Gábor Almási

Faking the National Spirit: Spurious Historical Documents in the Service of the Hungarian National Movement in the Early Nineteenth Century

In 1828, two Latin historical documents were published in the German-language Viennese journal *Archiv für Geschichte, Statistik, Literatur und Kunst*. Both concerned the age of Prince Gabriel Bethlen. One was a supportive letter written by James I King of England addressed to Bethlen with references to the deep affinity between Hungary and Transylvania, promising financial help for Bethlen’s war against the Habsburgs. The other was a report on the meeting of the Viennese secret council, during which the decision was reached to resolve “the Hungarian-Transylvanian question” by killing the Hungarian-speaking adult population. My goal in this essay is to prove the spurious nature of these documents through a historical analysis and point out anachronistic elements that throw into question their authenticity. As is often the case with forged texts, these documents reveal more about their own age and the political-ideological agenda of the national movement of the early nineteenth century than of early seventeenth-century Transylvania. By examining how these documents ended up in the Austrian journal of Baron Joseph Hormayr, I offer an opportunity to reflect not only on the ways in which history was used for nationalist agendas, but also on the paradoxes of contemporary Austrian patriotism.

Keywords: nationalist historiography, patriotism, Joseph Hormayr, Gabriel Bethlen

In the summer of 1828, two Latin historical documents were published in the German language Viennese journal, *Archiv für Geschichte, Statistik, Literatur und Kunst*.¹ These documents, as I will prove in this paper, were fakes. They were presented as historical sources of the age of Gabriel Bethlen (1580–1629), the great Transylvanian ruler of the early seventeenth century, who led three successful campaigns against the Habsburg emperor Ferdinand II and who was on the way to becoming a national hero in nineteenth-century Hungary. Thus, these sources allegedly pertained to the legacy of a highly controversial figure, especially within the broader narrative of the history of the Habsburg Monarchy, who had often been represented in Western propaganda and historical works as a

barbaric enemy of the Habsburgs, a man without principles or faith. As is often the case with faked texts, these documents tell more about their own age, the era of national awakening in nineteenth-century Hungary, than of early seventeenth-century Transylvania. They offer glimpses into the history of cultural-linguistic nationalism in the Kingdom of Hungary and the ways in which history was used for nationalist agendas, as well as an opportunity to reflect on the paradoxes of contemporary Austrian patriotism. In this essay I first present the sources and point out the problems and anachronisms in them. I then investigate the context in which they were published in the Austrian journal edited by Baron Joseph Hormayr.

The Letter of James I to Gabriel Bethlen

The first document published concerning Gabriel Bethlen in the Archiv für Geschichte was a letter written in 1621 by James I and VI, King of England and Scotland. More precisely, it was a letter undersigned by Prince Buckingham, James’s favorite, in the name of the king and by a certain Larrey in the name of the parliament. If it were an authentic document, it would be the only known exchange between the king of England and the prince of Transylvania during the Thirty Years’ War. According to the introduction, James I was responding to Prince Bethlen’s letter, which had been brought to England by Dénes Kubosi, a diplomat of whom no other trace is found in the sources. The king was glad to see that Bethlen sought to further friendship between Transylvania and England, a friendship which was based as much on the splendor of the forefathers and military virtues of both glorious nations as on the elegance of their legal systems. No wonder, James I was all the more unhappy to hear about the erosion of ancient liberties in the Kingdom of Hungary since the Battle of Mohács, which

---

should be taken as a reference to Habsburg rule (although the name of the Habsburgs is never mentioned in the letter). Hungary, he claimed, would have suffered the fate of Bohemia and been reduced to servitude had Gabriel Bethlen not saved it from demise and restored many of its liberties.⁵ And although England had made great financial and military sacrifices in Spanish and French affairs and above all in the Bohemian war, the king nevertheless offered 80,000 ducats in support of the Transylvanian army, which was to be paid secretly through the English legate in Constantinople. The reinstatement of the glorious Kingdom of Hungary allegedly was a matter of great importance to James I and his parliament, since it was in the interest of the whole of Europe that Hungary survive independently as the invincible bastion of Christianity and contribute to the European balance of powers as a bridle of “Germany,” repelling Austrian attempts to disrupt the European balance.⁶ This would all be better explained by the king’s diplomat, Dudley [Carleton], “secretary of the parliament,” who was staying in “Belgium” with the Bohemian King, but would soon be sent to meet with Bethlen.⁷

It is relatively easy to prove that this letter, which is rich with anachronism, is spurious. As it was written in the name of both the parliament and the king, one can first check whether the English parliament was sitting on October 19, 1621, the purported date of the letter. In fact, it was not. Although it assembled in 1621, it was adjourned for the summer and autumn.⁸ There are several other factors that render the letter implausible. Although the majority of the political body in England supported greater involvement in the war on the part of the Protestant Palatinate and Bohemia (and the King of Bohemia Frederick I was

---

⁵ “Dolenter etenim tum ex relatione Legati tui verbotenus longius facta, tum ex rumoribus ac actis publicis Nobis intelligere fuit [...] ut adeo praepediendum sit illud, quod universum regnum deplorat, ne Hungaria aliquando in servitutem (ut deploranda nostra aetate Boemia) redacta e serie liberorum expungatur Regnorum, quod omnino pridem jam factum fuisset, nisi fortis Tua et praedecessorum tuorum manus nobilissimum Hungarie Regnum, alterum Europae ornamentum, ab interitu vindicasset illudque regeneratum quasi habitu aureae libertatis donasset.” Ibid., 454.

