological debate.³¹

Aladár Mód, professor of Eötvös Loránd University, a leading figure of ‘national communist’ historiography, and chair of the third section, considered the total rejection of the terminology ‘dependency’ and ‘semi-colony’ suggested by Vilmos Sándor to be dangerous. He agreed that the terminology needed some precision, but claimed that Hungary was in a semi-colonial status before 1848 and remained dependent on the center of the Monarchy with some semi-colonial features after the Compromise.³²

29 Sándor, “Magyarország függőségének jellege,” 102. The statement was based on quotations from Lenin.

30 Puskás and Szuhay, “A ‘Magyarország története’ c. egyetemi tankönyv,” 792.

31 Sándor, “Der Character der Abhängigkeit,” 333. This means he repeated his position from 1954. Mód, *400 év küzdelem*, 309. See a similar report on the conference: Kende and Surányi, “A kapitalizmus fejlődése.”

32 Kende and Surányi, “A kapitalizmus fejlődése,” 949.

We could say that, for all intents and purposes, this put an end to the brief academic career of the adjective ‘semi-colonial.’ Yet Vilmos Sándor had found justification for introducing its use; Péter Hanák later confirmed its applicability in his essay on historiography and in highly poetical terms—and the impact of the term certainly “continues to reverberate” in public consciousness to date.³³

Sub-Empire building?

While the use of the term ‘semi-colony’ was clearly an attempt to introduce a retrospectively constructed conceptual framework with the aim of interpreting Hungary’s situation within the Monarchy (the conclusion that Hungary was in a colonial situation in the eighteenth century was itself rooted in contemporary discourse), the term ‘Hungarian Empire’ clearly arose from the language of the nineteenth century. Many examples can be quoted to support this claim. For the different interpretations of the concept ‘Hungarian Empire’ in the Vormärz period must be mentioned the inaugural lecture of Ignác Romsics in 2002 and the more recently published paper of Bálint Varga³⁴ as essential works. According to them, the main distinctive difference between the various meanings constitutes the use of the term for the one-time territory of Hungarian Kingdom (the Holy Crown of St. Stephen, meaning Hungary proper, Transylvania, Croatia, and Slavonia) on the one hand, or, as an imperialist concept, another one involving its expansion beyond the Carpathian basin (mainly toward southeastern Europe).³⁵ However, as is clear from the texts, a third meaning also existed: a Hungarian-centered version of all Habsburg provinces, which from time to time was hard to distinguish from the first and second meanings mentioned above.³⁶ It must be not forgotten that the concept of an Austrian Empire in the sense of the *Gesamtmreich* was first formulated in legal terms as late as in the so-called Constitution of 4 March 1849 (*Reichsverfassung für das Kaiserthum Oesterreich*). The attributes (*untheilbare und unauflösbare*) in their administrative-juridical and economic expansive totality pushed the Hungarian political elite towards having declared, independent, nation-state ambitions.

The most obvious place to look for examples would be in the field of geography, as geopolitics is clearly one of the aspects that take center stage when discussing the overall issue. In a piece of work entitled *A Magyar birodalom természeti viszonyainak*

33 Hanák, “Magyarország az Osztrák–Magyar Monarchiában,” 314.

34 Romsics, “A magyar birodalmi gondolat,” 136–37; Varga, “The Two Faces.”

35 Romsics uses the term primarily with the second meaning. Romsics, “A magyar birodalmi gondolat,” 122.

36 Bálint Varga, in the English version of his paper formulates carefully concerning these visions: “I would hesitate to call their scattered initiatives a discourse.” Varga, “The Two Faces,” 126.

leírása (The Natural History of the Hungarian Empire), János Hunfalvy offered a definition that seemed to be self-explanatory in terms of natural geography: “The Hungarian empire is a geographical unit that is clearly distinct in its overall natural characteristics; its borders are, with just a handful of exceptions, marked by natural boundaries, that is, mountain ridges and rivers.”³⁷ Of course, in terms of geography, the weak points of the above claim are more than apparent: namely, “in terms of natural geography, the country’s most problematic borders are its southern borders.”³⁸ This reflects the fact that Hunfalvy, much in line with the public-law thinking of the era, made a distinction between “Hungary in the strict sense” and the other parts of the empire—namely, “the other Hungarian homeland: Transylvania,” as well as Croatia and Slavonia, and the Military Frontier, just to make the list short.

