

Royal Hungary or Kingdom of Hungary? Interpretation, History and Reception of Two Historical Terms

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In Hungarian historiography, the term *royal Hungary* (*királyi Magyarország* in Hungarian) refers to the remnant of the former *Kingdom of Hungary* (or *Hungarian Kingdom*, *Magyar Királyság* in Hungarian) after the *Tripartition* (Latin, means division into three parts). The symbolic date of the end of the integrated Hungarian Kingdom and of her division into three parts is 29 August 1541 when the Ottoman Army led by Suleiman the Great (1520–1566) infiltrated the castle of Buda. Until 1568, the Ottomans conquered the central part of the Hungarian Kingdom and this always expanding region became the *territory under Ottoman* (often used Turkish in Hungarian historiography) *rule* (often used as *Ottoman Hungary*, *Subjection or territory under Ottoman/Turkish yoke*). The eastern territory, Transylvania became an Ottoman vassal state under the name of *Transylvanian Principality*. The remaining western-northern crescent was mentioned by historians as *royal Hungary* but in newest monographs and studies it is often called *Kingdom of Hungary* as well. This division of Hungary lasted until the end of the 17th century, therefore the two historical terms referring to Hungary mentioned above are highly time-specific.

History as a human science uses historical terms as mathematics applies axioms. The difference is that language is a dangerous transmitter of ideas (as it is well-known due to the post-modern turn in language, literature and history), therefore historical terms can be interpreted in different ways. One of the best examples, in relation to early modern Hungarian history, is the Habsburg Empire. It is used different ways which motivated Tibor Monostori to redefine and reinterpret it.¹ He highlighted that Hungarian historians misinterpreted the term *domus Austriae* and overextended the significance of the eastern Habsburg political-economic entity. Partly this inspired the idea to contemplate on two other commonly used terms in historiography, as *royal Hungary* and *Kingdom of Hungary* definitely do not mean the same as they imply two different interpretations of early modern Hungarian history. These two terms speak volumes on Hungarian history and historiography and this short study offers a glimpse into them.

1 T. MONOSTORI, *A Magyar Királyság helye az Ausztriai Ház országai között az európai spanyol hegemónia korában (1558–1648)*, in: *Századok*, Vol. 5, 2009, pp. 1023–1062.



The Copernican turn in Hungarian historiography is marked by the monograph of Géza Pálffy² in which he argued for the usage of *Kingdom of Hungary* instead of the former term of *royal Hungary*.

TABLE 1: The expression “royal Hungary” (királyi Magyarország) in Hungarian historiography³

Hits in database (total = 2,190)	Date of the appearance of the expression
3	1840–1860
3	1860–1880
53	1880–1900
46	1900–1920
104	1920–1940
77	1940–1960
345	1960–1980
801	1980–2000
758	after 2000

“In contrast to my predecessors I do not use the terms *Royal Hungary* or *Habsburg Hungary*. The term *Royal Hungary* suggest [sic!], incorrectly, that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were several kingdoms of Hungary, such as the *Habsburg kingdom*, the *Transylvanian kingdom*, or even a *Slavonian kingdom*. Furthermore, and more importantly, I do not share the idea that under the name of *Royal Hungary*, a new entity emerged after 1541 and existed until 1686, or that *Royal Hungary* emerged from the medieval *Kingdom of Hungary* as a new state. [...] During the era under investigation such concepts were not used [...]”⁴ Historians use several terms referring to the past which were not used in that period. Therefore, the problem is rather the dichotomy of disruption and continuity. The short excerpt above emphasises the latter. There was the continuity of region, population, economy etc. Although, the remnant of the Hungarian Kingdom lost its independence as it became part of the Habsburg Empire having a new Habsburg king, Ferdinand I (1526–1564). The person of the king was very important for the contemporaries, because he represented the state itself. Its significance is highlighted by the fact, that after the death of Lajos II (1526) two kings were elected, Ferdinand I and Szapolyai János (1526–1540). From the beginning, the Habsburg administration started to integrate the remnant of the Hungarian Kingdom to her administrative and religious system which provoked several fights including religious conflicts between the catholic state and several layers of the mostly protestant Hungarian society.

