Gabriella Erdélyi (ed.)

Armed Memory

Agency and Peasant Revolts in Central and Southern Europe (1450–1700)

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York: CEU Press, 2000) and her most recent book is *Magánélet a régi Magyarországon* [Private Life in Early Modern Hungary], Budapest, 2012.

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Martin Rothkegel studied Protestant Theology (ThD, Charles University Prague, 2001) and Classical Philology (PhD, University of Hamburg, 2005). He is Professor of Church History at the Theologische Hochschule Elstal near Berlin, Germany. His research interests are focused on the Radical Reformation and Humanism in East Central Europe. He is the editor of the series *Bibliotheca Dissidentium. Répertoire desnon-conformistes religieux des seizième et dix-septième siècles* (Baden-Baden: Éditions Valentin Koerner).

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Fig 2. The execution of Dózsa in Paul Ricaut, Die Neu eröffnete Ottomanische Pforte (Augsburg, 1694) vol. 2, p. 106. Library and Information Center of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Oriental Collection.

Giorgio Politi

Fig. 1. „Gaismairs" sogenannte Landesordnung: Wasserzeichen aus der Wiener Abschrift (Ochsenköpfe mit einer Schlange mit doppelter Kontur). Haus-, Hof- u. Staatsarchiv Wien, Reichskanzlei, Oesterreichischen Akten, Abteilung Tirol, Generalia Faszikel 2, Fol. 3; G. Piccard, Die Wasserzeichenkartei Piccard im Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, Findbuch II/I, Abteilung XVI, Typ 331, Stuttgart 1966.

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Gabriella Erdélyi

Introduction

The Faces of Peasants

There remains a vivid picture in academic circles, the larger public and in school books of the peasantry living east of the Elbe as being "exploited" and "overburden" with forced labor. Furthermore, peasants endured this passively as they sank into the state of "second serfdom" at the time when free peasant ownership and personal status emerged in the West due to the active resistance of the peasants there. This notion of a dual Western and Eastern model of European peasantry—the systems of *Grundherrschaft* versus *Gutsherrschaft*—reached its most extensive version, both in terms of its geographical scope as well as its theses, during the time when Europe was divided by the Iron Curtain.[1] In response to this long-established paradigm based on the concept of two enormous regions, over more recent decades the earlier observation—going back to Otto Brunner himself—seems to have become prevalent again: that the immense diversity of peasant conditions in Europe renders any grand-scale comparison meaningless.[2] As a result, local studies and national frameworks dominate the field of the history of late medieval and early modern European rural society.[3]

1 On the historiography of the model see András Vári, "Kelet- és Nyugat-Európa agrártársadalmi dualizmusa – tavalyi hó?," *Korall. Társadalomtörténeti Folyóirat* 15–16 (2004): 117–44; Idem, "Wirrwarr der Herrschaftstypen? Herrschaftselemente und regionale Typologien von Herrschaft über Bauern," in *Historie und Eigen-Sinn: Festschrift für Jan Peters zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Axel Lubinski, Thomas Rudert, and Martina Schattkowsky (Weimar: Böhlau, 1997), 115–27.

2 See the results of the project called *Potsdamer Studien zur Geschichte der ländlichen Gesellschaft* (Böhlau: Cologne–Weimar–Vienna, 2001–2003), 4 vols. For more thoughts on this issue see Katalin Péter's chapter in this book.

3 As the editors of this collective volume note, the effort at a new comparison of European servile status was induced by the lack of such modern scholarly output. Contributions in the book stress the fundamental local variations of the conditions of serfdom. Paul Freedman and Monique Bourin, eds., *Forms of Servitude in Northern and Central Europe: Decline, Resistance, and Expansion* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005). This impression is also reinforced by the survey by