Having reviewed the descriptive categories of natural geography, the post-Compromise era’s system of statistical concepts also jumps to the forefront. Since the very beginning, the official statistical publications of the era reflected a unique, dual sense of loyalty. While one of the handbooks discussed the foreign trade relations of the “Austrian-Hungarian Empire,” another one detailed the mining industry of the “Hungarian empire.”³⁹ This could not have been any other way, really, as any foreign trade transaction could only be concluded within the framework of the single customs union, while all actors in the extractive industries within the territory of Hungary were local mining operations. Károly Keleti, the head of the Statistical Office, wrote the following in justification of the title of his seminal work *Hazánk és népe* (Our Homeland and Its People)⁴⁰: “...so, lest we wander off into obsolete theories or arbitrary rambling, and instead to depict our society as it exists in the sense of or our very own era, we must consider that our subject matter is our homeland as a state and as a country.” What this means in effect is that “the countries under the Crown of Saint Stephen must be described in societal terms as a political whole, as a territory where the population lives and its farm animals are bred, while, at the same time, offering at least an outline of how the individual countries are delimited and divided, this serving as the backdrop, as it were, for a description of the society, and,

37 Hunfalvy, *A magyar birodalom természeti viszonyainak leírása*, 112. See the same concept repeated twenty years later: Hunfalvy, *A magyar birodalom földrajza*, 1–13.

38 Hajdú, “Az ‘államtáj’ és a ‘tájállam,’” 138. This has been mentioned in Hunfalvy’s work as well: “Toward South neither the borders of Croatia, nor those of Dalmatia had been settled by the nature itself.” Hunfalvy, *A magyar birodalom természeti viszonyainak leírása*, 113.

39 “Külkereskedelmi viszonyok 1868 [Foreign trade relations, 1868],” HSK, vol. II, no. IV, 32 ff; “A Magyar birodalom bányászata 1867-ben [Mining of the Hungarian Empire in 1867],” HSK, vol. II, no. I, 143–73.

40 Keleti, *Hazánk és népe*. The title of this work was clearly inspired by Wilhelm Riehl (*Land und Leute*).

in other words, comprising, along with the people and all its institutions, the state.”⁴¹ And even though the public-law status of some territories was not yet formalized at the time, the narrative took the “individual countries” and developed the concept of “all the empire under the Crown of Saint Stephen”; that is, “the Hungarian empire.”⁴² Yet somewhat later he saw no problem discussing the grape production or the mining industry of “the Austrian–Hungarian Empire.”⁴³ When discussing the customs union agreement concluded between Austria and Hungary as part of the Compromise, he interpreted such a customs union as “a single customs area” created in order to liberally harmonize the interests of “Saint Stephen’s realm and the Austrian Empire” since “the interests of the nations are common.”⁴⁴ In a state where no provincial level exists in public administration,⁴⁵ statistical publications must bridge the gap between local municipalities and counties, and, in fact, countries by construing maps for such major regions as, for example, “the right side of River Danube,” “the left side of River Danube,” “the right side of River Tisza,” “the left side of River Tisza,” etc., because the big picture must be construed bottom up from autonomous local elements all the way to the level of the countries and, eventually, to the crown that holds them together (that is, the empire as a whole).

However, let us not think for a second that political thinkers, politicians, and policy makers had no concerns about the asymmetrical use of the concept of the empire. This could not have been any other way because it was central to the so-called public-law issue. However – or possibly for this very reason – it very rarely took center stage in debates. The again, it is hardly an accident that at the end of January 1867, Kálmán Ghyczy (1808–1888), one of the representatives of the Hungarian National Assembly sent out as part of the 67 Committee to negotiate the so-called “common relations,” normally known to be prone to worrying too much, openly raised the problematic nature of using the concept of ‘empire.’ If the text had spoken only about the “the empire of his Majesty and that of the Austrian House,” Ghyczy would have not mentioned it, although even then he suggested avoiding its use.

“If, however, the word ‘empire’ is understood the way it is usually understood across Europe, namely as meaning ‘state’; if it means an Austrian state; if it means what the German terms ‘Reich’ or ‘Österreichischer Kaiser-Staat’ mean; if, as I say, the word ‘empire’ is taken to mean all those

41 Keleti, *Hazánk és népe*, 33–4.

42 Keleti, *Hazánk és népe*, 36.

43 Keleti, *Hazánk és népe*, 110, 180–81.

44 Keleti, *Hazánk és népe*, 286.

45 “Hungarian public administration does not know provincial division, enclosed between the counties and the government which could unify more counties in itself.” Edelenyi-Szabó, “Magyarország közjogi alkotórészeinek,” 660.

things—and in this context Hungary is considered as part of this state—then I believe accepting the word ‘empire’ in that sense would clearly put an end to Hungary’s independence and self-determination. I therefore believe that this amendment should be drafted without the expressions ‘empire,’ ‘both halves of the empire,’ or ‘the two halves’...”⁴⁶

