

GERHARD BAUMGARTNER

Distant Relatives

On the Austrian Perception of Hungarian History

"You are Hungarian, therefore Austrian!"

Heimitto von Doderer

This paradoxical statement, with which the undisputed head of Austria's literary elite Heimitto von Doderer allegedly greeted his colleague, the Hungarian refugee György Sebestyén, pointedly describes the Austrians' view of Hungary in the second half of the 20th century.

Austrians view Hungarians (the only neighbouring nation about which they did not indulge in derogatory or demeaning jokes) sympathetically, as their relatives. Our Hungarian cousins, uncles and aunts "actually" belong to us, only that nobody can really remember any more how exactly we are supposed to be related to each other. We see them as our poor relatives, who once were better off, when we still had more to do with each other.

We "really" do have a common history, which means that our history is also theirs, but not vice-versa. That is probably why Austrians hardly wrote anything about Hungarian history and why not a single edition of any history of Hungary was published in Austria during the 20th century.

Poor Relatives

In the Vienna City Library I tried to research how and what Austrians had written about Hungarian history, and which among these texts the Austrian public used to read most frequently. After stating my intention that I wanted to read about Hungarian history, the friendly librarian of my favourite branch library in the 17th district of Vienna guided me to the shelves of history books. His hand self-assuredly darted out towards a book, hesitated,

started to roam along the shelves and finally he said: “Well now, it has to be somewhere around here!” Murmuring apologies he disappeared. Since I know that my librarian is a very responsible person, a fanatical librarian and a real lover of books, I also knew that he would not desert me but had returned to his computer to sort out the problem. In the meantime I went through the shelves of the generally very well stocked library of Vienna’s 17th district (dominated by Social Democrats) on my own and resigned myself to the fact, that I probably would have to go to the main library in the 9th district or to some other branch in one of the intellectual-bourgeois districts of the inner city or the western suburbs of Vienna.

“Well, this really is embarrassing!” proclaimed my librarian somewhat broken hearted, after he had returned. “We do have two histories of Albania, Bulgaria and Romania, and even one about China. It’s just about Hungary that I couldn’t find anything. And in our other branches you will have no more luck either.” With these words he handed me a computer printout of all titles from the Vienna City Library under the heading “Hungarian History”.

Theoretically my thirst for knowledge might have been quenched by Holger Fischer’s *Eine kleine Geschichte Ungarns* (*A Short History of Hungary*, 1 copy extant) or by Thomas von Bogyai’s *Grundzüge der Geschichte Ungarns* (*Basics of Hungarian History*, 9 copies extant), but since these books were written by Germans they would not enlighten me about the current Austrian perception of Hungarian history. The same goes for Hans Miksch’s *Der Kampf der Kaiser und Kalifen – Ungarn zwischen Kreuz und Halbmond* (*The Struggle Between Kaisers and Caliphs – Hungary Between the Cross and the Stickle*, 1 copy extant). That was the total of books on offer from the 20th century. Of course there was also Paul Lendvay’s book, written for the Frankfurt Book Fair, *Die Ungarn – Ein Jahrtausend – Sieger in Niederlagen* (*The Hungarians – A Millennium – Victors in Defeat*, 50 copies extant) but this book was a) written by a Hungarian, b) published in Germany and c) at the time only to be found on the computer printout but not yet on the library shelves, since they had not yet been bought and distributed.

My librarian’s printout listed two further titles. Ludwig Kuppelwieser’s *Die Kämpfe der Ungarn mit den Osmanen bis zur Schlacht von Mohács 1526* (*The Hungarians’ Battles with the Ottomans up to the Battle of Mohács 1526*, 1 copy extant) did not sound too promising. And the two volumes of Jenő Csuday’s *Die Geschichte der Ungarn* (*History of the Hungarians*), published in 1900, could hardly be expected to be on top of current events and trends.

In itself, this list constitutes a document of cultural history. It illuminates Austrian interest – or rather disinterest – towards the history of its Siamese twin, neighbouring Hungary.

