The Triangle of the Year One Thousand
The Late Medieval Outline of a "Post-modern" Concept

Alexandru Simon

The triangular shape of (this) East-Central Europe is both artificial (for it dates from the 21ˢᵗ century) and natural (for it reflects the medieval and early modern evolutions influenced by its three "imperial" sides, arbitrarily linear and structurally influential).

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Aʙᴏᴜᴛ ʜᴀʟғ a century prior to the Eastern Schism and almost four centuries prior to the Western one, the area which was to become East-Central Europe, not yet crossed by the "Huntington line," was surrounded by three "superpowers," all advancing towards its center. Virtually all three could be regarded as having reached the maximum point of historical expansion. The first of the three was Byzantium. The empire was in the process of eliminating the last remainders of the First Bulgarian Tsarate and of reestablishing "East Roman" imperial control on the Lower Danube and between the Adriatic and the Black Sea. The second superpower was Kievan Rus', christianized by Byzantium and created as an "empire" by a mixture of Nordic, Oriental and Slavic elements, connecting the Baltic to the Black Sea. The third one was the "Western Empire," already more German than Roman. The empire's supremacy was—successfully—contested from within by the papacy, which had just

created in front of the Western Empire the kingdoms of Hungary and Poland, thus reestablishing its own missionary front between the Adriatic and the Baltic Sea. The three imperial sides formed a triangle marked by political fragmentation, which came to an apparent end, more exactly to a more lasting status quo, due to the brutal alterations in the structure of power and in state boundaries imposed by the events of World War II.[1]

The entire East-Central Europe should have been a purely Christian affair, regardless of rite. The collapse of Kievan Rus', followed by the subsequent rise of the Cumans, Tartars and Lithuanians, in particular, turned the eastern side of the triangle into a heathen side, half pagan, half Muslim, between the late 1200s and the late 1300s. The decline of Byzantium and the fall of the second series of Slavic Balkan states brought the rising Ottoman power to the Lower Danube already by the end of the 14th century. Less than a century later, the southern side of the triangle was completely Ottoman, and therefore Muslim, and was to remain so for 3–4 centuries, later collapsing from the west to the east. However, at no point, largely due to the Christianization of Lithuania in the late 1300s, were there two *heathen* sides of the triangle. Furthermore, due in particular to the costs and strategies of Ottoman expansion, which, in an almost traditional Roman imperial manner, tried to reduce its areas of direct authority north of Danube to a minimum, the politically and culturally strong Muslim impact on East-Central Europe was rather reduced in matters of ethnic composition. The reduced "administrative mobility" of the Ottoman southern side gradually turned the quest for East-Central European supremacy into a clash between East and West, also largely due to the decline of the Porte in the 1700s and 1800s. Regional political fragmentations and frontier changes thus increased, instead of diminishing (1850–1940).[2]

Mission, Authority and Division

B y definition, isolation practically means purity, whether we take into discussion "mountain values" or "monastic values." On the other hand, *East-Central Europe*, like *Christendom's bulwark* or *gate*, taken simultaneously into account as defining concepts for the area (although the first one was coined in the 1950s, following the Soviet victory in the East, and the second was born following the Mongol shock of the 1240s), are anything but representative for, or products of isolation and political or ideological reclusion. In its turn, exposure has swiftly become a synonym for corruption, for distortion. On a larger scale, therefore, one discovers two attitudes or claims, both extreme, by the values made to fit them, and arbitrary, in their determinations.

