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# Interaction - Representations I-III Social history and epidemics in the Carpathian Basin<sup>1</sup>



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Imre Pászka's *Együttthatás - reprezentációk* Volumes *I*, *II* and *III*, the result of a huge research work that took several years, is, as the title suggests, a continuation of an ongoing work, first published in volume I. The first two volumes have already been reviewed in Hungarian in the journal Erdélyi Társadalom (Veres 2020, 2021), but about the three volumes together, especially the recently published third volume (Pászka 2024), can be read here. A second, revised edition of the first volume was also published in 2020. The three-volume work paints a more complete and complex picture of the social history of modern Hungary and Transylvania, with a special focus on natural changes and epidemics.

The volumes analysed here represent an important stage in the author's work, which was preceded by his MTA (HAS) doctoral thesis (PÁSZKA 2007), and in which he sought to apply the findings in the volumes of *Interaction - Representations*. As we pointed out in the first

<sup>1</sup> PÁSZKA IMRE: *Együttthatás – reprezentációk I-II-III*. See Pászka (2019, 2020, 2024).

volume, the writing of these volumes is the result of a very labour-intensive undertaking. The volumes examine, in chronological order, the environmental changes and epidemiological crises of the Carpathian Basin and their demographic impact. The first volume focuses on the first phase of the medieval 'Little Ice Age', ending with the Turkish occupation in Hungary, while the second volume analyses the epidemiological crisis, especially the plague epidemics, which occurred during the last period of the Principality of Transylvania and the subsequent Austrian rule in the 18th and 19th centuries. The third volume examines the circumstances, course and demographic impact of the cholera epidemics in 19th-century Hungary and Transylvania in the 19th century.

But the first volume is much more than that. Like the environmental and demographic changes of the "Little Ice Age". Here we can learn important details about the impact of climate change on medieval society in the Carpathian Basin, the peculiarities of the Little Ice Age, which, according to current research, covers a period of 500 years, roughly 1300–1880. More important and interesting was the analysis of human, 'anthropogenic' factors, written in a historical-sociological perspective. Imre Pászka placed special emphasis, quite rightly, on analysing both the situation in Hungary and Transylvania, which had considerable differences in topography and politics within the Turkish occupation and the Habsburg Empire. This modal separation is maintained in the second and third volumes, even though the Principality of Transylvania was incorporated into the same Austrian Empire as Hungary with the end of the Turkish occupation in the 18th century. But this did not constitute a 'unification' until 1867, as Transylvania had a separate government, the Gubernium, governed by other decrees, and we read in the book that the administrative and military measures to try to deal with the plague were specifically focused on Transylvania for the plague epidemic that was raging only there, and did not enforce the provisions with some kind of uniform set of instructions for the whole empire.

The understanding of the concepts and methods of the second and third volumes can be understood starting from the first volume. Thus the central term of analysis, *interaction*, is presented here. Pászka defines this as the juxtaposition of different climatic, geological, biological, epidemiological events in a given space and time, mostly local, less often on a larger scale. At the same time, interaction refers to both nature and man acting and interacting with each other. While geological, biological and epidemiological factors are episodic, climatic and anthropogenic factors are constant, despite following different regularities. Man adapts to the natural environment, shaping it through his actions, but the same cannot be said of nature. Although the creator of the algorithm seems to have adapted the conditions of our earth to the sustainability of man's physical and cognitive capacities (see: weather of the seasons = climate) (Pászka 2019. 9.; VERES 2021.).

In the following, we will review the contents of each volume, with a brief evaluation, and some aspects and additions that the author of these lines finds interesting.

Imre PÁSZKA (2020) *Interaction - Representations* Volume I. also requires an interdisciplinary approach to review. As we read in the introduction, "the writing of the volume [...] constantly required crossing interdisciplinary boundaries and involved many uncertainties." We agree with the author that this was a very labour-intensive undertaking, even if he was able to rely on Antal Réthly's rich data archive for the sources of information on the evolution of climatic conditions in Hungary and Transylvania.

