



BOOK REVIEWS

Klasszikus és modern republikanizmusok: Eszmetörténeti tanulmányok [Classical and modern republicanisms: Studies in intellectual history]. By Ágoston Nagy and Milán Pap. Budapest: Ráció Kiadó, 2021. 275 pp.

It may sound like a bit of a cliché to begin a review with the contention that the work in question fills a lacuna in the relevant literature, but in the case of the collection of essays in *Klasszikus és modern republikanizmusok: Eszmetörténeti tanulmányok* [Classical and modern republicanisms: Studies in the intellectual history], one cannot really avoid this admittedly trite phrase. With a few refreshing exceptions, Hungarian scholarship has tended to treat the various aspects of republicanism rather narrowly, both in Hungary and on the international political stage. A single collection of studies cannot resolve this problem entirely, of course, but the volume edited by Ágoston Nagy and Milán Pap, which contains the papers presented at the conference “Res publica – pro patria – virtus: Conference on the History of Classical and Modern Republicanism and Patriotism,” which was held in Budapest in 2015, points out the by its very existence shortcomings of the literature on republicanism in Hungary. It strives to address these shortcomings with the means at its disposal and to the extent possible for a single volume, and it does a very impressive job and meets high academic standards.

The volume is divided into a preface (“From the grand narratives to the multifariousness of republicanism”) and three major groups of essays (“Hungarian republicanisms,” “Euro-Atlantic perspectives,” “Republicanism and political theory”). In the preface, the editors offer a summary of the international historiography of republicanism. They concentrate particularly on the conceptions of “classical republicanism” and “civic humanism” (*Bürgerhumanismus*) developed by Zera Fink and Hans Baron respectively and their later adaptations. They then turn to the contributions of Anglophone “intellectual history” to the reinterpretation of the republican tradition, discussing the significance of the work of figures such as John G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner. Finally, they note that in the image of republicanism as tradition and discursive mode that has emerged in the scholarship published in recent decades one finds differentiations in several dimensions, which have led to the disintegration of the early grand narratives. This process has been accompanied by a spatial expansion of the interpretative framework of

republicanism, including the discovery of the republicanism of Central and Eastern Europe, and by increased and deepening attention to the history of these republicanism. The volume itself is to a large extent the fruit of this. The foreword makes references to the developments in the research in Hungary so far, and it then concludes with a brief introduction to the essays included in the volume.

The relative proportions of the three major sections of the volume give a good impression of the thematic, temporal, and geographical points of emphasis in the collection. The first section, which consists of six studies, is the largest. It offers a look at some of the layers of the history of early modern and modern republicanism in Hungary and Transylvania. This is followed by a unit consisting of four essays on certain aspects of French and American republicanism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The volume concludes with two studies reflecting on republicanism primarily from the perspective of political theory.

In the first section, the chronological framework of which is the period from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth, we find discussions of how certain problems related to the republican tradition appeared (or sometimes did not appear) in Hungarian political thought, understood broadly. An essay by Gábor Petneházi (“Philosophers at the Wheel: The Prospects of Republicanism in Transylvania in the Báthory Era”) examines the degree and depth to which the idea of republicanism was present at the end of the sixteenth century, whether with positive or negative connotations, in the political discourses in Transylvania, which had existed as a separate political entity since the late Middle Ages. Petneházi concludes that there can be little talk of any serious enthusiasm for republicanism in Transylvania at the time or for that matter of any deep reflection on its theoretical foundations. References to republicanism remained predominantly at the surface level of political rhetoric, and they functioned primarily as a stigmatizing slogan for the opposing party. Even when positive statements were made, they were always carefully hidden or “coded” in the discourse.

Zsófia Köllő offers an essay which adopts a strictly text-centered approach. Her discussion, “Republicanism and Patriotism in the Nádasdy Mausoleum,” focuses on a highly influential work, the so-called Nádasdy Mausoleum (a series of engravings of prominent Hungarian leaders followed by elogia in Latin and German translation), first published in 1664. Köllő demonstrates the prevalence of republican-patriotic conceptual frameworks and values in seventeenth-century Hungarian political discourse on the basis of the use of the terms and

concepts of *patria*, *rex-regnum*, and *res publica* in the Nádasdy Mausoleum, showing their complex semantic interrelations. The contribution by Ágoston Nagy (“The Experience of the Festival Culture of the ‘Thermidorian Republic’ in the Diary of Sándor Kisfaludy”) focuses on elements of the republican ethos as expressed in the French festival culture of the late eighteenth century and in children’s martial games and public contests in the period. Nagy offers an exemplary mix of methods from intellectual and cultural history more broadly in his discussion of how the “cultural adaptation” and “productive reception” (p.109) of these elements are found in the diary of Sándor Kisfaludy, a renowned writer of the first half of the nineteenth century who was taken prisoner of war in France as a young military officer in 1796. Nagy analyzes and contextualizes the narratives Kisfaludy wrote on his experiences upon his return home, which he later reinterpreted and applied to the political framework in Hungary. On the basis of this discussion, details emerge concerning the cultural transfer processes of republican values of the time, which have hardly been discussed so far in the secondary literature.

