

MARIA THERESA'S REIGN AND HUNGARY

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Abstract

In 1762, Maria Theresa awarded the rank of academy to the School of Mining and Metallurgy (Bergschola), established in Selmechánya in 1735, whose name was Academy of Mining and Metallurgy (Bergakademie) from this time on. This paper commemorates the monarch on the 260th anniversary of making the school an academy. I strive to give a brief but comprehensive overview of the 18th century history of Hungary, the interconnectedness of the fate of the Habsburg dynasty and Hungary as well as the forty years' reign of this outstanding queen. Her judgement – just like that of the Habsburg Empire – has changed through time both in public opinion and in historiography but in this paper, my aim is not primarily to present special literature findings.

Keywords: *Hungary and the Habsburg Empire, Hungary in the 18th century until the reign of Maria Theresa, Maria Theresa's reign, Ratio Educationis, Regulating the status of serfs*

1. Hungary and the Habsburg Empire

From the 13th century, the Habsburg dynasty played a decisive role in the history of Europe, and since the age of discovery, outside Europe, as well. From the 15th century, or more exactly, from 1438, the seven Electors elected the members of the Habsburg family Holy Roman Emperors – disregarding a brief interruption – until 1806, the end of the Holy Roman Empire¹. Albert Habsburg – the son-in-law of King Sigismund of Hungary - was the first Habsburg on the throne of Hungary and also the first Holy Roman Emperor under the name of Albert II. (King of Hungary: 1437-1439; king of Germany and Bohemia: 1438-1439.) From his reign, the history of the Habsburgs was closely interconnected with Hungarian history although after Albert, Ferdinand I (1526-1564) was the first to rule permanently as King of Hungary, as well, although only in the western half of the country due to the Ottoman invasion. By the time of his reign, the House of the Habsburgs had been divided into two branches. the Spanish and the Austrian ones. Ferdinand's elder brother, Charles V (1519-1555) could call himself lord of the world as a king of Spain and Holy Roman Emperor, in whose empire, 'the sun never set' as beyond Europe, he also ruled the Spanish colonies. Ferdinand became head of the Austrian branch, which meant the control of the Austrian Hereditary Lands, Bohemia and the western part of Hungary. In 1555, after Charles' abdication, the title of Holy Roman Emperor was inherited by the Austrian branch but the division of the empire remained. Thus, the current emperor was at the same time king of Hungary, too. In 1700, when the last Habsburg of the Spanish branch, Charles II remained without a successor, a war broke out for the Spanish inheritance (War of the Spanish Succession, 1701-1714). The military conflict,

¹ Concerning the history of the Habsburg dynasty, some essential sources are listed in the bibliography so I do not list them here.

which extended to the whole continent and even North America, ended with the result for the Habsburg dynasty that they lost the Spanish inheritance, which went to the Bourbon dynasty. They received territories in Italy (Naples, Sardinia), they came into possession of the Spanish Netherlands but following this, their rule concentrated in East Central Europe. On the other hand, due to this, the role of Hungary became all the more important.

The year 1526 saw the end of medieval Hungary as the country was torn into two and then, following the occupation of Buda in 1541, into three parts: the western part was ruled by the Habsburgs, the middle part by the Ottomans while in the east, the Principality of Transylvania was formed. This division lasted until the expulsion of the Turks. The 150 years' Ottoman rule was ended by the Treaty of Karlowitz but the whole territory of the country was only liberated with the Treaty of Passarowitz of 1718, with the recapture of Temesköz (Banat).

Following the war of liberation, Rákóczi's war of independence (1703-1711) represented a prolonged military conflict but after the Treaty of Szatmár closing the war of independence, there was no war on the territory of the country. The war of independence broke out under the rule of Leopold I (1657-1705), expelling the Turks, went on and was lost under the reign of Joseph I (1705-1711) but the Treaty of Szatmár was concluded by Charles III (1711-1740), or as Holy Roman Emperor by Charles VI.