Right after his intervention, the “spiritus rector” of the Austrian–Hungarian Compromise, Ferenc Deák, took the floor, making reference to the fact that the word ‘empire’ was used both in the acts of 1848 and in the addresses of the National Assembly of 1861, and such documents could hardly be seen as aiming at “undermining the country’s independence or expressing Hungary’s subservience.” His argumentation from this point on was of great interest to anyone interested in the history of concepts:

“When the clear and detailed explanation of a term is included in the act or address or it is explained as part of the principles expounded in this House, I have no concern whatsoever that a word could be construed to have any other meaning than what it is assigned in our clearly formulated terms and definitions; thus, I have no reservations whatsoever about keeping the word »empire« in the text.”⁴⁷

I would not like to challenge Ferenc Deák’s statement in this paper—in all probability, he was fully aware of the fact that any text, let alone a corpus of various texts drafted on various occasions, can be interpreted in more than one way. Also, our space is limited and therefore we cannot delve into an analysis of all further aspects of the debate. However, it is certainly of interest for our purposes here that Deák enjoyed the support of the majority of the committee, and the decision was adopted accordingly on the relevant point.

During the discussion on the common affairs in the National Assembly in March 1867, Ghyczy returned back to this question. Counter to the minister’s proposal, he argued that Hungary was interested not in the sustainability and great power status of the “empire” but that of the “Monarchy.”⁴⁸

As these hard battles went on in the National Assembly, the country’s politicians also recorded interesting thought experiments in their diaries. Baron József Eötvös, Minister of Religion and Education in 1848, and after 1867 one of the leading figures of the circle of centralists who played a key role in preparing the Compromise, as well as author of the volume *A 19. század uralkodó eszméinek*

46 *A közös viszonyok rendezésére vonatkozó okmánytár*, 69–70. (30 January 1867) The content of Ghyczy’s speech briefly summarized: in Kónyi, ed., *Deák Ferenc*, 243. About Ghyczy’s career see Szigeti, *Hazámnak hasznos*.

47 *A közös viszonyok rendezésére vonatkozó okmánytár*, 71. For the answer of Deák with small differences, see also Kónyi, ed., *Deák Ferenc*, 243–44.

48 *Képviselőházi Napló*, IV. 5. (22 March 1867).

befolyása az államra (Dominant Ideas of the Nineteenth Century and Their Impact on the State), prompted by the outbreak of the Austro–Prussian War, pondered over the opportunities awaiting Hungary as a consequence of the war:

“Austria’s withdrawal from the German Bund would mostly eliminate the danger of Hungary’s absorption because of German preponderance; and since the formation of a single great German state (which I believe to be inevitable) would have the same impact on Austria’s German provinces as the unified Italy had on Venice, and since the secessionist aspirations that are bound to crop up in the German provinces may be impeded temporarily but will eventually reach their objectives, it is foreseeable that the *Austrian empire* will gradually and eventually become a *Hungarian empire*. It follows that while *the power wielded by the overall empire has thus far threatened the independence of our nation, and therefore our primary interest has been to ensure that it does not become exceedingly powerful and that, as much as it is possible, we maintain our difference and thereby safeguard ourselves against assimilation, today our interest is quite the opposite: now, the empire should hold itself as strong against the outside world as is possible, while internally it should be organized in a manner that allows us to influence all its parts constituent.*”⁴⁹

Before we come to think that Eötvös, now a minister, forgot all about his related concerns in the wake of the conclusion of the peace treaty and the public-law compromise, let us quote a passage from his 1870 diary as a reminder (duly noting that his assumptions had certainly changed under the looming shadow of the new war):

“...[F]rom now on, the future of the nation will depend on whether our empire survives for a while, at least until Hungary progresses to a degree of cultivation where it can assume the place of Austria, that is, where it becomes able to create a great empire. For the very moment when Germany becomes a fully-fledged state, the German parts of our empire will, beyond the shadow of a doubt, join it, and *I never considered the creation of dualism as anything else than a transitional period towards the creation of an independent Hungarian empire.*”⁵⁰

49 Lukinich ed., *Báró Eötvös József: Naplójegyzetek*, 169–70. (17 July 1866. Italics in original.) As István Hajnal pointed out in his work on Hungarian foreign policy in 1848, the idea of the Hungarian-centered empire dates back at least to 1848, to the Batthyány and Kossuth ministerial period: Hajnal, *A Batthyány-kormány*, 56, 82, 84, 108, 114, 161. The work was originally written for the jubilee of Kossuth in 1952, but first published as late as in 1957 and later in 1987. The manuscripts are found in MTA KIK Kézirattár, Ms 5387/12-15. The original concept at that time was closely connected to the given moment in the process of German unification as well.