Hungarian history? Oh yes, some long time ago they came here on their horses and until 1918 they belonged to Austria. They liked the empress Maria Theresa and empress Sissy – her they actually loved. Under the Habsburgs, as long as they belonged to us, things did not go too badly for those Hungarians. But of course they had to have their own state, quite stubbornly insisted on it, always having been so proud and temperamental and a little bit unrealistic dreamers, those Hungarians. And when after the First World War the region of Burgenland was taken away from them and annexed to Austria, they were of course a little bit annoyed with us. And then they tried to go it on their own, but when the Russians came in 1956 they of course again fled to us. Their best times were under the two “K. u. K” periods, under our common emperor, the “Kaiser und König” and under Kreisky and Kádár. They have never again had it as good as then. These *topoi* constitute the consensual Austrian discourse on Hungarian history, which has held its place in everyday life as well as in countless Austrian historical publications for decades.

This is not to say that in Austria there is nothing interesting to be read about Hungarian history or that Austrian historians do not reflect the current discussions of their Hungarian colleagues. Austrian academic publications are of course on the cutting edge of current theoretical and scientific debate.

Among the best-known publications are the works of the leading historians of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, with clear emphasis on the history of the Habsburg Empire. After the Second World War this historical discourse became one of the dominant themes of Austrian historiography. As an heir to Cold War traditions Austrian historiography on the Habsburg Monarchy has presented Central Europe, i.e. the region of the successor states of the monarchy, as a cultural, social and to some extent political unity. Within the framework of such enormous projects as – the since 1973 published – *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918* (*The Habsburg Monarchy, 1848–1918*) the Austrian Academy of Sciences has tried to integrate the leading historians of the successor states into the discourse about this culturally and historically defined region. Although some parts of this series were written by such famous Hungarian historians as László Katus or Béla Sarlós, there remains a linger-

ing impression that the history of these states is being treated on the level of the history of Austrian provinces, of provinces we have lost. The central role of the period of the Habsburg Monarchy in the reception of Hungarian historiography is evident. The books by Péter Hanák, Emil Niederhauser, István Diószegi and Imre Gonda on this theme have all been translated into German.

Outside of this thematical framework, the reception of Hungarian historiography is limited to the involvement of Hungarian colleagues in specific projects, if their field of work touches upon relevant topics of Austrian history. As in the case of Falko Daim's catalogue for the historical exhibition *Reitervölker aus dem Osten – Hunnen und Awaren (Equestrian Peoples from the East – Huns and Avars)* or in the excellent volume by Ernst Bruckmüller, Ulrike Döcker, Hannes Steckl and Peter Urbanitsch, *Bürgertum in der Habsburgermonarchie (The Bourgeoisie in the Habsburg Monarchy)*, the articles concerning Hungary are always written by Hungarian colleagues. This on first sight positive co-operation distorts our view and helps to blind us to the fact that nobody in Austria is engaged in systematic research on the history of Hungary.

Although in recent years some journals have published articles by Hungarian historians on themes from social history, cultural history or from women's studies, continuous research concerning Hungarian history is nowhere in sight. The different trends of Hungarian historiography, its different schools and its original interpretations of central issues of European history are mostly ignored. Jenő Szűcs's book of 1981 on the *Three Historical Regions of Europe*, for example, was virtually ignored in Austria until 1990, when Eric Hobsbawm in the introduction to his book *Nations and Nationalism since 1789* ranked it among the seven most important books on this topic. The fate of Szűcs's book is typical. Most Hungarian historical works only come to the attention of their Austrian colleagues after the book has gained international fame. Christof Nyiri's book *Am Rande Europas (At the Fringe of Europe)* is another case in point.