Hungary was fully integrated into the Habsburg empire under Charles. Although it is true that the country did not regain its independence in the medieval sense, it became a determining part of a large empire.

2. Hungary in the 18th century until the reign of Maria Theresa

Under the given circumstances, the Treaty of Szatmár was the best compromise possible. The Habsburg court realised that Hungary could not be integrated into the empire in the same way as the Hereditary Lands as the Hungarian Estates were stronger to be neglected when decisions were made. The peace treaty guaranteed the rights of noblemen and the religious acts in force since 1681. The peace treaty of Szatmár was also the best compromise possible as during his war of independence, Rákóczi did not succeed in winning the support of the whole society so defeat was unavoidable. A significant part of the Catholic high priesthood and the aristocracy remained loyal to the Habsburgs similarly to the Saxons. What is more, some of the free royal boroughs like for example, Buda, Pest and Sopron did not join Rákóczi, either. Therefore, the defeat did not only have military and diplomatic causes but social ones, as well. The peace treaty ended a long state of war and the rebuilding of the country could start, although within the Habsburg empire but as one of its strongest members. In the 18th century, even if the dynasty waged a war, it was not in the territory of the country so the conditions of development were really created for a long time. The letter of Charles III written to Count Wratislaw (Chancellor of Bohemia), characterizes his ideas as a monarch concerning Hungary: 'It is my intention and special care should be taken to treat this nation with greater understanding, and complaints should be avoided that they are oppressed by the Germans. It should be demonstrated to the Hungarians that we wish to govern them with unbiassed justice and with love.'²

The first Diet, convened by the new monarch, Charles III (1711–1740), was held in 1712–1715³. He was crowned there. Rákóczi and his supporters following him into exile were declared guilty of high

² Ifj. Barta 2000, p. 26.

³ For the 1712-15 Diet, see Ifj. Barta, János 1984. pp. 67-73. and 2000. pp. 26-27.; Kosáry, Domokos, 1990, p. 32.; Katus, László, 2007. p. 497.; Szijártó, M. István, 2005.

treason. The acts passed at the Diet, finishing its work in 1715, seemingly guaranteed Hungary's governmental autonomy, confirmed the rights of the Estates within the empire, required the convening of the Diet every three years, maintained the independence of the Hungarian Chancellery and the Hungarian Chamber, codified the provisions of the Treaty of Szatmár, wound up the infamous Commission of New Acquisitions (*Neoacquistica Commissio*), enacted the obligation to set up a standing army and voted a tax for its sustenance while kept the institution of noble resurrection serving as the justification of the tax exempt status of noblemen. A national tax conscription was ordered to count taxpayers. The Diet declared that should the Habsburg dynasty die out on the male line, the Estates could freely elect a monarch again. We know that it did not happen this way. In the Diet, the archbishop of Esztergom received the title of a prince, hence the name 'Prince-Primate'.

On the other hand, the monarch was given a free hand in religious issues. Charles III kept the relevant decisions of the 1681 Sopron Diet, which limited the Protestants' freedom of worship to two articular churches per county. In addition, the monarch could decide on imposing a military tax without the approval of the Diet. Transylvania and the border area continued to be administered separately. The Jassic and Cuman districts remained in the possession of the Teutonic Order as there were no finances to redeem them. (As newly acquired territories, Jaszygia and Cumania were pledged to the Teutonic Order by Leopold I in 1702.) Actually, the importance of the Hungarian government bodies and their opportunity to have a say in the issues of the country decreased and the Palatine and the high officials played a smaller and smaller role. However, in comparison with the attempts at absolutism in the 17th century, particularly under the rule of Leopold I, a more favourable situation arose. Armed conflicts ceased and dualism was restored. In the 17th and 18th centuries, almost all the anti-Habsburg conspiracies and revolts originated from Transylvania or Northeastern Hungary, but in this period, there was nothing like this after Rákóczi's war of independence. There was peace in our region until 1848.