Three studies in the volume deal with the manifestations of republicanism in Hungary in the nineteenth century. The essay by György Miru (“Republican Freedom and Democratic Self-Government: The Example of Kossuth”) focuses on the political thought of Lajos Kossuth, one of the most prominent and influential politicians of the first decisive period of Hungarian nation-building, the so-called Reform Era, and the 1848–49 Revolution and War of Independence. Miru persuasively argues that Kossuth ultimately expressed and espoused views which were progressively democratic by the standards of his time by bringing to the foreground and venturing distinctive (re)interpretations of motifs linked usually to the republican tradition, such as the concept of freedom as a matter of political participation, the crucial, anti-tyrannical role of local self-government (in the case of Hungary, primarily the counties), the strengths of the republic as a political system, and the importance of community morality. In “Republican Norm and Verse Novel,” which offers a discussion of *Rombányi*, a long narrative written in verse by nineteenth-century literary historian and author Pál Gyulai, József Takáts argues that Gyulai’s poem presents the 1848–49 Revolution and War of Independence as “a unique moment of the republican ideal” (p.142), in the course of which two core values of the republican ethos, soldierly virtues and the “passion for equality,” were increasingly asserted.

The first larger unit of the volume on the history of republicanism in Hungary concludes with Attila M. Demeter’s study. Demeter focuses on József Eötvös,

one of the most important politicians and political thinkers of the nineteenth century in Hungary, and particularly on his most important work of political theory, "The Influence of the Ruling Ideas of the Nineteenth Century on the State." As Demeter persuasively shows, Eötvös recognized the importance of ethnolinguistic nationalism(s), which he saw as particularly dangerous for the future of the political unity of multi-ethnic Hungary. Drawing on Tocqueville, Eötvös proposes a certain degree of "administrative decentralization" as a solution that would not compromise the prerogatives of the strong central government in issues that were essential to the integrity of the state. The strengthening of local self-government, Eötvös contended, would offer citizens a genuine experience of political freedom. It would also foster a stronger sense of patriotism by increasing the number of circles in which "the individual can move freely" and to which he thus can become emotionally attached (p.157). According to Eötvös, the adoption in political practice of these basic elements of the classical republican ethos would help hinder (stronger) nations in their attempts to usurp state sovereignty and crush other national communities.

In an essay titled "Hereditary Monarchy and Patriotic Civic Virtue: The Figure of the Minister of State in the Seventeenth Century" in the second section of the collection (the section on "Euro-Atlantic perspectives"), Gábor Fölköli offers an array of engaging examples of how, in the era of French absolutism, the minister of state was often portrayed as a guardian of old republican, classical civic values which had been corrupted in the intricate milieu of court life and the custodian of an alternative role in the political elite to that of the courtier. The two other contributions in the second part take the reader back to the early period of US history with discussions of the debates over the maintenance of patriotic civic virtue. In "The Differentiation of the Concept of Republican Virtue in a New World Context: The Case of the Anti-Federalists and the American Constitution of 1787," Zoltán Vajda analyses the debates on the Constitution of 1787. He begins with an examination of the anti-federalist arguments, pausing to note that the concept of virtue at the time was hardly a matter of clear consensus. It consisted of several layers, reflecting and also shaped by the social and regional heterogeneity of the United States. Vajda also calls attention to the doubts expressed by the anti-federalist authors about the "natural aristocracy." The anti-federalist authors considered it necessary to maintain the virtue of this "aristocracy" with certain institutional guarantees (frequent elections, the recall of representatives). Csaba Lévai, in his essay "How to Ensure the Survival of a Virtuous Republic? The Intertwining of Classical

Republicanism, the Scottish Enlightenment, and Physiocracy in the Economic and Foreign Policy thought of Thomas Jefferson,” also focuses on debates at the time concerning the question of how to prevent the erosion of republican virtues in a state as large as the United States. By separating the different strata of Thomas Jefferson’s views on this subject, Vajda shows the fundamental heterogeneity of this system of views, reconstructing the main influences (classical republicanism, stadial history, physiocracy) and their interrelationships.

In the first essay in the section of the volume on political theory (“The Republic of Actors: On Hannah Arendt’s Republicanism), László Levente Balogh outlines the role of the concepts of power, (political) action, violence, and the masses in Hannah Arendt’s thought and their complex interrelationships. Balogh also touches on their theoretical relationship to the structures of totalitarianism, democracy, and the republic as postulated by Arendt. In the final essay in the collection (“Post-Communist Republicanism? A Program for the Rectification of Liberalism in Post-Communist Hungary), Milán Pap presents the republican argument and alternative political-community model that emerged in opposition to liberalism, which gradually gained ground after the regime change and came to dominate Hungary in the 1990s.

As I suggested at the beginning of this review, this collection of essays really does fill a lacuna in the secondary literature. I would hazard only one critical remark. One could argue that the essays are too thematically divergent. However, this is largely offset by the fact that the authors discuss issues and problems related to the history of republicanism with a level of detail and depth that can serve as a reference point for further scholarship on republicanism in Hungary.

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