⁶ “Et nobis et universae Europae interest, ut nobilissimum Hungarie regnum parte ab una qua Christianitatis fortalitium inexpugnabile, porro quoque independens supersit, et parte ab altera qua fremum Germaniae, Austriadum fortiter repellat vires aequilibrium Europae plus vice simplici turbare nitentium.”

⁷ No English diplomat was ever sent to meet Bethlen.

the son-in-law of James I), the English king insisted on remaining neutral.\(^9\) This meant that England initially followed pro-Spanish politics and failed to support Calvinist allies, which included Transylvania. English efforts and money were spent mostly on peacemaking through English ambassadors. Curiously, the expenses offered for John Digby’s Viennese delegation were exactly 80,000 ducats, the money allegedly given to Bethlen.\(^10\)

It is thus absurd to suppose that James I supported the Transylvanian prince, when he failed to support his own son-in-law, Frederick I. Apparently, the king of England was heavily influenced by Catholic propaganda, which depicted Gabriel Bethlen as a half-Muslim vassal of the Ottoman sultan.\(^11\) No money could be secretly paid to the Transylvanians in Constantinople either, as they still had no relationship with the English ambassador in 1621, who was ordered to avoid Bethlen’s men.\(^12\) Moreover, the letter’s lament for Bohemia as a country which had fallen into servitude is also anachronistic. Since the vengeful measures that were taken in response to the Bohemian revolt and the systematic pacification of Bohemia had just started (the execution of 27 noblemen happened in the summer of 1621), it would have been nonsensical to speak of “Bohemian servitude” at the time, whatever that term might have been intended to imply.

Characteristic of nineteenth-century thinking is also the way the letter interprets Bethlen’s politics, tacitly supposing that Bethlen’s goal was to “liberate” Hungary from Habsburg rule and unite the divided parts of the kingdom and win back its “freedom.”\(^13\) This reading could in no way be the official one in

---

9 England’s neutral position at the beginning of the Thirty Years’ War was heavily and widely debated in the country. The idea of composing the letter in the name of Buckingham, who would later support interventionist politics, may have served to resolve the doubts of contemporaries who could have found it strange that James I had written such a supportive letter to Bethlen. Nevertheless, in 1621 there was still no difference between the pro-Spanish politics of James and Buckingham, and even if there had been, Buckingham could not have afforded to follow a different line of politics than his master and ruler.

10 C. Pursell, “War or Peace?,” 159.

11 His hostile attitude to the prince of Transylvania might have later been somewhat smoothed by the English ambassador of Constantinople, Thomas Roe, but this happened only a couple of years later.


13 Cf. note 5. As an example of the nationalist interpretation of Bethlen’s rule see the academic speech of Bethlen’s greatest nineteenth-century researcher, Sándor Szilágyi, Adalékok Bethlen Gábor szövetkezéseként
the seventeenth century. If the country needed to be freed from anyone, it was the Ottomans, not the Habsburgs. In the rhetoric of the seventeenth century Bethlen moved against the Habsburgs out of Protestant solidarity. James I could have praised Bethlen’s support of the Protestant Union (which he did not), but Hungary’s unification was not a matter of English concern.

The interpretation given to Bethlen’s rule is one of the earliest documents of a new historiographic tradition, in which the prince of Transylvania was a celebrated hero of the fight for Hungary’s independence from the Habsburg Empire. This interpretation was the result of the Hungarian national awakening, and it remained influential for more than a century, up until the 1980s. The most important attempt to overwrite a teleological reading of Bethlen’s battles against the Habsburgs was made in 1929 by Gyula Szekfű, whose outstanding monograph on the prince of Transylvania was heavily debated by contemporaries. One of his critics, István Kiss, responded to Szekfű in a book-size essay, which was recently republished. What truly upset Kiss was Szekfű’s interpretation of Bethlen’s foreign policy: “in our days, it is ridiculous to speak about the pain of the Hungarian mind, but I’ll tell you, even if you’ll laugh at me, that my Hungarian mind was in pain, and I was clenching my fist when reading those pages.”16 According to Kiss, Szekfű misrepresented Transylvania’s relationship with England, and he kept silent about the letter sent by James I to Bethlen, for instance. This letter, Kiss claimed in 1929 (nine years after the Treaty of Trianon was signed), still had an important message. It could strengthen the self-confidence of a humiliated nation.17 But Szekfű had a German heart in Kiss’ assessment, and he had an aversion to the idea that Hungary could play a role in the political balance of Europe and act as a curb on the power of the Habsburgs. He added that Szekfű might also have disliked the fact that the fraternity between

---


16 Ibid., 132.

17 “Egyes mondatai még ma is alkalmasak arra, hogy letiport, kétségbeesett nemzetünk önbizalmát és történeti hivatásának hitét megerősítse.” “The letter was all the more actual since the first signs of understanding, respect and love toward Hungary came newly from England,” Kiss wrote in 1929, nine years after the humiliating Treaty of Trianon. Ibid., 134.
the English and the Hungarian nations and the eminence of their constitutions had already been recognized at the beginning of the seventeenth century.18

