

## **Beyond Nation States: New Perspectives on the Habsburg Empire<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** Starting from a discussion of three new books, the article examines recent developments in Habsburg historiography, which have important implications for the ways historians explain nineteenth-century European history as a whole, and the Empire's relationship to its many nationalities in particular. Wolfram Siemann's monumental new biography of Metternich makes a crucial contribution to reassess the historical context from which the Habsburg monarchy emerged. At the centre of this work is the statesman's political thought and his dramatic experience of political change between the French Revolution and the aftermath of 1848. Pieter Judson's history of the Habsburg monarchy exemplifies a substantial new body of research that has shifted attention from the antagonistic relationship between the Empire and its nationalities to the compatibility between a sense of national belonging and imperial loyalty. Both works complement the discussion of hybridity and national indifference during Emperor Franz Joseph's long reign, which Michaela and Karl Vocelka examine in a new biography.

**Keywords:** Austrian Empire, Habsburg monarchy, Nationalism, Metternich, Historiography

Since the fifteenth century the Habsburgs had provided the Holy Roman Empire with Emperors, but before 1804 their European possessions never constituted an Empire in

its own right.<sup>2</sup> The *Kaisertum Österreich* emerged as an administrative structure for their territories after the Holy Roman Empire had become defunct as a consequence of the Napoleonic Wars. In 1806 the last Roman Emperor Franz II dissolved the Old Reich, but continued to rule as head of his new Empire, using the name Franz I. Over the following decades the Empire's constitutional development had to take account of the rights and privileges of its different territories, as well as of its peoples' more recent sense of national belonging, including the particular challenges arising from the Habsburgs' association with the lands of the Hungarian and Bohemian crowns. At no point the Empire's internal borders overlapped with those of its nationalities' areas of settlement; and most nationalities did not live in compact units, but were spread across the monarchy's different parts. For over a hundred years the Habsburg monarchy held this complex system in balance. Too often its history has been written as one of 'decline and fall', where what we know about the Empire's demise in the wake of World War One has determined the historiographical agenda. In this teleological perspective the Habsburg monarchy's national diversity has usually been seen as its principal weakness. As a 'prison of nationalities' the monarchy was doomed to fall, or similar the cliché goes.

While it would be difficult to talk away the Empire's challenge of nationalism, or the growing tension between its peoples, much of this argument is still based on the assumption that modern societies have to be organised on the basis of ethnic belonging, and that nation states represent an almost inevitable step of historical development. Consequently, the Habsburg Empire was demoted to a relic of the past (despite the fact that it was actually a modern invention), an obstacle to the timely organisation of Central Europe in form of independent nation states. The revival of studies on modern nationalism since the 1980s, invigorated by contemporary political

change, is partly responsible for reducing much of nineteenth-century history to an age of emerging nation states. While a rich historiography contributed enormously to our understanding of modern nationalism, it encouraged historians to ignore the alternatives to national states that were also discussed in nineteenth-century political thought. Studies of national conflict were privileged over more peaceful exchanges between national groups. Much of the historiography read almost any aspect of nineteenth-century political, cultural or economic life as the articulation of a national sense of belonging.

Contemporary awareness of problems resulting from nationalism, as well as the rise of transnational history and of new approaches to the history of political thought, have contributed to a change of agenda in research on nineteenth-century Europe. Cultural and intellectual history, with their focus on ideas, their reception and lived experiences, have complicated approaches informed predominantly by social theory, making it more difficult to present history as the sole result of single processes such as national identity formation. On the back of these multiple new trends in historiography, a fascinating range of recent works on Habsburg history, many of them coming from across the Atlantic, have called into question the conventional view of the Habsburg Empire as one of constant conflict between nationalities. An influential early example of this reassessment has been István Deák's book on the Habsburg officer corps, followed more recently by Laurence Cole's book on Austrian military culture.<sup>3</sup> But the army was not the only institution where the Empire's nationalities met. Along with a wealth of articles in specialised periodicals, contributions to this reassessment include monographs by Monika Báár, John Deak and Benno Gammerl.<sup>4</sup> Eagle Glassheim, Jeremy King, Dominique Kirchner Reill, Rita Krueger and Tara Zahra, to quote only a selection of authors writing in English,