50 Czeglé, “Eötvös József: Naplójegyzetek,” 378. (18 August 1870. Italics mine – Gy. K.) On the close linkage between Eötvös’ diary remarks and the events on the international scene (Königgrätz, Franco–Prussian war) see Romsics, “A magyar birodalmi gondolat,” 136–37.

Granted, he also had to realize that this would be an empire of an entirely different sort of constitution:

“The only objective towards which we can work is not the strengthening (consolidation) of the Monarchy, which would be impossible with our delegation, but to ensure that by the time the German provinces run off to join their greater homeland, Hungary is ready and prepared to assume the position of the Austrian empire. The constituent parts required for the creation of an appropriately strong empire are given. The Polish, Romanian, and Hungarian nations, joined by our Catholic Slavs, are strong enough building blocks for the creation of a state that can survive even between Pan-Slavism and a unified Germany. The only question is whether the Hungarian people have the ability to become the core of such an empire and whether we will have enough time. That is what everything depends on.”⁵¹

As far as the outcome of the public-law controversy is concerned, it should suffice to compare the Austrian and the Hungarian acts on the Austrian–Hungarian Compromise in terms of what they say about common affairs. As is widely known, the two texts were not merely drafted at different times and in different structures, but they also show substantial differences in terms of form and content. Looking at the parallel texts fleetingly, one might say that the word ‘empire’ (‘Reich’) appears in both texts in the context of, for example, foreign affairs and foreign representation. However, looking at the two texts more thoroughly, the way they are worded is substantially different, especially in light of the controversy and debates we refer to above, in terms of how the two texts refer to the “two halves,” in how only the Hungarian text contains the phrase “common foreign minister,” and how in Hungary acknowledges that foreign affairs are common affairs.⁵²

Act of 21 December 1867

On the common affairs affecting all the countries of the Austrian Monarchy and on the manner of handling such affairs.

Section 1 Paragraph a.: [...] Foreign affairs, including providing for the representation of the empire in diplomacy and commerce abroad and adopting any

Article 1867: XII.

On the affairs of common interest between the countries of the Hungarian Crown and the other countries under the rule of his Excellency and on the handling of such affairs.

Section 8.: [...] providing for the representation of the empire in diplomacy

51 Czeglé, “Eötvös József: Naplójegyzetek,” 409 (28 November 1870).

52 For the texts of Austrian and Hungarian articles, their parallel German publication and their systematic comparison, see Sutter, “Die Ausgleichsverhandlungen,” 159–83. The German text was translated into Hungarian by Ágnes Deák in 2001 [!]: Deák, “Az 1867. decemberi ausztriai törvénycikkek.” The Hungarian text in *Magyar Törvénytár*, 333–44.

measures that may become necessary in the context of the international treaties; however, approving international treaties, in case such is necessary in the interest of the constitution, shall fall within the competence of the representative bodies of the two halves of the empire (the Reichsrat and the Hungarian National Assembly). [...den Verträzungskörpern der beiden Reichshälften (dem Reichsrate und dem ungarischen Reichstage vorbehalten bleibt.)]

and commerce abroad and adopting any measures that may become necessary in the context of the international treaties shall be part of the responsibility of the common foreign minister in agreement with, and subject to the approval of, the ministries of both halves. Each ministry shall communicate the international treaties to their respective legislations. Therefore, Hungary also considers such foreign affairs common[...].

A letter written by Antal Csengery, a fellow leader of the Deák Party, recounts how Hungarian Prime Minister Gyula Andrassy discussed the confusion arising from the terms ‘imperial minister’ and ‘common minister’ and reports on a meeting with Beust and his Austrian fellow ministers in January 1868, shedding some light on the situation at the time:

“A heap of Hungarian dailies and National Assembly minutes lay in front of Beust, with the word ‘empire’ underlined in red in all copies. Both Beust and Becke claimed that they had been granted the title ‘Reichsminister’ by way of having been appointed by His Excellency... to which Andrassy responded that the members of the committee [delegation] in general resented the use of the term they considered to be in breach of the law, and that such resentment was shared by the whole country. The empire was united towards foreign entities but was divided internally. [...] The term ‘common minister’ was more appropriate in the light of the idea of dualism as created by the Austrian–Hungarian Compromise—this is why the legislations of both parties used that term.—The common ministers responded passionately.—Andrassy stood up and commented: ‘I guess I’ll just get my hat and leave then.’—All of a sudden, Beust changed his tone and said the Hungarian Prime Minister had misunderstood them. After all, all they had wanted to do was approach the Hungarian Prime Minister and ask him for his guidance as to what they should do.”⁵³

Andrassy explained that the German text of the law never used the term *Reichsminister*; at most, it used the phrase *gemeinsames Ministerium*.