Nevertheless, the two are facile solutions for an environment shaped by great informational challenges (lack of information), which, only by the means imposed and the limits drawn by such aspects, does not allow for final solutions, in particular for the 1200s and 1300s. It should nonetheless be said that this area was never "united" under one authority (the Soviet Union, not the European Union, due in particular to the status of the Ukraine, was the only authority that, by officially indirect means and under circumstances radically different from those under which the triangle had developed, achieved, for five decades, an almost complete East-Central European hegemony, as Croatia, as a part of former Yugoslavia, escaped Soviet control).[3] Prior to the rise of modern ideologies and national states, as well as of transnational structures, Louis I of Anjou, king of Hungary, Croatia (1342–1382) and Poland (1370–1382), suzerain of Wallachia and Moldavia (in particular after 1378), came closest to "uniting" East-Central Europe. The House of Jagiełło also came close (1490–1526), after Władisław II, already king of a divided Bohemia (since 1471), was crowned king of Hungary, following the death of Matthias Corvinus (his "co-king" of Bohemia). At that time, for more than a century, the Jagiellonians ruled over the Polish-Lithuanian Union. At times, personal unions, family ties or feudal relations brought nearly all of these territories under a single authority. Some even claimed that authority, such as Louis I, who allegedly stated that his realm touches the three seas (the Adriatic, the Baltic and the Black Sea). Moreover, the Angevins and the Jagiellonians paid very dearly, both in relation to "East-Central Europe" and to the "foreign powers" for their hegemonic attempts and successes. The disintegration of Louis' heritage after his death and the events surrounding the battle of Mohács (1526), which also marked the beginning of the decline of the Jagiellonians, are best evidence of this.[4]

Another defining feature of the region is its missionary character. It is an area made by and for a *holy war*, for the crusade, in Christian terms. This fact also applies to the smallest medieval political structures in the area, in particular to the Croatians and the Wallachians. Actions against Livonian or Lithuanian pagans, Bohemian heretics or Russian schismatics and Tartars converted to Islam, were gratified with the title and support of a crusade. Anti-Ottoman warfare became virtually identical with crusading. The Wallachians, usually the only Greek rite Christians on Rome's crusader list, after 1453, adapted and exported the Latin concept to Moscow. Beginning with to the second half of the 16th century and especially after 1700, Moscow returned to the concept of holy war in its Orthodox format and pushed south in its name. The Holy War transformed the Ottoman expansion and encompassed the major Ottoman actions north of the Danube line, more than it had done in the case of earlier Tartar campaigns. As time went by, the Reformation and the crisis and changes

thus triggered gave new meanings to the concept. In the end, World War II was also a series of holy wars, whether brown or red, western or eastern.[5]

As crusades and trade combined, another political protagonist played an important, almost imperial, part in regional affairs, long after the "infamous fourth crusade," which that power had diverted and which eventually led to the conquest of Constantinople (1204). Adriatic-based Venice overshadowed in this respect her Italian archrival Genoa, whose colonies took over, for up to three centuries in some cases, large portions of the western and north-western shores of the Black Sea. The Venetian bureaucracy left us with probably the most accurate late medieval "definition" of East-Central Europe: *Hungaria* [including Bohemia as they had the same king, residing in Buda most of the time]*, Polania, Dacia* [i.e. Moldavia and Wallachia] *et Croatia* [initially absent from the formula, for Hungary's king was also king of Croatia; it was added afterwards due to Venice's Adriatic interests). The *Hungaria, Polania, Dacia et Croatia* formula used in Venetian records as title for all information coming from the area (mid 1490–late 1520), is also eloquent for the impact of that age on the modern political fate and perception of the area. Christian crusading proved ineffective, while the Muslim holy war was successfully used by the Ottomans, equally careful to become a "European" partner of the divided Christendom, another aim achieved by the pragmatic and often tolerant Ottoman state apparatus. The south side of triangle was thus largely blocked (the most notable exceptions, the conquest of Buda in 1541 or the siege of Vienna in 1683, proved to have both long and short-term disastrous consequences for the Turks). In more than just one way, the Ottomans drew East and West closer together, over "East-Central Europe."[6]