The researchers: old relatives

There are nevertheless some areas that intensively deal with Hungarian history and historiography, and where Austrian historians sometimes tackle Hungarian problems and topics. Host Haselsteiner, Friedrich Gottas, Gustav Reingrabner and Peter Haslinger are some of the noteworthy exceptions. Host Haselsteiner was born in Voivodina and besides German speaks

Hungarian and Serbo-Croat on a mother-tongue level. It is typical for most Austrian historians dealing with Hungarian topics that they come from families with strong ties to the region, be it that their families have at one time or another been expelled from eastern Europe, be it that they are Hungarians living abroad or that they are members of Hungarian ethnic minorities and thus came into contact with Hungarian history. Hungarian history was, so to say, “sung at their cradle”. Friedrich Gottas from Salzburg belongs to a second, quite untypical, group of Austrian historians that deals with Hungarian history. Gottas is one of the acknowledged historians of the small religious minority of Austrian Protestants, amounting to roughly four per cent of the country’s population. The majority of Austria’s Protestants live in Vienna and Burgenland, and they closely follow the events around the Hungarian Protestant congregations, which have played such a big role in their own history. If there somewhere is a systematic reception of Hungarian historiography in Austria, it is among the historians of the Protestant churches. The example of Gustav Reingrabner, a professor of ecclesiastical law and a leading church historian at the Protestant Faculty of the University of Vienna, demonstrates that, in spite of language barriers, the reception of Hungarian historical discourses is quite possible. That Reingrabner should occupy himself with Hungarian history is by no means coincidental. He was born in Burgenland, was a parson there and superintendent of the province’s Protestant church, and has more or less single-handedly created the 20th century Protestant church historiography of the region.

Cousins from Burgenland

The third area of Austrian historiography that exhibits a constant reception of Hungarian history and its literature is the history of the province of Burgenland. Here again we meet with the overall Austrian tradition, that problems and topics of Hungarian history are being left to be dealt with by colleagues from regional archives from western Hungary or by historians from Budapest. Burgenland’s once quite pan-German and *revanchiste* vein of historical discourse concerning Hungarian historiography and Hungarian policy has more or less dissolved during the 1970s. This has probably been due to the results of an exceptionally fruitful cooperation between Hungarian and Burgenland historians within the framework of the *Mogersdorf Symposium on Cultural History*, which has been going on for more than three de-

cares, and in which Slovene and Croatian historians have also participated. In their discussions of themes and problems of the region of Pannonia – which all participants perceive as a historically developed entity – historians from Burgenland and Steiermark have entered into an intensive dialogue with their colleagues from the neighbouring states. This cooperation, which has always been taken very seriously by all participants (the participating states and provinces sending official delegations with officially nominated leaders, the sessions being headed by boards with rotating presidents, all papers being translated into all four languages) has resulted in a serious reception of Hungarian historiography in Burgenland. During recent decades all chapters of historical works from Burgenland concerning topics of Hungarian history have been written by Hungarian specialists. Chapters on the early settlement of the region by Huns were written by Péter Tomka, those on Avars by Bálint Csanád, and articles on the development of Hungary's western border system by Endre Tóth, István Fodor and Géza Erszegi. To this day Vera Zimányi is regarded as the grand old lady of the late medieval and early modern political and socio-economic history of Burgenland. Another example of this cooperation among historians from Croatia, Hungary and Burgenland is represented by the *Schlaininger Gespräche (Schlaining Consultations)*, a conference on economic and social history, which has been going on for more than twenty years. These meetings are not for parrying arguments, but serve the discussion and evaluation of scientific literature of the different countries and regions across existing borders.

Within this cooperative framework the once hotly debated issues of the so-called “Burgenland Question”, i.e. the annexation of Burgenland to Austria in 1921, in Austrian and Hungarian discourses have acquired the status of a consensual historical perspective long overdue. The reception of the literature on the plebiscite of Sopron/Ödenburg of 1921 in Burgenland may here serve as a good example. The history of this allegedly faked, unjust and manipulated plebiscite, which left the town of Sopron/Ödenburg in Hungary, was a central element of Burgenland historiography in the inter-war period. When, in 1990, Mária Ormos published her book *Civitas Fidelissima. Népszavazás Sopronban 1921 (Civitas Fidelissima. Plebiscite in Sopron, 1921)*, in which she presented the circumstances of this plebiscite and its accompanying secret negotiations and protocols in quite a different light, no storm of indignation swept over Burgenland any longer. In the beginning some Austrian historians, who spoke Hungarian and knew the book, discreetly failed

to mention it, for example Peter Haslinger in his *Der ungarische Revisionismus und das Burgenland 1922–1923* (*Hungarian Revisionism and Burgenland 1922–1923*). Peter Haslinger's depiction of the plebiscite illustrates that in those areas of Austrian historiography where the reception of the relevant Hungarian literature did not take place, the old historical discourses of Austrian historiography still dominate the field.