studied particular regions or nationality groups within the Empire.<sup>5</sup> Pioneering were the works by Pieter Judson, one of the authors discussed in what follows.<sup>6</sup> All published within just over a decade, these studies have shown that a dominating sense of national belonging was not a given among the Empire's populations, and that adherence to one nation often involved difficult choices, in particular in ethnically mixed areas. Many recent works underline the hybridity of national identity, as well as constant exchanges between nationality groups, which were not always conflictual.<sup>7</sup> In the wake of these new studies also the myths concerning the Empire's successor states have been partly dismantled.<sup>8</sup>

The many specialised studies on individual regions, on particular social or national groups, require a fresh synthesis of Habsburg history, which Pieter Judson has produced with great skill: a narrative that reflects decades of research on Central Europe.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, the new historiography on the Empire's nationalities also challenges established views of its main protagonists. In the case of Metternich, one of the principal architects of the Empire and its relationship to Europe, the assessment by historians of nationalism has usually been outright negative, without that their judgement has engaged in any meaningful way with the political thought that informed his decisions as a diplomat and statesman.<sup>10</sup> While many historians of nationalism are critical of some aspects of nationalist ideology, they often share the main idea informing these movements' policies, that nation states are per se a good thing and that their establishment counts as a sign of societal progress. If the new historiography on the Empire's nationalities no longer shares this view, Metternich's role has to be revisited. Wolfram Siemann has written the biography that provides us with the much needed revision of the ideas on which many of the previous evaluations of the Empire's role in Europe have been based: a massive book that

nevertheless reads extremely well and promises to last longer than anything that has been written on Metternich over the past one hundred fifty years.<sup>11</sup> Another of the Empire's protagonists has had overall a slightly better press, if probably for the wrong reasons. Monarchical nostalgia and popular culture, combined with a historiographical agenda that rendered biographies of any monarchs suspect, have protected Emperor Franz Joseph from taking too much of the blame usually directed against the Empire. This is surprising considering that during his long reign much of the Empire's executive power was concentrated in his hands. Michaela and Karl Vocelka have written a very readable book on which future historians will be able to draw for the biographical background other histories of the Empire have left aside.<sup>12</sup> Although their book relates only indirectly to the nationality issues recent histories of the monarchy have revised, their study makes a welcome contribution to the current interest in the cultural representation and the social function of monarchy.<sup>13</sup> In the following this article will discuss all three works in roughly chronological order, keeping the focus on the relationship between the Empire's nationalities, while also referencing other recent titles on the Empire.

Siemann's *Metternich* is a monument to scholarship, a *Jahrhundert-Biographie*, not only because it convincingly challenges our view of the statesman, and therefore of nineteenth-century Europe as a whole, but also because it represents the model of a scholarly biography against which future works will be measured.<sup>14</sup> It is well-written, showing empathy for its main character without becoming uncritical; the product of thorough research in many previously overlooked archives; and based on an exhaustive engagement with the wider historical context. Any work of historical scholarship can easily be amplified by additional archival work. The same is true for Siemann, simply because every national archive in Europe contains files relating to

Metternich, from state papers and diplomatic notes to the personal files of people who had met Metternich or wrote about him. While any serious work on Metternich would use materials from the Viennese Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, and the Verwaltungsarchiv, Siemann's most remarkable archival achievement is the inclusion of numerous Czech collections, which are richer and at the same time more difficult to use than for instance the French, British and Italian archives Siemann did not explore.

Siemann describes Metternich's upbringing as a cosmopolitan world that engaged eagerly with the ideas of the Enlightenment. The French Revolution destroyed this world, replacing the old order with nationalism, intolerance and fanaticism, and with a level of bloodshed Europe had not seen since the 30-Years-War. Although German universities tend to have no dedicated chairs in intellectual history, Siemann demonstrates how fruitful this approach can be to explain Metternich's political actions. Throughout his work he analyses what Metternich has read, from newspapers and pamphlets to academic works, and uses this information to examine in what sense his ideas responded to different authors. He also employs conceptual history to show how Europe's social and political language changed during the long years of Metternich's involvement in politics: A brilliant example of this approach is his analysis of the term *Policey* (778).

