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Four Great Hungarians Seen Through the Glasses of a Foreigner

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Compatriots of important persons always find it difficult to judge the work and the aftermath of historical figures, because national patriotic feelings resonate too much, according to the motto “Our heroes are the greatest”. It is therefore always good for foreigners who have a solid knowledge of the achievements of such persons to be judged to look at them through their own glasses. The author does not presume to be the person who can achieve this objective all-encompassingly, however, through his many years of studying Hungarian culture, history, and daily life, he believes that he can at least understand the Hungarian soul a little better and he at least makes an attempt to appraise the achievements of four great Hungarians – Matthias Corvinus, Francis II. Rákóczi, Count István Széchenyi and Miklós Zrínyi. The author will also give a brief presentation of the merits of the selected great Hungarians in each criterion.

KEYWORDS: great Hungarians heroes: Matthias Corvinus, Francis II. Rákóczi, Count István Széchenyi, Miklós Zrínyi evaluation

Négy nagy magyar egy külföldi szemüvegén keresztül

A fontos történelmi személyek honfitársainak mindig nehéz megítélniük e személyiségek munkásságát és utóhatását, mert a nemzeti hazafias érzések túlságosan is visszhangra találnak, a „A mi hőseink a legnagyobbak” mottó szerint. Ezért mindig jó, ha a külföldiek, akik szilárd ismeretekkel rendelkeznek az ilyen személyek eredményeiről, a saját szemüvegükön keresztül tekintenek rájuk. A szerző nem tekinti magát olyan személynek, aki ezt a célkitűzést teljes mértékben el tudja érni, azonban a magyar kultúra, történelem és mindennapi élet sokéves tanulmányozása révén úgy véli, hogy legalább egy kicsit jobban megértheti a magyar lelket, és kísérletet tesz arra, hogy értékelje négy nagy magyar – Corvin Mátyás, II. Rákóczi Ferenc, Széchenyi István gróf és Zrínyi Miklós – munkásságának eredményeit az egyes – maga választotta –kritériumok alapján.

KULCSSZAVAK: nagy magyar hősök: Corvin Mátyás, II. Rákóczi Ferenc, Széchenyi István, Zrínyi Miklós értékelése

Introduction

Compatriots of important persons always find it difficult to judge the work and the aftermath of historical figures, because national patriotic feelings resonate too much, according to the motto "Our heroes are the greatest". It is therefore always good for foreigners who have a solid knowledge of the achievements of such persons to be judged to look at them through their own glasses.

The author does not presume to be the person who can achieve this objective all-encompassingly, however, through his many years of studying Hungarian culture, history, and daily life, he believes that he can at least understand the Hungarian soul a little better and he

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at least makes an attempt to appraise the achievements of four great Hungarians – Matthias Corvinus, Francis II. Rákóczi, Count István Széchenyi and Miklós Zrínyi.

This essay was intentionally written in English and not in Hungarian, German or French, so that many interested people anywhere in the world, who are also able to read and understand English, should read it to get a first impression of these four great Hungarians. Therefore, in order to explain in more detail why he chose the criteria for the appraisal, the author will also give a brief presentation of the merits of the selected great Hungarians in each criterion.

The methodology of the evaluation

Available material was used to bring about an objective evaluation of the four people: unequivocally documented historical achievements as a statesman and as a military leader, achievements as a manager, literary work, the appreciation of posterity through the use of the name or images on stamps, banknotes, and as a heroic figure in films. Furthermore, there was also an evaluation of the number of books or essays written about the person.

The following criteria have been selected by the author for the study: Skills as a Manager, Leadership skills as a Military man, Quality as a writer, Total aftermath for Hungary, Aftermath abroad, Aftermath in popular culture. Afterwards, the available material was rated with a school grade system of 1 (worst result) to 5 (best result).

A brief explanation of the criteria

Skills as a Manager

During the lifetimes of the great Hungarians, it was, and is still, important that a state has excellent managers. The term manager is to be understood here not only as a manager of companies or latifundia, but also as a manager of a state in the sense of a wise leader of state.

Leadership skills of a Military man

Among the great persons of a country, there is a high percentage of very successful military leaders. There are good reasons for this, as military strength has always been a prerequisite for the overall strength of a state. But these persons could only be successful as a military leader if they had the talent to be a wise military leader, had exceptional abilities as a commander and own the so-called Coup d'œil. Napoleon remarked upon it: There is a gift of being able to see at a glance the possibilities offered by the terrain ... One can call it the coup d'œil militaire and it is inborn in great generals.

