Austrian History Yearbook (2024), 1–18
doi:10.1017/S0067237824000122

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

Revolution, War, and Cholera in 1848–49: The Case of Hungary

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Abstract

This paper investigates the events and lessons from the 1848–49 cholera epidemic in Hungary. For contemporaries, the ongoing revolution and civil war pushed the devastation of the cholera epidemic into the background, even though the death rate was similar to that of the earlier 1831 infection. The epidemic hit the country in a period when the revolutionary Hungarian state was waging a war of self-defense. This article strives to refute the historiographic view that the movements of the different armies had a considerable influence on the development of the epidemic. Instead, this article argues that the cholera epidemic was a demographic crisis unfolding in the background of war, but for the most part independently of it. It mattered that most people of that time had already directly experienced cholera and that the Hungarian government did not want to cause panic with restrictive measures. In 1848, cholera was not a "mobilizing factor," but in 1849 it contributed to the demoralization of the hinterland and frequently appeared in the political propaganda of the civil war.

Keywords: cholera; epidemics; revolution; war of independence; 1848–49; Hungary; protection against cholera; social reactions; epidemic and politics

The historical question of the connection between cholera and social movements dates back to the early 1960s. At that time, it was pointed out that although national histories were relatively well known, examination of the international context of the pandemic was only just beginning.[1] The classic analyses of the parallels between cholera epidemics and nineteenth-century revolutions and their social context—works by Louis Chevalier, Asa Briggs, Charles Rosenberg—were transcended by Richard J. Evans's 1988 *Past & Present* article, also a classic, that formulated research criteria that are still valid today.[2] The literature on the links between pandemics and their social impact has been further enriched by studies of cholera's political, demographic, and everyday consequences.[3] A number of works, particularly on the social history of cholera, have reframed longstanding debates, as one historiographical review noted:

> A key point, and one that is often overlooked in the urge to paint the nineteenth century as an era of mortality crises, is that "epidemics" were and are socio-political as much as natural events. Historians have not always been clear about this either. Charles Rosenberg's and Asa Briggs's classical articles understood cholera epidemics as exogenous events, as ideal tools for the historian to test the stability of societies. While this was an important historiographical development helping along social history of medicine as a discipline, it has done a disservice to historicising cholera.[4]

[1]Louis Chevalier, *Le choléra: la première épidémie du XIXe siècle* (La Roche-sur-Yon, 1958), quoted by Asa Briggs, "Cholera and Society in the Nineteenth Century," *Past & Present* 19, no. 1 (1961): 76–96, here 77, 89; Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (Chicago, 1962).

[2]Richard J. Evans, "Epidemics and Revolutions. Cholera in Nineteenth-Century Europe," *Past & Present* 120, no. 1 (1988): 123–46.

[3]Samuel K. Cohn, "Cholera Revolts: A Class Struggle We May Not Like," *Social History* 42, no. 2 (2017): 162–80.

[4]Flurin Condrau and Michael Worboys, "Second Opinions: Epidemics and Infections in Nineteenth-Century Britain," *Social History of Medicine* 20, no. 1 (2007): 147–58, here 149.

Placed in this context, the case of Hungary allows us to see the course of the epidemic and its various effects, the similarities with Western European examples, and some of the special characteristics brought about by the revolution and the war of independence.

In epidemic history literature, there is significant interest in nineteenth-century cholera epidemics. In most European countries, particular emphasis has been placed on the history of the first devastating and shocking pandemic of 1830–32. Because of the revolutionary events across Europe, less attention has been paid to the second major epidemic of 1848–49.[5] This is particularly true in the case of Hungary: the epidemic coincided with a long revolutionary period and a war of national self-defense across the country. The fundamental social and political reforms enacted early in the 1848 revolution, the so-called "April Laws," which included the abolition of serfdom, the institution of a constitutional political system, and the freedom of the press—along with the events of the war—simply pushed the history of the epidemic and its consequences into the background of historical research. Examining it now has the potential to illuminate specific details and larger patterns for the history of the cholera epidemic in an international comparison. Major monographs and volumes on 1848–49 usually deal with the cholera epidemics of 1848–49 only in other European countries,[6] whereas the Hungarian monographs typically present detailed political and military history but neglect cholera.[7]

It must be mentioned that a relative lack of sources puts a serious limit on research into the pandemic in Hungary compared with Western European countries. For example, in contrast to England[8] or France[9] no national surveys were made in Hungary, where "the local and public administration were not able to take care of the problem of data-collection of the epidemiological evidences."[10] In England, from the epidemic data documented by local authorities, analysts have been able to present a detailed picture of the appearance, course, and social effects of the epidemic, and to analyze the relations between the size and water supply of buildings, the availability of food, and the effects of livestock farming.[11] In general, it can be said that several thorough investigations of the local events of the European cholera epidemic in 1848–49 exist.[12] Fortunately, some Hungarian case studies also offer an opportunity to draw wider conclusions.[13] These analyze the number of deaths according to local

[5]Evans, "Epidemics and Revolutions," 131.

[6]Robert Evans and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, eds., *The Revolutions in Europe, 1848–1849: From Reform to Reaction* (Oxford, 2002); Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848–1851* (Cambridge, 2005); Dieter Dowe, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, Dieter Langewiesche and Jonathan Sperber, eds., *Europe in 1848. Revolution and Reform* (New York, 2008); Mike Rapport, *1848: Year of Revolution* (London, 2008).

[7]Róbert Hermann, "Revolution and War of Independence," in *A Concise History of Hungary: The History of Hungary from the Early Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. István Gy. Tóth (Budapest, 2005), 381–402.

[8]John D. Sunderland, *Report of the General Board of Health on the Epidemic Cholera of 1848 & 1849* (London, 1850); *Report on the Mortality of Cholera in England, 1848–1849* (London, 1852).

[9]M. Blondel, *Rapport sur les épidémies cholériques de 1832 et de 1849* (Paris, 1850).

[10]Tamás Faragó, "Maramureş and the Cholera (1831–1893)," *Romanian Journal of Population Studies* 2, no. 1 (2008): 33–66, here 47.

[11]Amanda J. Thomas, *The Lambeth Cholera Outbreak of 1848–1849: The Setting, Causes, Course and Aftermath of an Epidemic in London* (Jefferson, 2009); Gary Elliott, *1849: The Cholera Outbreak in Jefferson City* (Charleston, 2021).

[12]Romania: Paul Cernovodeanu, "Epidemia de holeră din 1848 în Principatele dunărene, după rapoartele consulare engleze" ["Cholera Epidemics in the Danubian Principalities in 1848, in the Reports of the English Consulate"], in *Momente din trecutul medicine* [Moments from the Past of Medicine], ed. Gheorghe Brătescu (Bucharest, 1983) 297–317; Norway: *Kolera i Bergen 1848–1849* ["The Cholera in Bergen in 1848–49"] Online: https://www.bergenbyarkiv.no/oppslagsverket/2010/06/02/kolera-i-bergen-1848-1849/ Accessed June 2021; Turkey: Özgür Yilmaz, "1847–1848 Kolera Salgını ve Osmanlı Coğrafyasındaki Etkileri," ["The Cholera Epidemic of 1847–48 and its Effects on the Ottoman Empire"] *Avrasya İncelemeleri Dergisi* 6, no. 1 (2017): 23–55.

[13]Jovin Slavko, *Epidemija kolere u Vojvodini 1848–1849 godine* (Novi Sad, 1987); Lajos Mádai, "Hat nagy kolerajárvány és a halandóság Magyarország dél-dunántúli régiójában a XIX. században," ["Six Major Cholera Epidemics and the Mortality in the South Trans-Danubian Region of Hungary in the 19th Century"] *Demográfia* 33, no. 1–2 (1990): 58–95; Csaba Fazekas, "Egy 'elfelejtett' pandémiáról. Az 1848–49. évi kolerajárvány és a szabadságharc," ["An 'Unforgotten' Pandemic: Cholera Epidemics in 1848–49 and the War of Independence"] in *Társadalomtörténeti tanulmányok* [Social History Studies], ed. Csaba Fazekas (Miskolc, 1996): 300–20; Mihály Bodosi, "Adatok a XIX. század Somogy megyei kolerajárványaihoz" ["Data on the Cholera Pandemics in County Somogy in the 19th Century"] *Somogy megye múltjából* 27 (1996): 113–43; Edina T. Gál, "Kolera a forradalom idején: Az 1848–1849-es kolerajárvány Kolozsváron és környékén" [Cholera in the Age of Revolution: The Cholera

sources (ecclesiastical registers) and present examples of the local administrative measures. The larger questions and directions in this Hungarian secondary literature are similar to other historiographies—the difference lies much more in the relative focus (with cholera pandemic in the background) and the relevant sources for research.

