

Kurt Wessely

Prof. Kurt Wessely died on July 9, 1977. With his death the Austrian East and Southeastern European Institute lost a distinguished colleague. As a long time member of its board of directors, Wessely contributed a great deal to the development and fashioning of the structure of the Institute. At his passing the world lost not only a scholar whose work was highly esteemed but also a man belonging to that increasingly rarer circle of individuals whose experiences as youths instilled in them an awareness of the dimensions and possibilities of the Danubian monarchy.

Kurt Wessely, the son of a lawyer, was born in Linz in 1906. During that same year a Transylvanian Romanian, Aurel Popovici, who had close connections with the successor to the throne, wrote his sensational book, *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Großösterreich*. Twelve years later the monarchy was destroyed, but for Wessely it still remained a field for research. He was educated at the Institute for International Trade in Vienna and at the Universities of Vienna and Innsbruck, where the judicial and philosophical faculties honored him with doctorates in both law and political science. His subsequent studies in Budapest and Hermannstadt (Sibiu) clearly indicated the area and direction of his work: the Danubian and southeastern European area, especially the history of the Szeklers and the Germans in Hungary as well as that of the Military Frontier. His first publication, entitled "A doua diplomă leopoldina," appeared in the annals of the Romanian Academy of Sciences in 1938.

During the course of the Second World War Wessely was wounded twice. But even though he was badly wounded he was able, while still in the hospital, to prevail upon his commanding officer to allow him to continue his studies of the history of the Military Border in the Viennese Kriegsarchiv. During the postwar period, stimulated by his editorial activities in the field of economics, Wessely placed his main emphasis on the scientific study of that subject. This change in the direction of his interests culminated in his appointment to the staff of the Austrian Institute for Economic Research in 1955. Seven years later, in 1962, Wessely joined the staff of the Austrian Institute for East and Southeastern Europe. Expanding his work into the field of economic history, he continued to concentrate on economics.

The mention of Wessely's interest in economics leads one to reflect on his work as director of the economic-research division of the Institute: on his great prudence while serving as editor-in-chief of the *Presseschau Ostwirtschaft*; the thorough legal knowledge reflected in his compilations of the "Dokumentation der Gesetze und Verordnungen Osteuropas;" and his fine articles in *Österreichische Osthefte* and his expertise as its economics editor.

In addition to basic scholarly essays on economic subjects, which in their totality give a clear picture of the development of the economies of all eastern Europe, Wessely has written wider-ranging historical studies on such topics as "Die Regensburger "harrige" Reichshilfe 1576" and the "Neuordnung der ungarischen Grenzen nach dem großen Türkenkrieg." Both studies were the fruit of long years of research. The first makes a remarkable contribution to our evaluation of the assistance given to the Turks by the empire; the latter presents an equally impressive picture of the Military Frontier itself and of the forces determining its formation during one of its important phases of development.

Again and again carefully considered judgments surface in Wessely's works, such as his evaluation of the highly important matter of "Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung von Bosnien-Herzegowina" in the decades before 1914. Time and again the wheel came full circle and impelled the historian to join forces with the economist to draw from both areas of research. This synthesis is apparent in his "Wirtschaftliche und soziale Probleme der Slowakei seit dem Ersten Weltkrieg" and in a fragment of contemporary history such as "25 Jahre österreichischer Osthandel," in which the past forms the direct basis for determining the position and point of view in the present.

Vienna always remained as Wessely's fixed point of departure. His last independent work, which was made up of a series of essays, *Osthandelszentrum Wien*, and which was published in 1976, was both a challenge for its editor and what the economically responsive bourgeoisie from which he came would call "an Austrian task." Austria's peripheral position vis-à-vis the European Economic Community and the corresponding but less intense "impulse towards integration" made his country's task in dealing with eastern Europe perfectly clear to Wessely. He did not overlook the difficulties involved, but he was always genuinely interested in promoting realistic cooperation with eastern Europe.

At the beautiful Bergfriedhof in Alt-Aussee in Upper Austria his friends gave a last farewell to Wessely, the scholar, the colleague, and, above all, a fine person.

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