For Metternich relations between states had to be based on mutual respect of international law, a lesson he learned from Christoph Wilhelm Koch, with whom he studied at Strasbourg, the same teacher that influenced Constant, Goethe and Montgelas. Niklas Vogt in Mainz introduced Metternich to the mixed constitution of the Holy Roman Empire, a system that protected Europe from hegemonic power. Metternich, who in 1809 became Austrian foreign minister, considered Napoleon's

defeat the only way to re-establish order in Europe. As Siemann points out, Metternich spoke of 'Rekonstruktion' not of 'Restauration' (78). Instead of 'restoring' ruins of what no longer was, Metternich wished to 'reconstruct' a system of international relations from scratch. He put the emphasis on a 'security policy', which was aimed at defending the Vienna system of international law from a return to revolutionary turmoil, while at the same time establishing the constitutional governments the Congress had failed to deliver. Siemann is the first biographer to have studied in detail the first of Metternich's three trips to England, in 1794, where he appreciated the country's constitutional institutions and turned into what Siemann describes as a 'conservative Whig' (155). Many years later, in 1819, Metternich confessed that he would have liked to be born an Englishman. Meanwhile, he insisted that constitutions had to be rooted in historical circumstances. It was for this reason that he opposed constitutions emerging from revolutions, or the implementation of foreign models in countries that had their own social, economic and political histories. His argument shows surprising parallels to the ideas discussed at the time by de Tocqueville, or the Italian political thinkers Romagnosi and Cattaneo.<sup>15</sup>

With regard to previous biographies Siemann dismisses early on the influential work by Austrian historian Heinrich Ritter von Srbik, a cultural imperialist, who had denounced Metternich for his lack of volkish instinct. Much of Siemann's *Metternich* seems to be written to prove Srbik wrong, and it does so successfully. Siemann combines a chronological journey of almost 1000 pages through Metternich's life with four thematic chapters on war, women, the economy and governance. In many respects the most revealing of these four chapters is the one on war. It is a tribute to what the emotional turn is able to add to historical-political analysis. Siemann shows us a statesman who hated almost every aspect of modern

warfare. He was disgusted by its effects on humanity and remained traumatised by his experience of battlefields, the brutal suffering of young soldiers and civilians, the raping, the looting and all other forms of human degradation associated with the enormity of the Napoleonic wars. Metternich revealed these feelings almost exclusively in his private correspondence with family and lovers, but they become an important source of understanding for the intentions that informed his design of a post-Napoleonic order.

An important key to Metternich's life is his family's legacy in the Rhinelands and in the service of the Holy Roman Empire, which is what first brought him into contact with the Habsburgs. Bohemia, Vienna and the later Austrian Empire became the geographical centre of Metternich's life only at the end of 1794, when the Metternichs had lost all of their possessions west of the Rhine to the French. According to Siemann's account, it is during the collapse of the Third Coalition that Metternich became a true European, when he accepted that the Holy Roman Empire could not be saved and had to be replaced by a new concept of Europe based on international law. This political vision grew out of his observation of Prussia's disastrous policy of neutrality and its subsequent arrangements with Napoleon, for which it paid the prize at Jena and Auerstedt. Siemann rewrites the history of 1813 by arguing for Metternich's leading role in turning this page of European history. Rather than opportunism, a long-term strategy to preserve Austria informed Metternich's approach to the changing military circumstances that finally led to the alliance against Napoleon. As early as May 1813 Metternich presented to Czar Alexander and the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm III the principles that would inform the Vienna agreement of 1815. Siemann rejects Paul Schroeder's view that it was Castlereagh who gave the alliance of 1813 coherence by spelling out the war aims and Germany's



future federalist order.<sup>16</sup> According to Siemann this framework was born earlier at Teplitz, in September 1813, before Britain joined the alliance. While much of the historiography still argues that Metternich, early in 1814, still tried to reach peace with Napoleon, Siemann demonstrates that from January 1814 his aim was to force Napoleon to abdicate and to push France back into its borders of 1789. That the coalition did not break had much to do with Metternich's negotiating talent. In June 1814 Metternich departed for his second extended trip to England. A royal frigate under the command of the Duke of Clarence, son of George III, welcomed him in Boulogne; in London the masses greeted his carriage with a heartfelt 'Hurray Prince Metternich forever' (467). During the same visit the University of Oxford, in presence of the prince regent, Czar Alexander, the Prussian King, Wellington and Blücher, made Metternich a doctor honoris causae.