Epidemic Management in Revolution and War in Hungary

The Hungarian press frequently reported in early 1848 that a cholera epidemic as serious as that of 1831 was approaching Europe from the direction of Russia. Up to the beginning of March, the process corresponded to the general social reception related to epidemics—information about severe casualties was treated as news about remote countries—but as the threat became more evident it aroused the interest of the public. On 1 March 1848, a member of the Hungarian Diet suggested that the authorities should take preventive measures against the approaching epidemic.[14] At the same time, however, news of the revolution in Paris arrived in Hungary, and the speech by Lajos Kossuth[15] demanding a constitution started the process leading to the revolutions in Vienna and Pest.[16] No matter how realistic the danger of cholera seemed to be for Hungary, revolutionary events soon pushed worries about it into the background. What is more, the part of the state establishment (the executive power, the central government of the Habsburg Empire) that was urged to take preventive measures against the approaching epidemic, was precisely the part that was transformed by the appointment of the first Prime Minister of Hungary, Lajos Batthyány, and adoption of the new constitution called the "April Laws."[17]

The Batthyány government had a few relatively calm months to lay the foundations of the new political system and yet it faced many difficulties. Amidst administrative restructuring, it nonetheless reacted resolutely to the arrival of cholera. Setting up an independent ministry of health was out of the question at that time. Healthcare instead fell under the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Trade, and Minister Gábor Klauzál[18] constantly monitored the news from the Romanian principalities, Moldova and Wallachia. On 24 May, the minister made an announcement in the press that he had sent a group of three medical doctors to explore the situation in Romanian principalities and the southern border region of the Hungarian Kingdom and Transylvania.[19] Klauzál needed accurate, reliable information, given the exaggerations and misconceptions often observed both in revolutionary and epidemic times.[20] In addition to providing information about the current status of the spread of the epidemic, the text of Klauzál's announcement clearly reveals the attitude of the government related to cholera: on the one hand, the danger was considered to be real and significant, but at the same time, it regarded the need to calm and prepare the public, and above all, to emphasize that no restrictive quarantine measures would be taken, as most important. It stated: "We also declare that if cholera were to occur within our borders, we will avoid any unsuccessful measures that

Pandemic in 1848–49 in Kolozsvár and the Countryside] in *Közösség és identitás a Kárpát-medencében* [Community and Identity in the Carpathian Basin], eds. Csilla Fedinec and Szilvia Szoták (Budapest, 2014), 133–58.

[14]*Pesti Hírlap* [Pest Daily], 5 March 1848, 185.

[15]Lajos Kossuth (1802–94) was a journalist, liberal politician, and leader of the liberal party before the revolution. He was the most important politician in the transition of March and April; later he was the minister of finance in the first Hungarian government, and from October he became the head of the executive power and the political leader of the war of independence. From April 1849 he was the Governor-President of the independent Hungarian state.

[16]Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 164–66; Imre Képessy, "National Modernisation through the Constitutional Revolution of 1848 in Hungary: Pretext and Context," in *Modernisation, National Identity, and Legal Instrumentalism: Studies in Comparative Legal History*, eds. Michał Gałędek and Anna Klimaszewska (London, 2019), ii, 51–68; general history of the Hungarian events in 1848 and 1849: Hermann, "Revolution and War of Independence,"; Rapport, *1848: Year of Revolution*, 140–51, 237–50, 301–14, 365–80.

[17]Robert J. W. Evans, "1848–1849 in the Habsburg Monarchy," in *The Revolutions in Europe, 1848–1849: From Reform to Reaction*, eds. Robert Evans and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann (Oxford, 2002) 181–206, 187–88.

[18]Gábor Klauzál (1804–66) was a liberal politician, Member of Parliament, leader of the liberals of Csongrád County, minister in the first Hungarian government, and followed moderate policy. In the autumn he resigned and retired from politics and did not take part in the war of independence.

[19]*Pesti Hírlap*, 26 May 1848, 477.

[20]Olaf Briese, *Angst in den Zeiten der Cholera: Über kulturelle Ursprünge des Bakteriums* (Berlin, 2003), 172.

would only cause panic and hamper transport as during the last outbreak."[21] At this point, it is important to highlight one of the most important aspects of the 1848 cholera epidemic in Hungary: the majority of contemporaries had personal experience of the 1831 epidemic, which had led to riots. The new and still unsteady government considered it a priority to prevent similar riots in an atmosphere that was already overheated following the abolition of serfdom and the outbreak of revolutions across Europe.

The next important milestone came on 9 July, when Klauzál took new measures on the basis of the report of the doctors, who had returned from their mission.[22] The new measures were intended to prevent restrictive measures; he wrote that travel restrictions would not only give rise to panic or dread but would also hinder trade, indicating that he considered it most important to carry on the normal order of life and preserve social harmony. The minister also warned hospitals and doctors about the importance of preparation, and his measures were also proclaimed by the churches from the pulpit. Leading doctors published articles and sent leaflets to countryside authorities about the nature of cholera and possible therapies.[23] They urged people to have confidence in doctors and recommended treatments in case of symptoms such as brewing tea from medical herbs, rubbing the skin with camphorated distilled spirits, and sweating.[24]

At the same time, during the summer of 1848, several sources indicated that the infection had already been carried into Hungary from the south and southeast, and that by the beginning of October it was spreading in the capital as well.[25] During the autumn, news came from every part of the country about the devastation of cholera, and as sporadic cases were replaced by epidemic-like situations, both morbidity and mortality increased. In September war broke out between Hungary and Austria, and the number of cholera cases kept growing in both armies.[26]

In October, the Batthyány government resigned and a Committee of National Defense led by Lajos Kossuth was formed. It is important to note that Kossuth himself had personal experiences of the 1831 epidemic and its consequences; he had served as a member of the special committee for cholera affairs in Zemplén county, where the riots had been serious.[27] Kossuth's Committee of National Defense was primarily engaged in the organization of the war of self-defense but also took seriously the challenges of the cholera epidemic. On 27 October a National Cholera Committee was set up consisting of medical doctors, led by Dr József Pólya (1802–73), one of the best doctors in Hungary, who had served in 1831 as the chief medical officer of the cholera hospital in Pest. The committee's tasks were protection against the epidemic, providing information, and collecting and continuously assessing the data concerning the spread of cholera. It repeatedly emphasized that a quarantine would not be introduced. In a lengthy newspaper article titled "Notice about the Cholera," the committee's chairman presented the symptoms of the disease and the possible ways of treatment, such as therapies alleviating vomiting and dysentery, airing out living quarters, the importance of a healthy way of life, and refraining from alcohol consumption.[28] The Committee of National Defense and the commanders of the Hungarian army did everything they could against the disease and to support the operation of the civilian and military hospitals; however, it is an exaggeration to say, as István Deák did, that cholera was "handled successfully, and there were no other epidemics."[29] The authorities did avoid widespread panic, but their actions did not significantly reduce the number of victims.

The reactions of the Hungarian authorities corresponded to wider European trends. For example, in Hamburg, where the first significant wave of cholera occurred in autumn 1848, claiming several

[21] *Pesti Hírlap*, 26 May 1848, 477.

[22] *Közlöny* [Official Gazette of Hungarian Government], 15 July 1848, 153.

[23] Orvosi utasítás ["Medical Instructions"] 10 July 1848, in Franciscus Linzbauer, *Codex Sanitario-Medicinalis Hungariae* (Budae, 1861) iii-v, 926–30.

[24] On the spread of medical procedures: Golian, "Possibilities of Studying Epidemics," 70.

[25] *Pesti Hírlap*, 16 October 1848, 1012.

[26] Mádai, "Hat nagy kolerajárvány," 68–69.

[27] István Hőgye, "Report by Lajos Kossuth on the 1831 Cholera Epidemic in Sátoraljaújhely," *Review of Historical Demography* 6 (1990): 7–21.

[28] *Pesti Hírlap*, 6 November 1848, 1044; ibid., 7 November 1848, 1049–50.

