

## Krauss, Karl-Peter. *Mord an der Donau: Leopold von Márffy und die deutschen Untertanen in Tscheb (1802–1812), Eine Mikrogeschichte der Gewalt.*

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Peter Becker 

Department of History, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
E-mail: [peter.becker@univie.ac.at](mailto:peter.becker@univie.ac.at)

*Mord an der Donau*, “murder on the banks of the Danube,” is a truly remarkable book. Its main title is somewhat misleading, as the successful murder plot against Leopold von Márffy, who was killed on the way to his Tscheb estate in southern Hungary in 1812, does not structure the narrative. Rather, the book focuses on the microhistory of violence; that is, on life and work in the Tscheb estate in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, where violence in the form of physical abuse, sexual violence, and economic exploitation dominated the life of German settlers.

The book does not even pretend to be a crime story. The first chapter presents the murder, the identification of the perpetrators, and their adjudication in a straightforward manner, even though the crime was not easily solved because of the wall of silence built around the perpetrators. The book keeps the attention of its readers by a skillful exploration of power relations, the reconstruction of the agency of peasants, and a discussion of peasant resistance.

The author uses the conceptual advances of James Scott and Michel de Certeau to analyze the moves of the subjects of Tscheb to escape their ordeal. They were caught, as Krauss argues, within the competing claims for the control of lord–peasant relations between the central authority in Vienna, represented ultimately by the Habsburg ruler, and the county nobility. It is a strength of this book that these claims are situated within their proper political and constitutional frame but analyzed from the perspective of the peasants in Tscheb. Following the individual and collective agency of the peasants allows him to reflect on these power relations as a dynamic field in which German subjects tried to find a hearing for their complaints.

The life of German peasants in Tscheb was made a living hell by their abusive, greedy, and wanton landlord, who had purchased the estate without having sufficient funds. The landlord, Leopold von Márffy, had to increase the revenue from his estate as much as possible while paying for his lavish lifestyle with borrowed money. Krauss presents Márffy as a demonic villain, whose ruthless pursuit of his own interests did not even stop short of tricking his sister, who had loaned him money, and of tricking his subjects. He abused his power to put economic stress on the German settlers, who resisted by grasping every legal opportunity available to Hungarian subjects of the emperor.

After a brief introduction of the murder plot, which defines the end of this narration, Krauss takes his readers back in time to make them understand better the political, economic, and legal structures that framed the agency of Márffy’s subjects. He argues that the Tscheb estate was developed with Germans from the second generation of settlers, after the Serbian peasants had decided to resettle to escape the abusive landlord. Here, Márffy is characterized as a violent despot who forcefully drove out subjects from their homesteads. His efforts to expel peasants and to take over their estates into his own management was motivated by the economic prospects of the Napoleonic Wars for Hungarian agriculture—and by his desperate need to increase his revenue.

The conceptual tools of Michel de Certeau provide Krauss with the instruments for a highly differentiated perspective on the ways in which the Tscheb peasants tried to resist the unreasonable demands and intolerable abuses of their landlord. Using the concept of tactics, he moves as close as possible to the agency of peasants and their various forms of resistance. The specific archival situation limits this conceptual move to a critical assessment of official records, which document the peasants’ miserable plight and legal struggles to enforce their legal rights against their landlord.

Krauss's book directs our attention to the power struggles between the emperor and his representatives on the one hand and the regional estates on the other. The subjects of the Tscheb estate were deprived of their legal rights, above all the rights granted to them within Maria Theresa's Urbairial Patent. The reason for the success of Márffy's audacious violation of his subjects' rights is found by the author in the landlord's well-established networks at the county level. Having served as chief notary of the county and thus as one of the top officials, he could rely on the support of his peers to cover up his violations of the law and to support him in defrauding his subjects of their rights and land.

The author's exemplary exploration of many archives allows him to unearth the voices of the peasants in their defense of rights and land. This includes the files from the church administration, which reveal an interesting tactical move of Márffy's subjects. They went after him also for violating marriage laws and basic moral principles by living with his married concubine at this estate. They found backing from their local priest, but even the support of the archbishop and the procedures at the consistorial court failed to build sufficient pressure on the landlord.

The suspense in this book is built through the growing desperation the peasants experienced when all their legal moves missed the mark because of the support Márffy received from his network at the county level. Not even the petition sent to the emperor changed the course of events. His authority was supreme, but not regarding the implementation of norms at the local level. The normative framework built by Maria Theresa and Joseph II included the protection of their subjects from exploitation by landlords. These rules could be bent or even completely ignored by the local elite if they were ruthless despots and not enlightened souls, as we can learn from Krauss's book.

This book is not just a bleak story of oppression and exploitation. It also presents the tactics of the subjects and their unyielding fight for their rights and land. This dimension of the story is developed with a conceptually well-informed look at the biographies and activities of the main protagonists, bringing the agency of the subjects to the fore as much as the limited source material allows.

Krauss has written a fascinating book about German settlers in Hungary, power relations between Vienna and the Hungarian counties, and the high potential for exploitation and abuse during the Napoleonic Wars. These structural problems are discussed with an interest in the agency of the subjects—and this is a most welcome perspective.

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## Storchová, Lucie. *Řád přírody, řád společnosti. Adaptace melanchthonismu v českých zemích v polovině 16. století* [The Order of Nature, the Order of Society: The Adaptation of Melanchthonianism in the Czech Lands in the Mid-sixteenth Century]

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Howard Louthan

University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

E-mail: [hlouthan@umn.edu](mailto:hlouthan@umn.edu)

For many students of medieval and early modern Europe, the history of Bohemia is one that intersects only occasionally with the standard and more familiar European narrative. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there is Charles IV and the magnificent imperial capital he built, the dramatic emergence of Jan Hus and the crusades that came in his wake. Prague shines once more in the following