Burgenland's historiography has by now without further ado accepted Mária Ormos's analysis, namely that Austria's position vis-à-vis the plebiscite was from the beginning a very weak one and first and foremost served to conceal the fact that Austria had practically already given up the town. In exchange for this, Hungary accepted Austria's annexation of the rest of Burgenland and withdrew its support for the Hungarian nationalist partisan groups still operating in the region. By 1991 the Burgenländische Forschungsgesellschaft (*Burgenland Research Society*) had already published a book on the history and current situation of the region, *Hart an der Grenze* (*Close to the Border*), in which two Hungarian historians, Katalin Soós und József Tirnitz, in their chapters on the Burgenland Question completely followed Mária Ormos's analysis and argumentation, which thus had been received into the official historical discourse of Burgenland.

Estrangements

Since we have always belonged together, Hungary cannot really have been that different from Austria, and Hungarians today cannot be that much different from us. Instead of closely following Hungarian events and developments, Austrian historians thus often tend to simply project Austrian circumstances onto the Hungarian situation. A good example of this was a discussion among young Austrian historians in 1991. In *ÖZG-Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* (*Austrian Journal for Historical Sciences*) a group around Franz Delapina published an article on recent developments in Hungary under the title *Die Reform frißt ihre Kinder* (*The Reform Devours its Children*). As the starting point of their analysis the authors defined "a form of social partnership called 'Kádárism'", which they characterised in the following way.

"'Kádárism' was the name of the post-1956 era, when social peace was to be established by new means. 'Who is not against us, is with us' was the slogan with the help of which one took leave from severe ideological terror, and

with the help of which, in exchange for material satisfaction, the population's renunciation of political participation was bought according to the motto: 'We rule, you buy dachas and Ladas'.¹

This depiction of a Hungarian variant of Austrian social partnership – the K. u. K., Kreisky and Kádár theme – was soon corrected by Béla Rásky, an Austrian historian from a family of Hungarian refugees of 1956.

"To call these developments a reform is as erroneous as the comparison of Kádárism with social partnership. Hungarian historiography depicts the period after 1956 (to roughly 1959) as a time of revenge and retribution (that it would later develop into Kádárism, was by no means clear). As for social partnership, it lacked the most vital element of partnership, namely autonomous social bodies. In addition, under Kádár the leading role of the Party was a must. Even after 1965 Kádárism was nothing more than a dictatorship. The real problem is, why this dictatorship was accepted by Hungarian society so quickly – and how easily Hungarian society tends to forget this today."²

Scapegoats or the Black Sheep of the Family

The characteristics of this typically Austrian view of Hungarian history are most clearly depicted in popular historical presentations. What does the Austrian reader interested in Hungary and Hungarian history find, when turning to historical handbooks and standard histories? Manfred Scheuch's *Historischer Atlas Österreich (Historical Atlas Austria)* is undoubtedly such a representative standard work. From the 1970s Scheuch had, as editor of the Social Democrat daily *Arbeiterzeitung (Workers' Newspaper)*, regularly published historical maps concerning central questions of Austrian history, which soon became used in schools. From his collected materials the author of several schoolbooks edited first a small collection and finally the first and only available historical atlas of Austria. In this volume we first encounter the Hungarians on page 23 under the heading of "Hungarian Invasions". The reader is informed that the Hungarians – a people related to the Finns – originate from the Ural regions, fled from the Petchenegs, first attacked Vienna in 881 and

1 Franz Delapina, Hannes Hofbauer, Andrea Komlosy, Gerhard Melinz, Susan Zimmerman: Ungarn: Die Reform frißt ihre Kinder. *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften*, 1991, No. 1., 110.