53 Csengery, ed., *Csengery Antal hátrahagyott iratai*, 248–49. (30 January 1868) The story originated from the first meetings of the common affairs committee and the purpose of discussion was a parliamentary interpellation.

We could list example after example of efforts to construct a certain historical past. Even prior to writing the millennial history of Hungary, there was harsh debate around whether Hungarian statehood should be linked to Saint Stephen or Árpád.⁵⁴ Catholic and Protestant, *labanc* and *kuruc*, pro-Compromise and Forty-Eighter pro-independence positions were pitted against one another. In such an environment, the series of volumes edited by Sándor Szilágyi under the title *A Magyar nemzet története* (The History of the Hungarian Nation) made an attempt to create peace between the ruler and the nation. As writer Mór Jókai summarized in his afterword to Volume X:

“The first millennium of the Conquest of Hungary has come to completion. It has been a success. The Hungarian nation has found itself. Its heart and mind have come to an agreement. It has kept and manifested its warrior virtues yet is seen by the world as a guardian of peace. As it serves its country and crown loyally and voluntarily, it no more fears servitude. It does not fight foreign nations anymore but competes with them; it surrounds itself not with enemies but with allies.”⁵⁵

However, as we know, lasting peace never arrived; in fact, the crisis-ridden decades of the era of Dualism brought to surface quite a number of concepts in historiography that were critical of dualism itself. It may not be an accident that two of the authors we are about to mention here represent the generation of historians writing Hungary’s millennial history. Gusztáv Beksics (1846–1906), a member of the Hungarian National Assembly, was a publicist rather than a historian; he wrote a summary of the most sensitive era under the title *I. Ferencz József és kora* (Franz Joseph I and His Era) in which he attempted to place the era of dualism into the context of a wider national discourse:

“The most important task is to widen the very basis of our national existence, that is, to harmonise our efforts and aspirations. Whoever succeeds at consolidating the Hungarian nation, that is, establishing the harmony between our national and state foundations, will have for ever safeguarded the survival of the Hungarian race as well as the national character and independence of the state thus created.”⁵⁶

Beksics is especially interesting for us because he criticized Article 1867: XII even before the country’s millennial history was written and, in fact, he put together a critical dictionary of terms from the perspective of the history of concepts in a

54 Sinkó, “Árpád kontra Szent István”; Varga, *Árpád a város felett*, 9–43.

55 Jókai, “Utószó,” 838.

56 Beksics, “I. Ferencz József,” 398. (In the language of the era and Beksics, the term ‘race’ is a cultural category meaning ‘a race of people’ or a nationality.) On the historical transformation of Beksics’s ideas, see: Nagy, “A ‘nemzeti állam’ eszméje”; Müller, *Beksics Gusztáv pályája*.

chapter entitled *Hibás közjogi elnevezések* (Incorrect Public Law Terms). In that chapter, he stated the following:

“[I]t would be highly appropriate to make wider use in our public law terminology of the terms ‘Hungarian state,’ ‘Hungarian empire,’ and ‘Hungarian Monarchy,’ and to afford a more restricted use to the term ‘country,’ which even highly respected orators often use instead of the word ‘homeland’ when speaking in the National Assembly.”⁵⁷

It is interesting to see how he made reference to the 1867 debate between Ghyczy and Deák concerning the ‘empire’ concept, although he gave a somewhat ‘modernizing’ reinterpretation of Deák’s position when he said “Deák was absolutely right in saying that every word means whatever meaning we attribute to it...” However, he did not agree on everything even with Ghyczy; he believed that “the word ‘empire’ is not acceptable even in the sense in which Ghyczy would have accepted it. The Habsburgs do not have a common empire; they have *two empires*: the Hungarian and the Austrian. The *single* empire is not acceptable even as a mere idea for such incorrect concepts can become practice and, like Tisza said in the 67 Committee, it may be turned against us.”⁵⁸ He was of the opinion that the designation “both halves of the empire” is also incorrect and the term “both states of the Monarchy” would be preferable; and that the term “Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy” is also “objectionable” and the term “Austrian and Hungarian Monarchy” should be used. The term “Austria–Hungary,” which abounds in international treaties, is also fundamentally “flawed,” he insists. His reason for conceptual purification is that “incorrect expressions gradually give rise to incorrect concepts, and incorrect concepts gradually give rise to public law injuria.”⁵⁹ But Beksics went much further than that. In a historical piece he wrote at the end of his life, he reached back to King Matthias’ empire in an effort to identify a historical precedent that would foreshadow the nation’s future. After the death of King Matthias and the tragic battle of Mohács, Hungary set out on the wrong path when the Habsburgs gave up the “historical foundation” that “the Hungarian king must become a Hungarian.”