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Is there a viable alternative to the oversimplified model shaped by political ideologies and the empiricist narratives of a protean social reality? By its focus on peasant revolts, the present edited volume attempts to narrate, on the one hand, the entangled history of peasants and, on the other hand, to reflect upon the entangled memories of revolts and of their leaders.[4] Such an approach is based on the assumption that rebellions—I use the term *revolt*, *rebellion*, *uprising* and *unrest* as synonyms—render themselves more apt for comparison since they place peasants, otherwise portrayed as passive and exploited in their everyday lives, on the stage amid independent action. In terms of methodology, this volume wishes to promote the move from local, national and sometimes comparative history, which have dominated scholarly literature on European peasantry and peasant revolts, to the history of interactions, transfers and entanglements.[5]

With regard to the book's geographical scope, it wishes to put under the spotlight that part of Europe which is always missing from the comparative analyses of European peasant revolts.[6] Under the term Central Europe we focus on the region that historians came to call "Habsburg central Europe" of the early modern period: the Kingdom of Hungary and Croatia, territories of the Bohemian Crown, the Austrian Hereditary Provinces, as well as the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. The inclusion of northern Italy into our investigation had an a priori justification: the Ottoman expansion threatening Europe on both land and sea, the military and political challenge of which placed additional burdens on and increased the potency of social tensions among social strata in both Central Europe and the Mediterranean.[7] It turned out, however,

Peter Blickle in this book of the scholarly literature of rural revolts in the last fifty years. See further literature there.

4 For the concept of entangled history or *histoire croisée* see Shalini Randeria, "Entangled Histories of Uneven Modernities: Civil Society, Caste Solidarities and Legal pluralism in Post-Colonial India," in *Unraveling Ties. From Social Cohesion to New Practices of Connectedness*, ed. Yehuda Elkana et al. (Frankfurt: Campus, 2002), 284–311; Bénédicte Zimmermann and Michael Werner, "Beyond Comparison: *Histoire Croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity," *History and Theory* 45 (2006): 30–50.

5 On the concept cultural transfer in history writing and the advantages of this approach compared to comparative history see Michael Espagne, "Au delà du comparatisme," in idem, *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 35–49.

6 Hugues Neveux most typically writes about England, France and the German territories under Europe: Hugues Neveux, *Révoltes Paysannes En Europe (XIV^e^-XVII^e^ Siècle)* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997). The terms Central Europe designates the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation in Peter Blickle, ed., *Resistance, Representation and Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). Peter Blickle's chapter in this book is an exception in this regard: he includes the Mediterranean (Italy and Spain) and also the post-communist countries of what he calls Eastern Europe (Hungary, Czech Republic) into his summary of European revolts.

7 See for example the role of the extraordinary tax called Turkish Aid (*Türkenhilfe*) as a factor that made the peasants feel that the social status quo had been damaged before 1525 and also in

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Gabriella Erdélyi, Armed Memory

that we have an argument more relevant to our social historical perspective. Marco Gentile's case study of the 1462 peasant uprising in the territory of Piacenza provides an exceptional insight into what has been deemed to be structurally impossible by experts of Italian rural protests: the alliance between peasants and urban commoners.[8] The *Gemeiner Mann* of the Mediterranean sounds, therefore, like an apt title for a future European research project.

This volume is an endeavor to unravel the ways in which ideas, rituals, people, texts and images related to revolts migrated and met in Europe and how their interaction mutually shaped them. The identification of the transfers and adaptations between the ideas and practices of rebellious peasants in Europe is facilitated by the chosen perspective. The authors who have contributed to this volume sought to narrate the histories of peasant resistance from the perspective of the actors—the peasants themselves.[9] In historical narratives peasants most often appear as the passive victims of great historical processes, such as the rivalry between territorial states and landlords for control of the serfs, who from that angle appeared to be the "Leibeigene" of their overlords.[10] Historians who are perhaps more interested in *longue durée* processes than the world of peasants investigated the ways in which peasants contributed to the making of the modern state, which has become the mainstream approach of peasant revolts in the last two or three decades.[11] According to these investigations, the rebellion of peasants against the state effectively served to advance the process of centralization.[12] Although the approach interprets itself as a model of state-building from below,

Moravia in 1530 (on the latter see Martin Rothkegel's essay in this volume). The role of the anti-Ottoman crusade in the outbreak of the rural rebellion is most obvious in the Kingdom of Hungary in 1514.