Pászka's work entitled *Interaction - Representations I.* examines the methodological and theoretical framework of social science research, with a special focus on the problem of representation. The author emphasises the need for dialogue between scientific discourses, while also presenting his own interdisciplinary approach (COMAN 2009, HANKISS 1999, MAIR 2009). One of the main aims of the thesis is to explore the dynamics of representation and how social reality is constructed in different discourses. One of the important commitments of the book is to analyse the concept of representation from the perspectives of several disciplines, in particular sociology, philosophy and communication theory. This approach is particularly valuable as it addresses a central issue in the social sciences. The author also presents the problem of representation in the context of social construction, linguistic meaning-making and power relations. The text occasionally refers to external sources and theoretical antecedents without explaining them in detail, which makes it difficult to understand for those who have no prior knowledge of the subject. However, the length of the three volumes has rightly led the author to keep his explanations brief in places.

Based on a more thorough analysis of Volume I, we can make a few specific observations and assessments. Following the foreword, several short chapters provide information on the framework for discussing the phenomena covered in the book, the spatio-temporal context, the indicators of cooling trends, the sources of research and the analytical aspects and concepts. In this section, we learn that the chronology of the volume deviates from the usual historical logic because the author has used the relative chronology used by climatologists.

The central concept of the book is the *interaction*, which the author defines as the combination of different climatic, geological, biological, epidemiological events in a given space and time, mostly local, less often on a larger scale. At the same time, however, interaction also implies, as I have written, that both nature and man are active, interacting with each other. While geological, biological and epidemiological factors are episodic, climatic and anthropogenic factors are constant, despite following different regularities. Man adapts to the natural environment, shaping it through his actions, whereas the same cannot be said of nature. Although the creator of the algorithm seems to have adapted the conditions of our earth to the sustainability of man's physical and cognitive capacities (see: weather of the seasons = climate).

The author, citing the meteorological encyclopaedia, defines the Little Ice Age as "a decline in the Earth's temperature, which occurred over a certain area and time in Europe, North America, Russia, China, and, according to recent research, in the Arctic ice cores" (PÁSZKA 2020. 9). The author focused on the Carpathian Basin in the Little Ice Age, placing each factor in a broader context. She examines the European perspective in terms of climate, the European and Eurasian (Cha-list) perspective in terms of epidemics (plague, cholera), and explains the geopolitical exposure of the Carpathian Basin, which influenced subsistence, in the introduction of epidemics: the Crimean Tatars 14. In the 19th century, the British spread the plague from India by sea, and the Russian tsarist army spread the Indian plague from Persia to Europe by land.

After the preface and introduction, the volume is structurally divided into six chapters. Each chapter concentrates on subsistence, but illuminates different aspects of it, starting with geological factors, continuing with biological factors, and then discussing climate. Then, in chapter four, he discusses nutrition, and continues with anthropogenic factors, which are discussed in separate subchapters for Hungary and Transylvania.

In the subsection on *the Aspects of the analysis*, you can find out the logic behind the analyses.

Here we can read the author's dilemmas about framing the analysis of events and happenings in terms of their causes or consequences. In the end, he chose the solution of dividing the triggers and their consequences along the broader and narrower notions of subsistence, including in the analysis only those dysfunctions that, in the author's words, "affect almost all elements of the broader, extended content of subsistence" (PÁSZKA 2020. 29–30). Whenever a situation was observed that was damaging some of the basic elements of subsistence, in such cases he sought to 'assess the situation', although it is the dramatic representation of the narrative situation that is most characteristic of the volume. Thus, in my reading, the meaning of the various disasters was interpreted in terms of the magnitude of the situations affecting different social groups, the spatial and temporal distribution of their intensity, and their recurrence and permanence.