2 Béla Rásky: Verschwörungstheorien. *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften*. 1991, No. 3., 107–108.

swept across Europe in plundering and pillaging hordes, in the course of which these “barbarians” took many Christian hostages. They only held the eastern part of Austria “up to the river Enns” from 907 to 955, until the battle of Regensburg. The reader is twice assured, on page 23 and again page 26, that “The half century of Hungarian rule in Lower Austria has left hardly any traces whatsoever!”. After their conversion to Christianity and the crowning of King Stephen in 1001 the Hungarians disappear for half a millennium, only to reappear as occupying foes under their king Matthias Corvinus. “Austria’s lord for eight years: Hungary’s King Matthias Corvinus” reads the caption under his picture. Although the author mentions that after the successful siege of Vienna the king did not allow his troops to plunder the city, the government of this Renaissance prince *sans pareil* does not meet with any praise.

“The court of Matthias Corvinus was under the influence of Humanism and many Italian artists and scientist were called to Vienna. The taxation of the centralist administration was, of course, much more effective than under the messy administration of Friedrich, which the burghers did not really appreciate, just like his Hungarian followers, into whose hands Corvinus now placed the most important positions.” Austrians are hard to satisfy, even with a benevolent Corvinus and his effective administration. Therefore, as we can read further on, “after his unexpected death in 1490 his reign collapsed like a house of cards and the Habsburgs were effortlessly able to take over their hereditary lands again.” Hereditary lands obviously cannot be simply replaced by a mere house of cards.

After this the Hungarians lose the Battle of Mohács and prince Eugene of Savoy has to regain Hungary from the Turks. After 1806, the only thing to be found on the maps of the Austria historical atlas is an empire, which is not further explained. The Revolution of 1848 appears as a somewhat muddled uprising of the population of Vienna, and although there is another map showing the more important uprisings of the 1848 Revolution within the Habsburg Monarchy, no explanation is given for these. Once we reach the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, we immediately learn that this was the beginning of the end. The last sentences of the chapter, which is, incidentally, headed by a portrait of Austria’s minister president Count Beust, perfectly illustrate the dominant perception of Hungary’s role within Austrian history, even among the educated classes of Austria.

The rejection of reforms, which aimed at an equality of all nationalities, by the ruling classes of Hungary very much contributed to the destabilisation of the empire and the

*estrangement of the Southern Slavs from the Monarchy. The special status, which Hungary had attained by the Compromise of 1867, turned after the lost World War into a disadvantage, in as far as Hungary was now, in contrast to all other non-German peoples of the monarchy, regarded as a defeated nation and reduced to a small state, which had to leave millions of its co-nationals outside of its borders. This opened the door for Hungary's revisionist policy in the inter-war years that finally let the country become one of Hitler's allies.*³

That is thus the lesson, which a real Austrian learns from the Compromise of 1867. The tendency to claim that really others were responsible for the many political mistakes of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy runs like a red thread through all of Austria's popular historiography. Problematic periods, like the Revolutions of 1848, Austrian historiography either has tended to keep quiet about completely or just mentioned in passing. Austria's most popular historical handbook, Walter Kleindl's *Daten zur Geschichte und Kultur (Dates in History and Culture)* summarises the events of 1848 under the heading *Revolution in Austria* in just 24 lines.

The internal political situation in Austria actually suffered from Metternich's overwrought conservatism. The strict "Metternich System" necessarily led to circumstances rightly regarded as suppression. To the socially and economically deteriorating situation of the peasants was added the growing dissatisfaction of the bourgeoisie and the "intelligentsia", who no longer wanted to bear the intellectual limitations. This in reality "bourgeois revolution" did not seek the fall of the House of Habsburg (as in France or in the non-German speaking crown lands) but the abolition of absolutism. Personal freedom and a democratic constitution were the aims. Even Karl Marx, who in 1848 several times came to Vienna, declared, that these events had nothing to do with the "social revolution" he represented.

The supporters of the revolution were the students, the Trades Association of Lower Austria, the Juridical-Political Reading Society and the booksellers together with the printers and typesetters.

During the revolution there was no close connection between Vienna and the provinces.

Only from Styria did Vienna receive some support. In Upper Austria, Styria and the Tyrol only the regional assemblies were active. New local legislation and the land taxes were the problems.