Time, Space and Belonging

I N THE 15th century, prior even to the fall of Byzantium and of medieval Serbia (1453–1459) and up to the first decades of the 16th century, the special and at the same time ideological *Christian* structuring of East-Central Europe remained a Cumanic-Tartar product (1200–1300), with German (from the west), Lithuanian and Teutonic (from the north and the north-east), Kievan Rus' (from the east and the north-east) influencess (all older than the Ottoman one), as well as with southern support from the Byzantine, Bulgarian and Serbian imperial remnants. From the second half of the 16th century and, at least, until the beginning of the 19th century, the same defining features of "crusader" East-Central Europe were the results of the Ottoman influence, once again with Habsburg-German participation (from the west), older, from

a chronological perspective, than the "oriental hegemonical dominant," with a Polish-Lithuanian involvement (from the north) and Muscovite Russian pressure (from the north and north-east). To this one we should add, from the south, the pro-Ottoman or "Orthodox irredentist" resurrection of the Serbians and Greeks, in particular, as well as the Albanian or Bulgarian endeavors. The outcome was a three-sided political pressure (one side had constantly been *heathen* for eight centuries), though only two circles of Christian civilization existed in the area, and this not only in theory.[7] Even before 1204, Constantinople and Rome circumscribed two circles of civilization, built on state and faith, which interfered. Their "perfection" decreased towards their margins, towards Hungary and Poland (from Rome's perspective), towards Kievan Rus' and, later, the Balkan polities (from Byzantium's point of view), to mention only those structures directly connected to East-Central Europe. These "political creatures of the frontier" represented border areas both in relation to the "central perfection" and to the "unknown," to the outlying territories. The latter, the frontiers of the frontier, interposed areas, grew into spaces of contact, which the neighboring powers—the circles of civilization to which these powers belonged—could claim for themselves. In political practice, prior to the rise of the Ottomans, such "territorial claims" were justified by the fact that the desired areas bordered and opened up the vast space of traditional eastern unrest, with which the wanted areas tended to identify. The areas unavoidably saw considerable intermingling and acculturation, also due to the "central" Roman and Byzantine developments. In this respect, the changes, crisis and developments triggered by the various forms of Church Union and Reformation were a proper match for the "genetic features" of East-Central Europe.[8] The triangular shape of (this) East-Central Europe is both artificial (for it dates from the 21st century) and natural (for it reflects the medieval and early modern evolutions influenced by its three "imperial" sides, arbitrarily linear and structurally influential). The triangle, with its maritime corners, has a correspondent in the shape of the Balkan Peninsula, based on the Lower Danube and pointing at the Mediterranean Sea, another triangle which contains similar and often more pronounced political, ethnical and religious phenomena of fragmentation and change induced from the sides (e.g., prior to the rise of the Ottomans, by the Hungarians, Cumans and Tartars from the north, by the Genoese and Byzantines from the east and by the Venetians and the Italian Angevins from the west). It is interesting to note that, taken together, these two triangles, in which rivers tend to play a greater role than mountains (minor in terms of territorial predominance) cover the geographical center of continental Europe, forming a more than troubled European "middle earth," where individual endeavors and local specificities combined with outside influences and "imperial" pressures in shaping a peculiar ensemble, constant only in its