This brings us to another significant point. The myth of the fraternity between the English and the Hungarian nations, based on similar military virtues and glorious histories (as claimed in the letter) and, more importantly, on similar legal systems goes back exactly to 1790, and certainly not to the early seventeenth century. In the year when Emperor Joseph II died and the national diet was finally newly convened, a short anonymous Latin pamphlet appeared on the parallels between the Hungarian and the English legal systems entitled Conspectus regiminis formae regnorum Angliae et Hungariae. It was published together with an anonymous analysis of the British constitution, Dissertatio statistica de potestate exsequente Regis Angliae.19 While the Conspectus, written by a Hungarian nobleman who had never been to England and did not read English, put emphasis on parallelism with the goal of emphasizing the power of the Hungarian parliament and the limits of royal power, which was a typical agenda of contemporary publications, the Dissertatio, prepared by an erudite schoolteacher originally from Bohemia, called attention to the uniqueness and the peculiarities of the British constitution.20 It was through a Hungarian translation of the Conspectus21 and a book in Hungarian by György Aranka (though published anonymously) that the idea of British-Hungarian fraternity became truly popular.22 This latter work lacked scholarly depth and only served the political and ideological goals of the Hungarian national awakening. Aranka, who was the organizer of a Hungarian language society in Transylvania, demanded that Hungary be treated as a separate political

19  The book was published anonymously without date, place, or publisher.
unit, independent of the rest of the Habsburg monarchy, with no foreigners employed in state administration and no foreign soldiers stationed in Hungary, but with a ruler who stayed in the country and spoke Hungarian, and whose power was granted by the Hungarian nobility. He claimed that the Hungarian language had been neglected, as the rulers of the country lived abroad and thus the nation used Latin, “the language which, next to the mother tongue, gives access to the sciences, but which is also the master of ignorance, leading one to blindness, once the national tongue is ignored.”

*The Report of a Transylvanian Agent on Austria’s Plans for Hungary’s ‘Pacification’*

Neither is the second document, which appeared two months later (in September 1828) in the *Archiv für Geschichte, Statistik, Literatur und Kunst*, without anachronism. This text was allegedly a report by a Transylvanian agent concerning a meeting of the imperial secret council, which happened “in the last days of last year, before the Transylvanian prince left his country.” As the source also mentions the name of Girolamo Caraffa, Marchese di Montenero, who took part in the 1623 campaign against Prince Bethlen but later left Austria, the meeting of the secret council, if it ever happened, must have taken place in last part of 1623 (or early 1624).

According to the very first sentence of the text, the imperial council, which included members like Carlos de Harrach, Hans Ulrich von Eggenberg, Cardinal František Dietrichstein, together with the Apostolic legate (Carlo Caraffa), the Spanish ambassador (Íñigo Vélez de Guevara, Count of Oñate), the Florentine ambassador (Giovanni Altoviti), and Prince Albrecht von Wallenstein, convened in order to discuss the strategy of the Habsburgs against Gabriel Bethlen: “during a serious consultation in neighboring Austria, the question of which firm and reliable method to use to pacify all the kingdoms and provinces subjected to the power of His Majesty was debated.”

23 Anglus és magyar igazgatásnak egyben-vetése, 37.
25 The quotation above continues: “vicinae Austriae seria consultatione deliberatum est, qua nempe Metodo firma et certa, Pacificatio in omnibus Regnis et provinciis, imperio S. C. Majestatis subjectis, constituì possit?” Ibid.
This opening passage arouses suspicion. If there had been such an important meeting of the imperial secret council, how could have the details of the discussion been disclosed? And why did a Transylvanian agent use Latin when writing to Gabriel Bethlen or write in a form that reminds one of the minutes recorded during such meetings? Were the document a report by one of Bethlen’s agents, it would be in Hungarian, the language used at Bethlen’s court, and it would have a proper form of address to the Transylvanian prince. And why did a secret agent speak of something that happened the previous year? Secret agents were expected to report immediately, especially when it concerned such crucial information. Moreover, its dating to the last days of the year (1623) also raises questions.26

If one looks at the report in detail, one’s suspicions become stronger. The discussion of the meeting of the secret council was initiated by the Spanish ambassador, who wondered how the councilors envisioned keeping Hungary and Transylvania obedient and loyal to the emperor.27 Curiously, the first (unknown)

26 Bethlen never attacked Emperor Ferdinand II at the end of a year, but always in late summer or autumn. Nevertheless, we have some reason to suspect that some kind of meeting did indeed take place and that the person who forged the document relied on the minutes of this meeting. This is what the papal legate Carlo Caraffa’s final report also suggests. In the autumn of 1623, Bethlen crossed and occupied a great part of northern Hungary. He then pillaged Moravian lands and villages and kept the army of Girolamo Caraffa, sent in the defense of Austria, under a long-lasting siege. Finally, having realized that there was not much more to gain, he victoriously withdrew and initiated peace negotiations. The Ottoman subsidiary army, which accompanied him, collected great numbers of captives, but many of them were freed by the soldiers of pro-Habsburg Hungarian aristocrats with Bethlen’s consent (who had earlier pleaded in vain with the pasha of Buda to free the captives). For details of this relatively understudied event see Ferdinand Tadra, “Beiträge zur Geschichte des Feldzuges Bethlen Gabors gegen Kaiser Ferdinand II. im Jahre 1623: Nebst Original-Briefen Albrechts von Waldstein,” Archiv für österreichische Geschichte 55 (1877): 403–64; Kemény János önéletírása, 1657–1658, ed. Éva V. Windisch (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1986), part D; László Szalay, Galantai gróf Eszterházy Miklós, Magyarország nádora, 3 vols. (Pest: Lauffer and Stolp, 1863–1870), 2:86–87; Christian D’Elvert, “Auszüge aus dem (im k. k. Haus-, Hof- und Staats-Archiv befindlichen) Buche sub N. 108 lit. t. u. V: Underschiedliche Schriften und Zeitungen des Röm. Reichs und des Erzhauses Oesterreich Zustand und Verlauf betreffent von 1620 bis 1627,” in Beiträge zur Geschichte der böhmischen Länder, insbesondere Mährens im 17. Jh. Band III. (Schriften der historisch-statistischen Section der k. k. Mähr. Schles. Gesellschaft des Ackerbaues, der Natur- und Landeskunde 22) (Brno: Carl Winiker, 1875), 127.