“And even though the Hungarian king may have countries outside Hungary, political leadership must be in the hand of Hungary. And as we will see, the Monarchy slowly but insistently develops to eventually reach exactly that objective. The traditions and established customs of over three centuries may from time to time impede this great transformation process but they cannot stop it. *The rule of the facts, the rule of the laws of state and national development cannot be overthrown.*”⁶⁰

57 Beksics, *A dualismus története*, 270.

58 Beksics, *A dualismus története*, 272. (Italics in the original.)

59 Beksics, *A dualismus története*, 273.

60 Beksics, *Mátyás király birodalma*, 118. (Italics mine – Gy. K.)

Therefore, trusting the strength of this evolutionary process, there is no need to give up on the idea of the Monarchy; what must be achieved is that “Hungary should assume leadership within the dual Monarchy of the Habsburgs, whether the actual form of this is dualism or personal union.”⁶¹ And while – as we have seen – the idea of Hungary’s leading role within the Monarchy was not a tenet Beksics came up with, the way he linked it to ‘national assimilation’ in a social Darwinist style and the way he set out to promote the idea also in the Balkans can be said to have fully reversed the direction Eötvös had been investigating with the aim of finding the way forward.⁶²

It is not at all beside the point that yet another author of Hungary’s millennial history also decided, at the end of his life, to write an imperial history of Hungary. Just as critical of the Habsburgs as Beksics, Ignác Acsády deployed some peculiar reasoning in an effort to match up the ‘old Hungarian empire’ with the recently emerging ‘colonial situation’:

“However, as hostile as the royal power may have been in its attitudes towards the territory of Hungary, as little effort as it may have dedicated to its defence, acts, and century-old institutions, and as much as it downgraded it into an economic *colony* by making it a victim of Vienna’s predatory greed, the centre of gravity of Hungarian national life remained in the royal territories of Hungary during this century, with Transylvania’s influence on the fate of Hungarians being rather the exception than the rule for the time being. The fact that Hungary had a king wearing its crown (even though that king may have lived abroad), the fact that Hungary had its own state authorities (even though forced to serve foreign interests), and the fact that there was a Hungarian National Assembly (even though its role was mostly limited to voting to pass tax laws and its acts of any other nature remained without implementation) had a moral impact on the future of the Hungarian people that is beyond measure. It was these institutions that incorporated *the memory of the old Hungarian empire*, it was these institutions that symbolised state independence, and that kept the traditions of old national unity in the masses, which, even in the most critical of situations, insisted tenaciously on keeping the ideal of a free and independent Hungary alive.”⁶³

According to Acsády, “the ancient unity of the Hungarian empire” was only reinstated by the National Assembly of 1847/48, which was then once again “torn apart” by the new emperor “[as] soon as he ascended to the throne.”⁶⁴ However, in

61 Beksics, *Mátyás király birodalma*, 179.

62 On Beksics’s views concerning this subject, Müller, *Beksics Gusztáv pályája*, 161–64.

63 Acsády, *A magyar birodalom*, vol. II, 274–75. (Italics mine – Gy. K.).

64 Acsády, *A magyar birodalom*, vol. II, 732, 749. The phrase “torn apart” concerns the formation of Serbian Voivodina.

discussing the outcomes of the Austrian–Hungarian Compromise, what he has to offer is fundamentally a series of questions:

“Have the nation’s political leaders at all times made appropriate use of the means afforded by the Compromise to safeguard the national interests in all relations? Have they been able to thwart the re-emergence of old Austrian and centralizing traditions? Has the antiquated feudal spirit not awakened once again in our public life, and has it not become, promoted as it was by the Viennese, and in general, European reaction, a factor of influence out to assert selfish class interests in our public life to the detriment of the common interests of the nation? Answering these questions is hardly the task of our generation of historians.”⁶⁵

On the other hand, he believed that the “radical changes” seen in “our national and social lives and in the emergence of the bourgeoisie” were commendable; he was most appreciative of the cooperation between state and society.⁶⁶

The geographical, statistical, political, and historical constructs in which the contemporary idea of the Hungarian empire found its expression were never able to take root in the actual political practice of the era. There was no way a given concept could capture two realities that contradicted one another. The concept of the ‘Hungarian empire’ could not depict, at the very same time, both the imperial status of the Austrian–Hungarian Monarchy towards the world outside and that of the Hungarian empire towards world within. The very dynamics of the processes involved prevented this to begin with. Thanks to the different rates of development seen in the Cisleithanian and Transleithanian parts of the Monarchy, the gap between the two parts of the empire narrowed (just think of the changing of the quotas, set out in contract, benefitting Hungary); however, in terms of their social and political constitution (suffrage, managing the problem of the nationalities through granting them cultural autonomy, etc.), the two parties seemed to be drifting farther and farther away from one another. Various actors following distinct nation-building practices found that the Austrian–Hungarian Compromise offered them different opportunities.

