



BOOK REVIEWS

IV. Iván és I. Péter mikrohistoriográfiája [A micro-historiography of Ivan IV and Peter I]. By Gyula Szvák. Edited by Gábor Klaniczay and István M. Szijártó. Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2019. 175 pp.

Volume 9 of the series *Mikrotörténelem* [Microhistory], edited by Gábor Klaniczay and István M. Szijártó, offers an overview of professor Gyula Szvák's research career on Russian historiography, a career which stretched over a period of some 40 years. The volume *IV. Iván és I. Péter mikrohistoriográfiája* [A micro-historiography of Ivan IV and Peter I] contains studies previously published in various journals and other volumes. Szvák explains the importance of publishing these papers again in a single volume in the introduction: "The present microhistory is in fact a micro-historiography, and it seeks to make claims about the entirety of Russian history through excavation. Thus, the series of micro-examinations focusing on the periods of the rule of Ivan IV and Peter I provide a picture of 200 years of Russian historical science" (p.8). As a result, the volume may catch the attention not only of those interested in Ivan IV and Peter I, but, as Szvák suggests, anyone interested in Russian historiography or history.

The introduction is followed by six papers of various lengths. The first two focus primarily on the Russian and Soviet historiography on Ivan IV, while the third discusses all the historiographical works published on Peter I in Russia. These three studies constitute the bulk of the volume (pp.19–136). Although the volume is not divided thematically, after the first section, which clearly deals with (micro)historiography, the second part, which begins with Chapter 4, focuses more on the oeuvre of a selected few historiographers. The first study discusses Russian historian Ruslan Skrynnikov and his historical conception of Ivan IV. The following chapter provides a comparison of Skrynnikov's career and the career of Hungarian historian József Perényi. The final chapter, the third thematic part of the volume, is a study on attempts to compare Ivan IV and Peter I.

As my intention with this review is to introduce a volume the studies of which have been published earlier, I will not discuss the studies themselves individually. It is worth paying attention to the introduction, however, which was written specifically for the volume. The introductory chapter consists of four smaller sections. The first one discusses a recent Russian-language anthology of

Gyula Szvák's studies, the main inspiration for the volume reviewed here. Since, according to the author, Hungarian readers are interested mainly in Ivan IV and Peter I, the Hungarian edition only contains studies written about the two rulers. Based on the decades the author has spent in the field of Russistics, this claim is supposedly justified. However, it might have been worth including at least a short list of the studies that were not selected for this volume. In the same section, we are given a brief discussion of the tenets and development of Gyula Szvák's historiographical works, as well as of his "arrival" at "micro-historiography" as a concept. In the following sections, Szvák reflects on changes in Soviet historiography and the role of Russian studies in Hungary, with special regard to Szvák's own experiences and expertise. The section provides an exciting insight into life as a historian in the period prior to the change of regimes through the eyes of Gyula Szvák and the "lens" of Russian studies in Hungary, of course. Szvák recalls limitations to academic freedom in Soviet historiography and, later, the loosening of these constraints, as compared with a more enabling Hungarian social and academic life.

The concluding thoughts of the introduction appear to be a summary of a historian's career in the context of current political events. Although Szvák does not primarily deal with Russian historiography here, he does not fully digress from it either, since as the papers in the volume shed light on the relationship of historians of the given period to the state powers of the times, the final section of the introduction likewise mentions some major conflicts concerning the academic sphere in the past few years. In the author's view, the parallel between the historical perspective of the volume and the situation report of the present time, formulated at the end of the introduction, is manifested in the tendencies of the development of an authoritarian rule and historians' relationships to these tendencies. The selected subjects of the volume (Ivan IV and Peter I) practically determine the questions of this kind, as the historical assessment of the two monarchs was never an issue to which state power could afford to be indifferent.

The first three studies present the entirety of the Russian and Soviet historiography on Ivan IV and Peter I, thus achieving the aims laid out in the introduction: they provide a comprehensive picture of 300 years of Russian and Soviet historiography. The relationship between historian and state power, emphasized in the introduction, appears as merely a minor topic next to more imposing themes, such as the use of sources, the importance of belonging to certain schools of historiography, academic discourse, and the impacts of international Russian studies, among others. The spelling of Russian names to

Hungarian can be done in several ways, and, in my assessment, Szvák is not consistent in this respect. Nevertheless, this obviously does not affect the value of the studies from the perspective of their content.

The second part of the volume foregrounds the work of historiographers Ruslan Skrynnikov and József Perényi, who have become historical figures themselves. The Soviet historiographer is mentioned in two studies, one of which discusses his works on Ivan IV. The greatest merit of the volume is this very in-depth examination: considering the previous study on the historiography of Ivan IV, the reader is given an opportunity to get to know the deeper connections and the oeuvre and mindset of the Soviet historian. At first glance, the only study which seems to fall somewhat outside of the scope of the topics of the volume is the one comparing the career of the Soviet historian and József Perényi, but the claims made in the introduction and the study on Skyrnnikov's oeuvre create a logical connection between the studies. The two historians are connected not only by their works but also by the author himself, Gyula Szvák. This paves the way for the final study in the volume, *IV. Iván és I. Péter* [Ivan IV and Peter I], which is by Szvák and which offers a comparative analysis of the two monarchs. Szvák approaches the comparison from basic perspective, such as systems of historical theory, socio-political processes, autocracy, individual lives, and personality traits. It is important to mention here that, while the other studies in the volume meet the criteria of scholarly publications, the final section lacks proper references. It would have been worth spending a bit more time on correcting these oversights.

Overall, volume 9 of the series *Mikrotörténelem* offers much more than the title suggests, since, in accordance with the objectives, in addition to an (undoubtedly detailed) Russian historiography on Ivan IV and Peter I, it also provides a comprehensive picture of the entirety of historiography in Russia. It also offers insights into Gyula Szvák's oeuvre and the achievements and professional life of Hungarian scholars of Russian history and culture in the past few decades, hallmarked by Szvák's name. I recommend the volume for all those interested in the aforementioned topics.

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