27 “Quibusnam modis et mediis [...] Regnum Hungariae ac Principatus Transylvaniae in devotione et fide suae Maiestatis Sacrattissimae detinere possint?” Archiv für Geschichte, Statistik, Literatur und Kunst, September 29, 1828, 619. The way this question is posed reflects nineteenth-century thinking. The two states, the Kingdom of Hungary and the Principality of Transylvania, could not be regarded in the same way. One was ruled by the emperor, and in the major part remained loyal to the Habsburgs (especially after the diet of 1622). The other was an inimical state. See Géza Pálffy, “Crisis in the Habsburg Monarchy and Hungary, 1619–1622: Hungarian Estates and Gábor Bethlen,” Hungarian Historical Review 2 (2013): 733–60; idem,
speaker was apparently a pro-Hungarian courtier, who used rhetoric reminiscent of nineteenth-century patriotic discourses. He claimed that Hungarians normally observed their laws and customs religiose and that rebellions arose only in response to violations of their privileges and liberties. He argued that Hungarians would be loyal to the House of Habsburg—“they would subject themselves to the Austrian House and remain loyal forever (in fide perennali perseverarent)”28—if their ancient liberties and privileges were respected. The Spanish ambassador then wondered about the military strength of the emperor. When he learned that the imperial army never numbered more than 34,000, he replied that the Spanish king was ready to provide a well-equipped army of 40,000 and sustain it at his own expense for the next forty years, i.e., forever. Thus, “that treacherous nation, which has disrespected His Majesty and the imperial authority so many times, would be rooted out entirely.”29 He was told that Hungarians were good soldiers and could also have recourse to the Ottomans, and their invasions were no reason enough to oppress the people.30 The Spanish ambassador replied that in that case one needed to bribe the Ottomans first, alienate them from the Hungarians by stirring up controversy, and then make peace with them. Thereafter, the emperor should follow the strategy established by the Spanish king, who governed through omnipotent viceroys and made sure that they were blamed for the oppression of the people.31 These governors should then use any tyrannical methods necessary; they “would afflict the criminals with invented punishments and harass them in unheard-of ways.”32 The consequent insurrections could then provide excellent opportunities to get rid of anti-

28 “Si libertate pristina et immunitatus, quibus ab initio regni sui sine interruptione gavisi sunt, iterum ornarentur, et in pristinum vigorem constituerentur, fore facillime, quod sine ulla difficultate, Domui Austriacae se denuo subjicerent, et in fide perennali perseverarent.” Archiv für Geschichte, Statistik, Literatur und Kunst, September 29, 1828, 619. Note that “perennali” was a characteristic legal term in Hungarian property law, used for instance in István Wörbőczy’s highly popular law book, the Tripartitum.


30 The expression “istas invasiones” gives the impression that Bethlen attacked the emperor more than three times, as happened in reality. Once again, no distinction is made between Transylvanians and Hungarians. Ibid.

31 Obviously the text is referring to Spanish colonization. In the original, governors are mentioned, not viceroys: “constituantur Barbaris istic Gubernatores”. Ibid.

32 “Poenis excogitatis delinquentes afficiant, et inauditis modis exagitent.” Ibid. (Note again the neo-Latin term delinquentes, which was used in criminal law.)
monarchic elements. If the army of 40,000 men were to prove inadequate to the task, the Spanish king was ready to give an extra twenty thousand soldiers.

When the consultation came to a conclusion, Emperor Ferdinand II subscribed to the opinion of the Spanish ambassador concerning the importance of resolving the “Transylvanian-Hungarian problem” for good, and even went further. He entrusted the execution of the project to two military leaders, Prince Wallenstein and Girolamo Caraffa, and told them to invade Hungary as soon as they received the slightest news of seditions. They were to proceed to the town of Šintava (Hungarian Sempte, in present-day Slovakia) on the river of Váh (Vág, Waag) and slay everyone older than twelve who spoke Hungarian. The killing of Hungarian speakers was to continue until they either expelled the chief plotter or brought him alive to the emperor. If the war turned out to be long, desolated provinces had to be newly populated by foreigners. Finally, it was suggested that the same procedure be repeated in Bohemia and Silesia.

There are many absurd and anachronistic elements in this document. Like the letter purportedly sent by James I, this writing tends to represent Hungary and Transylvania as one and the same state, although during the Ottoman period they were separate political entities. The Kingdom of Hungary had a royal head, who was the Habsburg emperor, while Transylvania was a semi-independent Ottoman vassal state, despite the fact that the king of Hungary continued to lay claim to it.