For the new historiography on the monarchy's nationality question the negotiations at Vienna are particularly interesting. Metternich always saw the partition of Poland as a violation of international law and supported the idea of its independence in the borders of 1772 as an element of equilibrium between Russia, Prussia and Austria, although it is unclear what solution he envisaged for Galicia's substantial Ruthenian and Jewish populations. Congress Poland, the Russian dominated Kingdom of Poland created at the Congress of Vienna, only emerged as a compromise to block the extreme territorial demands of Prussia and Russia. Metternich opposed Alexander's idea of forming the Holy Alliance, created in Metternich's words to 'hold down the rights of peoples, to promote absolutism and tyranny' (521). Behind Siemann's analysis we see a statesman who supported the rights of nations within states, a concept the author compares to the Swiss constitution and the European Union, as opposed to ethnically homogenous nation states, which

he rightly considered inapplicable to most of Europe. Siemann presents plentiful evidence for this view. When in 1828 Metternich created a Mausoleum for his family on his Bohemian estate in Plaß/Plasy, he had the documents printed in German and Czech, at a time when the Czech revival was still in its infancy. At the Universities of Laibach/Ljubljana, Prague and Brünn/Brno he supported the creation of chairs in Slavonic languages. The University in Lemberg/Lviv should teach in Polish. If Srbik described Metternich's thinking as 'unnational', Siemann uses the example of the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom to prove the opposite. His declared aim was the provinces' autonomy and self-rule within the monarchy, symbolised by judicial independence and the establishment of a Milanese court, comparing the city's rank in the Empire to that of regional capitals like Brünn/Brno or Graz. All Austrian civil servants based there had to speak Italian. For these reasons Metternich frequently found himself in conflict with Germanizing tendencies among the Austrian administration. He had no difficulty seeing Italy as a unity in cultural terms and supported the promotion of Italian language and literature across the peninsula. He compared the Italian nation to Germany: united in its historically grown political diversity. What he aimed for was the creation of a 'Lega Italica', a league of Italian states comparable to the German Confederation (615). With this in mind he promoted the development of an inter-Italian infrastructure, the regulation of customs between the states and improved postal services. He explicitly encouraged the mobility of Milanese students to allow them periods of study in Florence or Parma. Soft diplomacy meant imperial visits, public education, the promotion of Rossini all over the Empire (an aspect he does not consider). Relations with the Hungarian magnates proved more complicated, but still in the 1840s he developed a programme for Hungary's economic improvement, based on the ideas of Friedrich List. Choosing

Countess Zichy-Ferraris as his third wife, Metternich married into one of Hungary's most influential noble families, a source of great support for his policies.

Highly instructive sections of Siemann's book deal with Metternich's role as administrator of his estates and innovative industrialist, and as a generous benefactor to his subjects. Metternich's rule is frequently associated with the monarchy's alleged backwardness in economic matters, where internal duties are listed among the barriers to modernisation. Siemann shows that in the 1830s it was Metternich who wanted to reduce tariffs, partly in response to economic integration within the German Confederation. Agrarian interests and the influence on economic policy of Bohemian lobbyists around Count Kolowrat blocked these initiatives. Also for the repression of democratic and revolutionary movements Metternich conventionally has to take most of the blame, although supposedly more liberal or progressive regimes like England and Piedmont resorted to very much the same measures in order to prevent Europe from falling back into turmoil. Siemann explains the emerging social question as closely related to the financial consequences of the Napoleonic Wars. Napoleon's policies of eliminating economic resources in occupied territories, combined with gigantic levels of debt accumulated to finance the war effort, put public investment or any form of financial support for underdeveloped regions to a halt. For decades after the Congress of Vienna public debt exceeded national income, while the masses continued to live below the poverty line. Once villages had been destroyed, horse-craft and cattle confiscated, and the male labour force reduced by conscription, it took several generations to make up for the loss, a development that simply could not be balanced out by industrialisation. The result was mounting political and social discontent. According to Siemann most European states took until the mid 1840s to reach fiscal consolidation. His argument does not account for the social dynamic set