The first volume, regardless of the author's intentions, was highly topical at the time of its publication in two respects. Firstly, although the author did not intend the volume to fit into the global warming discourse, it nevertheless provides social scientists with a wealth of insights into the evolution of climate factors and their relevance to changes in human lifestyles and the organisation of society. On the other hand, it also contributes to the understanding of the social and economic problems caused by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, thus offering insights into the social context of previous epidemics and epidemiological crises in the wider region, and to the understanding of social responses to constraints.

In the first chapter, the author analysed the geological factors, focusing on the climatic changes caused by volcanic eruptions and the social consequences, such as increased mortality and drought-induced famine. This chapter may be of interest to hydrologists and geologists, who will be able to judge how much new information and data can be added to the historical sources for the study of these events. For the social scientist not familiar with the subject, almost everything is new. In particular, the reader may find it novel that volcanic eruptions in relatively remote areas, such as Greenland, Iceland or the Indonesian islands, caused climate change and cooling over such large areas that the inhabitants of the Carpathian Basin also felt the effects, and according to the author, tens of thousands of people in parts of Hungary and Transylvania even starved to death (PÁSZKA 2020. 50).

Among the crises caused by biological factors, the author analyses the phenomenon of locust epidemics and the damage they caused, which led to famine, giving a spatial and temporal overview of the period under study. The author draws on many sources and gives a sense of the magnitude of the phenomenon, although it is not clear to the reader how these actually affected demographic conditions.

The third chapter deals with the impacts of climate change. This is perhaps the most promising chapter in the book. We learn that the combined effects of cooling and the plague epidemic have led to the demographic consequences of large numbers of deaths, leading to a significant population decline. The author's overview of the social problems caused by climate change is not confined to the Carpathian Basin, but is also examined from a European perspective. Climate change has caused not only cooling, but also drought in many cases. As the author has pointed out, despite the lack of information, the two main hydrometeorological disasters - wet and dry natural disasters - caused a variety of livelihood disruptions, but with significant differences in space, time and intensity. While in the north-west of Europe and in the Central

European region, it was mainly the wet seasons that caused problems, in the Carpathian Basin the devastating effects of drought were more prominent (PÁSZKA 2020. 82.).

The crises of the 14th century, including malnutrition, malnutrition, disease, and the demographic losses generated by them, as described in the book, affected more the poor (without land, industry, supplies, etc.) part of the urban population, while there is no clear data on the losses of the rural population, mainly due to floods. As a result, the urban population in Western European regions has declined by 5-10 % on average, while the losses in rural areas cannot be quantified.

The fourth chapter deals with nutrition. If the reader missed the social science approach in the previous chapters, it is more prominent in this one. Here, the quantitative and qualitative evolution of agricultural crops/products necessary for nutrition was examined, including new contexts than before, including the evolution of food crop yields, since this is how the spatial and temporal evolution and variations of abundance and scarcity were judged and qualified in the texts (PÁSZKA 2019. 211.). Overall, the author's assessment is that in Hungary and Transylvania in the 15th-19th centuries, famine and starvation could be considered as a temporary phenomenon, which occasionally developed but was not permanent. From a social-historical point of view, it is an important contribution to the local specificity of the food culture related to the way of life, as long as the main food products were the same throughout the Carpathian Basin, their occurrence and scarcity varied. And, in particular, they were used in different ways, depending on local conditions, to make up for basic food shortages. For example, in Szeklerland (1717, 1718): hair, acorns, various roots, straw and polyves of lime, beech and potted trees were ground together to make scones or bread. In even poorer situations, for example in the counties of Ung, Bereg, Ugocsa and Maramures/Máramaros (1790), the poorest classes also made bread from roots, corn cobs and sawdust. The Romanians of Salaj/Silágyság (1817) baked bread from a mixture of acorns, pigs' tears, sea-balls, hemp seeds and wood shavings. In Szolnok (1790), under the specific conditions of the Great Plain, bread was baked from the inside of reeds (benzele, sás) (PÁSZKA 2020. 222–23.). The author sheds light on why the consumption of bread was at the centre of the population's eating habits. In his view (using the writings of Aymard, Montanari as sources), the bread-centred diet was 'based on the liturgy of the Western Latin Church, which continued the Greco-Roman heritage in times of scarcity and famine. (PÁSZKA 2020. 224.). We can also learn important facts about the spread of maize consumption, the 'eating of porridge': maize dishes were not commonplace in the daily diet of the population, as ethnographic descriptions have so far suggested. In fact, these maize dishes played a greater role in the diet of certain regional, ethno-cultural groups, but this cannot be generalised either for Transylvania or for the ethnic groups of Hungary as a whole. Although, according to the author, the spread of *malai*, *malé* and *puliszka* in other regions of Hungary was encouraged by serf-owning landlords, the cultivation of maize became established in Transylvania in the 1700s and 1720s. As a foodstuff, it played an important role in the diet of the poorer serfs of the county. In the better-off villages of Transylvanian Saxons and Szeklerland, and among the urban population, it was less frequently used as food, and was sold more as animal feed (*ibid.*, 2019. 237.). We also learn that in 18th century Hungary, the Austrian imperial institutions, especially the army, encouraged the spread of potato cultivation, thus helping to reduce hunger and promote a healthier diet. In the 1720s, American-born peppers, followed by beans and pumpkins, also