Therefore, the ideas presented above provoke some contemplations and afterthoughts and ultimately lead to the question why other historians really use the term *royal Hungary* and what it really symbolises for them. The solution originates from the 19th-century-nationalism, in the name of which historians highlighted national independence and differences from the Habsburg Empire. One of the first represent-

2 G. PÁLFFY, *The Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy in the Sixteenth Century*, Boulder 2009.

3 Based on the ADT Plus Arcanum digital database of Hungarian periodic.

4 PÁLFFY, p. 12.

atives of this approach was Árpád Károlyi⁵ who wrote that the *Hungarian Kingdom* ceased to exist as an independent power in Europe and her remnant, *royal Hungary* was drawn into the personal union of the Habsburg Empire.⁶ Therefore, in this approach the “new” Hungarian state lost her continuity to the old one having lost her national king and independence.



TABLE 2: The expression “Hungarian Kingdom” (Magyar Királyság) in Hungarian Historiography⁷

Hits in database (total = 14,519) ⁸	Date of the appearance of the expression
2	before 1820
10	1820–1840
58	1840–1860
694	1860–1880
1,384	1880–1900
2,190	1900–1920
3,204	1920–1940
1,059	1940–1960
557	1960–1980
1,933	1980–2000
3,428	after 2000

This older tradition lives on simultaneously with the new paradigm represented by for example by Géza Pálffy. This new paradigm, under the impact of modern ideas, like multi-culturalism or globalism emphasises the positive effects of the Habsburg Empire on Hungary and her development. In addition, it criticizes the usage of the term *royal Hungary* as a symptom of an old fashioned nationalism partly neglecting

- 5 He was born in 1852, in Pest. He was a historian and an archivist, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He died in 1940, in Budapest. Brief biography on the Internet: [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%A1rlyi_%C3%81rp%C3%A1ld_\(t%C3%B6rt%C3%A9nelmi_és_tudományosi_alkalmazott_tudós\)](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%A1rlyi_%C3%81rp%C3%A1ld_(t%C3%B6rt%C3%A9nelmi_és_tudományosi_alkalmazott_tudós)), [cit. 2016-09-15].
- 6 “Erre a nyugatra nézve a keleti kérdés attól az időponttól kezdve lesz általános és közvetlen érdekű, midőn Buda veszte után Magyarország megszűnt az európai hatalmak rendszerében külön életet élni; midőn az ország kétharmada török birtokba vagy befolyás alá kerülvén, a szabadon maradt töredék annak az újdónatúj európai érdekközösségnek a sphaerájába vonatott, mely a királyi Magyarország, az osztrák-német és cseh tartományok personal-uniójában a Habsburgok jogára körül jegezesedett ki. [...] Míg a többi országok az újonnan összekovácsolt államegységen belől nem szűntek meg legalább a cultura és anyagi jólét útjain előbbrehaladva, bizonyos önczélal bírni: hazánktól még ezt is megtagadta a végzet, megtagadták a sanyarú viszonyok; mert a királyi Magyarország pusztá eszközzé vált egy magasabbnak tartott, idegen cél, a nyugat védelme szolgálatában. Ama világbontó küzdelmek ugyanis, melyek közt a Habsburgok keleti ágának monarchiája megszületett, ezt a monarchiát a folyton ostromló ozmánóság ellenében, a várerősség jellegével ruházták föl.” A. KÁROLYI, *Bocskay szerepe a történetben*, Vol. 6, 1898, pp. 284–285.
- 7 Based on the ADT Plus Arcanum digital database of Hungarian periodic.
- 8 The term *Kingdom of Hungary* or *Hungarian Kingdom* is not as time specific as the term *royal Hungary*, it can refer to Hungary from the foundation of the state to 1918. It explains the higher number of the appearance of the term.



the fact that the continuity of the Hungarian Kingdom was a problem for the contemporaries and for them continuity was a legal, religious and emotional question as well. However, they did not use the term royal Hungary but their cooperation with the Habsburg ruler and state was far from smooth. In different forms, some of the Hungarian politicians and of the Hungarian social-political elite (e. g. István Bocskai) often questioned the continuity of the Habsburg kings to the former “good old” Hungarian “national” kings.

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