3 Manfred Scheuch: *Historischer Atlas Österreich*. Wien, 1994, 103.

The climax and the end of the October Revolution in Vienna witnessed the most victims (about 2000 people fell during the fighting).

Since foreign elements had taken over the revolutionary radicalism, the bourgeois liberal classes and the farmers had, step by step, distanced themselves.

One success of the revolution was the so-called liberation of the farmers. Kudlich, a representative of Silesia, through the Grundentlastungspatent (abolition of hereditary serfdom) achieved the liberation of all peasants. Farmers became the free owners of their land. On the other hand, the revolution paved the way for a revision of the constitution, which, after a period of neo-absolutism, was put into effect in 1867.⁴

In my Viennese library I looked in vain for an Austrian book on the Revolution of 1848. I finally found a German edition of Emil Niederhauser's *1848 – Sturm im Habsburgerreich (1848 – Storm in the Habsburg Empire)*. The role of dissatisfied rebels in Austrian history, of the so-called "foreign elements of revolutionary radicalism", we still like to leave to others, preferably to the Hungarians.

Anecdotes

This depiction of Hungarians in popular handbooks and standard reference books can also be encountered in historical biographies. In her new biographical novel (published in Graz in 1998) *Queen Mary of Hungary* Elisabeth Tamussion fantasizes about the behaviour of the Hungarian nobles in face of the Turkish threats in 1521.

Accompanied by Andrea de Burgo she appeared in the field camp at Adony in order to visit the king and the troops. She sat on a fiery horse, which she managed superbly, a fact that naturally caused a lot of admiration among the Hungarians. Shouts of "Éljen" were to be heard, trumpets sounded, their blood and life they wanted to give for the queen, vitam et sanguinem. But as so often, the enthusiasm did not last for long. When news reached the camp that the Turkish troops were retreating, a feeling of relief pervaded, the country had been "saved" – but for how long? It was decided to turn the camp into a national assembly in order to finally vote on the necessary decisions for the country's defence. But in this as well, all that remained were good intentions.

With such opponents, of course, the Turks later had an easy day at Mohács. Ludwig dies as a hero, Zápolya – in this version of Hungarian history – becomes an "unsentimental pragmatist" and the Hungarians are once

4 Walter Kleindel: *Österreich. Daten zur Geschichte und Kultur*. Wien, 1996, 239.

again depicted as “respectable dandies”, full of good intentions and hot air, in the way we know them so well from Lehár’s operettas.

Old family pictures in new frames

Austrian historical science still has a perception of the common Austro-Hungarian history characterised by a string of interpretations that have dominated the field since the 19th century. It was mainly German liberal positions of the 19th century which had influenced Josef Redlich’s magnum opus *Das Österreichische Staats- und Reichsproblem. Geschichtliche Darstellung der inneren Politik der habsburgischen Monarchie von 1848 bis zum Untergang des Reiches 1918* (*The Problem of the Austrian State and Reich. Historical Presentation of the Domestic Politics of the Habsburg Monarchy from 1848 to the Downfall of the Reich in 1918*). Many of these positions were after the Second World War – via the works of Robert A. Kann, a historian expelled from Austria in 1938 – to find their way back into Austrian historiography. This becomes especially clear in the contexts of the so-called nationality question and of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise. The tone was set by the Austrian edition of Robert A. Kann’s *Das Nationalitätenproblem der Habsburgermonarchie, Geschichte und Ideengehalt der nationalen Bestrebungen vom Vormärz bis zur Auflösung des Reiches im Jahre 1918* (*The Nationality Problem of the Habsburg Monarchy, History and Ideas of National Movements from the Vormärz Period to the Dissolution of the Empire in the Year 1918*).

