

***Representing the Power: The Habsburgs in the Transylvania: From piety to
Dynastical Loyalty***

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Abstract

The Habsburgs and their monarchy occupied a privileged place in the history of Europe. They have embodied one of the most enduring and interesting multinational political projects, whose brand was from its very beginnings the ethnic and the religious diversity. This political project was dominated by a deeply inclusive and universalistic vision of the Habsburgs confronted with strong the local particularities, which have created so many tensions and difficulties, sometimes insurmountable. An empire looking for power is the best definition of the main political, religious and symbolical actions of the Habsburgs in their quest to find a place in their Church but more important in their Church.

Therefore a historical reflection on the power, assumed by the Habsburgs trying to find a model for their state, a proper dialogue with the Church and with the German world, to use theology as a legitimating tool, or to impose in the Transylvania the power of enlargement of the social body is a very useful exercise to understand the deep evolution of early modern society, whose inner energy is the power.

Keywords: power, political theology, Habsburgs, monarchy, Pietas Austriaca, Corpus Christi, Transylvania, allegiance, multinational, culture of loyalty, Danube Empire, supranational Empire, nationalism, inland colonialism, tolerance, ideology, social control, perfect society

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Introduction

The power was always a way to legitimate the authority of someone to an individual or to a group, to impose a particular view upon the society or to change the course and evolution of events. Beyond the fact that power is a very abstract concept, it can be analyzed and observed from many perspectives: political, ideological, psychological, cultural, religious or symbolical. The power needs to be assumed by the people, institutions, to manifest as an act of leadership, or to manifest in a symbolical key. Therefore a historical reflection on the many manifestations of power assumed by the sovereign, as holding power or by the ordinary people as subjects of the power is a very useful exercise to understand the deep evolution of society, whose inner energy remains the power.

I have focused this historical and theological investigation on the Habsburgs and on their monarchy, because they have occupied a privileged place in the history of Europe. The Habsburgs have embodied one of the most enduring and interesting superstate project, whose brand was from its very beginnings, the ethnic and the religious diversity. This political project was dominated by a deeply inclusive and universalistic vision of the Habsburgs in which they were confronted with the many local particularities that have created so many tensions and difficulties, sometimes insurmountable. Looking for a perfect model of state and power the Habsburgs wanted to find for themselves a proper place in history, to ensure for them the authority in the Church and in society and to face all this challenges that threatened the modern Europe.

In this context, the political theology expressed by this particular concept of *Pietas Austriaca* offered the Habsburgs the perfect tools for building a public loyalty. The particular case of the early modern Transylvania, analyzed from the perspective of political theology of the Habsburgs, puts an emphasis on the fragile confessional balance, on the importance of the religious and political tolerance, on the significance of public events, on the image of sovereigns in the collective conception of the people. Therefore, Transylvania became a classic example of the periphery where the central model translates not without difficulties or constraints. The Habsburgs found there a very fertile ground on which they have built one of the strongest culture of loyalty to the House of Habsburg in the Monarchy. From here can be understood the formal aspects of Romanians hopelessness, which they have believed that addressing to Empire will get to the highest earthly authority, but in fact they have had addressed to a monarchy like any other, pragmatic and rapacious when their interests asked.

My paper would try to give a new perspective on the analysis of the developments in the Habsburgs political and religious attempt to construct their model of power in the German world, in the Church and in Transylvania. Influenced by Counter Reformation, the Habsburgs model of power was a very strong argument to claim respect for the catholic faith and by this to gain the loyalty to the House of Austria. In

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the late of Baroque era the spirituality was for the Habsburgs the main symbolical and theological instrument of power. By this new spirituality of the Counter Reformation, the Romanian communities from Transylvania were integrated religion in this broad concept of *Pietas Austriaca*, and political in the Habsburg Monarchy.

An Empire looking for a model of power

The territorial expansion of the Habsburg Monarchy from the late seventeenth century put in the front of sovereign a critical political agenda. The Habsburgs had to manage a very complicated confessional file, in which the conflicts between the Catholics and the Protestants have increased and threatened not only the political stability, but also their grown monarchy. The Reform was the main argument used by the representatives of privileged estates in opposition to the sovereign and to his projects of state centralization. This confessional competition was an important obstacle for the Habsburgs, which want to assume the power in their new territories like Bohemia, Hungary and Transylvania. So, Habsburg's drama was double: to manage the political state affairs and do not betray their own catholic conscience. From this perspective we can find a very important reflection about the leader's role, which has many times to choose, between the state interests and own beliefs. Contrary to what we might expect the Habsburgs were more clever to gain first of all political achievements and than religious victories.