In 1715, the Ottoman Empire attacked Venice. In 1716, the Habsburgs made an alliance with the city state, and with this, another Turkish war broke out, in which Belgrade was regained together with Northern Serbia, Oltenia, Temesköz (Banat) and the eastern part of the Syrmia. In the 1718 Treaty of Passarowitz, the Porte gave these territories up for good. However, the Balkan acquisitions lying south of the historical Hungarian border were lost in the unsuccessful war against the Turks between 1737 and 1739⁴. The population only felt from the war that soldiering was a heavy burden for them even at the time of peace.

Temesköz (or Banat), regained in 1718, was subordinated to the central government authorities in Vienna. The Banat administration, organised by Count Claudius Mercy, headed by the National Directorate, was partly under the supervision of the Aulic War Council (*Hofkriegsrat*) and partly under that of the Aulic Chamber (*Hofkammer*), which the Estates complained about. But undoubtedly, the chamber and military administration, which was considered to be modern at that time, was efficient in the resettlement of the uninhabited and ruined area, probably much more efficient than the Hungarian county administration would have been. The Banat of Temeswar was reunited with Hungary by Maria Theresa, who formed Torontál, Temes and Krassó counties in its territory⁵.

The Treaty of Szatmár settled the relations concerning state affairs between Hungary and other countries ruled by the Habsburgs. This occurred when there was threat that the Habsburg dynasty would die out on the male line and the idea of the enactment of female succession arose. As early as in 1703, the secret family agreement of the Habsburg dynasty, the Pragmatic Sanction provided that in case the male line

⁴ Kosáry, Domokos, 1990. pp. 37-38.

⁵ Katus, László, 2007. pp. 495-496.

died out, the right of succession should be conferred on the female line keeping the order of birth. In 1713, Charles III made the amendment that should he die without a male heir, his successors would be his own daughters and not those of Joseph or Leopold. When in 1717, Maria Theresa was born and there was no male heir, the problem of succession was in focus again. Between 1720 and 1722, the Austrian and Bohemian Diets approved of female succession, which was also voted for by the Hungarian Diet convened in 1722.

In addition to the female succession, the Estates accepted that Hungary and the Hereditary Lands (Erblände) were parts of the empire 'indivisibly and inseparably'. The acts passed by the Diet proclaimed the ancient rights and tax exemption of the nobles again.

The Pragmatic Sanction, passed in 1722/23, became the base of the public law relationship between Hungary and the Habsburg dynasty, and its Austrian and Bohemian Hereditary Lands. As Ferenc Deák said, 'in fact, this established the monarchy, this constitutes the solid base of the throne, and this is the most important guarantee of Hungarian constitutional law.'⁶

The 1722/23 Diet reorganised and modernised the Hungarian judicial system. Among others, the Council of the Royal Governor (*consilium regium locumtenentiale Hungaricum*), the National Commission and the National Archives were established, and the tax allowances to be provided for settlers coming from abroad were enacted. (All through the period, the Council of the Royal Governor became the most important office. Among others, its significance is revealed by the fact that Maria Theresa appointed it as an appellate forum for serfs, through which they could turn directly to the monarch with their complaints.)

Besides this one, Charles convened the Diet only once, in 1728/29, so in this way, he decided on the military contributions without the Estates. In spite of this, there was no open revolt of the nobles. This Diet was characterised by debates on religious issues but no decision was made.

The monarch issued his decree on religious issues titled *Carolina Resolutio* in order to solve religious problems. Pursuant to it, Protestants continued to be allowed to worship in the articular churches designated in 1681, Protestant clergymen were checked at the time of the Catholic *canonica visitatio*, mixed marriages could only be concluded before a Catholic priest, and for the officials entering their office, an oath including mentioning the Virgin Mary and the Saints was obligatory. Those abandoning the Catholic faith were punished⁷.