appeared. This also shows the reader that the ingredients of the main dishes of today's traditional Hungarian cuisine can be traced back only 250-300 years.

In the fifth and sixth chapters, the socio-historical approach becomes even more prevalent. Here, Imre Pászka examines the human, "anthropogenic" factors related to subsistence. While chapter five analyses the situation in Hungary, the final chapter focuses on the situation in Transylvania. If one were to question the author's choice of two separate parts of the Carpathian Basin, which are otherwise united by the Hungarian crown, one would understand this on reading the book. The author's Transylvanian origins and his professional interest in Transylvanian and Romanian society and sociology, which he maintained throughout his academic career, may have played a role in identifying these differences.

In the chapter dealing with the situation in Hungary, we can read in detail how the composition of the population of the Turkish occupied territories changed as a result of the spontaneous and forced migration processes that developed after the Battle of Mohács, based mainly on the results of historical research (Z. Dávid, A. Molnár, L. Szita, etc.). Moreover, we can also read how these population movements indirectly affected other areas (under Austrian rule) in the Northern parts of Hungarian Kingdom or in the Partium and Transylvanian regions.

The last chapter examines the "anthropogenic" factors of subsistence in Transylvania, which mainly include social, demographic, economic and political-power factors. From a sociologist's point of view, the chapter starts with a too long historical overview, especially concerning the formation of the Principality of Transylvania, and it is also difficult to judge whether Pászka's writing contains new elements and approaches compared to previous historical works. In the sub-chapter entitled *Principality - the struggle against the extension of the occupation*, we read a historical analysis, with military and diplomatic contributions, of how the gradual extension of the Turkish occupation of the Principality of Transylvania to the eastern part of the Tisza Lowlands (Alföld) and the Partium region took place in the second half of the 17th century. After the fall of Nagyvárad/Oradea, the Turkish rule extended to the mountainous parts of Partium (Zaránd, Kraszna, Central Szolnok counties), and afterwards the Turks tried to collect taxes in the western part of historical Transylvania, in the counties of Kolozs/Cluj and Doboka/Dăbâca. In describing the transformation of Kolozsvár/Cluj city, into a fortress, the author also provides a number of social history data, including the attitudes and changes in the way of life of the local population. In this way, the reader who is not interested in 'traditional' historical aspects may feel that the direction of the book 'returns' to its previous interdisciplinary direction. It is interesting to note that although it is known that Debrecen paid taxes in three directions during the Turkish occupation, according to the data published in Imre Pászka's book, the primary reason for the taxes seems to have been the connection to Transylvania: 'Debrecen, for example, paid taxes to the Transylvanian prince 3200 forints, to the sultan 2000 forints and to the Hungarian king of Vienna, in Bratislava, 1000 forints' (PÁSZKA 2020. 358.).