8 See the argument of Samuel Cohn, who established a divide between Europe north (France and Flanders) and south of the Alps (Italy) along the existence versus lack of city–country cooperation. Samuel K. Cohn, *Lust for Liberty. The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe, 1200–1425* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 157–76.

9 On the centrality of the concept of experience in the variant attempts of the transcultural reorientation of historical scholarship see for example Michel Espagne, "Sur les limites du comparatisme en histoire culturelle," *Genèses* 17 (1994): 112–21.

10 As an example for this perspective see R. J. W. Evans, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy 1550–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, first edn. 1979), 88–91.

11 See the volume on peasant resistance within the project entitled *The Origins of the Modern State in Europe.* Peter Blickle, ed., *Resistance, Representation and Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Wim Blockmans, André Holenstein, and Jon Mathieu, eds., *Empowering Interactions: Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe, 1300–1900* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Peter Rauscher and Martin Scheutz, eds., *Die Stimme der ewigen Verlierer? Aufstände, Revolten und Revolutionen in den österreichischen Ländern (ca.1450–1815)* (Vienna–Munich: Oldenbourg–Böhlau, 2013).

12 Blickle, ed., *Resistance*, passim, for example 337; Blockmans, Holenstein and Mathieu, eds., *Empowering Interactions*, 218.

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it hardly goes beyond the Tillyan thesis of "wars made states,"[13] extending its explanatory value to peasant wars, and thus remains a top-down narrative of the peasant world. And although its narrative, based on an evolutionary conception of history, may seem persuasive to modern readers, the rebels would have been surprised by the statement that they were, in fact, building the state from below when they demanded freedom via armed uprising. The application of this state-oriented perspective is anachronistic in an age when, for the peasants, authority was essentially represented by the landlord and thus peasants never rebelled against the king, but against his wicked advisors as well as the nobility and the Church as a feudal institution.[14]

Contemporary peasants would be surprised not only by this image of the *homo politicus,* but also by that of the *homo oeconomicus*, which they had been considered in the 1930s. According to the latter concept, the peasants organized their household and economy based exclusively on rational and economic considerations, thus being driven solely by the aim of maximizing the profit derived from the difference between the gross yield of their economic activity and the taxes levied on it. The landlord, from this perspective, enters the life of the peasant only in the role of the "economic exploiter."[15]

Evidently, the high price to be paid for comparativism is oversimplification. The present volume aims to avoid such perils through its focus on the lived experiences of contemporary agents. As a first step in this endeavor, we return the given names to the protagonists of our narratives, even if we are overly accustomed to books on the peasantry that do not use any personal names. Dispensing with this anonymity, we wish to portray peasants as people with faces and personalities; and more than that, as actors possessing independent spheres of action, personal relationships with their landlords, private thoughts and even emotions. The (loose) personal subjection and the (negligible quantity of) labor services, or *robot*, was onerous for Hungarian peasants primarily in an emotional sense, which made them invest an immense amount of money and know-how into purchasing freedoms for themselves, as Katalin Péter argues in this volume. Péter's thesis represents a radical rejection of that which has become accepted knowledge of the so-called second serfdom in East Elbia and in fact reminds the reader of the embarrassment of the wealthy Dutch during the same time period as portrayed vividly by Simon Shama.

13 Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990–1992*, revised edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

14 Rauscher and Scheutz formulate this problem of perspective, though nevertheless regard it to be legitimate due to other aspects that remain unspecified. Rauscher and Scheutz, eds., *Die Stimme der ewigen Verlierer?*, 23–24.

15 Cf. Wilhelm Abel, *Agrarkrisen und Agrarkonjunktur in Mitteleuropa vom 13. zum 19. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg–Berlin: Parey, 1935).