On the other part, in the context of European political geography of the Modern Ages, no other state is more difficult to be defined than the Habsburg monarchy. The image of monarchy in the eighteenth century is less one of a pre-modern state, but rather one of a conglomerate state, built on the background of dynastical or territorial arrangements. All these aspects have further influenced the image of the monarchy related to other European countries, placing the Habsburgs in the position of an interesting historical and political paradox, that of a universal empire without a strong political unity and power. In this case the major problem for the sovereign is the lack of an unquestionable authority and power in all his territories.

For early modern monarchies all over the Europe justifying the power wasn't a problem. Strong theological bases still form the fundament of the power of sovereigns which were endowed above all with divine authority. The idea of the Empire had the main political reasons the defense of the Christian faith and the ideal of unification of the European peoples under a single authority. Unfortunately for the Habsburgs this idea ended in the nineteenth century. To this final stage have contributed the collapse of the idea of universality, especially after European Protestantism have legitimized religious minorities born from it and after eliminating the external dangers that threatened Central Europe for centuries.

The project of a supranational unity of Europe articulated by the universal empire and by the universal Church has proved to be impossible to become reality, despite the political ambitions of the Habsburgs. Since then, the Habsburgs have lost their main *raison d'être*, which turned them into the most respected European sovereigns in their role as defenders of Christian Europe, they have tried to find a new historical legitimacy of power. Keeping Nostalgia for the Empire, an idea that became obsolescent in modern European political thought, the Habsburgs have assumed the mission to preserve the ideal of universality through their composite and multinational

monarchy, though this fact contrasted sharply with the more powerful national model, strongly affirmed among the peoples of the continent.

The evolution of modern Habsburg monarchy was deeply influenced by the defense of the Turkish threat (Căzan, 2009), by the struggles within the Empire, by the Italian conflicts, by the tensions between Reformation and Counterreformation, by the relationships, often problematic in the Spanish branch of the House of Austria and by the opposition between the Habsburgs and the German world. All these challenges of history have influenced the relations between sovereign and the Austrian states and have generated in terms of absolutism the process of modern state building.

Without definitively renouncing the idea of universal power, the Habsburg monarchy wanted to build a Danube Empire to offer a chance for their people to form a political unity in a Europe dominated by Russia and Germany. In reality, this space once dominated by medieval kingdoms has proved to be reluctant to the idea of universality and could not articulate a single large supranational Empire. The only elements that have guaranteed the unity and relative stability and homogeneity of this political construction, often anachronistic were the dynasty, the Catholic confession, and from the eighteenth century, the central government in Vienna.

In this sense, the Habsburgs have tried to find a model to legitimate their power using the concept of Mitteleuropa (Meyer, 1955). This is a political concept that claims from the imperial tradition, which looked the State as the embodiment of the universality idea. This concept has also expressed the opposition to the idea of nationalism perceived as a growing threat to the empire. This idea was formulated by the economist Friedrich List (Henderson, 1983) in 1840 and consecrated by the journalist František Palacký (1798-1876). In a letter address in 1848, to the Congress of Frankfurt, Palacký tried to justify the political role that the Austrian Empire has to play in the Central European space, by assuming the defense of the old imperial ideal and the central European nations in front of the new continental danger, incarnate by Russia (Ingrao, 1994). This image of Mitteleuropa is still looked today like a regional model of a political union for the Central European countries. (Busek, 1993)

For all these reasons, the real vocation of the Habsburgs was not to play a central role in the unification of German world but to rule over the peoples, territories and princes, of different nationalities with very different historical and political traditions, but very zealous to defend their independence. This form of power and the political project of the Habsburgs were perceived as a form of an inland colonialism inside the Europe, comparable with other forms of colonialism from America or from the Far East. (Fichtner, 2003)

Theology and the power of moderation

In the exercise of legitimating the power in their new world the Habsburgs have used different arguments and models. The theology was a strong weapon for granting the power not only in their Empire but also in the whole Church. The Church was the institution that has guaranteed the legitimating of the power for all Christian sovereigns in Europe until the modern times. In the terms of a sacred contract, the Church, by the Pope, offered to the sovereign the power and the title of God's anointed, and in turn, the sovereign committed to protect the Church. (Bernard & Hodges, 1958)

The Church was the traditional and the constant ally for the Christian emperor, because the sovereign embodied the power of the Church to consecrate the leader over the secular world, which is only an earthly reflection of the Kingdom of heaven, with the pope as the highest prince. Not infrequently this allegiance was a real source of tensions, as a reflex of a double perception of the power, secular and religious.