The book details the development of religious pluralism in Transylvania and the early modern manifestations of religious, ethnic and linguistic diversity. Analysing the dynamics of ethnic/linguistic/religious or religious exclusion, the author describes the various solutions in several Transylvanian cities (Brasov/Brassó, Sibiu/Nagyszeben, Baia Mare/Nagybánya, Ocna Sibiului/Vízakna, Orastie/Sászváros, Hunedoara/Vajdahunyad, etc.), in addition to Cluj/Kolozsvár, noting that the 'everyday necessity of life, the need for cooperation and discernment in the

conduct of the affairs of the municipalities, encouraged the introduction of a parity system' (ibid.: 376). The author's comments on the evolution of the number and ethnic composition of the Transylvanian population in the 18th century and the related migratory movements, although restrained, should have been omitted for reasons of space. In this form, based mainly on the work and estimates of Jancsó, the picture is somewhat simplistic. It would also have been advisable to use some other sources of contemporary data (e.g. ACSÁDI 1896) or more recent literature (ÖRI 2001; VERES 2002, 2006), since the real scale of the sporadic sources referring to migratory movements is not easy to contextualise in a way that gives a picture of the real scale.

In the sub-chapter on internal and external population movements, the author writes in more detail about migration phenomena that have been mentioned so far, but about which few details are known. These include the nobility, serfs and urban craftsmen who, because of the Turkish conquest, settled from the Hungarian Alföld and southern regions of medieval Hungary to the smaller and larger towns of Partium and Transylvania, which belonged to the Principality, and whose integration, according to Pászka, caused many tensions and disrupted the customary law of the 'localities'.

The final sub-chapters of the very extensive chapter, which focuses on the "anthropogenic" factors of Transylvania, deal with the historical-social relations of Transylvanian Szeklerland in the centuries of the Principality and the 18th century, when the former rights and privileges of Szekler society were transformed and partly abolished. The author analyses the internal relations of the contemporary Szeklerland society in many aspects, based on novel original source material. The internal division of the apparently 'homogeneous' Székely society and the discussion of the spread of serfdom are extremely instructive. We can also learn that the Székely society was not only vertically/systemically, but also territorially, seat by seat, very differentiated, both in terms of lifestyle and the organization and development of social relations. The book is especially recommended for readers interested in the past of Szeklers. (see also VERES 2020)

One of the strengths of the volume is that it draws on a wide range of literature, including both classical and contemporary social scientists. In interpreting the notion of representation, the author takes into account not only sociological dimensions but also philosophical and communication theory dimensions. This allows for a complex analysis of the concept, but at the same time the work is sometimes too theoretical, which may make it difficult to apply it to empirical research. In terms of methodological approach, the author draws on the interpretative social science tradition, with a particular focus on hermeneutic and discourse analysis methods. However, the text does not always go into detail on their practical feedback, sometimes leaving the reader to find the link between theory and empiricism.

Overall, the significance of the first volume is that it provides an interdisciplinary approach to scientific analysis and reflection to understand the real scale and causes of population catastrophes that contribute to the understanding of the social history and historical demographic processes of the past centuries

The second volume is structured into seven chapters. The initial two chapters explore the phenomenon and manifestations of epidemics, with a particular focus on the plague, both in Europe and worldwide. The author then turns to the plague epidemics in the Carpathian Basin, followed by a description of the situation in Hungary in the 17th and 18th centuries. For readers from Transylvania, the fifth and sixth chapters of the second volume contain more interesting

information. In the fifth chapter (Pestis in the Transylvanian Carpathian Bend), he examines in detail events in Transylvania, but already at the end of the fourth chapter we learn that ‘in Transylvania, as in all previous plague epidemics throughout the continent, the usual, established order of everyday life in the settlements, especially in the towns, is disrupted, and the free spirit of the people prevails in their behaviour (PÁSZKA 2020. 193.). For his analysis of the conditions in Transylvania, he used the data from Mihály Cserei’s *Historia* (CSEREI 1983), expanding it considerably, since Cserei’s work only shows the epidemics of the years 1708–1711. In the second volume, the author analyses, in addition to Cserei’s sources, other, mainly administrative, data from the reports drawn up by the magistrates of the various towns at the beginning of the 18th century, which reported the losses of the plague to the governorate. These in-depth analyses provide a great deal of detail that can be used to understand other aspects of the social history of Transylvania (see also VERES 2021).