[29] István Deák, *The Lawful Revolution: Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians, 1848–1849* (London, 2001), 200.

thousand victims, it was proposed that gathering in public places should be limited for the purpose of containment. The focus was primarily on the prevention of panic, and inhabitants were called upon in posters and notices to avoid cholera with a healthy way of life and by refraining from alcohol consumption, just as in Hungary.[30] Management of the epidemic in European countries essentially took an anti-quarantine approach. In addition to the goal of forestalling panic, this was inspired by the experience of 1831, when it proved impossible to completely isolate infected areas and persons.[31]

In almost all the medical communications of the period there was an attempt to deny or at least downplay the contagious nature of cholera. Hungarian doctors followed this policy as well. The Hungarian doctors' knowledge of the disease and recommendations for epidemic management were exactly the same as those of doctors elsewhere in Europe, for example, the German Ludwig Wilhelm Sachs[32] or Italian Pietro Betti.[33] Although available data indicated the role of water, it was instead commonly emphasized that the disease spread through "bad air." The spread of cholera through bacteria was not known to medical science at that time.[34] There were doctors, otherwise enthusiastic and committed, who even after several decades of research to the contrary, still argued that cholera could emerge anywhere under favorable conditions and in this, the most important role was played by the composition of the soil.[35] The example of Hungary in 1848–49 offers powerful evidence that the later "recognition of the relationship between the infected water and the cholera epidemic represented a turning point in health statistics and epidemiology."[36]

Pressured by the continuously changing war situation, despite its efforts, the National Cholera Committee was not able to coordinate a defense on a national level in the autumn of 1848; its activities were mainly confined to the capitals, Pest-Buda. However, the characteristics of cholera were perhaps best expressed in the opinion of a contemporary journalist. He started by writing about the importance of the therapies proposed by the doctors (taking care not to catch cold, teas made from herbs, warm compresses, sweating), and then admitted that this alone would not eliminate the epidemic. He conceded that there was a very high number of deaths from cholera and then wrote:

> Otherwise, do not believe, dear readers in the countryside, that we are much disturbed by this cholera here. We do not care about it at all, and the inhabitants of our capital read the news about it so apathetically as if they were reading about Jelačić's or Windischgrätz's appointment as a royal commissar. For us, neither is more dangerous than the other, and they are not dreadful at all. We are preparing for war, and we have bigger problems than meditating about death.[37]

From this and similar utterances, the conclusion can be drawn that the devastating cholera epidemic was present in the thinking of contemporaries but only in the background, and not only did the authorities do their best to avoid panic but no significant disturbances arose related to the risk of infection. People's recent experience with cholera, the focus of their attention on politics and war, and the relative success of the authorities' measures combined to ensure that no major panic situation developed.

At the end of November, the extremely sporadic data that were collected about the epidemic showed a decreasing trend. In December, the epidemic curve flattened, and people had good reason to assume that in addition to its other problems, the Hungarian government, moving from Pest to Debrecen (a

[30]Richard J. Evans, *Death in Hamburg: Society and Politics in the Cholera Years* (New York, 2005), 250–51.

[31]Peter Baldwin, *Contagion and the State in Europe, 1830–1930* (Cambridge, 2004), 135; Michael Stolberg, "Public Health and Popular Resistance: Cholera in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 68, no. 2 (1994): 254–77, here 265–67.

[32]Briese, *Angst in den Zeiten der Cholera*, 191.

[33]Stolberg, "Public Health and Popular Resistance," 259–60.

[34]Ajesh Kannadan, "History of the Miasma Theory of Disease," *ESSAI* 16, no 1. (2018): 41–43.

[35]József Nagy, *A cholera Nyitra megyében 1831-től 1874-ig* ["The Cholera in Nyitra County from 1831 to 1874"] (Nyitra, 1876), 74.

[36]Imre Hutás, "Mortality and the Possibilities for Reducing its Current Trends" in *Population and Population Policy in Hungary*, eds. Dávid Bíró, Péter Józan, and Károly Miltényi (Budapest, 1984), 67–80, here 68.

[37]*Kossuth Hírlapja* [Kossuth's Newspaper], 29 October 1848, 463.

town in the eastern part of Hungary), could place less emphasis on monitoring cholera infections going forward. As could be observed in similar pandemics, a "second wave" of the epidemic entered Hungary only later, mirroring the course of the cholera epidemic in other European countries.[38] That is, after a temporary retreat in late 1848, the epidemic became more intensive in several places in the country at the end of May 1849, and at the beginning of June the number of cases and deaths increased—by summer the cholera epidemic was much more serious than the first wave[39] (see Figure 1 and Table 3).

Meanwhile, in spring 1849, the Hungarian army started a counterattack and chased the Austrian troops to the western border in several major battles. On 14 April, the parliament declared the independence of Hungary from the Habsburg Empire. A new, democratic government formed, led by Bertalan Szemere, and Lajos Kossuth became the head of state as a "governor-president of Hungary." Emperor Franz Joseph I asked the Russian Tsar Nicholas I for military assistance, who promised his help on the basis of the Holy Alliance.[40] The Hungarian government moved back to Pest-Buda at the beginning of June, but a month later had to escape again to the southern part of the country, to the town of Szeged. The Hungarian army surrendered to the Russian and Austrian armies, which vastly outnumbered it, on 13 August.[41]

In spite of this, the Hungarian government, although constantly on the move, made an effort to handle the cholera epidemic. Szemere organized the health care system in the Ministry of Interior. The head of the new health care committee became Dr Pál Bugát (1793–1865), who took his task seriously; in the autumn of 1848 he was nominated as the chief physician of the country. As long as he could, in relative peace in Pest for some weeks in June 1849, he tried not only to supervise the hospitals but also collect data related to cholera. It is perhaps revealing that in his only detailed data report, he was able to give data for only a few localities, evidently because he had received reliable data from only those places (see Table 1).

On 18 June 1849, the Ministry of the Interior published its decree entitled *Order Concerning the Cholera,* which basically repeated what had been ordered a year before by Minister Klauzál; it was intended to both inform and reassure the public at the same time.[42] Following this order, new medical instructions were published, and doctors in rural areas were required to prepare similar information sheets concerning the prevention of the disease and the nursing of patients ill with cholera, which were distributed in the press and displayed on street posters.[43] The reassuring words of the authorities were very much needed to keep morale high in the first half of June, when infections reached the level of an epidemic. There were places where the casualties caused by cholera were considered more serious than in 1831,[44] and several reports documenting the deteriorating epidemic situation arrived from the army too.[45] Governor-president Lajos Kossuth himself gained personal experience with the devastation of the epidemic and urged local authorities, doctors, and nurses to enhance their efforts to control it.[46]

[38]Joseph H. Tien, Hendrik N. Poinar, David N. Fisman, and David J.D. Earn, "Herald Waves of Cholera in Nineteenth Century London" *Journal of Royal Society Interface* 58, no. 8 (2011): 756–60, here 758. In England the appearance of the cholera in 1848 seemed a "false alarm" compared with the second wave in 1849. See Christopher Hamlin, *Cholera: The Biography* (Oxford, 2009) 127. About the "second wave" in spring 1849 in Paris: Marc Francke and Matthijs Korevaar, "Housing Markets in a Pandemic: Evidence from Historical Outbreaks," *Journal of Urban Economics* 123 (2021): 1–12, here 4–5.

[39]Mádai, "Hat nagy kolerajárvány," 69–70; Fazekas, "Egy elfelejtett pandémiáról," 306–12.

[40]Eugene Horváth, "Russia and the Hungarian Revolution (1848–49)" *Slavonic and East European Review* 12, no. 36 (1934): 628–45; David Saunders: "A Pyrrhic Victory: The Russian Empire in 1848," in *The Revolutions in Europe, 1848–1849: From Reform to Reaction*, eds. Robert Evans and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann (Oxford, 2002), 135–56, here 137.

[41]Hermann, "Revolution and War of Independence," 399–400.

[42]*Közlöny*, 24 June 1849, 521.

[43]"Choleráról a magyar népnek," ["About Cholera to the Hungarian People"] *Közlöny*, 14 June 1849, 494.

[44]*Közlöny*, 13 June 1849, 490.

[45]*Kossuth Lajos kormányzóelnöki iratai, 1849. április 15. – augusztus* [Governor-President Lajos Kossuth's Papers, 15 April – August], ed. István Barta (Budapest, 1955), 531.