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Gabriella Erdélyi, Armed Memory

This volume contends that the "political" moments of armed collective resistance and the everyday lives of peasants seemingly dominated by their "economic" activities can be better grasped in the process of *Herrschaft*, in which—if considered as a social practice—the relations between peasants and their overlords are shaped within the dynamic of their everyday communication and interactions.[16] From this angle, their everyday lives and exceptional moments of armed rebellion appear as part of the social practice of "negotiating freedom."[17] This is highlighted with exceptional clarity in the chapter by Marco Gentile in this volume regarding the Rebellion of Piacenza in 1462, in which the author pinpoints the pivotal role that rituals of negotiation played in the armed conflict and speaks of a limited or regulated use of force. Gentile argues, moreover, that the well-known fact that in Southern Europe and in particular Italy there were relatively few rural revolts in the fifteenth century can be seen as evidence of the effective use on the part of peasants of existing legal channels for negotiating freedom.

The concept of freedom refers not to a human right,[18] as it evolved in later discourses of freedom, but to a practical matter, most typically an exemption from a duty tied to the peasant plot. According to S. A. Eddie's investigation of rural life in Prussia, during the period under discussion such exemptions entailed ad hoc deals in which peasants altered their economic and personal status.[19] For the individual, freedom in its fullness meant the possession of a plot free from any taxes and services, in other words, reaching noble status.[20] The status of nobility could be purchased with money or earned through education or the provision of services, just as it could through armed uprising. A different interpretation of the demand of peasants for freedom also appears in this volume,[21] which shows that more work should be done in this field in the future.

16 Cf. Alf Lüdtke, "Einleitung: Herrschaft als sozale Praxis," in idem, *Herrschaft als soziale Praxis. Historische und sozialanthropologische Studien,* Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Insituts für Geschichte 91 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 9–63. See also detailed case studies of other members of the Göttingen school (David Warren Sabean, Hans Medick, and Jürgen Schlumbohm), which are strongly influenced by social anthropology.

17 Thus I propose to extend the concept used by Katalin Péter in this volume referring only to their everyday negotiations aimed at elevating their social status.

18 See the contrary argumentation of Samuel Cohn with regard to the aims of late medieval revolts in Italy, France and Flanders in his book *Lust for Liberty*.

19 S. A. Eddie, *Freedom's Price: Serfdom, Subjection and Reform in Prussia, 1648–1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

20 As interpreted by Katalin Péter in this book.

21 See the chapter in the present volume by Peter Blickle, who argues that the slogan of freedom represented the effort to abolish "Leibeigenschaft" and also to extend communal political rights. Commoners in North Italy aimed to redress justice (overturned by new taxes) without changing the social order, as shown by Marco Gentile in this volume.

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When did rebellion break out? From our anthropological perspective, at moments when the mutually expected reciprocity of human relations was undermined.[22] If this premise is accepted, it logically follows that this happened in both the West and in the East, in both the *Grundherrschaft* and *Gutsherrschaft* zones of Europe. The most recent investigator of rural life in Prussia, generally considered as the archetype of Eastern exploitation, asserts that *Herrschaft* in the *Gutsherrschaft* zone did not represent unilateral exploitation, but a mutually beneficial relationship, "a more balanced system of mutual rights and responsibilities than the received wisdom has allowed … where peasants were well capable of defending their rights."[23] In this volume, Katalin Péter also describes Hungary in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a *Gutsherrschaft* zone. She uses the category of *Gutsherrschaft* in its limited, original sense introduced by traditional German history writing, thus denoting the relation in which peasants became subjected to the manor through their possession of a plot (*Gutsuntertänigkeit*).[24] Péter therefore preserves the concept which originates from contemporary usage and discards its extended interpretation, which constructed a homogenous social system from it whose central criteria are commonly held to be the workings of the seigneurial *Gutswirtschaft*, the labor of the serfs for the lord and the fragility of their personal rights and of their possessions. On the contrary, in this volume one can read of the hereditary nature of the peasant tenant plot, the far-reaching personal freedom of Hungarian peasants and of their purposeful actions.