During the first two decades of the 18th century, the author estimates the combined losses due to epidemics and military conflicts at approximately 300,000 in Hungary and 200,000 in Transylvania. By analyzing tax censuses from 1720–1920 and refining population statistics from Acsádi (1896), the author concludes that the total population of Hungary and Transylvania declined by approximately 10% and 20%, respectively (see ÖRI 2001; VERES 2002). Examining the partial data, the author highlights that certain micro-regions may have lost up to half their population within a few years, particularly between 1717 and 1719. However, as the majority of deaths were among young children, with fewer adult casualties, the number of families and households declined to a lesser extent. Over a longer period (1700–1725), natural reproduction helped mitigate these severe mortality losses. Consequently, census data collected at later intervals do not always reflect the full extent of population loss, as early church and tax censuses primarily recorded household numbers rather than individual deaths. In many cases, epidemics did not completely wipe out entire households but rather affected only a portion of their members.

The author also challenges the longstanding perception that disease control regulations emerged simultaneously with Austrian rule. Instead, he emphasizes that early measures were largely ineffective and only improved gradually through a process of learning from previous failures. The first notable set of effective regulations appeared in the Decree of Charles III (1724), later refined under Maria Theresa in the General Normativum (1770). There were also plague epidemics in Transylvania in the middle and second half of the 18th century, but according to the sources analysed by the author, they did not cover the whole province and did not affect as large a part of the population as the epidemics of the early 18th century. In 1738, for example, the number of plague victims in Transylvania, according to one of the sources analysed by the author, was 41 622 in 23 administrative units and 501 municipalities (another source reported far fewer victims), the most affected area being the south-western part, today’s Hunedoara/Hunyad, Alba/Fehér county, the city and county of Sibiu/Szeben and Scaunul Aries/Aranyosszék near Turda.

Into mid 18. century, the Transylvanian military command and the Brasov city council issued decrees prohibiting the entry of “foreigners” from outside the province. Despite these efforts, a severe plague epidemic struck Brasov (Brassó) between 1755 and 1756, leading to the complete isolation of the city and the entire Burzenland (Barcaság) region from the rest of Transylvania. Pászka suggests that the blockade did not result in catastrophic consequences

comparable to similar events in Europe, as Austrian military and legal authorities ensured food supplies to the quarantined areas. In August 1762, authorities once again closed the southeastern Transylvanian border, imposing a twelve-day quarantine (a precursor to modern standstill measures) on individuals waiting to enter the Turnu Roșu (Vöröstorony) gorge. Prior to this, the Brasov city authorities were instructed to monitor more closely the movements of shepherds and Orthodox monks (kalugyers) from Wallachia, who frequently used concealed mountain paths for crossing the border. From the summary of the chapter, we learn that Transylvania was mostly exposed to a major plague threat only when “the magnitude of the epidemic in the neighbouring countries, under Turkish dominance, exceeded the local scale” (*ibid.*: 268). However, during the 18th century, the responsibility for combating the outbreak of the plague fell to the authorities in south-eastern Transylvania (Brasov/Brassó, Bârsa region/Barcaság, Treiscaune/Háromszék, Ciuc/Csík- és Gheorgheni/ Gyergszék). However, the author finds that the Habsburg military bureaucracy failed to eliminate the back-and-forth between the passes, hidden paths and traps of the Carpathians and its role in the ‘reintroduction’ of the plague in the case of those who engaged in smuggling salt and other products, vagrancy, robbery or transhumant herding. (*ibid.*: 261). In addition, traders, transporters, etc., who used legal local passes and crossings, were more often than the authorities would have liked, and the leniency of the local border guard ‘plájos’, who were commissioned by the Austrian authorities before the later Romanian border regiments were established, was also tried to be controlled and broken by severe punishments. The special value of the book is that the exploration of the plague developments in Szeklerland in the 18th century is largely based on the author’s own research, including the fieldwork of the surgeons of the Szekler border regiments during the epidemic. These are mainly based on independent research in the archives of Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda and Sfântu Gheorghe/Sepsișzentgyörgy, which adds to the value of the volumes. (see also VERES 2021).