One of the difficulties the history of concepts tends to run into is the inability of a given term to describe the phenomenon it tries to capture. Even more serious problems may emerge when the historian, who thinks in terms of the concepts of his or her own era, faces the challenge of finding his or her bearings amidst the wildly different linguistic coordinates of historical sources. How can you bridge the discursive spaces of the two different eras? How can you promote understanding or even establish a dialogue between two distinct historical worlds—that of the present

65 Acsády, *A magyar birodalom*, vol. II, 796.

66 Acsády, *A magyar birodalom*, vol. II, 796.

and that of the past? We have shown above how, despite the fact that the concept of the ‘colony’ as used in the eighteenth century was widely known, the category of the ‘semi-colony’ eventually proved incapable of describing the conditions of the Austrian-Hungarian world in the second half of the nineteenth century, even though—during a brief transitional period—quite a few attempts were made at its introduction from within very different ideological systems.

There are also a number of later examples of how conceptual frameworks that projected contemporary concepts back into the past failed to help establish discourse between the historian and the past, and in fact frustrated those efforts. During the 1960s, Krisztina Maria Fink set out to track down the historical origins of the European Economic Community (EEC) in the Habsburg Empire.⁶⁷ Without discarding the actual possibility of historical parallels off the bat, it may be worth mentioning that her dissertation encountered criticism by her contemporaries, who had concluded that the external historical circumstances and the respective situations of the parties involved in economic integration during these two distinct eras were so strikingly different that such historical projection of the EEC back into the era of the Habsburg Empire was of little relevance.⁶⁸ This is one of the reasons why one finds it really hard to understand some of her conclusions, including the claim that, despite all its political disadvantages, “forced integration” as introduced by neoabsolutism was the most successful stage of development in the emergence of the economic union.⁶⁹ In fact, in discussing the current situation of the EEC, Fink concluded that “Only supranationality guarantees the interlocking of the national economies involved, going beyond a mere customs union, and even the customs union is untenable without common competences, unless it leads to a free trade area.”⁷⁰ From there, it took only one step for her to comment on the Compromise of 1867 as follows:

“Thus, one can certainly claim that the retarding moment was actually brought into the course of things by the 1867 treaty. This held out the prospect of an economic separation after every ten years and thus inhibited the natural progression through stirring public opinion and through constant interference with production and trade. Lasting uncertainty also had a crippling effect on legislation and administration, and the slogan of the ‘monarchy with a deadline’ [Monarchie auf Kündigung] arose.”⁷¹

67 Fink, *Die österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie*.

68 Freudenberger, “Krisztina Maria Fink”; Varga, “Krisztina Maria Fink.” The question was how could the author compare the EEC, a collaboration of sovereign members, to the customs union of the Monarchy formed in the shadow of the Tsarist military intervention and the Habsburg revenge for revolution?

69 Fink, *Die österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie*, 19.

70 Fink, *Die österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie*, 24.

71 Fink, *Die österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie*, 35–6.

Looking at things from this angle, there is no mention of the fact that in a dynamic economy it might be a good idea to adjust the regulatory environment to changing conditions at least once every ten years. What one thinks about one's own present is, of course, one's own business even if one is a historian; however, taking historical processes out of their contemporary contexts is a practice that is at least dubious.

In the early twenty-first century, the enlargement of the European Union once again led to the knee-jerk reflex of finding historical parallels between the Union and the Monarchy. "The EU shows many more similarities with the Habsburg state than with the states organized along national principles, especially after its forthcoming enlargement, which will integrate a vast amount of territory in regions formerly belonging to the Austro-Hungarian Empire,"⁷² wrote Andrea Komlosy in 2004. At that time, the author interpreted the market of the Habsburg Monarchy (first and foremost, migration) in the context of the dual concepts of center and periphery, focusing mainly on the Cisleithanian part of the Empire: "Hungary is not considered here because of its de facto independence after the Dual Settlements of 1867."⁷³ In this interpretation, the Habsburg Empire itself existed as a "world economy" in the sense of Wallerstein with its internal centers (cores) and peripheries, although because of the "economic integration and political fragmentation," only the Empire's Cisleithanian territories succeeded in building modern centralized states over territorial units of power.⁷⁴

Ten years later, Komlosy's interpretation of the Monarchy resurfaced in an entirely new context; by then, Hungary had also assumed her own position: "The Dual Settlement of 1867 had separated the k. u. k. monarchy into two k. sub-empires."⁷⁵ In this structure, there was no synchronicity between the "economic and political level[s]" of center and periphery. The Czechs, who beyond any doubt whatsoever enjoyed a central position economically, never achieved political autonomy, while the Hungarians, who achieved political self-determination by means of the Austrian-Hungarian Compromise, never managed to break out of their peripheral situation economically.