instability (as opposed to the neighboring "imperial" spaces of calm).[9] Still, East-Central Europe (and the Balkans too) should have been Slavic in terms of the common ethnic background (making the subsequent regional fragmentation all the more eloquent for the nature of this Europe). The medieval German *Drang nach Osten*, the Hungarian "intrusion," the Lithuanian expansion, combined with the Cuman and Tartar hegemonies, and, to a lesser degree (in East-Central European cultural and chronological terms), the Ottoman growth changed its course, which had begun to alter around the year one thousand (Hungary became a Christian state, the first signs of major German eastern solutions to local necessities arose, and a new wave of eastern riders formed further to the east). The survivors of the old Roman settlers or the old Greeks turned Byzantine (unless they were under the direct imperial administrative protection) were usually no match for the already imposed or rising powers. The local Latin element only made it to (relative) power by the creation of Second Bulgarian Tsarate (only for a few decades: 1180–ca. 1230) and by the foundation of Wallachia and Moldavia (1300), which soon, if not from the beginning in Wallachia's case, adopted Slavic institutions. Nonetheless, prior to the rise of modern nationalism and its effects (on "Latins" too), significant divisions were added to the already individualized Slavic groups by their choices between Rome and Byzantium and by the Reformation. Nowadays however, after World War II, if one looks at East-Central Europe (and the Balkans), one notices that the Slavic element, regardless of denomination, has a regional majority greater than in 10th and 11th centuries. Romanians, Hungarians, Greeks and the smaller groups of Muslim Albanians and Bosnians, or the inhabitants of the Baltic states, are basically the only non-Slavs.[10]

Substance, Legitimity and Action

ALTHOUGH LEGITIMIZED and influenced by one of three sides (less so by the "eastern" one prior to Muscovite expansion, although the Tartars legitimized the rise of Wallachia or even Moscow), East-Central European states and structures are, in most aspects, products of local confessional and political emulations, involving populations already settled in East-Central Europe. From this point of view, the *Sarmatian*, in Poland, *Scythian*, in Hungary, or Roman (later, in terms of local relevance, *Dacian*), in Wallachia and Moldavia, identitary high notes are particularly interesting because they tend to dominate (less in the *Sarmatian* case) the transition from the Late Middle Ages to the Early Modern Age (in this respect too, the *Bohemia* of the Czechs is more than just a particular case study). It is interesting to note that in (most

of) these cases, such high notes, destined to strengthen the (local and regional) position of the "autochtonous population," revolved around and resorted to the use of a faraway cradle. "Born" as states by the West, Poland and Hungary "come" from the East. Whether we rely on Długosz's or Bielski's texts or we turn to the violent reactions of the Orthodox magnate Konstanty Ostrogski in the late 1590s, Poland "crosses" the eastern barrier posed by the legacy of Kievan Rus'. Hungary, Christendom's bulwark, still searched, by way of the messengers of King Andrew II (in the late 1230s) or of Matthias Corvinus (in the 1470s) for that *Magna Hungaria*, in the steppes north of the Black Sea. Legitimized by the southern and, to a lesser extent, by the eastern side, Wallachia and Moldavia claimed their Italian roots when they were still young states (at the turn of the 14ᵗʰ century).[11]

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Notes

Quotations were limited to a historiographical minimum. Precedence was given to secondary literature and to syntheses. Nonetheless, the works quoted are largely those that make the most use of primary sources in regard to the specific topics in the text. Readers can easily find the way back to the edited and unedited material on which the authors have based their analysis. In relation to the archive and library material, worth mentioning are some of the most important "reservoirs," especially for the Late Middle Ages, which can still be of great use. Such "reservoirs" can be found in Venice (Archivio di Stato di Venezia, in the highly researched series of Senato Secreta/Secreti, and also Deliberazioni, in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, where, aside from the numerous chronicles still preserved there, several collection of diplomatic reports are contained in the Italian and Latin sectors of the Codices), Milan (leaving aside, for the moment, the famed Biblioteca Ambrosiana, the collections in the Archivio di Stato di Milano, Archivio Ducale Sforzesco, in particular the Potenze Estere division, are, in the terms of the Later Crusades, the medieval equivalent of the Swiss archives for World War II) or Vienna (both the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv and the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek offer unique insights into the political and cultural dealings and trends of the last six centuries) and even Budapest (still largely underrated and undervalued in relation to the greater more "attractive" archival centers in Europe). This distribution largely speaks for the fact that up to the late 1700–early 1800 the history of the Eastern part of Europe is a history that has been written based mostly on Western and Central European data.