Shared Ideas and Experiences

Revolts were sparked off when these mutual relations between peasants and lords were damaged and the lords did not fulfill their obligations from the perspective of the peasants. The language of negotiation, which escalated into conflict amid the disappointment resulting from its failure, was very often that of religion in the first half of the sixteenth century, when the majority of armed conflicts discussed in this book took place. If we want to take seriously the actions and thoughts of peasants, this deserves special attention. Therefore, the second section of this volume (Part II) is dedicated to issues related to the role of religion in revolts. With regard to this subject, the edited volume entitled *Religion and Rural Revolt* signifies an important milestone, which, extraordinarily, discussed the role of

22 See also Blockmans, Holenstein, and Mathieu, eds., *Empowering Interactions*, 170.

23 Eddie, *Freedom's Price*, 88.

24 Georg Friedrich Knapp, *Die Bauern-Befreiung und der Ursprung der Landarbeiter in den älteren Theilen Preußens,* vol. 1 (Leipzig: n.p. 1887), 22–23.

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Gabriella Erdélyi, Armed Memory

religion in peasant rebellions in a global context already in 1982.[25] The research of the Hungarian medievalist, Jenő Szűcs (1928–88), who enjoyed international fame at the time appears to have influenced the choice of themes in the edited volume.[26] At the beginning of the 1970s, Szűcs expressed radically new viewpoints concerning the revolt of 1514 in Hungary. The results of his research were fully published in Hungarian and partially in German in 1972.[27] Szűcs was the first historian to divert attention from the economic and social contexts to the religious rhetoric of texts possibly produced by the rebels themselves—thus placing him a little before research concerning the German Peasants' War of 1525, which gathered new impetus with the anniversary of 1975.[28] His central concern was the question of who had translated the orthodox Christian ideology of the crusade against the Ottomans into a religio-political language (which he called "popular crusade ideology") that mobilized the masses and how they had done so. Szűcs identified the young, "apostate" Observant Franciscan friars in the role of military leaders and as forgers of the central idea of the revolt, which claimed that the consecrated army of crusaders, being commissioned not only by the pope, but by God himself, must fight not against the Ottoman-Turks, but against the "infidel" nobility that failed to perform their duty. Szűcs reached this insight through nuanced philological readings: on the one hand, he identified the rhetoric of religious mysticism and apocalyptic ideas in the texts produced by the Observant Franciscans in the Kingdom of Hungary; while on the other hand, he noticed that the centers of the revolt—as well as the regions which reacted most intensely to evangelical ideas a decade later—coincided with the location of major cloisters of the Observant Franciscans. Szűcs spoke of the ambivalence inherent in the spirituality of the latter order: the social criticism preached from the pulpit on the basis of the sermons of the leaders of the Observant Franciscans, Oswaldus de Lasko and Pelbartus de Temeswar, combined with the spiritual traditions of the order easily developed into a rebellion against all kinds of authority. This, according to Szűcs, accounts for the fact that while the Observant Franciscans were officially entrusted to preach the crusade in the name of the pope and the king, the spiritual and military leaders of the revolt against the

25 János M. Bak and Gerhard Benecke, eds., *Religion and Rural Revolt* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

26 On the oeuvre of Szűcs and its reception in more detail on the twentieth anniversary of his death see Gábor Gyáni, "Szűcs Jenő, a magányos történetíró," *Forrás* 40, no. 6 (2008): 13–17.

27 On his works concerning the 1514 revolt see the study of Pál Ács here. In German: Jenő Szűcs, "Die Ideologie des Bauernkrieges," in *Aus der Geschichte der Ostmitteleuropäischen Bauernbewegungen im 16.–17. Jahrhundert*, ed. Gusztáv Heckenast (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1977), 157–88.

28 Szűcs's writings on the 1514 revolt were occasioned by official commemorations in 1972 of the 500-year anniversary of the "invented" birth year of Dózsa. See more on these commemorations in the chapter by Pál Ács in this volume.

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