[46]*Kossuth Lajos kormányzóelnöki*, 545. Regarding Kossuth's personal experiences, it should be noted again that in 1831 he led the response to cholera in Zemplén county, and as a contemporary accurately wrote about the pandemic and the riots: "This dark tragedy brought Kossuth from his comparative obscurity. He became the angel of mercy amid the horrors of those scenes. He sought the hamlets where the cholera was the most deadly, and lived under the outspread wing of the Destroyer, almost without repose." P.C. Headley, *The Life of Louis Kossuth, Governor of Hungary* (Auburn, 1852), 19–20.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0067237824000122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

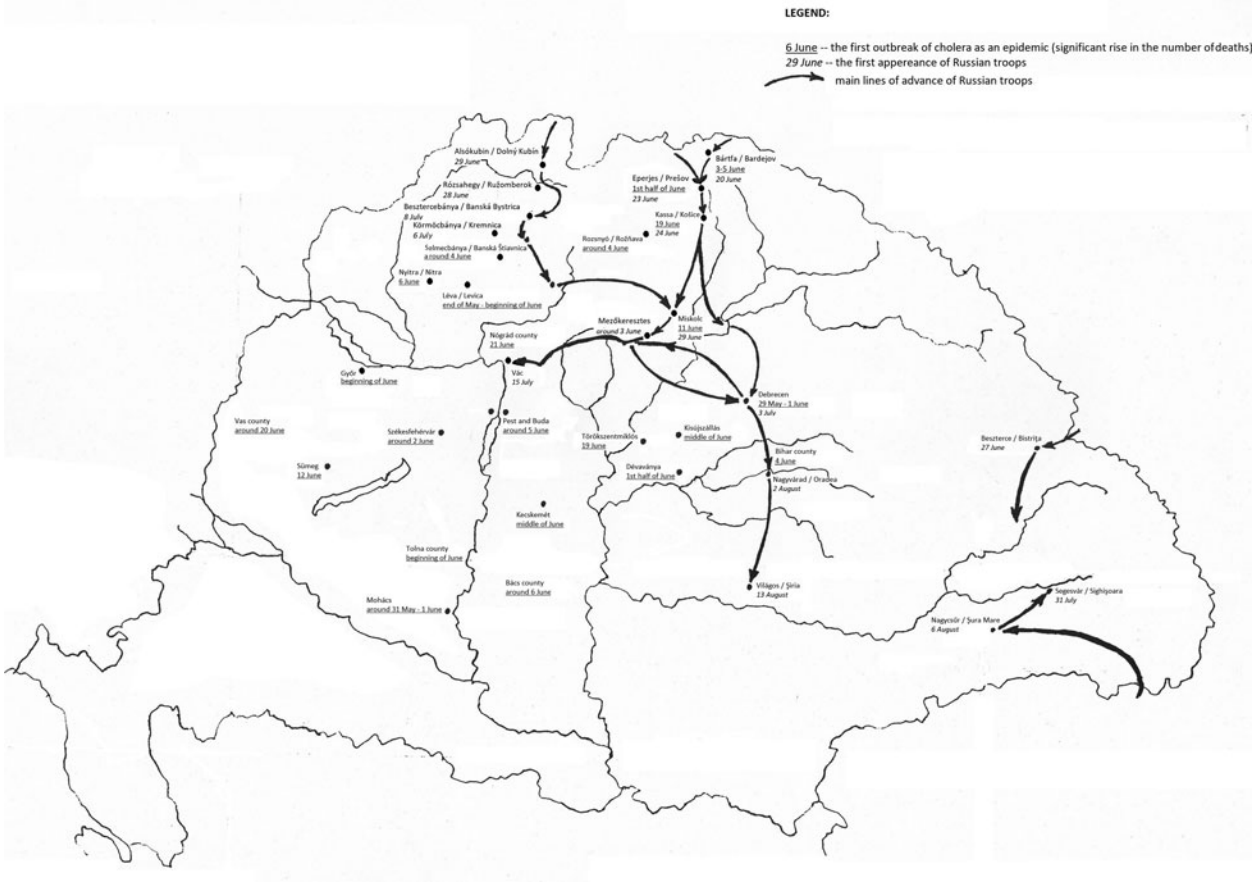

Figure 1. The first outbreak of cholera as a pandemic and the appearance of Russian troops in Hungarian settlements, 1849.[47]

[47]Fazekas, "Egy elfelejtett pandémiáról," 320.

Table 1. Official Report on the Cholera from Some Towns and Counties, at the Beginning of the Second Wave of Epidemics, 23 June 1849[48]

	Cases of Cholera	Healed	Dead	Still Sick	Death Rate
		No. of Persons			%
Towns:					
Pest (Only the Central Hospital)	126	48	52	26	41.27
Selmecbánya (today: Banská Štiavnica, Slovakia)	113	26	59	28	52.21
Debrecen	90	21	62	7	68.89
Counties:					
Fejér	160	52	78	30	48.75
Tolna	187	95	92	—	49.19
All	676	242	343	91	50.74

At this point, we should address a theory often appearing in older literature, namely, that the Russian intervention army brought cholera into the country in 1849.[49] In Russia, the pandemic had severe consequences; according to recent assessments, of all the nineteenth-century epidemics that struck Russia, cholera in 1848–49 claimed the greatest number of victims.[50] The epidemic caused severe devastation in the Russian troops entering Hungary, and this surely aggravated the situation in the areas where they came into contact with the civilian population. But on the whole, the wave of cholera in summer 1849 had spread throughout the country even before the arrival of the Russian troops, and also in those regions which the Russians never entered, so it is justified to conclude that the devastation of the disease in Hungary's territory was not caused by—although certainly aggravated by—the army of the tsar. As Alice Freifeld remarks in moderate style: "A cholera epidemic coincided with the Russian invasion. As the battle visited and revisited areas, cholera spread from the troops to civilians and back again, rendering darker a darkening threat." The epidemic "slowed down the Russian offensive and demoralised the public."[51] My local historical data support this assessment.[52] As a parallel, it is worth recalling the simultaneous events in summer 1849 surrounding the war of independence in the Republic of Venice, which was defeated in August with cholera playing a similar background role.[53] The case of Venice is certainly the closest to that of Hungary: it was a revolutionary war of similar length, the army similarly augmented the spread of cholera, the government tried the same measures, and the epidemic claimed victims of similar magnitude (approximately 1.5 percent of the population).

The severe wave of the epidemic in summer 1849 devastated the country at a time when the implementation of uniform policy decisions had become impossible, as the Hungarian army fought its last major battles against Russia and the Habsburg Empire. As in autumn 1848, the devastations of the epidemic were nonetheless pushed into the background, both in the attention of contemporaries and in the analyses of historians. This occurred despite the fact that high-ranking officials as well as officers—and even a general of the Hungarian army, Mihály Répási—died of cholera.[54] Likewise, well-known public figures died of cholera during this period in other countries, for example, a famous

[48]*Közlöny*, 24 June 1849, 522.

[49]Fazekas, "Egy elfelejtett pandémiáról," 306–12.

[50]Saunders, "A Pyrrhic Victory," 154; John P. Davies, *Russia in the Time of Cholera: Disease under Romanovs and Soviets* (London and New York, 2018), 45.

[51]Alice Freifeld, *Nationalism and the crowd in liberal Hungary, 1848–1914* (Washington, 2000), 91.

[52]Fazekas, "Egy elfelejtett pandémiáról," 307.

[53]Paul Ginsborg, *Daniele Manin and the Venetian Revolution of 1848–49* (Cambridge, 1979), 351–55; Rapport, *1848: Year of Revolution*, 362–65.

[54][György] Klapka, *Memoirs of the War of Independence in Hungary* (London, 1850), ii, 195.

general of the French army, Thomas Robert Bugeaud,[55] and the wife of the leader of Venetian revolution, Daniele Manin.[56] Many cases of important and well-known victims of cholera appeared in the contemporary press and in historical works. The Hungarian examples were well known, but victims of the military events became much more important for the general public.

Estimates of the Number of Victims

One of the most important points of connection between the revolution and war of independence and the cholera epidemic pertains to the number of victims. It is difficult to know precisely how many people died because of the war and the epidemic between spring 1848 and autumn 1849.[57] Hungarian historian Sándor Márki wrote (unfortunately, without referring to his sources) that "the civil war claimed 37,000 deaths in Hungary" (broken down as 24,000 Hungarians and 13,000 Romanians, Serbians, and Croatians), while he indicated that the Austrians had lost over 10,000 people.[58] The Hungarian military historian Gábor Bona later put the number of victims of the military conflicts at a lower figure, about 25,000–30,000 people in Hungary.[59] But there are also estimates—likely exaggerated—that place that the Hungarian and Habsburg military losses each around 50,000.[60]

Based on the death certificates remaining from the present territory of Hungary, demographer Lajos Mádai measured about 140,000 extra deaths in 1848–49 compared to the average in the years 1845–47, in the time preceding the cholera epidemic, of which at least 100,000–120,000 could be connected to the disease.[61] In accordance with this, and on the basis of my own similar calculations made with data from available records, the number of cholera victims can be estimated to be double this, about 200,000–250,000 people within the entire territory of Hungary at that time.[62] Surely, it is no exaggeration that in autumn 1848 and in summer 1849, the epidemic claimed at least as many as or perhaps slightly fewer victims than the cholera epidemic in 1831.[63] Just to compare: deaths from cholera in England were recorded as 1,934, in 1848 and 53,293 in 1849 (for a total of 55,227); of these victims more than 14,000 died in London. A further 19,000 or so died of "diarrhoea."[64] The difference between England and Hungary can be explained by better medical care and education, and by the fact that the population movements (e.g., of refugees) triggered by the war in Hungary exacerbated the epidemic's consequences.

