

Nándor Dreisziger
Hungarians From Ancient Times to 1956.
Biographical and Historical Essays

Toronto: Legas, 2007. 214 pp. Notes and Appendix. ISBN 978-1-894508-96-4.

Hungarians From Ancient Times to 1956 is a collection of essays relating to Hungarian subjects from the pen of Nándor Dreisziger, Professor Emeritus of the Royal Military College. These essays are drawn from his extensive knowledge of Hungarian history. They cover topics which were recurrent preoccupations of his in his extensive list of scholarly publishing. There is no overarching thesis which connects every essay in the book to each other. Instead essays are organized into four sections: ‘remarkable Hungarians’, ‘Hungarian proto-history’ (the examination of the origins of the Magyar peoples before their settlement in the Carpathian basin), ‘Hungary and the world’, which he states is about “information on the attitude to Hungary and Hungarians by outsiders” (p23-24), and ‘Hungarian communities in the New World’, which focuses on Hungarian settlements in places that have been both documented (ex. U.S.A) and overlooked in scholarship (ex. Brazil). The first three themes possess large historiographies, as anyone who has perused the titles on display in a Hungarian bookstore will recognize. The fourth theme of this essay collection has not received as much attention. Especially helpful, due to this lack of attention, is a detailed historiography by Dreisziger on scholarship pertinent to this field, which will no doubt aid subsequent researchers.

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This book will be of interest to Hungarians and scholars of Hungarian topics, but there is much here for a wider readership. One reason that the essays transcend limitation to the two

audiences mentioned is because of Dreisziger's careful efforts to find or emphasize details which historiographies on these subjects have overlooked. The opening chapter on Béla Bartók (1881-1945), his nomination for 'greatest Hungarian', details the ethnomusicologist's little-known involvement in Hungarian émigré politics in the U.S. with his several-month-long leadership of the organization 'Movement for an Independent Hungary'. Another chapter devoted to political philosopher Oszkár Jászi (1875-1957) convincingly argues that there were prophetic elements to Jászi's writings, including his wish for a federation of Europe (p60), and his conviction that the Second World War would result in Soviet rule over Central Europe (p75). The chapter on the 1956 Hungarian Revolution puts forth the idea that Hungary may have been of strategic importance to the Soviet leadership because the U.S.S.R. lacked long and medium-range missile capability (p138). By 1989, when the Soviet Union possessed intercontinental missiles, its leadership made the calculation to let Eastern Europe go. In the last chapter on the historiography on Hungarians in the New World Dreisziger mentions alternate theories as to why peoples from the Hungarian-controlled lands emigrated from Europe to the Americas. Béla Várdy of Duquesne University concluded uneven economic progress and modernization in Hungary led people to seek better lives elsewhere (p199), while Julianna Puskás took a less-cited opposing view, that there was a directly proportional relationship between Hungarian economic prosperity and high levels of immigration to America (p202). In other words, the fact that so many people were able to save enough money to immigrate to America at all indicated that the economy was doing

well in Hungary during the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

I think scholars of Canadian history will also find material to appreciate in this volume of essays, especially in relation to Canadian-Hungarian connections. There is a chapter devoted to Transylvanian travel book writer Sándor Bölöni Farkas (1795-1842), detailing how parts of his 1834 *Journey in North America* were based on his visit to Montréal, Quebec City and York, and how he formed impressions of British North America based on a meeting with William Lyon Mackenzie (p87). While intrigued by Canada, Bölöni Farkas was disappointed that Canada retained a monarchical form of government, for it resembled the Hungarian form of government too closely. There is a section of a chapter devoted to Watson Kirkconnell (1895-1977), a Canadian linguistic genius who was familiar with 50 languages including Magyar, and who produced several volumes dealing with Hungarian subjects. Two other chapters have information on Hungarian settlements in Bekevar and Esterhaz-Kaposvar in Saskatchewan, and on a grouping of Hungarians in Winnipeg around the turn of the last century. For a Canadianist it is interesting to consider how hard Hungarian immigrants laboured to construct the social structures which they had possessed back home (ex. Church organizations) in lieu of the particular difficulties associated with the Canadian prairies, such as the isolation and distance between settlements. The article on the decline of the use of Hungarian in Canada is a reminder to Canadians about how multiculturalism is constantly in flux.

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Considering all of these positive aspects of this book of Hungarian essays, the only comment I have left to make is to warn the reader that there are a large number of copy-editing

errors in the text. I would urge these errors not to distract potential readers from engaging with the essays, or utilizing the appendix and extensive notations which are most helpful for further research.

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