3. Maria Theresa's reign⁸

After the second unsuccessful Turkish war already mentioned, there was no significant event under Charles' reign. In October, 1740, he unexpectedly fell ill and died. Charles died being convinced that he had arranged the issue of succession reassuringly and with final effect. Maria Theresa inherited his countries but female succession did not apply to the title of Holy Roman Emperor. Gyula Szekfü wrote: 'When Maria Theresa ascended to the throne of Hungary, one of the greatest sovereign

⁶ Deák Ferenc beszédei. ('Ferenc Deák's speeches') III. (1861-1866.) 1889. 330. p. Cited in Katus, László, 2007. p. 497.

⁷ Ifj. Barta, János, 2000. p. 32..

⁸ In the bibliography, I have listed several Hungarian and foreign works on Maria Theresa's reign but her rule was given a separate chapter in the general, comprehensive histories of the Habsburg dynasty, too. Her first monographer was Alfred Ritter von Arneht, who wrote the queen's biography in ten volumes. In Hungarian historiography, the first one was Henrik Marczali.

personalities of the Habsburg dynasty became monarch, [...] the only woman who has exerted an authoritative, decisive influence on the history of the Hungarian nation.⁹ She ascended to the throne at the age of 26, and her firmness and excellent regal qualities had a determining role in it that she managed to preserve the unity of the empire as she came under a fire of attacks immediately upon ascending to the throne. The husbands of Joseph I's daughters, Charles Albert, prince-elector of Bavaria and Frederick Augustus, prince-elector of Saxony made a claim for the Habsburg inheritance. Frederick II, King of Prussia wanted to acquire Silesia, the most developed province of the empire. Charles Albert achieved that in 1742, he was elected Holy Roman Emperor and not Maria Theresa's husband, Francis of Lorraine. In 1741, there was the danger that the empire would fall apart. The European powers trusted in the anti-Habsburg feelings of the Hungarian Estates, and in their being able to make use of the opportunity to secede from the empire. It did not turn out so. When Frederick II attacked Silesia, and the war of succession (1741-1748), broke out, Maria Theresa asked for the help of the Hungarian Estates. At the 1741 Pozsony Diet, Maria Theresa was crowned, and the Hungarian estates offered their 'life and blood' to their monarch, and indeed, the Hungarian weapons, the almost 80,000 strong Hungarian army greatly contributed to it that although Silesia was lost for the empire, its unity was preserved. In exchange, the queen accepted the tax exemption of the nobles, admitted that Transylvania 'belonged to the sacred crown of the Hungarian kingdom', and promised that she would decide on the issues concerning the country with the help of her Hungarian advisors

In 1745, Charles Albert died, and then the estates of the empire elected Maria Theresa's husband as their emperor. Pursuant to the Treaty of Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle) (1748), ending the war of succession, the Prussians acquired Silesia but the Habsburg empire survived¹⁰. Hungary's approach to the war of succession is an interesting question. Barely three decades after Rákóczi's war of independence, Hungary sided with the queen. What could have been the reason? Naturally, noblemen's gallantry could have played a role – which I myself doubt – to help their queen, who had got into trouble. Probably, a more important consideration was that in exchange for their help, the Estates could see their privileges guaranteed and their position strengthened. Evidently, the consideration that Hungary could also rely on the protection of the Habsburg Monarchy against the Turks also played a role¹¹.

In the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), Maria Theresa would have liked to regain Silesia from the Prussians, but without success. The most developed province of the empire was lost for good. The good relationship between the monarch and the Estates, typical in the 1740s, soon deteriorated. Its signs could already be seen at the 1751 Diet, where the Estates did not vote for the tax increase requested and protested against awarding some market towns the rank of free royal boroughs. The real breach took place at the 1764–1765 Diet, when the monarch wanted the gentry to contribute to the maintenance of a permanent army instead of the anachronistic noble insurrection and pass an act to settle the socage relations. The Estates rejected both requests and only raised the tax by 700,000 forints so Hungary contributed 3.9 million forints to the imperial budget. Until the end of her reign, Maria Theresa did not convene the Diet any more. From this time until 1790, the death of Joseph II, we are concerned with enlightened absolutism. Enlightened absolutism meant a form of government with the decrees of the ruler, without the Estates. The objective was modernisation, the decrease of the lagging behind West Europe.