Quality as a writer

Although no law can be derived from it, great persons have often left behind a written treasure. This is also true for the majority of great Hungarians. In addition to a detailed autobiography on self-presentation, there are trivial literatures up to dignified scientific books and articles.

1. Table

Numerical evaluation of four great Hungarians according to certain criteria

<i>Name</i> <i>Criteria</i>	Matthias Corvinus King of Hungary 1443–1490	Francis II Rákóczi Prince of Hungary 1676–1735	Count István Széchenyi de Sárvár- Felsővidék 1791–1860	Count Miklós Zrínyi Ban (Viceroy) of Croatia 1620–1664
Skills as a Manager	5	4	4	4
Leadership skills as a Military man	5	3	3	5
Quality as a writer	1	3	5	5
Total aftermath for Hungary	5	4	4	2
Aftermath abroad	4	3	2	2
Aftermath in popular culture	4	4	3	2
Sum	24	21	21	20
Greatest achievements	Through his political skills and military abilities, the Kingdom of Hungary achieved its greatest territorial expansion. He is considered the greatest king of the Hungarians.	Rákóczi fought all his life to achieve Hungary's independence from Austria.	Széchenyi put all his energy into modernizing Hungary. Much was modernized through his energy. He is considered to be the greatest Hungarian.	Zrínyi put all his energy into liberating Hungary from the Ottoman occupation. He only had no lasting success because the court in Vienna was against his energetic efforts.

Total aftermath for Hungary

The extraordinary achievement of a person is reflected in the memory of him. Many testimonies point to his achievements, i.e. monuments, place names, names of military

installations and large military equipment, names of universities, research projects, etc. In Hungary, you can feel at every turn that these great Hungarians are omnipresent.

Aftermath abroad

Great historical figures are often received with mixed emotions in foreign countries, as they were often enemies in the past. The greatness of a people, however, lies in being able to forgive past disputes and also to appreciate the deeds purely objectively.

Aftermath in popular culture

Popular culture is the kind of media that has mass accessibility and appeal. Great persons of the past often became cult figures during their lifetimes, but it is posterity that finds many opportunities to pay special tribute to these people, for example through operas, films, books, special foods and drinks, or by naming villages, streets, waterways after them, etc.

Merits of the Great Hungarians in the light of the selected criteria: Matthias Corvinus

Matthias Corvinus was ruler of the Kingdom of Hungary in the late Middle Ages. He was also known for establishing an excellent army organization. In Austrian history, he is remembered above all as one of the main opponents of Emperor Frederick III. Under his rule, the Kingdom of Hungary had the greatest extent. Between 1485 and 1490 he was ruler of most parts of the Duchy of Austria under the Enns with headquarters in Vienna. King Matthias preferred to reside in Vienna, where he held court in the castle (today the Swiss wing of the Hofburg). He spoke Hungarian, Romanian, Croatian, Latin, and later also German and Czech.

Skills as a Manager

In the course of his expansion policy, Matthias strengthened his state's diplomacy. Apart from his regular network of relations with his neighbours, as well as the Pope and the Kingdom of Naples, he established regular contacts with France, Burgundy, Switzerland, Florence, most German states, Russia and, occasionally, with Persia and Egypt. Matthias introduced a series of reforms designed to improve internal stability. He abolished tax privileges for large landowners, strengthened the power of the lesser aristocracy to curb that of the barons and commissioned a codification of the legal system. Internally, he relied on diplomacy and negotiation to achieve his goals.

Leadership skills as a military man

Deviating from the previous usual practice, Matthias Corvinus kept a mercenary army in addition to the usual noble army. Corvinus' so-called "Black Army" (Fekete Sereg) was recruited between 1459 and 1460, consisted of about 8,000 to 10,000 soldiers and was the basis of his power.

Quality as a writer

Although Corvinus himself had not written any books, his Bibliotheca Corviniana was one of the largest collections of scientific and philosophical writings of the time in the 1480s. It comprised about 5,000 volumes, some of which cost over 1,000 gold ducats, including the so-called Corvines.