All in all, the social history of the management of plague epidemics is an important contribution to the book, which is made available to posterity. It also helps us to understand why, despite the high mortality associated with the epidemics, the population of Hungary and Transylvania was able to grow at a moderate but significant rate in the 18th and 19th centuries.

In Volume III of Imre Pászka’s book, he makes a professional and interdisciplinary study of the cholera epidemics in the Carpathian Basin in the 19th century. Placing these epidemics in a broader environmental, socio-political and economic context, the book provides a comprehensive historical and sociological analysis of epidemics, public health responses and social reactions to crises. The volume serves as the concluding part of a series examining the relationship between climate, survival strategies and epidemics, building on previous discussions of plague and environmental difficulties.

The book is divided into a number of well-structured sections, each covering a different aspect of the cholera epidemics in the region. The introductory chapter sets the conceptual framework, defining key concepts and methods. The chapter places cholera in the context of the environmental and climatic conditions of the Little Ice Age and explores the factors that contributed to the spread of epidemics, including poor sanitation, increased mobility and socio-political instability. Pászka provides a detailed historiographical overview, compares past and current research on the topic, and discusses the challenges of interpreting archival records, many of which have been shaped by political biases and administrative constraints.

The first major chapter, entitled *From Endemic Foci to Pandemic*, presents a comprehensive history of cholera, tracing its origins from its endemic presence in the Bengal region to its emergence as a pandemic. The book examines the different routes of transmission, highlighting both maritime and land-based trade networks, and discusses the geopolitical implications of the spread of the disease. Here, Pászka effectively integrates the findings of economic history and epidemiology, showing how trade expansion and military campaigns played a crucial role in the spread of pathogens.

In the following chapters the author deals with the actual epidemics in Hungary and Transylvania, such as Cholera in Hungary in 1831/32 (Cholera in Hungary, 1831/32) and Cholera in Transylvania in 1831/32 and 1836. These sections provide a detailed chronological account of how the disease spread in urban and rural settings, the measures ordered by local and imperial authorities, and the public reaction to both the disease and government interventions. Of particular interest in the case of Cluj Napoca is the detailed description of the crisis management and the civilian mobilisation to buy food supplies. But perhaps even more important, and so important in subsequent sociological analyses, are the city-region differences. According to the summary results of the 1932 cholera epidemic, the outcome of the epidemic in Cluj-Napoca and the five counties of northern Transylvania was radically different: while in Cluj-Napoca 'only' 18 % of the infected died, in the counties 59 % of the infected died during the cholera epidemic (PÁSZKA 2024. 190).

One of the strengths of the book is the meticulous use of archival sources, including government reports, contemporary medical treatises and newspaper articles, which are prominent in these chapters and help to reconstruct the lived experiences of those affected.

Of particular interest is the chapter on "The War of Independence and Cholera in 1848/49", which examines the intertwining of politics, administration and public health in the context of the Revolution and the Civil War. Pászka argues that the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence disrupted public health measures, which exacerbated the spread of cholera. The military movements of Habsburg and Russian forces, as well as poor sanitary conditions in refugee camps and besieged cities, contributed to high mortality rates. This section provides a particularly convincing discussion of how war and epidemic crises reinforced each other, showing the vulnerability of societies under multiple simultaneous pressures.