1. E.g. *A History of East-Central Europe*, gen. eds. Peter F. Sugar and Donald W. Treadgold, vols. I, III–IX (Seattle–London, 1974–2001), regardless of the discrepancies in terms of the quality of the analysis between and within volumes; Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus', 750–1200* (New York–London, 1995); Johannes Fried, *Otto III. und Boleslaw Chrobry. Das Widmungsbild des Aachener Evangeliars, der*

Akt von Gnesen und das frühe polnische und ungarische Königtum: Eine Bildanalyse und ihre historischen Folgen (Stuttgart, 2001²); Alexandru Simon, *În jurul Carpaților: Formele și realitățile genezei statale românești* (Cluj-Napoca, 2002); *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500–1492*, ed. J. Shepard (Cambridge, 2008); see in particular the studies of Michael Angold, Paul Magdalino, Anthony Bryer and Michel Balard; Nevra Necipoğlu, *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins: Politics and Society in the Late Empire* (Cambridge, 2009).

2. Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1990); Jan Paul Niederkorn, *Die europäischen Mächte und der **Lange Türkenkrieg** Kaiser Rudolphs II. (1593–1606)* (Vienna, 1993); George C. Soulis, *The Serbs and Byzantium during the Reign of Emperor Stephen Dusan (1331–1355) and his Successors* (Athens, 1995); *Pope Innocent III and his World*, ed. John C. Moore (Ashgate, 1999); Suraiya Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It* (London, 2004). For the various perspectives, see also the series *Die Habsburgermonarchie*, gen. eds. Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch (Vienna, 1973–2008; including the reprints and re-edited volumes).

3. For instance: Francis Dvornik, *The Making of East-Central Europe* (New York, 1974²); Nancy Shields Kollmann, *Kinship and Politics: The Making of the Muscovite Political System, 1345–1547* (Stanford, 1987); Oskar Halecki, *Jadwiga of Anjou and the Rise of East-Central Europe* (New York, 1991); Al. Simon, "*Annus Mirabilis 1387:* King Sigismund's Ottoman and Greek Rise in the Late 1380s and Early 1390s," in *Sigismund of Luxembourg and the Orthodox World* (= *Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, CCXCII), eds. Ekaterini Mitsiou, Mihailo Popović, Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, and Al. Simon (Vienna, 2009), 125–150. See also J. R. S. Phillips, *The Medieval Expansion of Europe* (Oxford, 1998²), as well as the controversial work of William H. Mc Neill, *Europe's Steppe Frontier 1500–1800* (London, 1964), but also the collective volume *The Federal Vision Legitimacy and Levels of Governance in the United States and the European Union*, eds. Kalypso Nicolaidis and Robert Howse (Oxford–New York, 2002).

4. See also the first four volumes in the *Between Worlds* (= *Mélanges d'Histoire Générale*, NS) series: *Stephen the Great, Matthias Corvinus and their Time*, eds. László Kozsta, Ovidiu Mureşan, and Al. Simon (Cluj-Napoca, 2007), particularly the studies of András Kubinyi, Sándor Papp and Ioan Drăgan; *Extincta est lucerna orbis: John Hunyadi and his Time*, eds. Ana Dumitran, Loránd Mádly and Al. Simon (Cluj-Napoca, 2009), in particular the works of Vladimir Agrigoroaei, Andrea Fara, Iulian-Mihai Damian, Dan Ioan Mureşan, Matei Cazacu and Petre Ş. Năsturel; *Sigismund of Luxemburg and his Time*, eds. Florina Ciure, András W. Kovács, J. Preiser-Kapeller, and Al. Simon (Cluj-Napoca, 2009), forthcoming; with particular reference to the articles by János M. Bak, Konrad G. Gündisch, Szilárd Süttő, Géza Erszegi, Krzysztof Baczkowski, and Ioan-Aurel Pop; IV, *Matthias Corvinus and his Time*, eds. Enikő Rüsz-Fogarasi, Mária Makó Lupescu, Tudor Sălăgean, and Al. Simon (Cluj-Napoca, 2010), forthcoming; in particular, the studies of Norman Housley, Oliver Jens Schmitt, Michel Balivet, Borislav Grgin and Ovidiu Cristea.