More importantly, the radical solutions of the Transylvanian question suggested in the document seem entirely exaggerated. Even if in 1623 there were opponents to another peace treaty with Gabriel Bethlen, as was suggested in Carlo Caraffa’s final report of 1628, no one could seriously have imagined solving the conflict with Transylvania by exterminating the Hungarian population. For one thing, Hungarian speakers were no target of seventeenth-
century politics in any manner. The Habsburgs might have been prejudiced against Hungarians or Transylvanians, but their concept of nation was legal/territorial and not ethno-linguistic/cultural, while the idea of slaughtering entire national groups was in contradiction with the early modern concepts of ruling and nation. Slaughtering a share of a king’s subjects according to their native tongue (Hungarian speakers older than twelve) was an absurd idea in the age of absolutism. It reflects nothing but the concerns (or fears) of ethno-linguistic nationalism of the turn of the eighteenth century, when the Hungarian gentry and many non-noble intellectuals were demanding the use of Hungarian instead of Latin as the official language of the country. Similarly, the notion of the repopulation of desolated Hungarian provinces with foreigners was the worry of the early nineteenth-century Hungarian learned men, who realized that the proportion of ethnic Hungarians within the Kingdom of Hungary was painfully low. The negative role played by the Spanish in the document might also be explained by the legend of Spain’s evilness and backwardness, developed mainly by rivals in colonization, which was also spreading in Hungary by the nineteenth century. But even if the Spanish ambassador ever had argued in support of an anti-Transylvanian campaign, he certainly could not have offered 40,000 Spanish soldiers. It would have been extremely hard for Spain to maintain an army even half that size. This was approximately the number of all the Spanish soldiers who were involved in the first three years of the Thirty Years’ War; it was far greater than any subsidiary army offered during these years; for example, the Spanish army that joined the emperor in the critical year of 1619 consisted of
only 13,000–15,000 soldiers.\textsuperscript{38} The last statement of the document, according to which the same procedure should be repeated in Bohemia and Silesia, seems similarly a flight of fantasy.\textsuperscript{39}

Fortunately, historians did not take this document seriously. As far as I know, hardly any contemporaries referred to it in their publications, and later historians seem to have forgotten about it.\textsuperscript{40} Some contemporaries, however, must have been deeply impressed. Lajos Kossuth, who was 26 years old in 1828, referred to the document in a personal letter as late as 1870.\textsuperscript{41}

Dezső Dümmerth, a historian who considered both texts appropriate subjects of research in the 1960s, cared little about anachronism (although he must have noticed some), and did not really question their authenticity. For


\textsuperscript{39} The administrative procedure of the council gives similar reason for suspicion. Once the council had been dismissed, there would have been no place for the Spanish ambassador to intervene again, and no decisions could have been made in the plural “statuerunt,” as all further decisions depended solely on the emperor.

\textsuperscript{40} The second document is quoted by Johann Maiáth, \textit{Geschichte der Magyaren} (Vienna: Tendler, 1831), 5:161–63. Apparently, the publication of the \textit{Archiv} also took Maiáth (a collaborator of writings by Joseph Hormayr, the \textit{Archiv}’s editor) by surprise. It is difficult to understand why he quoted the report of the secret council among the notes that concerned Emmerich Thököli but did not mention it in the previous volume of his history, which concerned Gabriel Bethlen among other figures of history, where he, in fact, referred to King James’s letter (ibid, 4:219). Another exception comes from Joseph Trausch, \textit{Chronicon Fuchsiolupino-Ollardinum sive Annales Hungarici et Transsilvanici} (Corona: Göttingen, 1847), 1:303–06. At the same time, the supposed letter sent by James I was also mentioned by another of Hormayr’s Hungarian collaborators, Baron Alajos Mednyánszky, who was the author of a noteworthy biography of Gábor Bethlen, \textit{Taschenbuch für die vaterländische Geschichte} 4 (1823): 453–516, at 485; it was later also translated into Hungarian by Szalay, \textit{Galantai gróf Eszterházy Miklós}, 2:5–7. As for afterlife of the report on the secret council, I know of only one semi-historical work quoting it: \textit{Magyar Holocaust: Dokumentumok a magyarak megsemmisítéséről} (1917–1967), ed. Kálmán Magyar (Kaposvár 1999), 2:21–22 (I thank Péter Tusor for calling my attention to this book).

\textsuperscript{41} “Wallenstein, who killed his closest heir with a poisoned radish, was the person chosen to carry out that diabolic plan set up by a council of the Cabinet, after which an order was issued, signed personally by Ferdinand II. It was discovered in the Secret Archive and published by Hormayr.” (Legközelebbi örökösét egy megmérgezett retekkel ölte meg Wallenstein, azon pokoli terv egyik választott végrehajtója, melyet Magyarországnak cseh lábra helyezése iránt Bécsben egy Cabinet tanács megállapított, határozatokba foglalt, II. Ferdinánd saját kezűleg aláírt, Hormayr a titkos levélban felfedezett és nyilvánosságra hozott.”) Letter to Antal Bavart of 4 March 1870, quoted by Dezső Dümmerth, “Történetkutatás és nyelvkérdés a magyar–Habsburg viszony tükrében: Kollár Ádám működése,” \textit{Filológiai Közlöny} 12 (1966): 392.
Dümmerth, these texts were early expressions of the anti-Hungarian trend of Habsburg politics, which oppressed Hungarian liberties and consciously settled foreigners among Hungarians. This historiographic thinking goes back to the early nineteenth century. These documents offer evidence not of anti-Hungarian Habsburg policies, but rather of the fears and frustrations that motivated the Hungarian nobility at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The frustration that Hungary was culturally, socially and economically backward; that it was politically dependent on Austria; that Hungarians were outnumbered in their country by non-Hungarians; the fear that the nobility would lose its privileged position in society; that the Hungarian language and Hungarian culture or Hungary itself would disappear—these were in fact serious worries of the time. Although these were worries of a certain stratum of society (the level of the Latin, influenced by legal terminology, used in these documents is expressive of their culture), we should not forget that fears and frustrations were driving political forces in other ancien régimes.