free by the emerging forms of industrial capitalism – to which Napoleon had contributed by liberalising trade, and transforming land and labour into commodities – but it explains why states lacked the resources to respond to the social question and why, at the same time, they so much feared democratic agitation.

On many occasions Siemann's reading of Metternich suggests that important chapters of European history have been written on the basis of ideologically motivated myths. At the Troppau conference of 1820, called to find a response to the revolution in Naples, Metternich encouraged Ferdinand I to introduce reforms and hesitated over foreign intervention, which Britain supported. During the conference at Laibach, the following year, revolution broke out in Piedmont-Sardinia, which called for Austrian help. France was the driving force behind intervention in Spain, again against Metternich's advice. Also in 1830 Metternich was among the few voices opting against an intervention in France. Louis Philippe's foreign policy decisions proved him right. Unfortunately, Siemann tells us little about Metternich's position towards the Italian states in 1830. While in recent years the history of the Risorgimento has received numerous new impulses, Habsburg history still largely overlooks the role of the Empire's Italian speakers.<sup>17</sup>

Metternich's last decade in office was marked by a sense of frustration over his inability to reform the Empire. After the Congress of Vienna it had been Franz I who lacked the vision to take up Metternich's plans for the Empire's reorganisation. Under Ferdinand, intrigues at Court and Kolowrat's sudden increase in power were to blame. Declining health deprived Metternich of the energy to hold against these forces. He was convinced that the events of 1848 were the direct consequence of the administration's failures during those years. From his exile in London Metternich wrote to Archduke Johann that in 'the future state no nationality shall be allowed to

stand above any other' (841). As Siemann points out, this view had much in common with the ideas of the Czech national leader František Palacký and his opposition to the policies of the Frankfurt parliament.

Sympathy with the main character certainly counts for some of Siemann's arguments. But it will require careful archival work to dismiss his revision of Metternich's image. It is regrettable that Siemann's publisher did not allow for a more complete set of notes, leaving many quotations from original documents without reference. Given that his work addresses a predominantly academic readership – several years ago Siemann already wrote a slim biography directed at a more general audience – this decision seems difficult to justify.<sup>18</sup> A number of avoidable factual mistakes slipped into the narrative, for instance when the 'invention of tradition' is attributed to E. P. Thompson (259); and peer reviewers should have spotted that Thompson was not American, but British (627). Siemann illustrates his account of Tyrol's spectacular 1809-uprising with the famous Andreas-Hofer-Lied, but its text dates from 1831 and the tune of 1844, when nationalism had started to play a rather different role.

Metternich's long period at the forefront of Austrian and European politics ended shortly before Franz Joseph I became Emperor, but was marked by elements of biographical continuity that sometimes go unnoticed. After 1835, when Metternich's influence in Austrian politics diminished, the Staatskanzler remained in close contact with Archduchess Sophie, mother of Franz Joseph, whose education Metternich oversaw, including weekly lectures on the art of politics. Metternich's own children belonged to the inner circle of the future Emperor. While biographies of Franz II/I and Ferdinand I are still difficult to find, plenty of biographical material is available on the penultimate Emperor, from edited primary sources and contemporary accounts of his

life to a number of more recent publications. Published in time for the one-hundredth anniversary of Franz Joseph's death, the biography by Michaela and Karl Vocelka distinguishes itself from earlier works by its excellent command of the academic literature and extensive use of published and unpublished primary sources.<sup>19</sup> Even more than in the case of Siemann, the authors face the particular difficulty of having to disentangle history, myth and memory, the latter having become a field of Habsburg scholarship in its own right.<sup>20</sup> The Vocelkas present a ruler at odds with modern times. They charge Metternich with a great deal of responsibility for Franz Joseph's reactionary political views; and here their assessment contrasts considerably with Siemann's more sympathetic account.

