

## Egy elfeledett magyar királyi dinasztia: a Szapolyaiak [A Forgotten Hungarian Royal Dynasty: The Szapolyais]. Edited by Pál Fodor and Szabolcs Varga.

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This edited collection is about a Hungarian royal dynasty which has not yet received attention to this extent in scientific research, thus it may easily count on the interest of not only Hungarian but also international readers. Indeed, counting on such readers, the full work was published in English a year later.<sup>1</sup>

This lack of attention shown to the House of Szapolyai is especially interesting in light of the fact that Hungarian historiography tends to reserve a special place for the so-called “national royal dynasties” (the Árpáds, the Hunyadis, and the Szapolyais) in history, but regarding the Szapolyais this distinguishing glory never really prevailed. A vital aim and virtue of the collection, which is anticipated in the foreword, is seeing the dynasty as a complete whole, which effort can clearly be seen in the thematically wide range of articles: all the important questions are covered by individual studies.

In Tibor Neumann’s paper, the story of three generations of the Szapolyai family is presented, from their uncertain origins to the royal throne of Hungary. The study introduces how huge work and permanent progression in rank and the financial status of many generations were required to make the founding of a royal dynasty possible. As the author notes, we have no data about John I’s ancestors before the fifteenth century, and these uncertain origins made it possible for the political adversaries of the Szapolyais to damage the reputation of the dynasty as harshly as they could. The Hungarian dignitaries, in a letter written to Henry VIII in 1527 (in which they sought the help of the English king), stated that the father of John I had arrived in Hungary a few decades before as a penniless esquire from Bosnia. The Bosnian

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1 Fodor, Pál and Szabolcs Varga. *A Forgotten Hungarian Royal Dynasty: The Szapolyais*. Budapest: Research Centre for the Humanities, 2021.

origins come up regularly in contemporary work, suggesting to readers that John was not even Hungarian for a long time.

The first confirmed ancestor is László Vajdafi, grandfather of the king, who appeared in the sources in 1444 as a landlord from Pozsega County. László had three similarly successful sons. Imre served at the court of Matthias Corvinus as a skillful military and financial organizer and became the Governor of Bosnia in 1463, after Matthias I took it back from the Turks. Imre had his quarrels with the king, but as a gesture Matthias created the title Count of Szepes for him, which title eventually became the prime component of the Szapolyai fortune for decades. Vajdafi's other son Miklós joined the church, and in 1462 became the bishop of Transylvania, while István earned a reputation as a gallant commander. István fought in Matthias's campaigns in Bohemia and on the side of Vladislaus II in the succession war. For his achievements, the diet of 1492 elected him palatine of Hungary. István died at Christmas in 1499, but managed to preserve and pass on the full family fortune to his son János Szapolyai, later king John I.

In the following years, the son of the palatine acquired the great castles of Oravský hrad (Árva) and Likavka in northern Hungary (present-day Slovakia), and in 1510 he persuaded the king to promote him to voivode of Transylvania. From this nomenclature one can clearly see the formidable might of the family, which made János Szapolyai the highest-ranked landlord in the country (the paper by István Kenyeres presents the Szapolyai possessions). Neumann also mentions the contemporary opinion that the Kingdom of the Jagiellons did not work properly because of the machinations of the Szapolyai family. On the other hand, the author points out the militant defense activity of the family in the service of the king, thus we have reason to be critical of the former statement.

The paper of Teréz Oborni and Pál Fodor analyzes the history of John I's kingdom, stuck between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empire. According to their summary, both Suleyman and Ferdinand were chasing false illusions when they hoped to conquer the whole kingdom with one significant military campaign.

The authors prudently show the fluctuating territorial extent of the Szapolyai-ruled areas of Hungary and their constantly changing role in the Ottoman plans. The latter data should be considered a novelty, for they broadcast the results of the last decade of Ottoman Studies. After the Battle of Mohács, the majority of the Hungarian estates elected John, and most of the country indeed pledged loyalty to him, but Ferdinand's campaign in 1527 annihilated John's kingdom. This led John to voluntarily put the territories loyal to him under Ottoman protection in 1528. However, being a protectorate led to no change in the daily life of John's kingdom: he looked on himself as the King of Hungary who ruled over the Kingdom of Hungary, and there were no Ottoman garrisons in the country except in the overrun Syrmia.

The situation changed in 1541 (after the death of John I): following the occupation of Buda, the sultan refused to give John's former country to his son John Sigismund Szapolyai, but instead created the Eyalet of Buda and left a notable garrison in the city, then divided Transylvania into three sanjaks, putting a local Christian lord at the head. With this move, the sultan demoted Transylvania into a position similar to that of Wallachia.

This status quo had been abandoned when in 1551, after long negotiations with Cardinal Martinuzzi, Ferdinand sent an expeditionary army that conquered most of the three sanjaks. This enraged the sultan, who launched a huge offensive in 1552, planning to fully integrate Transylvania into his empire. Yet realizing his armies had no power to manage it, he urged the Transylvanian estates to call back the Szapolyais, who returned in 1556. With the Szapolyais back, Transylvania had again been assigned vassal status. But the vassalization this time happened on way better terms than before—to confirm this, the authors make a detailed comparison with the Wallachian territories. After years of negotiation, through the Treaty of Speyer (1570) the Habsburgs and the Szapolyais finally made their compromise, but the agreement never took effect: after John Sigismund's death in 1571, the estates elected Stephan Báthory as voivode, and during his reign Transylvania was detached from Hungary and evolved to be a self-governed state under an Ottoman protectorate.

Szabolcs Varga gives an overview of the Szapolyai legacy from the sixteenth century to the present. Despite the fact that many contemporaries acknowledged the virtues of the educated king who could recite Virgil by heart, his name is associated with that of the Jagiellons, who are blamed for the fall of Hungary. The unbalanced nature of this verdict is clearly seen in comparison with the Hunyadis, who competed in almost the same way for the throne, but at a more fortunate time.

In the eighteenth century, the Habsburg-oriented scholars of Hungary showed little interest in the Szapolyais. In the decades of the reform era, during the debate on serfdom, he who had put down the peasant uprising of 1514 was not a lucky character to commemorate. It was only after the defeat in the War of Independence in 1849 that the figure of John I appeared again in debates about history (in Mihály Horváth's and László Szalay's work), as an alternative to the Habsburg dynasty. In the years of dualism, researchers' focus turned to Bishop Martinuzzi, who served as John's right hand, and was considered a grey eminence. For the following decades this pattern remained: in his great summary of early modern history, Gyula Szekfű considered John a weak monarch, and the prelate as a genius.

After World War II, the new communist regime stigmatized the whole feudal world, particularly the main dignitaries before the Ottoman occupation, and especially John I for putting down the peasant revolt. Therefore, knowing more about the dynasty is a relatively new phenomenon; the pioneer of the process was Gábor

Barta, who deeply researched the diplomacy of John I. The legacy of the Szapolyais started to revive slowly in Transylvania in the 1990s—the Unitarians of the region erected busts of John Sigismund Szapolyai in the villages of Dârjiu (Székelyderzs) and Şapartoc (Sárpatak).

The mentioned names and geographical locations have been collected into an index at the end of the book, while the inner section of the cover shows the lineage of the dynasty. The collection can surely be of good use to professionals and students of early modern history, but it will also be a good read for those with a more general interest.