"The Dual Settlement succeeded in overcoming the secessionist ambitions of Hungarian independentist nationalists by offering the Hungarian elites political autonomy, which came near to independence and could be interpreted as such by Hungarian politicians. The Hungarian government

72 Komlosy, "State, Regions, and Borders," 175.

73 Komlosy, "State, Regions, and Borders," 174.

74 Komlosy, "State, Regions, and Borders," 143–48.

75 Komlosy, "Imperial Cohesion," 398. The volume discusses the "nation building" process inside the empires—presumably this is the reason for the neologism in the terminology. See: Berger and Miller, "Introduction."

was able to pursue sovereign politics, while at the same time benefited from a huge market where Hungarian agricultural products enjoyed a quasi-monopoly.”⁷⁶

In answering the question *cui bono* (in fact, the real question was: *cui malo*) the two halves of the Monarchy quoted very different statistical data and relied on very different value judgments. In the debates of the era, the general rule seemed to have been that the neighbor’s garden was always greener. In light of the recent international quantitative analyses of the past few decades, it is not a very good idea to simply assume the viewpoint, even experimentally, of one of the old public-law actors.⁷⁷ According to Komlosy, two distinct models of nation building emerged within the space of the Monarchy, itself fragmented in multiple ways: “practically multi-ethnic pluralism in Austria and Magyarization in Hungary.”⁷⁸ However, in the context of governance, whether such distinctions make any sense can only be measured based on whether they prove to be useful, and the author herself cannot but admit that neither model proved to be successful then and there. It would seem that the concept of ‘sub-empire building’—a concept created after the fact to help historical interpretation—would not in fact have been attractive enough for either actor because it would not have granted sufficient leeway for the desired degree of sovereignty. Thus, this neologism is also unsuitable for expressing the complexity of the historical relations typical of the era of dualism.

Suppose the dualist Monarchy as two sub-empires means not taking into consideration the basic principle of Austro-Hungary: “one empire toward foreign entities but divided internally”—as Andrassy explained to the common ministers, cited above. From this point of view, while looking at the empire from outside, it could seem almost the same whether freedom or despotism unified the empire. Under the circumstances of market integration and internal constitutional dualism—as Pieter Judson formulated it—“neither state could change the arrangement without the agreement of the other.”⁷⁹ In this respect, internal empire-building ideas concerning the future could be interpreted as fictions; as the retrospective historical visions projected into the past. Key concepts are always slogans as well. Reviewing the asymmetric parallel developments of the concepts of ‘colony’ and ‘empire’ we must

76 Komlosy, “Imperial Cohesion,” 400–2.

77 In support of the statement that Hungarian agriculture monopolized the market of the Monarchy there is no citation from the recent economic history literature, except for the books of Komlos and Good, but neither Komlos nor Good uses the term monopoly, or quasi-monopoly, for the Austro-Hungarian customs union: Komlos, *The Habsburg Monarchy*; Good, *The Economic Rise*.

78 Komlosy, “Imperial Cohesion,” 371.

79 Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 262.

establish that the real grounds for their usage in the long term have been lost. This opinion seems to be even more valid in the case of the derivative, retrospectively constructed concepts—perhaps I may call them conceptual mutations (semi-colony, sub-empire)—not rooted in the dictionary of the historical sources and conceptual history of political ideas.

* * *

P.S.

And now, having addressed the topical aspects of the issue, the historian cannot shy away from looking into the present and the future either. In 2014, an entertaining map appeared on the Internet. It presented how Europe was expected to look in 2022.⁸⁰ Without taking the gag seriously, even for a fleeting second, the historian might find it interesting to reflect upon why the authors of this topographical joke may have thought that a future Europe (in which the European Union is limited to East Europe, from Poland to Ukraine) would include three empires, a big one and two small ones: a “Merkelreich” that will have peacefully absorbed France; a “Catalan Empire” that will have seceded from Spain; and, last but not least, a “Hungarian Empire.” How does this foreign image relate to the present-day Hungarian governmental discourse on the colonial attitude of Brussels? Do our visions of the future reflect our prejudices just as much as our visions of the past? Is it historical continuity, or is it permanent changeability that more accurately reflects a given country’s place in history, the aspirations surrounding that place, and how these aspirations are judged?

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