Regarding the comparison of military losses against deaths caused by cholera, the currently known Russian casualty data, which may be accepted as precise, serves as a guideline. (I should note that these only took military losses into account, not civilian victims.) According to the records, a total of 856 soldiers died in the tsar's army due to combat, whereas 7,819 soldiers died of cholera from a total of 20,200 sick, for a death rate of 38.7 percent.[65] The same source mentions another 8,735 Russian soldiers as suffering from other diseases, of whom 3,209 eventually died. Later publications considered these men to have had cholera too.[66] Official statistics give a much lower number for the loss of Russian soldiers due to cholera than the estimations of 20,000–30,000 by later historians.[67] In any

[55]Chrisopher Guyver, *The Second French Republic, 1848–1852: A Political Reinterpretation* (London, 2016), 146.

[56]Ginsborg, *Daniele Manin and the Venetian Revolution*, 377.

[57]Deak, *The Lawful Revolution*, 329. Many thanks to Róbert Hermann, a military historian in Hungary, who helped me to write the following paragraph.

[58]Sándor Márki and Gusztáv Beksics, *A modern Magyarország (1848–1896)* [The Modern Hungary (1848–1896)] (Budapest, 1898), 393–94.

[59]Mádai, "Hat nagy kolerajárvány," 69.

[60]Deak, *The Lawful Revolution*, 329.

[61]Mádai, "Hat nagy kolerajárvány," 71.

[62]Fazekas, "Egy elfelejtett pandémiáról," 307.

[63]Őri, *Demographic patterns*, 26–28.

[64]*Report on the Mortality of Cholera*, ii, 1, 5. The scale of losses was similar in Paris: Francke and Korevaar, "Housing Markets in a Pandemic," 5.

[65]H. v. n. [Menkov], *Bericht über die Kriegsoperationen der russischen Truppen gegen die ungarischen Rebellen im Jahre 1849* (Berlin, 1851), iii, 135. The total number of Russian soldiers sent by Tsar Nicolas I was about 200,000, whereas the Hungarian and Austrian armies each had 170,000 men.

[66]Rudolf Kiszling, *Die Revolution im Kaisertum Österreich, 1848–1849* (Wien, 1948), 283; Deak, *The Lawful Revolution*, 329.

[67]Freifeld, *Nationalism and the crowd*, 91.

Table 2. Sporadic Data from Hungarian Towns About Cholera Victims from Ecclesiastical Registers, 1849[68]

	No. of Deaths Caused by Cholera	No. of Inhabitants	Mortality Rate (‰)
Pest	1,974	86,800	16.72
Buda		31,245	
Szeged	~800–1,000	33,000	24.24
Székesfehérvár	~350	20,670	14.07
Nyitra (Today: Nitra, Slovakia)	122	5,500	22.18

event, the difference between those who died due to military action and those who died of cholera is remarkable.

The number of victims in Hungary can only be estimated on the basis of the data in the death records, but this is made difficult by the fact that at that time some religious denominations kept no records and that whatever records did exist do not survive.[69] Furthermore, some parsons did not record the cause of death, or it may be assumed that they recorded another cause for victims of cholera. Case studies suggest that the number of victims indicated as having died of cholera only made up a fragment of the actual number. For example, in Pest-Buda, although the annual statistics for 1848 contain 644 cholera deaths,[70] a single official report between 12 October and 25 November 1848 registered 443 cases just for Buda,[71] which had far fewer inhabitants than Pest. The summaries made about individual cities also confirm that in 1848, and especially in 1849, the epidemic had very serious consequences in Hungary (see Table 2). The severity of the epidemic at the end of the summer of 1849 is reinforced by the fact that, according to some data, cholera claimed about 400 victims among the refugees who fled to Turkey after the defeat of the war of independence.[72]

The total number of reported deaths in 1849 in Pest and Buda was 10,111,[73] which means that about every fifth death was caused by cholera, accounting for 1,974 persons. Data are available about only one county (Nyitra), and it shows a very high rate of mortality. Based on the limited statistics of ecclesiastical registers, it shows 6,186 cholera deaths in a region with 278,460 inhabitants,[74] for a mortality rate of 22.21.[75] In the case of the town of Miskolc, no data were available for about one-third of the population: Roman Catholics did not register the cause of death, while the death registers (*matriculas*) of the Greek Orthodox and Jewish communities are missing (see Table 3). The number of local inhabitants of Miskolc was 26,634 in the mid-nineteenth century. There are statistics only from Protestant (Calvinist and Lutheran) and Greek Catholic churches, which represented about two-thirds (67 percent) of the local population. If we take the total reported 215 cholera deaths for about 17,844 people and assume a similar rate for the missing (Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Jewish) denominations, that comes to an additional 106 estimated dead by cholera. Based on these estimates, the town of Miskolc had approximately 321 deaths from cholera in 1849, with a mortality rate of 12.05.

[68]Fazekas, "Egy elfelejtett pandémiáról," 318; Nagy, *A cholera Nyitra megyében,* 46–47.

[69]Péter Őri, *Demographic Patterns and Transitions in 18–20th century Hungary. County Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun in the late 18th and early 20th Centuries*, Working Papers on Population, Family and Welfare 10, (Budapest, 2007), 8; Golian, "Possibilities of Studying Epidemics," 63.

[70]Jenő Pallós, *Budapest 1848/49-ben* [Budapest in 1848–49], (Budapest, 1950), 61.

[71]*Közlöny*, 5 December 1848, 840.

[72]Headley, *The Life of Louis Kossuth*, 218.

[73]Pallós, *Budapest*, 61–62.

[74]Nagy, *A cholera Nyitra megyében*, 47.

[75]Mortality rates are typically expressed in terms of deaths per 1,000 individuals per year. For instance, this mortality rate of 22.21 indicates that for every 1,000 individuals, approximately 22.21 died in the given year. Expressed in terms of the entire population this comes to 0.2221 percent.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0067237824000122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 3. An Example of Cholera Victims from Different Ecclesiastical Registers: The Town Of Miskolc, 1849[76]

	1.	*1a.*	2.	*2a.*	3.	*3a.*	4.	*4a.*	5.	*5a.*	6.	7.	8.	*8a.*
January	64		11		2		23		20				120	
February	49		3				22		13				87	
March	42		9				23		9				83	
April	51		6		2		21		11				91	
May	27	*1*	7		2	*1*	21		3				60	*2*
June	70	*21*	10	*3*	5	*2*	51		5				141	*26*
July	114	*69*	28	*24*	3	*2*	71		32				248	*95*
August	131	*56*	34	*20*	1		51		43				260	*76*
September	75	*12*	12	*4*	3		16		20				126	*16*
October	42		5				12		11				70	
November	32		7				14		11				64	
December	43		3		1		12		13				72	
All	740	*159*	135	*51*	19	*5*	337	*?*	191	*?*	?	?	1,422	*215*

Death registers: (1) Calvinist Church; (2) Lutheran Church, (3) Greek Catholic Church, (4)–(5) Roman Catholic parishes (without mentioning the causes of death), (6) Greek Orthodox Church, (7) Israelites, and (8) Total. 1a, 2a, 3a, 4a, 5a, and 8a were registered as "death caused by cholera" from the concerning church and total.

[76]Fazekas, "Egy elfelejtett pandémiáról," 318.