If re-evaluations of the Empire's nationality question constitute an important element of recent historiography, there are a number of aspects in Franz Joseph's early biography that feed into this discussion. Since the very first days of his upbringing Franz Joseph was used to linguistic diversity, including French, Czech and Hungarian. Teaching was formalised with the help of professionally trained native speakers from his sixth year, adding to those languages Italian, Latin and classical Greek. His Hungarian readings included the writings of the liberal reformers István Széchenyi and József Eötvös. An explicitly modern aspect of the future emperor's education was his instruction in natural sciences, presenting an important basis for his later interest in the Empire's diverse economic resources. A basic instruction in engineering and a strong emphasis on modern military sciences complemented his curriculum.

The Revolutions of 1848 brought Franz Joseph's accession to the throne. The Vocelkas emphasise the role of the events in Paris (57), where the beginning of the Revolution in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, several weeks earlier, would have had

a more direct impact on the Habsburg Empire: For decades Europe had seen the Italian South as Austria's direct backwater; and it was here where the post-Napoleonic order started to collapse. The events in Milan and Venice followed suite. Equally dangerous for the monarchy was the unfolding German Question. Referencing recent studies on the Holy Roman Empire, Siemann demonstrated how Metternich had been aware of the role of symbolic representation.<sup>21</sup> Franz Joseph, however, decided to forego coronations in Prague and Milan, which still had been central to the accession of Ferdinand I. As an occasion for staging legitimacy, particularly in Bohemia they would have helped to reconcile both German and Czech speakers with the reigning dynasty. As the Vocelkas point out, the fact that the crownlands were not inhabited by single nationalities made it necessary to articulate legitimacy. In addition to being a political mistake, the authors underline how Hungary's forced integration into the Austrian administration was problematic from a legal point of view. After Hungary's defeat and occupation in August 1849, reconciliation with the monarchy became almost impossible even for anti-revolutionary Hungarians. In the Austrian part of the monarchy the revocation of the March Constitution in 1851 and its replacement with the Silvesterpatent likewise alienated even moderate forces. Despite these backlashes, almost everywhere Habsburg rule continued to have supporters. In their assessment of dynastic loyalty the authors underestimate the extent to which especially in Bohemia, but also among Hungary's Slavonic speaking majority, a multinational Empire was seen as the only political future that granted them cultural survival in an age of emerging nation states. Many people either believed in dynastic legitimacy or simply feared the turmoil associated with revolution. Also the Church continued to bind wide sections of the

population to the monarchy, a function that was reflected in the concordat that Franz Joseph and Pius IX concluded in 1855.

Another event marking Franz Joseph's early reign had been the forced retirement in April 1849 of Field-Marshal Alfred von Windisch-Graetz, who was hated by many nationalists. To a good deal Franz Joseph owed him his accession to the throne. The void he left was filled by a prominent Bohemian aristocrat, Prince Felix von Scharzenberg, who became Prime Minister and compared to Windisch-Graetz had a more liberal attitude towards public opinion. The Emperor himself started playing an important role in the administration. It was through hard work during those early years that he developed his excellent understanding of state bureaucracy. Any historian who has worked in Vienna's Verwaltungsarchiv will have been impressed by the mass and detail of the Emperor's annotations on almost all levels of the administration. It therefore seems surprising that during the Empire's constitutional development up to 1865 Franz Joseph often comes across as driven by changes he no longer controlled. This only changed after 1866, when he became 'the constitutional monarch he never wanted to be' (178).

The authors analyse in detail the traumatic experience of territorial losses in 1859. For the Habsburgs and much of public opinion these events constituted a violation of the principles of international law established at the Congress of Vienna. Not so much the victory of nationalism but the territorial expansion of some states (in this case Piedmont-Sardinia and France) at the expense of others contradicted the Emperor's understanding of princely honour. Prussia's recognition of Italian Unification and the two countries' military alliance of 1866 further hurt his feelings. In the summer of 1863 the Emperor had attempted resolve the German question through a convention of the German princes. He had travelled to Gastein to discuss



the idea with Wilhelm I, who refused: another affront to the waning prestige of the Habsburgs within the Confederation. The subsequent war of 1866, which cost Austria the lives of 44,000 soldiers and the loss of Venetia, sealed the country's constitutional relationship to the German states. The number of the monarchy's Italians, once the third largest population group, was suddenly reduced to just 700,000.