⁹ Szekfű, Gyula, 1943. p. 488.

¹⁰ Katus, László, 2007. pp. 501-502.

¹¹ Ifj. Barta János, 2000. p. 134.

In 1765, Lajos Batthyány, Palatine of Hungary died. The queen appointed her son-in-law, Duke of Teschen royal governor of the country. After the death of Count Ferenc Barkóczy, archbishop of Esztergom, his position remained unfilled for 11 years. There were innumerable reform measures taken during Maria Theresa's reign although thousands of enlightened decrees were issued by her successor, Joseph II.

Maria Theresa's decrees covered almost all the spheres of life from the economy (decrees on customs, finances and the tax system, which can mainly be linked to the name of Friedrich Wilhelm Haugwitz), through military issues and public administration (the establishing of new government authorities (dicasterium), e.g. the Council of State, which can mainly be linked to the name of Wenzel Anton Kaunitz-Rietberg), to culture, social policy and health care. From among them, probably the two most important measures, affecting Hungary in the long run, were the socage decree regulating the status of serfs and the educational decree, Ratio Educationis.

The socage decree maximised the serfs' obligations towards their landlords and created transparent legal relations¹².

The Ratio Educationis required every child to attend school from the age of 6 to 12. In the 18th century, schools were maintained by the church, but the monarch wanted to bring them under state supervision and standardize the study material because she thought that education was the primary device of social development. It seems, however, that a long time had to pass before the decree could exert an influence on social practice: most of the small Hungarian schools continued to work in the old, conventional way, and in many places, the qualification of the teachers left much to be desired.

Health care was also in focus during her reign. In 1752, she issued an order for lord lieutenants that every county should employ a qualified doctor who should treat poor patients free of charge. As the counties were slow in carrying out this order, in 1768, the queen issued a further decree on this subject, which included that every district should employ a qualified midwife as in this period a large number of children were still-born. In 1770, she issued her decree entitled Regulamentum sanitatis, which covered all the fields of health care.

During her long, 40 years' reign, Maria Theresa took part in two major wars, in the abovementioned war of succession and in the Seven Years' War. Furthermore, she participated in the partition of Poland: in 1772, Austrian and Hungarian troops led by field marshal count András Hadik occupied Galicia. (In the same year, the 13 cities in Szepes county, earlier pledged to Poland, were regained.)

After Maria Theresa's death (29 November, 1780), her son, who had been taking part in governing the empire as a co-ruler since 1765, ascended to the throne.

Summary

Maria Theresa was one of the Habsburgs reigning for the longest time. She ascended to the throne at a young age, unprepared, although in lack of a male heir, it could be expected that she should become a monarch. She had the education that the conventions of the age required but the legal, administrative or military etc. knowledge necessary for ruling a country were completely missing from it. Still, fate, compulsion and the justifiably assumed ruler's qualities made her one of the most talented monarchs of the dynasty and Europe while her life and thinking was full of contradictions although I am inclined to interpreting this rather as a paradox. She was a conservative Catholic and still took measures and issued decrees (seemingly) far from her faith, carrying the ideology of the enlightenment. But with the decrees

¹² About the socage reform, see e.g. Horváth, Z. 2001

serving the good of the people, she fulfilled her duty as a monarch as ordered by God. She loved her husband, Frederick of Lorraine faithfully, they had 16 children born, and after her husband's death, she wore a mourning dress until the end of her life, still, gossip was spread that she was unfaithful to him. After she ascended to the throne, most people saw her as a weak woman while she demonstrated several men's strength when she kept the empire she had inherited from her ancestors together although it was thought to be lost by many. Every monarch makes some bad decisions but if we consider the forty years of her reign, there are more positive than negative elements in it. She left to her successor a politically and militarily strengthened, economically developing empire getting modernised due to enduring reforms.

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