Specific Features of the Cholera Pandemic in Hungary

In the following, I discuss other connections between the Hungarian war of independence and the cholera epidemic not presented elsewhere or presented in another form. As has been mentioned, during 1848–49, one cannot speak about an administrative system controlling the whole territory of the country. When cholera reached Hungary as a severe epidemic at the end of the summer and in the autumn of 1848, the Batthyány government and later the Committee of National Defense could no longer control parts of the country occupied by enemy troops, and the administrative structures were even more severely fragmented in late spring and summer in 1849. One special circumstance is that the continuously changing frontlines formed by the opposing armies created a kind of quarantine situation, as the civilian population could not continue their usual trade or travel across them, thereby ostensibly decreasing the disease's spread. At the same time, the armies acted as closed communities with a higher risk of infection, which could have easily passed on to the civilian population. However, local epidemic history data suggest that the spread of cholera in Hungary did not follow the marching routes of different armies, not even those of the Russians, who were most severely infected by the disease. Analyzing the spread of the epidemic and the movements of armies, we see that the opposite is true: cholera "preceded" the Russian army, which means that the epidemic was more likely to be explained by natural factors.[77] In this respect the case of Hungary corresponds to its foreign counterparts, where the infection spread more quickly along "natural features," primarily along waterways.[78] In the regions unaffected by military events, no special role in the spread of cholera may be attributed to trade activities, for example, fairs.[79] Those fleeing because of the soldiers, paramilitary units, and ethnic conflicts—that is, the internal migration caused by the regions having become battlefields—played a less spectacular and obvious role, but still a more significant one than the armies.[80] The important role of migration in the spread of the epidemic is also found in Western European counterparts.[81]

On the basis of the data available from local history research and analyses of death records, it can be assumed that although there were regions stricken by cholera to greater or lesser degrees, cases were present all over the country in the same proportion, and consequently deaths peaked in October and November 1848 and in June and July 1849.[82] However, the public perception that the devastation of the cholera was worse in the crowded and unhealthy suburbs of the cities, which still had no sewer systems, is also a fact.[83] It should be remarked, however, that there was also a very significant number of victims among the rural population; in the countryside, there was a good chance that infection would occur through wells in common use, even if they would claim fewer victims.[84] In the villages, the availability of medical assistance was more limited, while the developmental level of the cities of Hungary fell behind that of Western European metropolises in the mid-nineteenth century. That is, the severity of the epidemic in crowded cities was not necessarily greater than in villages, and the chances of survival were not necessarily better in the countryside.[85]

[77]Gál, "Kolera a forradalom idején," 154.

[78]Thomas, *The Lambeth Cholera Outbreak*, 40–41; Amanda J. Thomas, *Cholera: The Victorian Plague* (Burnsley, 2015), 110; Frank M. Snowden, *Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present* (New Haven, 2020), 209–11.

[79]Gál, "Kolera a forradalom idején," 152–54.

[80]Gál, "Kolera a forradalom idején," 150–51.

[81]Thomas, *Cholera: The Victorian Plague*, 46; Maurice Agulhon, *The Republican Experiment, 1848–1852* (Cambridge, 1993), 115; Ginsborg, *Daniele Manin and the Venetian Revolution*, 359.

[82]Slavko, *Epidemija kolere;* Fazekas, "Egy elfelejtett pandémiáról," 312, 318; Bodosi, "Adatok a XIX. század," 122–28; Gál, "Kolera a forradalom idején," 139–47; Őri, *Demographic patterns*, 26–28.

[83]Theodore H. Tulchinsky, "John Snow, Cholera, the Broad Street Pump; Waterborne Diseases Then and Now" in *Case Studies in Public Health*, eds. Theodore H. Tulchinsky and M. Joan Bickford (London, 2018), 77–99.

[84]Ole J. Benedictow, "Morbidity in Historical Plague Epidemics," *Population Studies* 41, no. 3 (1987): 401–31; Romola J. Davenport and Max Satchell and Leigh M.W. Shaw-Taylor, "Cholera as a 'Sanitary Test' of British Cities, 1831–1866," *The History of the Family* 24, no. 2 (2019): 404–38. https://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6582458/. Accessed June 2021.

[85]Francke and Korevaar, "Housing Markets in a Pandemic," 9.

Cholera in Political Rhetoric

The appearance of the cholera epidemic also influenced political thinking in Hungary. In this it followed patterns formulated in other countries. In 1848, some French conservatives drew a parallel between the devastation of cholera and the wave of revolutions in Europe and the spread of new ideas.[86] The epidemic, appearing simultaneously with the Hungarian revolution, led to similar assessments. At first, when there was only news about a cholera epidemic raging in Russia and the Near East, it only encouraged humorous remarks. For example, the journalist Imre Vahot wrote that he had received news of the threat of cholera from Russia, which he considered to be the synonym of tyranny, and therefore he proclaimed that "we should also send them an epidemic in return, and this will be the infectious epidemic of freedom, giving life instead of death."[87] When the threat of epidemic became reality in Hungary during the time of revolution and war, cholera was depicted as one of the enemies threatening Hungary, along with the Austrian troops and the insurgents of non-Hungarian nationalities.[88] After the intervention by Nicholas I, even Lajos Kossuth wanted to exploit cholera in political propaganda, and on 14 July, 1849, in his proclamation *To the Nation*, he labelled the cholera raging in the Russian army the intervention of God, supporting the Hungarians, who represented the right cause.[89] Kossuth's speech can be read as a desperate attempt to keep public morale high, calling the Hungarian cause one of miraculous importance and the epidemic a divine tool in its service.[90]

Cholera and the Modernization of Infrastructure

The events of the Hungarian revolution and war of independence pushed the raging cholera epidemic into the background with wide-ranging consequences. In contrast to Western European states, the cholera of 1848–49 in Hungary did not result in the modernization of the health system and the construction of new sewer systems. In the large cities of England and France, these processes started after health experts drew lessons from cholera.[91] The disease also affected building regulations concerning the distance between buildings and the construction of toilets.[92] This too was the case within the more industrialized provinces of the Habsburg Empire, for example in the Moravian city of Märisch-Schönberg (today Šumperk in the Czech Republic), where the construction of municipal sewer systems started immediately after the cholera epidemics.[93] In Hungary, this happened only later, especially after the 1867 Compromise and the unification of Pest, Buda, and Óbuda as Budapest in 1873.[94]

Comparisons of 1831 and 1848–49

It is remarkable that the cholera epidemics of the nineteenth century often coincided with several large-scale pivotal events of European history: in 1830–31, the July Revolution in France and the Polish war of independence; in 1848–49, a European revolutionary wave across the German lands and Italian states; in 1854–55, the Crimean War; and in 1866 the Prussian-Austrian war.[95] Of course, there were also years that displayed no such parallels, for example, in the last, major cholera pandemic

[86]Evans, "Epidemics and Revolutions," 135; Guyver, *The Second French Republic*, 146.
[87]*Pesti Divatlap* [Pest Fashion News], 15 April 1848, 457.
[88]*Vasárnapi Újság* [Sunday Newspaper], 3 September 1848, 145–46.
[89]*Kossuth Lajos kormányzóelnöki*, 716.
[90]Deak, *The Lawful Revolution*, 292–93.
[91]Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford, 1996), 776–77.
[92]Thomas, *Cholera: The Victorian Plague*, 67; Hamlin, *Cholera*, 11; Stolberg, "Public Health and Popular Resistance," 255; Snowden, *Epidemics and Society*, 194.
[93]Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 350; Paul Bingham, Neville Q. Verlander, and M.J. Cheal, "John Snow, William Farr and the 1849 Outbreak of Cholera that Affected London: A Reworking of the Data Highlights the Importance of the Water Supply," *Public Health* 118, no. 6 (2004): 387–94.
[94]Endre Juhász, Katalin Kiss, Miklós Patzinger, and Károly Kovács, "History of Budapest Sanitation and Wastewater Treatment," in *12th IWA Specialised Conference on Design, Operation and Economics of Large Wastewater Treatment Plants* (Prague, 2015), 49–56.
[95]Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 249.

in 1872–73. With respect to the Hungarian 1848–49 period, it is still worth whether the cholera epidemic had an effect on the thinking and mobilization of society.