How these analyses of the late 19th century stubbornly persist in Austrian historiography, I would like to illustrate with two examples from recently published standard works on the history of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

Completely Austro-centrist in its evaluation of developments is Manfred Rauchensteiner’s *Der Tod des Doppeladlers, Österreich-Ungarn und der Erste Weltkrieg* (*The Death of the Double-Eagle, Austro-Hungary and the First World War*). In this detailed work on the course of the First World War, the evaluation of the political background lags far behind the presentation of military aspects. To qualify Mihály Károlyi’s government as one of “radicals and pacifists”⁵ is in itself questionable, but to present a book about the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy without even mentioning one of the major works – if

⁵ Manfred Rauchensteiner’s *Der Tod des Doppeladlers, Österreich-Ungarn und der Erste Weltkrieg*. Graz, 1994, 619.

not *the* major work – on this topic, namely Oszkár Jászi's *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago 1929) seems very strange indeed. Or did Austro-Hungary really lose the war because Hungary's war minister Béla Lindern ordered all Hungarians on the front to put down their arms?⁶ And was he really allowed to do that? It is not the unqualified historical research, which is to be criticised here, nor the unprofessional handling of historical sources, but the largely uncritical adoption of patterns of interpretation regarding these sources – interpretations that often come dangerously close to the platitudes of popular historiography.

These traditional representations determine how – apart from all historical knowledge – the Hungarian nation, the Hungarian state and the Hungarian people are being perceived by Austrians. *Eine Chance für Mitteleuropa, Bürgerliche Emanzipation und Staatsverfall in der Habsburgermonarchie* (*A Chance for Central Europe, Bourgeois Emancipation and the Disintegration of the State in the Habsburg Monarchy*) is the title of a book by Helmut Rumpler on the 19th century, published in 1997 as part of a new, ten-volume History of Austria. In spite of a broad reception of Hungarian literature, the presentation of a number of central events (e.g. the Revolution of 1848) still remains within well-worn tracks. Right at the beginning of the chapter “Hungarian State and Hungarian Nationalism” on page 169 we find the lapidary statement “Hungary was no state and had few chances of becoming one. The Magyars had in relation to other nationalities during the course of history become a minority...”. These fundamentals and their reasons having been clarified, it will be much easier for the reader to accept many of the quite strange things to follow. On page 296 we are told that the Revolution of 1848 was actually nothing like we imagine a normal revolution to be. “The revolution of the Hungarians was a revolution of noblemen. Therein lay its grandeur and its limitations. The Hungarian nobility acted as representatives of an almost non-existent national bourgeoisie.” The events of the autumn of 1848 and the situation in Hungary are described as follows.

Batthyány withdrew from politics. Széchenyi went crazy and was put away in a mental hospital in Vienna. Esterházy sided with the Viennese Court. Eötvös went abroad. In this situation Kossuth put everything on one card and ordered the Hungarian Army to march on Vienna, in order to support the October rising there and to bring the revolution, which for Hungary he thought secured, to a successful end in Vienna as well.

⁶ Manfred Rauchensteiner's *Der Tod des Doppeladlers, Österreich-Ungarn und der Erste Weltkrieg*. Graz, 1994, 619.

*At Schwechat, east of Vienna, the Hungarian troops were repelled by Jellačić and the commander of the imperial army ... could on the 31st of October recapture Vienna. With that the revolution in Austria was over.*⁷

Helmut Rumpler is by no means a short-sighted proponent of an Austrian position. He is one of the most original and most qualified Austrian historians, who in his evaluation of historical events is never afraid to call things by their proper name. On page 318 he characterises the “Blood Court Martial of Arad” as “brutal”, Haynau he calls a “butcher” and the death sentence for Batthyány he qualifies as an “expression of blind revenge”. Nevertheless, he remains within the traditional pattern of interpretation when he divides the Hungarian politicians into “pragmatists”, those who do not want a cessation from the monarchy, on the one hand, and “demagogues” on the other.⁸ What is blinding the latter in their judgement we learn from the author’s caption to a painting by Mihály Zichy which reads: “The Great Myth: the Hungarian Nation”.⁹

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7 Helmut Rumpler: *Eine Chance für Mitteleuropa. Bürgerliche Emanzipation und Staatsverfall in der Habsburgermonarchie*. Wien, 1997., 303–304.

8 Helmut, Rumpler: *Eine Chance für Mitteleuropa. Bürgerliche Emanzipation und Staatsverfall in der Habsburgermonarchie*. Wien, 1997, 520.

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