The book continues with case studies of later epidemics, such as Cholera in Hungary in 1866 (Kolera Magyarországon 1866) and The 1872/73 cholera epidemic in Hungary (Az 1872/73 évi kolerajárvány Magyarországon). These chapters examine how public health policy evolved over time, highlighting the shift from traditional quarantine methods to more systematic sanitary measures, including improved water management and medical response. However, as Pászka points out, administrative inefficiency and public distrust have often undermined these efforts. The book also details the socio-economic consequences of cholera, such as disruption of trade, displacement of populations and deepening social inequalities.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Interaction - Representations III* is the examination of contemporary medical debates on the nature of cholera. In the chapter on Cholera Contagious/Non-Contagious Dilemmas, Cures (A fertőző/nem fertőző vita és kezelések), Pászka examines the conflicting theories on the spread of cholera. He contrasts the early contagious approach with emerging scientific explanations, such as the role of contaminated water, which was later

confirmed by the discoveries of John Snow and Robert Koch. The book also details the various medical treatments tried during the epidemics, from herbal remedies to more experimental approaches, some of which were rooted in superstition rather than science.

The final chapters assess the long-term impact of cholera epidemics on public health infrastructure and perceptions of the disease. *Epidemic Prevention and International Cooperation after 1873* provides insights into the wider European context, showing how cholera influenced the development of modern public health policies, including the establishment of international health conferences and early attempts at global disease surveillance. Pászka argues that these developments laid the foundations for later 20th century efforts to combat pandemics through international cooperation.

Despite its many strengths, weaknesses can be found, although they fall far short of strengths. The depth of the archival research, while impressive, is sometimes overly dense in the presentation and illustration of statistical data, which detracts from the readability of the book and may be a challenge for readers unfamiliar with historical demography. In addition, the thematic structure of the book, while logical, at times seems fragmented, making it difficult to follow a coherent, consistent narrative across the different case studies. A clearer comparative framework between the different outbreaks and regions could have strengthened the overall coherence of the work, although this may have had some limitations, as not all regions can be described in the same way, in terms of semantic points and with the same depth.

All in all, *Interaction - Representations III* is a fundamental contribution to the field of historical sociology, but also to the field of medical history and epidemiology. Its meticulous research and analytical rigour make it an invaluable resource for historians, sociologists and public health professionals interested in the long-term interaction of epidemics and society. Although its scholarly style may be challenging for the general audience, the book's insights into historical and contemporary responses to epidemics provide key lessons for understanding modern health crises. Pászka's work highlights the importance of a historical perspective in the design of effective public health policies and highlights the enduring impact of past pandemics on contemporary epidemic management strategies.

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The book is also a niche from the point of view that the works of Western authors on climate history extend as far as the Oder River, while Imre Pászka's work sought to cover the Carpathian Basin, which has been less known abroad. Another important contribution is that this work is the first to present the Balkan epidemic situation in a broad sense in Hungarian and Transylvanian terms. Similarly, the Chinese Cha list on the origin of the plague and its correlations with the Mediterranean, Italian cities. This suggests that in the spread of the plague, its development into a pandemic, it was the agents of international long-distance, sea and land trade that played a prominent role, rather than warfare.

As the concluding chapter of the third volume confirms, the writing of the volume(s) is the result of a long, decade-long effort, in which the author had to draw on a wide range of interdisciplinary knowledge to adequately address the issues. In the book, the author has made a conscious effort to retain the vocabulary and designations of the original, contemporary sources, which undoubtedly has its advantages, but can also have its disadvantages. Readers with a

knowledge of history will find the many texts, accounts and letter extracts from the 17th and 18th centuries interesting and inspiring, and they may stimulate the researcher to further research. On the other hand, it is a drawback that readers who are not familiar with history and the old language may not always understand or may find the relevant parts of the book difficult to follow and read. Some of the concepts and terms he uses today may be considered pejorative and confusing to some readers. That said, we can only recommend it to all readers, laymen and researchers alike, interested in modern social relations.

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