This is an interesting question because the devastation of the cholera in 1831 led to riots with severe consequences, including mass hysteria in the northeastern part of Hungary and in the capital Pest-Buda.[96] In Marxist historiography, it was a frequent theorem that there was an "anti-feudal," "medieval-type" peasant's revolt in 1831.[97] In truth, the aggressive crowds ravaging the mansions of landlords were motivated by the panic caused by cholera in 1831 but this could not be regarded as a revolution or organized political action, as it was in 1848. Disasters or demographic crises are not automatically considered catalysts for rapid social and political changes. The 1831 "cholera revolt" and the 1848 revolution cannot be regarded to be similar. The former can be regarded as riots breaking out spontaneously out of collective panic and with no objectives, whereas the latter was a series of events proclaiming political objectives, consciously organized and attempting to defend the achievements of the political revolution (the "April Laws") with political and military devices.[98] In the history of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century resistance of the Hungarian peasantry, the 1831 "cholera revolt" was an exception, and in other cases the resistance remained within a traditional framework: "regionally limited, usually not involving an exaggerated intensity of violence."[99]

With respect to 1848–49, it is worth asking whether one can speak about the mobilizing effect of the cholera epidemic that claimed thousands of victims, either in general or specifically in the case of Hungary. The potential for correlation is enhanced because collective feelings of poverty, vulnerability, and hopelessness may often give rise to reactions from moment to moment motivated by despair, especially amidst the shock of an incurable epidemic.[100] Across Europe, this has tended to manifest itself in riots and movements intending to radically improve conditions and extend rights.[101] This is mainly due to the fact that the industrial revolution and modernization caused fundamental social changes in which individuals reached different levels of rights.[102] Furthermore, it is also evident that the opinion of crowds may change concerning social and political issues, such as the manner of exercising power and the range of those competent to do so. Other questions may arise about whether epidemics are really the punishment of God for humankind's sins, as was often stated at the time, and it can be concluded that "the unclear correlation between sin and cholera helped many rethink this idea."[103] Epidemics are capable of bringing suppressed conflicts to the surface so that their role may become more important at a time of social and political upheaval.[104] But it should be added that this does not happen unconditionally or necessarily.

Some contemporaries and historians thought it could not be "an accident that the years of civil revolt in France (1830–32, 1848–50) coincided with peaks of cholera epidemics in the summers,"[105]

[96]Carlile A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire, 1790–1918* (London, 1968), 243; Deak, *The Lawful Revolution*, 21–22; Freifeld, *Nationalism and the Crowd*, 35–36.

[97]László Kósa, "The Age of Emergent Bourgeois Society, from the late 18th century to 1920. I. Everyday Culture," in *A Cultural History of Hungary: In the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. László Kósa (Budapest, 2000), 60–100, here 67.

[98]A good comparison for the peasant movements of 1831 and 1848: Robert W. Gray, "Bringing the Law Back in: Land, Law and the Hungarian Peasantry before 1848," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 91, no. 3. (2013): 511–34, here 511–12.

[99]Wolfgang Höpken, "The Agrarian Question in Southeastern Europe during the Revolution of 1848/49," in *Europe in 1848. Revolution and Reform,* eds. Dieter Dowe, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, Dieter Langewiesche, and Jonathan Sperber (New York, 2008), 443–74, here 446–47.

[100]Remi Jedwab, Amjad M. Khan, Jason Russ, and Esha D. Zaveri, "Epidemics, Pandemics, and Social Conflict: Lessons from the Past and Possible Scenarios for COVID-19," *World Development* 147, (2021): 1–16; Rebecca Cordell, Reed M. Wood, and Thorin M. Wright, "Disease and Dissent: Epidemics as a Catalyst for Social Unrest," *Global Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (2023): 1–13.

[101]Thomas, *The Lambeth Cholera Outbreak*, 224.

[102]Thomas, *Cholera: The Victorian Plague*, 99–100.

[103]Beth Torgerson, *Reading the Brontë Body: Disease, Desire and the Constraints of Culture* (New York, 2005) 42. About the importance of the cholera as a symptom of God's punishment: Hamlin, *Cholera*, 88; in details: R.J. Morris, "Religion and Medicine: The Cholera: Pamphlets of Oxford, 1832, 1849 and 1854," *Medical History* 19, no. 3 (1975): 256–70, here 258, 265.

[104]Evans, "Epidemics and Revolutions," 126, 132.

[105]Gerald Weissmann, "Daumier and the Deer Tick," *Hospital Practice* 24, no. 5 (1989): 181–200, here 186; Sperber, *The European Revolutions*, 109.

and this viewpoint is closely connected to the classic analyses of Louis Chevalier, who suggested that cholera might be seen as one of several "potentially revolution-precipitating events."[106] Alexis de Tocqueville, seeing the migration from Paris to the countryside and the urban riots, evaluated the events of 1848 as symptoms of the crisis of the Second Republic.[107] But in this respect, contemporary opinions, which were apt to turn simultaneously occurring events into causal relationships, should be viewed critically and cannot be regarded as generally typical.[108] One factor that brings a direct link between the cholera epidemic and revolutions into question is that the cholera appeared in Central Europe in early summer of 1848 and severely attacked in autumn, while most of the revolutionary events had taken place in the spring, especially in February and March.[109] The situation in Hungary was the same. A characteristic example of this may be the case of Hamburg, where large demonstrations occurred in August but the cholera only broke out as an epidemic in September.[110] Recent literature also shows clearly that the revolutions in Paris also preceded the cholera epidemics, not only in 1848 but as early as 1830.[111] Because revolution preceded the cholera epidemic in France, as it did in Hungary, there was no question in Paris or in Pest-Buda whether a quarantine would be imposed—debate over the need for a quarantine was eclipsed by revolution.[112]

In the emergence of the social crisis preceding revolutions or riots, a greater role must have been played by the miserable harvests in 1845 and 1846 and the resulting famine, setback in trade, and financial crisis. Undoubtedly, contrary to the "historians' hindsight" at this time, being desperate, many people may have felt the urge to bring about a drastic change in their living conditions.[113] The history of the great Irish famine is relatively well known; the situation in other European countries was serious, but not so catastrophic. In German and French territories during 1846 and 1847 hundreds of potato riots happened and were broken up with violence by the police and army. However, as Jonathan Sperber points out, there was a better harvest in 1847, food prices fell, and the number of food riots was considerably reduced not only by actions taken by law enforcement forces but also by measures taken by administration, including the opening of army storehouses and the prohibition of food exports.[114] Sperber summarizes: "The 1848 revolution was not a glorified bread riot, a mindless reflex of high food prices; in fact, the revolution began when these prices were falling from moderate levels. However, the wretched harvests of 1845 and 1846 were a major indirect cause of the revolution."[115] Furthermore, the bad harvest could have contributed latently—even in the collective mind—to the later demand for radical social changes in Hungary, such as the liberation of serfs in spring 1848.

But all this was mostly independent of the later cholera epidemic. Therefore, it is rather worth investigating the questions posed by Richard J. Evans, probably the scholar who has dealt most thoroughly with the connections between revolution and cholera,[116] also with respect to Hungary. He asks: "Did cholera epidemics play a part in the major political upheavals of the nineteenth century—for example, the revolutions of 1830 and 1848?"[117] In case of the 1848–49 revolution of Hungary the available data does not suggest a definitive answer either way. In 1831, the situation was crucially different, and the cholera epidemic played a role in contemporaries recognizing the necessity for large-scale social

[106]Chevalier, *Le choléra,* quoted by Hamlin, *Cholera*, 11; see: Briggs, "Cholera and Society," 95.
[107]Weissmann, "Daumier and the Deer Tick," 186; Rapport, *1848: Year of Revolution*, 387–88.
[108]Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years*, 8.
[109]Evans, "Epidemics and Revolutions," 135.
[110]Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 250–51.
[111]Francke and Korevaar, "Housing Markets in a Pandemic," 2, 6.
[112]Baldwin, *Contagion and the State*, 126.
[113]Sperber, *The European Revolutions*, 109.
[114]Sperber, *The European Revolutions*, 110; Jan C. Zadoks, "The Potato Murrain on the European Continent and the Revolutions of 1848," *Potato Research* 51, no. 1 (2008): 5–45.
[115]Sperber, *The European Revolutions*, 111; Zoltán Fónagy, "Hungarian Economy and Society between 1790 and 1848," in *A Concise History of Hungary: The History of Hungary from the Early Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. István Gy. Tóth (Budapest, 2005), 341–56, here 348.
[116]Evans, "Epidemics and Revolutions," 127.
[117]Evans, "Epidemics and Revolutions," 127.

reforms and the need for and importance of serf liberation in Hungary. As one of the greatest statesmen and reformers, István Széchenyi, clearly explained: "The cholera . . . will have had some extremely good consequences, for it is impossible that it should not have aroused in many people at least a thirst for improvement . . . . The ancient Constitution is creaking with a loud noise that will be heard by even the infatuated anti-reformists and obstructers of the march of Time."[118]