**Joseph Hormayr and the Dilemmas of Monarchic Patriotism**

Seeing the anachronism and absurdities of these documents and their strong anti-Habsburg sentiment, one wonders, in fact, how they came to be published in a German language Austrian journal. To answer this question, we need to have a closer look at the Archiv für Geschichte, Statistik, Literatur und Kunst, which was, to be sure, not simply one of the Austrian journals. It was a very special periodical, edited by the extravagant Innsbruck-born intellectual, Baron Joseph Hormayr. Although we do not know if Hormayr actively edited the issues in which these two sources were published (from the autumn of 1828, he lived in Munich as

---

42 “The text reflects two distinctive anti-Hungarian aspirations of Habsburg politics; one was forcefully to annul old and acknowledged liberties, the other was to settle foreigners in the place of the Hungarian population within the borders of the Hungarian state. This all reveals the purposeful tendency of annihilating the Hungarians.” (“A szövegből a Habsburg-politikának két jellegzetes magyarelleses törekvése tűnik elő. Az első a régi szabadságjogoknak önmaguk által is elismert, erőszakos megsemmisítése, a második pedig a magyar állam kerete között a magyar lakosság helyébe idegeneknek letelítése. Mindez a magyarság léte ellen irányuló, cél tudatos tendenciákra mutat.”) Dümmerth, “Történetkutatás és nyelvkérdés,” 393.

ministerial councilor to the foreign ministry of the Bavarian government), the publication of such sources nicely harmonized with his concept of the journal.

Joseph Hormayr (1781–1848) was a complicated but fascinating figure, still too little appreciated. Considered a child prodigy, at a mere twenty years of age he had already been given a position in Vienna in the foreign ministry and almost contemporaneously had gotten a position at the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, of which he soon became the director. His interests in politics and historical research, both in the service of his heterogeneous patriotic ideals, remained driving forces throughout his life. Most importantly, he took part in the organization and promotion of the Tyrolean Rebellion (1809) against Bavarian and French rule under Napoleon. Although this movement was partly inspired by the Viennese government, Hormayr’s participation in 1813 in another Tyrolean anti-Napoleon movement (the Alpenbund) led to his imprisonment for one year in Munkács and Spielberg (close to Brno), as

---


it ran counter to the politics of Metternich, who became a lifelong enemy. In 1816, after a sojourn in Moravia, Hormayr was finally more or less rehabilitated. Although he was honored with the title of imperial historian, he could never get back his earlier standing or position. As the former, fallen director, he avoided any contact with the staff of the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsachiv, which made it almost impossible for him to pursue research. Although he could neither take a position as an archivist in other archives nor become a professor at a German university (which was one of his ideas), he could carry on (still in Brno) with his periodicals: alongside the Archiv für Geschichte, together with Baron Alajos Mednyánszky he also published Taschenbuch für die Vaterländische Geschichte. As a politically marginalized but intellectually reintegrated, central figure who remained under the severe oversight of the secret police, Hormayr’s general frustration turned increasingly against Vienna’s reactionary politics and Austria’s peripheral intellectual position within the German lands and Europe. This did not mean that his strong regional Tyrolean, Austrian, and monarchic patriotism waned. Since he never felt any tension between his different patriotic (and national) identities, but well understood their significance in modern times, his ideal was to energize the monarchy through patriotic movements. His journals served exactly this objective, offering historical material which could reinforce the various patriotisms within the Monarchy. As he continued stressing in the Archiv für Geschichte, he wanted “to foster the love of the homeland through knowledge of the homeland, to offer a focal point, a forum for the union of German, Hungarian and Czech literary products, which have been so foreign, almost unknown to one another.”

His collaborators and friends were mostly high-standing Austrian, Hungarian and Bohemian noblemen with a broad interest in history, society and culture. As a leading figure of Viennese literary circles and editor of an international journal with a large number of Austrian, German, Hungarian, and Bohemian contacts, Hormayr occupied a privileged

---

46 Mayr claims he could in theory have had access to materials with Metternich’s permission. Mayr, “Hormayrs Verhaftung 1813,” 351.
position from which to observe the divergent histories and societies of the Monarchy. What he saw was not very encouraging, and the government's repressive cultural politics made things even worse. In fact, this was not politics for Hormayr, since it did not serve the common good; it was a state run by secret police and censorship, which had no idea how to channel patriotic feelings in the right direction. Despite his considerable efforts in the interest of a common monarchical identity (which was not dynastic principally but based on mutual recognition of the various historical-intellectual traditions), he sadly realized that the various nations, agitated against one another, thought more and more of separatism instead of a common future.48

Posterity has given little credit to Hormayr's historical activity, whose principle mission as an archivist-historian was to use historical sources in order to lay the foundation of a collective (i.e. historical-cultural-artistic) identity in the Monarchy. At a younger age, even the falsification of history could have seemed appropriate to Hormayr as a means with which to further more noble, patriotic goals, as his faking of a Latin foundation diploma (using a later German chronic) of the monastery of Stams in Tyrol testifies.49 However, over the years he apparently became more critical and honest in historical research, and when the scandal about the Grünberg and Könighof manuscripts broke out in Bohemia (probably the most successful attempts at faking the national past in


the early nineteenth century), Hormayr took part in the criticism and published a critical review of Josef Dobrovský. Despite his often one-sided moralizing, patriotic portraits of Austrian statesmen in the popular series **Österreichische Plutarch** (1807–1814), Hormayr later developed a firm opinion concerning how history should be made: it should be a search for the truth only, and should not be driven by any preconceptions. For him, there was no such thing as Catholic or Lutheran historiography. In history, one needed to be impartial and objective. But was this possible, especially when it concerned the history of the Monarchy? Even his own patriotic **Österreichische Plutarch** was a far cry from impartial, Hormayr later realized, partly as a result of the criticism he received. In the 1820s and 1830s, he repeatedly complained that the Austrian regime interpreted any attempt at true history as a sign of liberalism or Jacobinism. For