In relation to the Church, the Habsburgs were not only the humble servants of their earthly interests. They pursued on the one hand to limit the actions of the Church, their state leadership, and financial privileges. They did so not as a form of disrespect, but because their great project of state-building found in the Church, at least in the sixteenth century, a great hindrance.

On the other hand, the Habsburgs were firmly engaged to defend the Catholic Church against the devastating effects of Lutheranism, aware to the importance that this institution has for their image as prince defender of the faith. Therefore, we can not establish a uniform profile of religious actions of Habsburgs, who had to ensure quiet and efficient governance in their vast territories and to keep open the dialogue with heretics, without sacrificing their faith. For this faith the Habsburgs were responsible in front of God and in front of their own history. Anchored in a sacred mission entrusted by God to protect the Church and the Holy Empire against the heresy, Habsburg sovereigns saw their mission as an affirmation of their own ideal in history, but also as an expression of their most intimate convictions.

If in the political attitude has always prevailed *raison d'etat*, in the theological beliefs, the Habsburgs were not always obey to the sharp theological line of the Church. The influences they have received from Lutheran and from humanists, made them to be moderate in their theology. For the Church, the Habsburgs also had assumed the responsibility for reformation, which demanded the availability for compromises with Protestants, assuming the role of arbiter between the two sides which were deeply involved in the confessional conflict. But the big challenge for them was the great dream of a Reform Council (Bond, Christianson & Izbicki, 1990). Europe saw Carol's V Empire in the terms of power and hostilities against the independent powers of the continent. Carol's insistences that his mission must combine the religious problems with political interests have made the relations with Protestant German princes and with Pope to become very difficult.

For the Protestants the emperor represents a double threat: the political power limitation and the religious punishment. For the Catholic sovereigns the position of growing power of the Habsburgs aroused suspicions, which marked the beginning of a policy of duplicity interests. The papacy, as ally of prince *defensor fide* was mostly dominated by the secular interests. For this reason, the Roman Curia has conducted duplicitous political negotiations with France against the Habsburg policy in Italy and against all they have done worse to the earthly interests of the Church. (Jones, 2000) What emperor did not understand was the pope, as head of the Church would never accept that the king could become an arbitrator in the disputes between Christians. In this case we can talk about the power of moderation assumed by the Habsburgs in the purpose to reach a compromise with Lutherans but also with the Church. This type of power stays in a flagrant opposition with the conservative and very suspicious attitude of the Church in front of demands for a religious peace and unity in Europe.

The spirit that dominated the Early Modern Europe was marked by searching the solutions to overcome the confessional impasse. Both Charles V and Ferdinand I, beyond their humanistic formation were firmly attached to Catholicism, which for them represent not just a coat of arms of the House of Habsburg glory but a strong guarantee of their historical continuity. (Ivanov, 2015) From the height of sovereigns they have been able to do anything to find a solution to save the Church but keeping the peace in the empire. Without abdicating to their conscience of Catholic princes the Habsburgs were sometimes forced to sacrifice the principles of their faith to save monarchy. Even when the theological points of view of the Habsburgs were unsatisfactory in their orthodoxy, they are nothing but sincere efforts concerned about the fate of the Church. This was in reality their real power seen as an effort to sacrifice their conscience but to maintain an open dialogue between the Catholic and the Protestants not closing the doors of a new unity in the Church.

Although the confessional balance of the sixteenth century was not decisive, something has changed the atmosphere in which Catholics and Protestants looked each other and a tolerant spirit began to dominate the elites. The sixteenth century Vienna was defined as an important center of Catholic and Counter-Reformation. Besides the firm or moderate actions of the sovereigns from the second part of the sixteenth century, Ferdinand I (1556-1564), Maximilian II (1564-1576) and Rudolf II (1576-1612), the town retains an imprint of a particular humanist spirit that cultivated a tolerant atmosphere. This new spirit of moderation avoids the extremes and the historian Herr Friedrich calls it "*the third force*". (Herr, 1960)

But the salvation came from the theology which was used by the Habsburgs as an instrument of legitimating the power.

