

Frank, Tibor. *Picturing Austria-Hungary: The British Perception of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1865-1870*. CHSP Hungarian Studies Series, 6. New Jersey: Center For Hungarian Studies and Publications, 2005. Pp.447, illus., tables.

Diplomatic history fell on hard times lately, undeservedly so, because by enlarging its scope it has transcended investigating foreign policy notes and the exchange of views among diplomats, which can be of critical importance as well. Nevertheless, Tibor Frank correctly broadened the range by including modern political marketing and image-making as significant integral parts of international relations. This “interrelated approach” (p.xvi) is not of academic interest alone, because, to mention only one example, how one country’s elite came to view its counterparts from other countries played into fatal decisions in July, 1914.

It also makes sense to couple the broadening of the scope with a limited time-frame. Unlike other branches of history that embrace trends or the “longue duree,” this new kind of diplomatic history can be at its best when it focuses on a brief period in a condensed manner. Frank’s book certainly qualifies as such as it is the product of prodigious research and of excellent analysis.

British perceptions were limited by their own somewhat skewered points-of-view, as they tended to regard others in light of their own interests and concerns. To a degree that has always been the case, but egocentric nationalistic/imperialistic attitudes, prevalent in the second half of the nineteenth century, reinforced that tendency. I wish Tibor Frank would have enlarged the scope of his book even further to include mutual perceptions, that is how Hungarians viewed Great Britain during this period.

For Great Britain, Austria, and then Austria-Hungary were islands of relative stability in a European balance of power, a key tenet of British foreign policy. For the time being even united Germany became part of that scheme as a convenient counterweight to

both France and Russia. Yet, there was an interesting contrast among the British between their lack of interest in and their lack of knowledge about affairs on the Continent – the grim memories of the Crimean war soured much of the public on those affairs – and continuing interest and commentaries by a small segment of that public. Turbulent domestic relations, the never-ceasing Irish problem, and matters related to imperial expansion kept the public's focus away from Continental affairs, but certain events, such as the Austro-Prussian war in 1866 awakened widespread interest. The 1867 Compromise between Austria and Hungary elicited near unanimous approval by both of the major political parties and their journalistic allies.

What remained in the aftermath of these events was a need by interested parties to maintain this involvement. Tibor Frank is at his best when narrating and analyzing a kind of two-prong effort, one by diplomats of Austria and then of Austria-Hungary, and the other by British writers who traveled to the Monarchy and disseminated knowledge about conditions there. Count Rudolf Apponyi II was the Monarchy's Ambassador in London from 1856 through 1871. In spite of efforts by Chancellor Count Friedrich Ferdinand von Beust to catch up with the new requirements of political marketing and image-making, the Embassy was mired in hobnobbing only with the elite of British society in “salons, soires, balls, clubs, and hunts” (p.39). Thus, comments Frank, “Vienna renounced winning over bourgeois public opinion as insignificant even though it was becoming more and more influential” (p.39).

The slack was taken up by writers, such as most prominently by Arthur J. Patterson, whose book, “The Magyars” was published in 1869, and whose translation of one of Mor Jokai's best novels became an instant publishing success. Discussions on Patterson's

and on other writers' books are most illuminating, not only for their factual content but also, for how Hungary, still viewed by many foreigners as an exotic country, appeared to British observers at that time.

I do have two critical points to make. First, the book's title is somewhat misleading. True, Apponyi represented the entire Monarchy and whatever he and the other diplomats were doing was on the Monarchy's behalf. However, when it comes to discussing the writers, and that is the bulk of the book, the emphasis is mostly on Hungary, and on Austria usually only when a connection with Hungary is involved. That is true even when the interesting Irish question is discussed, as it did not escape the attention of some British and Irish politicians that the Compromise of 1867 could serve as a model to a possible British-Irish rapprochement. Second, the two main chapters in the book are "Marketing Austria-Hungary" and the "Images of Austria-Hungary." The topics in them are intrinsically connected, and consequently, there are several overlaps and repetitions. It would perhaps be advisable in a future edition to fuse these two chapters and subdivide it along the lines of certain subject matters. That way, chronological anomalies too could be avoided, such as discussing the 1867 Compromise before the 1866 Austro-Prussian war.

Appendixes, detailed notes and an extensive bibliography round up this most interesting and informative book.

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