Total aftermath for Hungary

There are numerous legends surrounding Matthias Corvinus. He is said to have often moved incognito and disguised himself as a beggar or student, among other things, in order to learn more about the worries and concerns of the people. He is said to have used this information later as a court judge for a fair trial. In Hungary he is still called "Mátyás, az igazságos" ("Matthias, the Just."). In Budapest, the Corvinus University and the Mathias Corvinus Collegium are named after him. In the city and even in small villages, names of institutions commemorate the greatest Hungarian king.

Aftermath abroad

In Austria in Wiener Neustadt, the Corvinusring is named after Matthias Corvinus. The Corvinus Chalice is on display in the city museum, which, according to legend, he is said to have given to the city after its capitulation in recognition of its brave resistance. In addition to Wiener Neustadt, streets in other cities in today's Lower Austria and Upper Austria are also named after Matthias Corvinus: Korneuburg: Matthias-Corvinus-Straße, St. Pölten: Matthias-Corvinus-Straße, Wels: Matthias-Corvinus-Straße, Vienna, 23rd district: Corvinusgasse. The "Hasenhaus" is now part of Vienna's 1st district. It was located on the corner of today's Kärntner Straße / Seilergasse. Matthias Corvinus is said to have confiscated the house after the conquest of Vienna in 1485 and set it up as a residence.

In Upper Lusatia, two contemporary works of art have been preserved; in Bautzen at the Matthias Tower of the Ortenburg a larger-than-life portrait relief of the king and in Görlitz a royal coat of arms at the Old Town Hall. Modern copies of the Bautzen monument can be found in Budapest (former Dominican monastery on Castle Hill), Szeged (Franciscan church).

Aftermath in popular culture

Today, King Matthias is portrayed in popular culture as the ideal ruler who does not shy away from access to those under his rule, and even seeks it. There is a myriad of biographies and films about the king.

Francis II Rákóczi

Francis II Rákóczi was a Hungarian prince and freedom fighter. He comes from a family that held, among other things, the office of the princes of Transylvania. Rákóczi's noble relatives were often involved in anti-Habsburg uprisings. Rákóczi lost his father at the age of four

months and grew up entirely under the influence of his ultra-patriotic mother Ilona Zrínyi, the daughter of Péter Zrínyi (1621–1671), who was executed in 1671. When Rákóczi came of age, he began studying in Prague in 1690 and went on a cavalier tour to Italy in 1693 before settling in Vienna. Francis II Rákóczi led the uprising against the Habsburgs from 1703 to 1711, and has been considered a Hungarian national hero ever since. At its peak, his Kuruc army consisted of over 60,000 horsemen (“hussars”), who marauded as far as Vienna in 1704. However, they were poorly armed and therefore usually inferior in open field battles and therefore used guerrilla tactics.

Skills as a Manager

The foundations for the family's wealth and power were laid down by Sigismund Rákóczi. The Rákóczis became the wealthiest aristocrats of Hungary and were broad-minded, highly educated people for centuries. The generation of this wealth and the selection of the best administrators speaks for managerial qualities.

Leadership skills as a Military man

Although Francis II Rákóczi was not a general, he had 100,000 men at his disposal in 1705 and very quickly controlled the whole of Upper Hungary (now Slovakia) and the northern part of Hungary. A major factor in this success was the fact that in 1703 many officers of the Austrian army who had previously fought against him, e.g. Alexander Károlyi, joined his troops, so that he was familiar with modern warfare. On the other hand, however, many of his Kuruc troops were undisciplined, cooperated poorly, and mastered only one type of warfare practiced by Emmerich Thököly and other military leaders before him, and lacked proper weapons.

Quality as a writer

Rákóczi's *Confessio peccatoris* and *Memoirs* (*Mémoires*) are valuable contemporary testimonies today. These two major literary works definitely fill a niche.

Total aftermath for Hungary

One of the pieces of Hungarian national music, the Rákóczi March, is named after him and has been arranged by Franz Liszt (*Hungarian Rhapsody No. 15*) and Hector Berlioz (*La damnation de Faust*), among others. The melody is said to be based on trumpet signals from the Kuruc army. It is undoubtedly one of the most sonorous and going to the marrow and bone military marches in the world. What is more: Rákóczi is constantly present in the heart and memory of nearly every Hungarian.

Aftermath abroad

The Rakoczy spring in Bad Kissingen, which was discovered in 1737 during the relocation of the Franconian Saale in the old riverbed, was named after the then popular prince in the 18th

century, although he had never stayed in the spa town. The Rakoczy spring developed into the most drunk spa and healing spring of the later Bad Kissingen. After this healing spring, the local festival, which has been held on the last weekend in July since the 1950s, was named Rakoczy Festival.