Evans also asked, "did people blame the state for outbreaks of cholera, and did this lead to any changes in state policy or variations of approach from country to country?" In the case of Hungary in 1848–49, this was not what happened. Apart from some criticism of local authorities for their slowness in reacting to the epidemic, no manifestation of large-scale dissatisfaction was recorded during 1848–49. Against the background of the general history of the revolution and war of independence, several cases of local riots are known; these riots often emerged from disputes over the meaning of the liberation of serfs, and we can read sporadic news about peasants arbitrarily confiscating lands and forests in spring and summer 1848 from many regions of the country.[119] The most severe conflicts involving deaths were motivated by ethnic confrontations, especially in Transylvania and the southern part of the country.[120] It is right in the case of Hungary, that "the fear of a jacquerie—an uncontrollable, unfathomable, peasant uprising against landlords, government officials and other figures of hate—hastened the abolition of servile status";[121] there were far fewer riots arising only from social causes among the peasants,[122] but especially in regions of mixed nationality, a combination of ethnic and social tensions was common, for example between Hungarian landlords and Romanian peasants in Transylvania.[123] At most, misunderstandings or excessive demands resulted in actions involving smaller crowds of people but these were insignificant in the wider history of 1848–49.[124] During the war of independence the peasantry of different nationalities was mobilized more by fear of ethnic conflicts. By June 1848, the Hungarian government had mostly succeeded in suppressing sporadic peasant movements,[125] which means that dissatisfaction because of the epidemic could not have played any role in them, given that cholera had hardly entered the country at that time. The situation was the same concerning the antisemitic pogroms that broke out in some towns in spring 1848.[126]

As has been mentioned, in an atmosphere already tense, the authorities of the Hungarian state in 1848 opted for the strategy of almost "total inaction" in the face of cholera. That is, they refrained from taking any measures potentially capable of causing panic or limiting free movement and a free way of life, but they did make an effort to inform the population and ensure the operation of the health care services.[127] The absence of cholera panic was partly due to this but to a greater extent—in my opinion—to the fact that the population had collective knowledge from 1831; thus, they knew that it was a serious disease but they were also aware that in spite of the large number of casualties, it was not the beginning of the apocalypse.[128] The "laissez-faire" policy from authorities in Western European and Hungarian examples arose from the same two roots: contemporaries' common knowledge from 1831 not only about the nature of cholera, but the inefficiency of quarantines; and the authorities'

[118]Széchenyi's private letter was quoted and translated: István Bartha, "István Széchenyi," *Acta Historica* 7, no.1–2. (1960): 63–102, here 73.

[119]Höpken, "The Agrarian Question," 450–51.

[120]"While the Magyars were united in their will to defend the complete autonomy, if not sovereignty, of Hungary against Habsburg power, they were no less resolved to suppress the rising of the non-Magyar nationalities in the country." Robert A. Kann and Zdeněk V. David, *The Peoples of the Eastern Habsburg Lands, 1526–1918* (Seattle, 1984), 345; Rapport, *1848: Year of Revolution*, 275; György Spira, *The Nationality Issue in the Hungary of 1848–49*, trans. Zsuzsa Béres (Budapest, 1992), 61–107; Ambrus Miskolczy, "Transylvania in the Revolution and the War of Independence (1848–1849)," in *History of Transylvania*, ed. Béla Köpeczi (New York, 2002), 220–330, 312–18.

[121]Rapport, *1848: Year of Revolution*, 270.

[122]István Orosz, "Peasant Emancipation and After-effects," in *Hungarian Agrarian Society from the Emancipation of Serfs (1848) to the Reprivatization of Land (1998)*, ed. Péter Gunst (New York, 1998), 53–97, here 65.

[123]Höpken, "The Agrarian Question," 452–56.

[124]Freifeld, *Nationalism and the crowd*, 36, 78.

[125]Rapport, *1848: Year of Revolution*, 274.

[126]Deak, *The Lawful Revolution*, 86; Rapport, *1848: Year of Revolution*, 172–74.

[127]Evans, "Epidemics and Revolutions," 140–41.

[128]See above, note 35.

fear of the unintended consequences at a time of revolution.[129] The social tension caused by cholera was far from reaching the same level in Europe as in 1831, and this was independent of the mortality rate. As mentioned above, the epidemic in Hungary in 1848–49 was approximately as severe as in 1831. In England, the number of victims was much higher, about twice as high as before, yet it caused much less sense of social crisis.[130] Samuel Kline Cohn writes that given the

> high rate of cholera cases and absence of rioting, together with the infrequency of rioting during Europe's next cholera wave, 1848–49, when case numbers and mortalities reached their apex in European history . . . , one might speculate that cholera severity and rioting were inversely related. However, no correlation between the two seems evident.[131]

The latter remark is very important as there is no direct correlation between the severity of the course of the epidemic, with its increase in mortality, and the level of panic reactions in the wider population. This is proven by the fact that in the last great cholera epidemic in 1872–73, the loss of lives was similar to or even greater than that of former pandemics. Evans also found that in 1848, cholera was only one of the sources of social tension; what is more, these factors were not necessarily interrelated.[132] If cholera had any effect in the late phase of the Hungarian war of independence, it was not to urge people to riot but to the contrary, its demoralizing effect caused passivity.[133] Some foreign contemporaries also felt this and had the unfounded fear that due to cholera, mass support for the revolution might decrease.[134]

The relationship between social unrest in the wake of the revolution and cholera is worth comparing in Hungary and France. Catherine J. Kudlick, comparing the French events of 1831 with 1848–49, concludes that the latter provoked much less attention and reaction from society, which cannot be explained by the development of medical knowledge (this was exactly the situation in Hungary). In France, it was closely linked to the social structure and revolutionary traditions.[135] In the case of Hungary, other factors led to the same phenomenon. The country did not yet have the poor suburban districts populated by industrial workers that were more severely affected by cholera and were also the starting point for riots in other states. In Hungary, the peasantry made up the majority of society, and the political elite was made up of the nobility, who included many liberals. In the spring of 1848, by securing the emancipation of the serfs, they succeeded in preventing the peasant masses from becoming the basis for riots that could also be triggered by cholera. The social issues that concerned the masses of poor people in the suburbs of Western Europe (cleaner streets, better housing, sewage disposal), for example in England,[136] were still largely unknown in Hungary.

Conclusion

To sum up, the cholera epidemic raging in the background of the revolution and war of independence had fewer and less decisive points of connection with the political, social, and military events in Hungary than one might think. Based on all this, it can be concluded that in 1848–49, cholera spread and claimed victims in Hungary similarly as in those regions of Europe that were not affected or were less affected by long-lasting social and political changes. That is, cholera contributed to the increase of deaths and the change of political thinking, but not in a fundamental or decisive way.

Even if there had not been a war at the time of the cholera outbreak, the state administration, having had the experience of the 1831 epidemic, would likely not have ordered travel restrictions or

[129]Stolberg, "Public Health and Popular Resistance," 259, 276.
[130]Briggs, *Cholera and Society*, 85; Hamlin, *Cholera*, 55.
[131]Cohn, "Cholera revolts," 168.
[132]Evans, "Epidemics and Revolutions," 135.
[133]Gál, "Kolera a forradalom idején," 150–51.
[134]Rapport, *1848: Year of Revolution*, 388.
[135]Catherine J. Kudlick, *Cholera in Post-Revolutionary Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1996), 31–64, 176–219. Quoted by John Aberth, *Plagues in World History* (Lanham, 2011), 103–4.
[136]Briggs, "Cholera and Society," 86; Snowden, *Epidemics and Society*, 194.

quarantine, or at most, would have ordered them only in the centers of severe infection. At the same time, the government would have been able to follow and document the progress of the epidemic with state-of-the-art preventive measures and could have attempted to react to the events with the further development of the health service system and communications. With its experience of cholera epidemics, the elaboration of the legal regulations concerning public health and the construction of urban utilities, which actually happened in Hungary on a considerable scale not after the 1848–49 but only following the 1872–73 cholera epidemic, would surely have started earlier.[137] This leads to another conclusion: the cholera epidemic was an important but only background phenomenon in the Hungarian history of the years 1848–49. It had no fundamental or activating effect on the battles of the war of independence, political decisions, or public sentiments. In other areas of Europe that experienced revolutionary wars, the same "cholera as a background actor" can be observed.[138] However, it certainly exerted an influence on events in two aspects: first, it considerably slowed the movement in Hungary of the Russian intervention force, giving a partial explanation for why military actions in 1849 continued for another two months despite the Russian army having entered the country in mid-June.[139] Additionally, it contributed to demoralizing the hinterland, reducing Hungarian society's faith in the success of the war of independence and enhancing the feeling of defeat that was experienced in late summer and in autumn 1849.

[137]Kósa, "The Age of Emergent Bourgeois Society," 63–64.
[138]Briese, *Angst in den Zeiten der Cholera*, 204.
[139]Deak, *The Lawful Revolution*, 305, 318.

Cite this article: Fazekas C (2024). Revolution, War, and Cholera in 1848–49: The Case of Hungary. *Austrian History Yearbook* 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0067237824000122