The Counter Reformation has brought a different approach of the religious and political message, by this new form of religious ideology. The Habsburgs used all the methods and they have put this new message into a veritable baroque decor, building their own religious pantheon and their own piety. Not only ideological, but from political reasons the Habsburgs have tried through *Pietas Austriaca* (Coreth, 2004) to offer himself as models of faith and piety. Often the Habsburgs have adopted some models of theological culture and foreign policy, especially from Italy, which were exported and synthesized as a mark of their identity. In this case, the Italian impulses of the Counter Reformation, started in Rome found a very fertile space in Vienna, from where have spread a great influence in the entire Central Europe. We must be agree that there were other Catholic countries in Europe, but in none of them the religious piety was not so used as a tool of political legitimacy, in the terms of a genuine imperial ideology, as was in the Habsburgs Austria and Spain. In essence, by this new approach of the faith and confession as a form of a public political ritual we assisted to an extensive process of religiosity internalization until it become a private problem.

This concept, over-simplified translated as *Austrian Piety*, reveals a profound connection between the piety as an outer manifestation of faith and the political act, which was empowered by theological and religious authority. *Pietas Austriaca* has stressed the role of the Providence, the intercession position of Virgin Mary and the importance of attending to the rituals as an expression of faith and also as a form of castigation and social control. This form of political theology in which the sovereign

has offered himself as a model of political equilibrium and of orthodoxy of faith has guaranteed an efficient durability of the Habsburg Monarchy in Europe.

In the center of this piety, seen as an expression of the inner convictions of the Habsburgs, stood the feast of *Corpus Christi* celebrated in the Catholic, Anglican and Protestant world in the third Thursday after the Holy Trinity Sunday. (Walters, Corrigan & Ricketts, 2006)

The Eucharist was seen as a liturgical event, which is consumed in the symbolic reality. The public symbol and the Eucharistic mystery remains closely linked in a real presence of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist built a type of an ideal society, by the presence of the Eucharistic elements, transfigured by grace. This creates the image of the perfect society united around a single element, Eucharistic Christ. All the differences and dissensions are getting unified around the symbolic presence of the Lord, whose earthly image is the sovereign. Clearly this great celebration of Eucharistic worship has offered the complete framework where the Habsburg sovereign, but also a simple believer could prove their respect and fidelity to the Catholic faith. That's why, the Habsburg rulers were seen kneeling in an attitude of worship before the Eucharist, were the first persons in every liturgical procession in the city and they have offered himself as the first model of humility and Christian ministry. The stake was double: first of all religious, which has proposed a right model of faith articulated on the Tridentine reforms, but the main stake was political. Very briefly said, this attitude of worship before the Eucharist expressed that the Catholicism meant loyalty to the Habsburgs. *Pietas Austriaca*, as a form of Baroque culture emphasized visual emotions and religious symbols, in whose center was the sacrosanct image of the sovereign.

Moreover, this devoutness was the most important instrument of power and of the political ideology of the Habsburgs and was strongly affirmed until the Enlightened. From that moment the private piety has replaced the public act of worship and the perfect example is when Emperor Joseph II (Ingrao, 1979) refused to recognize for himself a connection with the traditional catholic devoutness.

From this point the theology becomes ideology. (Pecherskaya, 2013) This happens when its main function is not assumed like a legitimating process of the Truth but like a confirmation of authority of an institution and of their power structures.

Transylvania and the new model of power

For understanding this important topic is necessary to have a very short excursion on the theological fundaments of the power. First of all we can affirm that the “power has always a double character: first as an expression of God’s law and love and second as an exercise of man’s freedom. To understand “power as God's law and love” we must understand it as a manifestation of supreme Being; to understand it as man's freedom is to understand it as his response to the possibilities of being, a response which is both individual and institutional”. (James Luther Adams, 1976) In this dialogue, when God gives the power to people or institutions doing just to broaden people's freedom and not to shrink it. Practically, the exercise of power is an attempt to gain more freedom both for the God and man.

Socially speaking, the exercise of the power is not an attempt of sovereign to impose authority to all his subjects but to assure the inner liberty of social body. All the political actions which express the power of political authority must contribute to broaden personal liberties of all the members of social body.

It is obvious that the concept of social body is not enlarged to all categories of citizens; many of them were left behind this construction from political, social or confessional reasons. In this case the Habsburgs, following an enlightened philosophy, have tried to use their power to extend the participation to a large number of people at social body, until now excluded by the medieval privileges.

