

BOOK REVIEWS

Egy elfeledett magyar királyi dinasztia: a Szapolyaiak [A forgotten Hungarian royal dynasty: The Szapolyais]. Edited by Pál Fodor and Szabolcs Varga. Budapest: Research Centre for the Humanities, 2020.

Published within the framework of the Mohács 1526–2026 Reconstruction and Memory project, *Egy elfeledett magyar királyi dinasztia: a Szapolyaiak* [A forgotten Hungarian royal dynasty: The Szapolyais] fills a major gap in the secondary literature and also offers an encouraging springboard for further research. One of the important objectives of the book is to present the history of one of the most important noble, aristocratic, and royal families of the late Middle Ages and the early modern period in a consistent manner, thus addressing a serious lacuna in Hungarian historiography and providing a summary of the most recent findings. The book does this by focusing on a topic and a historical period in which we have come to see very differently as a result of research which has been underway over the course of the past few years and decades. The volume is not a traditional monograph, however. Rather, it is a volume of studies which summarizes knowledge of the subject at the moment, offering presentations of the findings concerning the period by established researchers in a manner that will be engaging and precise to specialists but also accessible to the general readership. The editors may have chosen this form (a collection of studies) precisely because it has enabled the fourteen authors to produce a work which encompasses everything we know about the period and the dynasty, from political history and royal symbols to religious and literary history and material culture. They may also have been motivated to choose this form by the fact that historians are still grappling with many unanswered questions about the history of the sixteenth century, and in some cases, basic research is lacking and only a summary of the findings so far can be provided. However, these questions may well be a source of inspiration for those interested in the period, and the book indicates several exciting possibilities for further research.

The volume contains a total of sixteen studies, the first four of which deal specifically with the history of the family before the Battle of Mohács. Tibor Neumann offers a classical family history and also the various ways in which the dynasty portrayed itself in the various symbolic languages of the time. István Kenyeres provides a history of the family estate and the ways in which it was farmed at a profit. Norbert C. Tóth describes the anti-Ottoman

struggles of voivode János, who later become John I. We also learn about the lives and dramatic careers of the two brothers, Imre Szapolyai, who was more prominent in the financial and administrative fields, and his younger brother István Szapolyai, a soldier to the core, and their close ties to Pozsega County and Bosnia, as well as the use of the Slavic language by members of the family, their construction projects, the good relationship between János Szapolyai and István Bátori in the Middle Ages, the political maneuvers of the Jagiellonian kings, and the ways in which the family perceived and portrayed itself. The wives also play an important role in the history of the Szapolyai family, and the book naturally focuses on Isabella, the wife of King John I, but we also learn about the wife of István Szapolyai, the mother of John I, Princess Hedwig of Cieszyn. Through marriage, the Szapolyai family built ties to the Habsburgs and the Jagiellons, as seen in the family's perception of itself as an "almost royal house" and the ways in which the family used the symbols of the time to portray itself. Princess Hedwig also sought to arrange advantageous marriages for her children. She tried to arrange the marriage of János to Princess Anne, daughter of King Vladislaus II, and György to the heir to the Hunyadi estate. Although the schemes eventually came to nothing, György's twin sister, Borbála Szapolyai, eventually became the wife of King Sigismund of Poland, which made János Szapolyai the brother-in-law of King Vladislaus. In addition to the wealth he inherited from his father and his princely lineage on his mother's side of the family, János's popularity among the nobility and his military successes made him a suitable candidate for king.

Most of the studies in the volume deal with the era of the reign of John I and John II, the foundations for which are laid by Pál Fodor and Teréz Oborni, who draw attention to the fact that the transition between the kingdom of the Szapolyai family and the Principality of Transylvania seems clear or predictable only from the perspective of today. The people at the time, however, were striving to avoid the division of the kingdom. The study shows how Sultan Suleiman changed his plans for Hungary along the way and how these changes affected the eastern part of the country. The changes in the administration and politics of Eastern Hungary are also explored from the perspective of one person, Péter Petrovics. Szabolcs Varga offers significant nuance to the frequently negative portraits one finds in the historiography of the ispán of Temes, who remained loyal to the Szapolyai family throughout, and although he adopted a pro-Ottoman policy, by doing so, he managed to preserve the Hungarian world in the region a few years longer. István H. Németh and Emőke Gálfi each write about urban policy

as an important element of domestic politics. They show how Buda and Kassa (today Košice, Slovakia) became Hungarian-majority towns after the fighting and the expulsion of the Germans, how the urban structure of the country was transformed, and why Gyulafehérvár (today Alba Iulia, Romania) did not become a free royal town. Péter Kasza's study shows the constraints King John faced in his foreign policy, and Kasza notes that Szapolyai's "national kingdom" failed with the defeat at Tokaj and Szina (today Seňa, Slovakia), while the accession of the whole country to the Habsburg Monarchy was made impossible by the subsequent failure to prevent Szapolyai's return and by the Vienna campaign of 1529. All this foreshadowed the inevitable partition of the country. János B. Szabó's study also gives us a better understanding of the Szapolyai army, its units, and the way in which it was structured and run.

The third major thematic unit in the volume addresses culture and perceptions. Szabolcs Varga's returns to the question of the ways in which the Szapolyai family portrayed itself. Zoltán Csepregi examines the debates surrounding the Reformation. Pál Ács and Péter Kasza look at literary life. Orsolya Bubryák discusses the treasury of the Szapolyai family. On the basis of these articles, an image of King John emerges as educated and art-loving ruler who claimed to be the political heir to the Hunyadi family. He was surrounded by educated humanists, and Hungarian culture thrived in his court, but the figure of the Muslim Hungarian poet Murad Dragoman is also of particular interest. The concluding study examines the ways in which the dynasty has been remembered, tracing how perceptions of the Szapolyai family have been shaped in the historiography, how negative views were associated with the figure of King John over time, how his person was gradually rescued by historiography, and how he was replaced by György Fráter and Queen Isabella as positive heroes.

The volume of studies presents the age of the Szapolyai family from an array of perspectives and using various methodologies, with a focus on political history, symbolic languages of power, culture, and estate management. It is not simply a dynastic history, but rather offers a contemporary history woven around the Szapolyai family. It is perhaps due to this approach that the focus of the book is on John I and John Sigismund, while the discussions of Imre and István Szapolyai serve more as a kind of prequel to the family history. The book deals with contemporary and later perceptions of the family on several occasions, and it adds important nuance to negative depictions. The reader is presented with a sympathetic, humane King John. The themes of the book are determined in part by the desire to present recent findings and the difficulties caused by the

lack of some basic research on certain issues. For this reason, the volume is both a summary of our knowledge of the subject now and also a springboard for further research in the decades to come.

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