5. E.g. S. C. Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending: A Pagan Empire within East-Central Europe, 1295–1345* (Cambridge, 1994); Jörg K. Hoensch, *Sigismund von Luxemburg,*

Herrscher and der Schwelle zur Neuzeit (1387–1437) (Munich, 1996); Irina Moroz, "The Idea of Holy War in the Orthodoxy World (On Russian Chronicles from the Twelfth–Sixteenth Century)," *Quaestiones Medii Aevi Novae* (Warsaw) 4 (1999): 45–67; Norman Housley, *Religious Warfare in Europe, 1400–1536* (Oxford, 2002). See also Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia, 2004); Thomas A. Fudge, *The Crusade against Heretics in Bohemia: Sources and Documents for the Hussite Crusades, 1418–1437* (Ashgate, 2002); Elizabeth Siberry, *The New Crusaders: Images of the Crusades in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Ashgate, 2002).

6. O. Halecki, "La Pologne et la question d'Orient de Casimir le Grand à Jan Sobieski," *La Pologne au Congrès International des Sciences Historiques* (Warsaw) 7 (1933): 431–443; Kenneth M. Setton, "Lutheranism and the Turkish Peril," *Balkan Studies* (Thessaloniki) 4 (1962): 133–168; Erik Fügedi, "Two Kinds of Enemies—Two Kinds of Ideology: The Hungarian-Turkish Wars of the Fifteenth Century," in *War and Peace in the Middle Ages*, ed. Bernhard P. Mc Guire (Copenhagen, 1987), 146–160; Günther Hödl, *Habsburg und Österreich, 1273–1493* (Vienna, 1993); Gérard Poumarède, *Pour en finir avec la Croisade: Mythes et réalités de la lutte contre les Turcs au XVIe et XVIIe siècles* (Paris, 2004); Al. Simon, "Antonio Bonfini's *Valachorum regulus*: Matthias Corvinus, Transylvania and Stephen the Great," in *Between Worlds*, I: 207–226.

7. For instance: Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500–1453* (London, 1971); Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans, 18th and 19th Centuries* (Cambridge, 1983); Alfred Kohler, *Karl V. 1500–1558: Eine Biographie* (Munich, 2001); William Urban, *The Teutonic Knights: A Military History* (London, 2003); Victor Spinei, *The Great Migrations in the East and South East of Europe from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Century*, 2 (Amsterdam, 2006); Giedre Mickunaite, *Making a Great Ruler: Grand Duke Vytautas of Lithuania* (Budapest, 2006); O. J. Schmitt, *Skanderbeg* (Munich, 2009), forthcoming. See also Apostolis Vacalopoulos, *The Greek Nation, 1453–1669* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1976), and the essays in *Myths and Nationhood*, eds. Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin (London–New York, 1997).

8. E.g. D. Obolensky, "Russia's Byzantine Heritage," *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 1 (1950): 37–63; Aleksandr Soloviev, "*Reges* et *regnum Russie* au Moyen Âge," *Byzantion* (Brussels) 36 (1966): 143–173; Tadeusz Wyrwa, *La pensée politique polonaise à l'époque de l'Humanisme et de la Renaissance (un apport à la connaissance de l'Europe moderne)* (Paris, 1978); Hermann Wiesflecker, *Maximilian I.: Die Fundamente des habsburgischen Weltreiches* (Vienna–Munich, 1991); John Godfrey, *1204: The Unholy Crusade* (Oxford, 1980); Thomas T. Allsen, *Conquest and Culture in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge, 2001); Klaus-Peter Matschke, *Das Kreuz und der Halbmond: Die Geschichte der Türkenkriege* (Düsseldorf–Zurich, 2004). See also the final two chapters of N. Housley's long-term analysis *Contesting the Crusades* (Oxford, 2006).