The Rákóczi-Tower of Wiener Neustadt Castle – now home of the Austrian Theresan Military Academy – is a reminder of Francis II Rákóczi. He was imprisoned in the castle of Wiener Neustadt in 1701. He had been accused of having instigated a conspiracy against the Habsburgs together with the French. He awaited life imprisonment (in Rattenberg Castle in Tyrol). But things turned out quite differently, because on 9th November Rákóczi managed to escape from his prison on the first floor of the Northwest Tower. The captain of the castle had made this possible for him, because he had been bribed with a large sum of money. The corrupt captain was then executed by quartering on the main square on 14th December 1701.

In the Turkish city of Tekirdağ, where Rákóczi spent several years in exile and finally died, there is now the Rákóczi Museum, which deals with his life and Turkish-Hungarian relations. In addition to contemporary objects and paintings, various writings are exhibited in the well-restored building.

Aftermath in popular culture

As the definition of popular culture suggests, popular culture is the kind of media that have mass accessibility and appeal. In view of this definition, any kind of marketing of Rákóczi can be found in Hungary, i.e. souvenir articles for tourists or serious films on TV. It is only too understandable that there is no comparable enthusiasm for Rákóczi in Austria.

Count István Széchenyi de Sárvár-Felsővidék

Skills as a Manager

During his activities on behalf of the public authorities, Széchenyi presented exceptional managerial qualities and also proved to be very skilled in the management of his farmlands.

Leadership skills as a Military man

Széchenyi initially aspired to a military career, but he only made it to the rank of captain. During his time in the military, Széchenyi proved himself as a young officer, which suggests talent. Overall, however, it was an advantage for Hungary that he did not stay in the military.

Quality as a writer

Széchenyi wrote remarkable treatises on the problems of his time, i.e. Hitel (Credit), Világ (World/Light), Stádium, Önismeret (Self awareness) and Ein Blick (One Look), which had a positive influence on the long-term development of Hungary.

Total aftermath for Hungary

The modernization of Hungary, which was driven by him, is visible today in Budapest. i.e. Széchenyi Chain Bridge (Hungarian: Széchenyi láncíd). And his attitude to the freedom struggle of 1848/49 is also seen more positively today than it was at the time of the freedom fight.

Aftermath abroad

Széchenyi is not widely known abroad, but there are some testimonies in Vienna that pay tribute to Széchenyi, since Széchenyi was born in Vienna and also died here. His fame extends into space where the Asteroid 91024 Széchenyi, discovered by astronomers Krisztián Sárneczky and László Kiss at the Piskésető Station in 1998, was named in his memory.

Aftermath in popular culture

In view of the definition of popular culture, many testimonies of popular culture can be found of Széchenyi in Hungary, i.e. serious films on TV.

Miklós Zrínyi*Skills as a manager*

The land that the Zrínyi owned was not very large, but through his managerial skills, Miklós Zrínyi was able to earn a large income from cattle exports, which enabled him to raise troops and wage war against the Ottoman Empire.

Leadership skills as a Military man

Miklós Zrínyi was blessed with the Coup d'œil and was a general who realized very early on that one can only be successful in war with a theoretical knowledge. Miklós Zrínyi would have become one of the greatest military leaders of his time if he had only had the necessary support from the emperor in Vienna.

Quality as a writer

Today, Miklós Zrínyi, with his works on military science, is considered the founding father of Hungarian military science.

Total aftermath for Hungary

Through the research on Miklós Zrínyi, which is led by Prof. Dr. Padányi, Miklós Zrínyi is gaining more and more the status that he should actually have for Hungary, namely, a tireless fighter for the well-being of his home-country.

Aftermath abroad

Today Miklós Zrínyi does not have the necessary attention outside Hungary and Croatia as he is simply not perceived as an important person of his time in other countries.

Aftermath in popular culture

Due to the lower level of popularity, Miklós Zrínyi is not well represented in popular culture. At least, a film about his winter campaign, which was unique at the time, would be desirable.

What can be done with the result

The reader will now ask himself what can be done with the result. This study is first of all an outside view of four great Hungarians by a foreigner. However, these results can also be used to make the achievements of one or another person even better known, for example, when more is written about the life and work of Miklós Zrínyi or a film is made about his winter campaign of 1664 resulting in the destruction of the bridge of Eszek. "It's just an idea!"

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