51 The 20-volume series of the **Österreichische Plutarch** presented idealized portraits of Austria’s princes and statesmen. For an interpretation see Puchalski, Imaginärer Name Österreich, 229–56; Robert, L’idée nationale autrichienne, 289–301. For its portrait of Ferdinand II see Oesterreichischer Plutarch oder Leben und Bildnisse aller Regenten und der berühmtesten Feldherren, Staatsmänner, Gelehrten und Künstler des österreichischen Kaiserstaates (Vienna: Doll, 1807), 8:113. For its influence on Caroline Pichler (who wrote a drama) and the problem of the rebelling Bohemians in this context see Edit Szentesi, “Birodalmi patriotizmus és honi régiségek: Az egykorú osztrák hazafias történeti festészetről szóló írások Josef Hormayr lapjában (1810–1828)” (PhD diss., Loránd Eötvös University of Budapest, 2003), 137.

52 “In der Geschichte sucht der gesunde Menschenverstand das wirklich Geschehene, er sucht die Wahrheit, nur die Wahrheit und Nichts als die Wahrheit: nicht wie sich der Verfasser die Vergangenheit denkt, will er wissen, nicht wie er die Begriffe, die Bedürfnisse der Gegenwart in die Vorzeit hineinstellt und seine Personen in wunderlichem, damals ganz unbekanntem, communistischem, liberalischem, absolutistischem oder theokratischem Aufputz und Kostüm vorüberschreiten oder tanzen läßt. Man bietet uns jetzt Geschichten dieser und jener Epoche mit dem lethalen Beisatz: ‘im katolsichen, im evangelischen Sinn,’ ohne zu bedenken, daß man dadurch schon der unparteisamen Geschichtswahrheit den Stab bricht und eine bloße Parteischrift ankündet.” Hormayr, Politisch-historische Schriften, 196.

53 “Dennoch scheint es, als könne auch jetzt noch kein Österreicher eine parteilose Geschichte jener alten Zwiste herausgeben, außer er habe sich vorher durch den Kopf geschossen, am wenigsten dürfte solches ein Staatsdiener unternehmen, ohne für einen Liberalen, für einen Jakobiner zu gelten, ohne lebenslange Ungnade daran zu wagen, ohne sich (trotz all seiner sonstigen Verdienste und völligen Unangreifbarkeit,) polizeilicher Verfolgung und Aufpasserei Preis zu geben, zu deren Werkzeugen sich gewiß erkaufte Domestiken, ungerathene Söhne, läderliche Weiber und undankbare Freunde finden lassen!! An Materialien, wie das böhmische Martyrologium, wie die Klagen Stranks’ys und anderer ausgezeichneter Flüchtlinge, böhmischer Brüder, wie jene Bethlens, Nádasdy’s, Illesházy’s , die Memoires der großen Parteihäupter Tókóly und Rakoczy oder wie die Klaglieder jener ausgetriebenen, in der Finsterniß der Kasematten dahinwelkenden oder auf die spanischen und venezianischen Galeeren verkauften protestantischen
a history of the Monarchy, he claimed, one needed to understand the individual histories of its nations and be able to read works in their languages. But keeping together the diversities within the monarchy was hard. It was not only a political but also a historical problem: “this aggregation of ethnographically such different, even incompatible elements, the keeping together of the Slavic, Hungarian, Italian components through the German, which is numerically the least important, constitutes as much a problem for the regime as for history. Add to this the protracted civil and religious wars! Should more than another half-century or perhaps an entire century pass before it will be possible to write the history of this composite state (Statenverein), when it will be one and the same truth?” Moreover, regarding the most problematic aspects of monarchic history, like those mentioned in Comenius’ Martyrologium Bohemicum, in the books of the famous exile historian Pavel Stránský (1583–1657), or the histories of Gabriel Bethlen, the memoirs of the Hungarian rebel-ruler Francis II Rákóczi, or the history of the Protestant galley-slaves, there was also the problem of missing or dubious sources. No wonder Hormayr, the frustrated historian, the archivist without an archive, became fully dedicated to publishing any kind of historical sources. He passionately took the side of those “who with historical fidelity published any kind of document without the least trace of malice which

---


54 “Erst seit der Wiedererweckung der lange niedergehaltenen ungarischen und böhmischen Sprachen und mit ihnen der nationalen Quellen, lässt sich wieder eine Geschichte der Nationen, lassen sich etwas nationale Ansichten hoffen, statt der bischerigen Chroniken der habsburgischen Dynastie.” Ibid., 192.

55 “Diese Vereinigung ethnographischer so sehr verschiedener und unter einander widerhaarer Bestandtheile, das Zusammenhalten des slavischen, des magyrischen, des italienischen Element, durch das an Zahl geringste, durch das germanische, bildet ein eben so schwieriges Problem der Herrschaft als der Historie: dazu die langwierigen Religions- und Bürgerkriege?! Es vergeht wohl noch mehr als ein halbes, vielleicht ein volles Jahrhundert, bis eine Geschichte dieses Staatenvereines möglich wird, wenn sie zugleich eine Wahrheit werden soll?” Ibid., 197. See in this regard the article of Varga, “Hormayrs Archiv.”