In 1867 Franz Joseph granted Hungary the recognition and some of the rights it had lost in 1849. The Compromise reflected a complicated process of rapprochement that had started during the mid 1850s, promoted throughout by Empress Elizabeth, culminating in the constitution of the Hungarian diet in 1865. To a large extent the Compromise was based on the Pragmatic Sanction of 1713, which made it acceptable to the Emperor as well as to the Magyars, despite the fact that considerable sections of the court rejected his policies towards Hungary. The authors tell us little about the reactions to the Compromise among Hungary's Slavonic speaking majority. The new Hungarian Prime Minister Count Gyula Andr ssy rejected any attempts on behalf of the Emperor to consider their position. In much detail the book analyses the symbolism behind Franz Joseph's coronation, staged by the magnates according to neo-medieval rituals. The Emperor received the Hungarian crown from Andr ssy, the same man he had sentenced to death in 1849. The pompous events and the response they received suggest both the acceptance of the new political facts by the Hungarian establishment as well as their distance to larger sections of the population, who continued to honour Kossuth's more radical position. During the ceremonies the Hungarian middle classes remained in the background, peasants and Slavs played no role at all, contrary to imperial rituals in other parts of the monarchy.

The year 1867 also brought an end to Austria's period of neo-absolutist rule. It was a development that contradicted many of the Emperor's political principles, but

he nevertheless felt bound to the set of laws that became Austria's constitution up to World War I. Against explicit papal advice he signed the religious laws of 1868, representing an important step towards the separation of church and state. The Empire was now divided into two largely autonomous parts, Cisleithania, which was dominated by 6 million German speakers, and Transleithania, where 5 Million Magyars continued to enjoy their privileged status. The Empire's remaining population of 18 million Slavs, where Czechs, Poles and Croatians formed the largest groups, gained civic and political rights, but their situation as national constituencies hardly changed. While in 1848 many of them had seen the Emperor as guarantor of their national rights, they now remained disillusioned. In Hungary Magyarisation became official state doctrine. Hungary enjoyed privileges that were denied to the lands of the Bohemian crown, despite their loyal support in 1848. Dualism destroyed much of the basis of Bohemia's dynastic allegiance, while also turning Czechs against Germans. The authors list many attempts on behalf of the Emperor to come to an agreement with Bohemia, but he persistently lacked the courage to confront German and Hungarian opposition to Trialism.

Long sections of the book read like a general political history of the monarchy under Franz Joseph, without much detail on the Emperor's personal role, his views or his daily work. Exceptions are sections on his relationship to the Empress and to his lovers, as well as on his travels and his passion for hunting. Here the reader encounters many of the familiar anecdotes about the Emperor's private life without that additional documents or the critical reading of previously known sources reveal new insights. Perhaps it is impossible to write a history of the Emperor's life, or of his political thought, while an analysis of his political and administrative role would require an almost endless analysis of his daily interventions in bureaucratic

procedures over the almost 70 years of his reign. In concluding their biography the authors credit Franz Joseph's efforts 'to contain local conflicts and to safeguard peace in Europe' (341); but these policies collapsed at Sarajevo.