In this case the Transylvania is an excellent example to observe the translation of the politics of limitation the medieval privileges of estates in order to extend the participation of Romanians and to other religious minorities like Jews to social body. (Gyémánt, 2000)

Transylvania became a priority for political thought of the Habsburgs especially after the fall of medieval Kingdom of Hungary defeated by the Turks on the plain of Mohács in 1526. The Habsburgs were firmly convinced that the sovereign who rules the Principality from the inside of the Carpathian Mountains, practically rules the Hungary. About 150 years the Habsburgs tried for many times and used any means to gain the ruler over Transylvania. From 1541 the Transylvania, which was the greatest part from the former kingdom of Hungary and the richest one, became an independent Principality under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire. (Pop, Năgler & Bărbulescu, 2005). The constitutional system of the Transylvania granted the political rights and religious liberties for three ethnical groups: Hungarians, Saxons and Székelys and for four confessions: Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran and Unitarian. From this political concert were expelled the majority of the population formed by Romanians who were in their majority Orthodox. (Dragomir, 1946)

In this case, the Habsburgs after they have extend the rule over the Transylvania after the battle of Zenta (1697), tried to exercise their power in order to change this anachronistic situation according to their interests. There the Habsburgs found a new laboratory for their power strategies. First of all was the *power of religious patronage*, changing the confessional configuration of the Principality by offering freedom again to the Catholic Church or by attracting the Romanians in union with Church of Rome. (Schaser, 2000)

Not without difficulties some of these projects were successful and the Transylvania became the center of the political empowerment of the Habsburg Monarchy. In many parts of the Monarchy the sovereigns were forced to accept political compromises in exercise of their power and to share the authority with powerful representatives of privileged estates.

Habsburgs were very interested to limit the medieval privileges of the Estates so they tried to enlarge the participation of social body for the Romanians, limiting social restrictions imposed on peasants and other ethnic and social groups like Jews. (Crăciun, Ghitta & Murdock, 2002). Patent of tolerance imposed in 1781 by Emperor Joseph II has affirmed that a political of power in religious life of Transylvania couldn't have lasting effects. This moment is a turning point in the inner structure of

power of the Habsburgs, which is not an attribute of divine authority but is more an expression of secular view of the leadership.

The power was expressed at a symbolical level in which the person of the emperor is in the center. Transylvania was visited three times by the Emperor Joseph II (1773, 1783, 1786) (Bozac, Pavel & Joseph, 2006). The first Imperial entry in Transylvania was a mark of a real Christian reconquista of the territory from the Ottoman political and military system, reintegrating the territory in a Christian empire. Imperial journey, in this case, means the "coming of the Christian Kingdom, which marks the symbolic opening of the Christian doors to the world or reopening of communicating vessels, long time discontinued, and thus resizing space of the European Christendom". (Radosav, 2002)

All these symbolic significance of the emperor journey in Transylvania, all the memories of the people, all the hopes of the Romanians was the expression of a popular patriotism to the House of Habsburg and a new perception of power.

The visits of the Habsburg emperors in Transylvania were in fact historical events on which was built the piety to the House of Habsburg as the form of this new dynastic patriotism. From this point we can affirm that the power is a visual concept which has manifested not only in the symbolical dimension but also in a change of the image of the sovereign in the perception of ordinary people. The Emperor had gain in the eighteen century the image of a charismatic leader, the good king, and in many churches this fact was represented by the liturgical objects with the imperial symbols on them. The traditional paintings, the minor arts from the churches will provide a very good way of transmitting and consolidating the dynastical attachment of the Romanians as a form of social piety.

Conclusions

For the Habsburgs assuming the power was a very great challenge. They have to manage a very difficult dialogue of the power in relation to the other power of the continent, in relation to the Church and in relation with the common people or with the periphery of Monarchy. By all these means, and especially by constructing a religious legitimacy, the Habsburgs wanted to reconcile the national consciousness with patriotism and dynastic loyalty to a multinational state. In this sense, the imperial government efforts were focused on building a state-oriented dynastical patriotism in the Habsburg Monarchy. From here, the dialogue between the center and periphery of the monarchy, was a great challenge for the Habsburgs, where they was forced to find particular solutions to accommodate their political discourse with the peculiarities of each nation, but also to integrate them in their broad political and religious vision.

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