56 See note 53.

appeared uncomfortable to the momentary worship of this or that favorite period or historical figure, to this or that trend."

I believe it is this radical openness that explains why Hormayr’s journal published the documents presented in this paper, whether with the editor’s active contribution or not. It seems that Hormayr and his Hungarian collaborators were taken in by these faked documents. If they had doubts, one does not find any sign of them. However, if they were deceived, they were not the only ones. News of the report on the meeting of the secret council was spreading among Hungarian learned men at least as of the 1810s, if not earlier. The only known manuscript copy comes from the historical sourcebook of István Horvát (1784–1846), a young enthusiast of historical research, who had allegedly copied the report from a Franciscan historian József Jakosich (1738–1804). The question of who faked these documents has not yet been answered. All we know at

58 “...die in geschichtlicher Treu, ohne mindestes Arg, irgend Documente veröffentlichten, die dem momentanen Götzentum dieser oder jener Lieblingsperiode oder Geschichtsfigur, dieser oder jener Richtung unbequem schienen.” Ibid., 201–02.
59 He apparently continued being an active editor in 1828, when he moved to Munich (which was probably not an abrupt process, in the summer he was still in Vienna, and he left Austrian service only on October 20). On the other hand, Gyurkovits ascribes the publication of the letter by Jacob to Hormayr. Gyurkovits, “B. Hormayr Józef,” 225.
60 Dümmerth, “Történetkutatás és nyelvkérdés,” 393–94.
61 Unfortunately, this could not be verified, since the volume which supposedly contained the text is still missing (it was missing in Dümmerth’s time, who called attention to this—ibid.). Horvát’s copy is held in the National Széchényi Library, Budapest, Quart Hung 467, IV, 133–36.
62 Dümmerth has given credit to the editorial note, which can be found at the beginning of James I’s letter (Archiv für Geschichte, Statistik, Literatur und Kunst, July 16 and 18, 1828, 453), and believed that both sources originated from the collection of the former imperial librarian Adam František Kollár (1718–1783). According to the editorial notes, Kollár took James I’s letter from the Hamilton books and manuscripts in 1773. This seems quite improbable, however, as the Hamilton manuscripts are not held in the National Library of Vienna, and the letter was faked in 1790 or later, as has been argued above. (Moreover, since it was a faked letter, obviously written by a Hungarian patriot, we can safely exclude its English origins.) One might use the hint to Kollár from the opposite direction and search among Kollár’s late enemies. If Dümmerth is right and the manuscript on the secret council was spreading during the diet of 1811–1812, which seems quite probable, the fakers might be found among those (like Horvát or Márton György Kovachich) who took an eager interest in the defense of the Hungarian language and constitution against the publications of Anton Wilhelm Gustermann and Michael (Mihály) Piringer, which were allegedly ordered by the Viennese government. These modern enemies were, in fact, associated with Kollár, whose similar attack on feudal privileges more than 50 years earlier was still remembered. See the letter by Ferenc Kazinczy of June 24, 1812, in which Kazinczy claimed that these men were basing their books “written against us” on the manuscripts of Kollár, János Váczy, ed., Kazinczy Ferenc levelezése, 21 vols. (Budapest 1890–1911), 9:2256. Cf. Dezső Dümmerth, “Kazinczy köre és az 1811/1812. évi országgyűlés,” Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények 71 (1967): 167–74.
the moment is that he (they) was (were) historian(s) who probably had some legal background and was (were) active between 1790 and 1810. He (they) very probably had access to the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, and apparently had thorough knowledge of the era of Bethlen and the Thirty Years’ War.

I hope future research will resolve the question of authorship, which may greatly enlarge our knowledge of the ways in which history was understood and written by early nineteenth-century men of letters. But whoever the author(s) of these documents was (were), we can be sure that his (their) act was inspired by national fervor and hatred for the Habsburgs. Like several of his (their) contemporaries, he (they) was (were) driven by a deep desire to save the nation from demise, to overcome “backwardness,” and to raise Hungarian people among the worthy nations of Europe, like the English, the French, and the German, the nations most frequently mentioned. Yes, there were times in history when Hungarians were European players, with whom even the English were ready to ally, even though the very existence of this Hungarian-speaking nation was often in peril, and not because of the Ottomans but because of the House of Austria, which relied in times of danger on the evil counsel and arms of the Spanish Habsburgs. No question the faker(s), like several of his (their) colleagues in Central Europe, worked in good faith for the common good of his (their) nation, which in the Hungarian case saw itself as warlike and heroic by nature and was in need of a past that fitted its purportedly virtuous character. If Joseph Hormayr published these documents, he did so in the belief that the history of the Monarchy was troubled by conflicts that needed to be faced and objectively comprehended. Otherwise, there was no hope for a common history. Seriously troubling was the rule of Ferdinand II (especially the years around the Battle of White Mountain), significant for Austrian national consciousness already in Maria Theresa’s times but increasingly understood by Bohemians and Hungarians in a markedly different way.

Bibliography


63  Cf. Manufacturing a Past for the Present.


Kunczer, Gyula. *Hormayr és az egykorú magyar irodalom* [Hormayr and contemporary Hungarian literature]. Pécs: Dunántúl Egyetemi Nyomdája, 1929.


Richardson, Samuel, ed. The Negotiations of Sir Thomas Roe, in His Embassy to the Ottoman Porte, from the Year 1621 to 1628. London: Samuel R., 1740.


Faking the National Spirit