9. E.g. Paul Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1938); Nicolae Şerban Tanaşoca, "De la Valachie des Assénides au Second Empire bulgare," *Revue des Études Sud-est-Européennes* (Bucharest) 19, 3 (1981): 581–593; Donald M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Cambridge, 1988); Geo Pistarino, *Genovesi d'Oriente* (Genoa, 1990); Vassil Gjuzelev, *Bulgarien zwischen Orient und Okzident: Die Grundlagen seiner geistigen Kultur vom 13. bis zum 15. Jahrhundert*

(Vienna–Cologne–Weimar, 1993); Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1211–1410* (London, 2005). The series *Da Roma alla Terza Roma: Documenti e studi*, eds. Pierangelo Catalano and Paolo Sinsicalco (Rome, 1983–2006) is quite eloquent for the variable amounts of scholarly knowledge as well as for "ideology," one could say.

10. For an overview: Wolfgang Kessler, *Politik, Kultur und Gesellschaft in Kroatien und Slavonien in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1975); Şerban Papacostea, *Between the Crusade and the Mongol Empire: The Romanians in the Thirteenth Century* (Cluj-Napoca, 1998); Pál Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary, 895–1526* (London, 2001); Paul Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier: A Political Study of the Northern Balkans 900–1204* (Cambridge, 2001); István Vásáry, *Cumans and Tartars: Oriental Military in the Pre-Ottoman Balkans, 1185–1365* (Cambridge, 2005); as well as Florin Curta's recent *South-Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, ca. 500–1250* (Cambridge, 2006).

11. For further data, see Lajos Tárdy, "Ungarns anti-osmanische Bündnisse mit Staaten des Nahen Ostens und deren Vorgeschichte," *Anatolica* (Leiden) 4–5 (1971–1972): 151–156; Adolf Armbruster, *Der Donau-Karpatenraum in den mittel- und westeuropäischen Quellen des 10.–16. Jahrhunderts: eine historiographische Imagologie* (Cologne–Vienna, 1990), 151–168; Edward Potkowski, "Sarmatismus als politische Ideologie der jagiellonischen Dynastie," *Zeitschrift für Ost-Mitteleuropa Forschung* (Marburg an der Lahn) 45, 3 (1995): 364–380; Borys A. Gudziak, *Crisis and Reform: The Kyivan Metropolitanate, the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Genesis of the Union of Brest* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 94–101; A. Kubinyi, "Az 1505-ös rákosi országgyűlés és a szittya ideológia," *Századok* (Budapest) 140, 2 (2006): 361-374.

Abstract

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About half a century prior to the Eastern Schism and almost four centuries prior to the Western one, the area which was to become East-Central Europe, not yet crossed by the "Huntington line," was surrounded by three "superpowers," all advancing towards the center of the area. Virtually all three could be regarded as having reached the maximum point of historical expansion. The first of the three was Byzantium. The empire was in the process of eliminating the last remainders of the First Bulgarian Tsarate and reestablishing "East Roman" imperial control on the Lower Danube and between the Adriatic and the Black Sea. The second superpower was Kievan Rus', christianized by Byzantium and created as an "empire" by a mixture of Nordic, Oriental and Slavic elements, connecting the Baltic to the Black Sea. The third one was the "Western Empire," already more German than Roman. The empire's supremacy was, successfully, contested from within by the papacy, which had just created in front of the Western Empire the kingdoms of Hungary and Poland, thus reestablishing its own missionary front between the Adriatic and the Baltic Sea. The three imperial sides formed a triangle marked by political fragmentation, which came to an apparent end, more exactly to a more lasting status quo, due to the brutal alterations in the structure of power and in state boundaries imposed by the events of World War II.

Keywords