For Pieter Judson the basis on which the Empire had survived did not collapse in the summer of 1914, but during the following years of military dictatorship. Judson's seminal work adopts an unconventional chronology, covering a period that stretches well beyond Metternich's and Franz Joseph's lives.<sup>22</sup> Starting in the second half of the eighteenth century, Judson argues that Maria Theresa's enlightened reforms formed the basis of support for Austrian institutions among peasants of different nationalities in many regions of the monarchy, who understood the central state as a counterweight to the arbitrary power of their local nobility. His book ends in the 1920s, explaining how elements of the Empire's legal and administrative practice survived in the successor states. Throughout his book Judson investigates how various social groups experienced and shaped the Empire, and how imperial institutions impacted on local life. He understands his book as a challenge to conventional approaches that tend to see nationality as the only basis of Habsburg history, showing instead how Empire brought different ethnic, religious or linguistic groups together, how class or a sense of regional belonging, as well as imperial loyalty, could unite people across national boundaries. He emphasises how different religions throughout the Empire, in particular Jews, but also Eastern Orthodox and Bosnian Muslims, 'claimed Francis Joseph as protector' and 'lobbied openly for his personal patronage' (235). For Judson, the Habsburg state was 'an on-going project that engaged the minds, hearts, and energies of many of its citizens at every level of society' (5). Unlike many accounts of the Empire, he underlines the monarchy's tradition of recognising legal equality among its citizenry; the role of mandatory primary

education in vernacular languages since 1774; the promotion of free trade within large parts of the Empire; and, as early as the times of Maria Theresa's reign, a growing sense of state patriotism that further increased during the Napoleonic wars. By synthesising many of the achievements of recent Habsburg historiography Judson produced a much needed corrective to countless teleological accounts that read what we know about 1918 back into the Empire's earlier past. Instead of taking for granted that national diversity caused the Empire's collapse, Judson argues that the Empire actively promoted it and that it stood for its 'unique ability to create a productive unity' (9). As a consequence, most nationalist movements sought political solutions to their quests within the Empire.

Like Siemann also Judson underlines the role of the Napoleonic Wars in fostering feelings of imperial allegiance among the population at large, where the creation of a militia (Landwehr) gained particular significance as 'an interregional all-Austrian patriotic institution' (93). Even in Hungary French attempts to raise the population against Austrian rule remained fruitless. All over the Empire Napoleon's defeat was celebrated by the local population and contributed to the reputation of Francis I as a 'prince of peace'. Only a decade after its foundation the new state seemed thoroughly rooted in its many lands and peoples. Concerning Metternich's years, Judson breaks with some of the myths constructed around his regime, but does not go as far as Siemann in presenting us a new image of the statesman. For Judson Metternich built a police state that petrified many aspects of Austrian society, but concedes that this did not reverse the rule of law established during the years of enlightened despotism. Police reports 'frequently sympathized with local public opinion' and 'often criticized government policy' as a way of proposing reforms or helping the local populace (132). Compared to Britain and France the size of the

Habsburgs' domestic police force remained rather modest. Noble elites were among the most active promoters of science, culture, vernacular languages, as well as of public access to education, thus encouraging the flourishing of bourgeois society in every corner of the Empire. These efforts notwithstanding, for some vernacular languages it took time to meet the semantic demands of educated debate. Hungary's first newspaper was published in Latin, from 1705, followed by a German-language paper in 1764. The first newspaper in Hungarian was not published until 1780, followed by a Slovak paper in 1783. Many Hungarian periodicals and books continued to be in German, including private diaries, memoirs and pamphlets. By 1847 a total of 191 newspapers appeared regularly, demonstrating that despite political repression debate flourished. Louis Kossuth's *Pesti Hirlap* then printed 5200 copies, reaching an estimated 100,000 readers. In Dalmatia and Istria the large majority of periodicals until the second half of the nineteenth-century were in Italian. The spread of Czech started earlier, with the first newspaper appearing in 1719, soon to be followed by bi-lingual papers as well as by Czech translations of German papers. If the use of vernacular languages spread, Judson argues, it was mostly the consequence of Austria's efforts to offer all children education in languages they spoke at home. The subsequent spread of political movements can be read as a sign of virulent discontent, but also of educational policies and the strength of associational culture. In the case of Hungary these phenomena explain why, once revolution broke out in 1848, opposition against Vienna swiftly produced coherent political programmes. Meanwhile, opposition in Hungary merely advocated the rights of the so-called historic Hungarian nation, the minority of Magyar speaking elites, without considering the rights of peasants and of large sections of the urban population.

For the majority of people involved or affected by the Revolution, its aim was not to replace the Empire but to reform it. Growing discontent with Vienna did not stop large sections of the peasantry to associate the Habsburg state with hopes for emancipation from exploitative landlords. For the growing middle classes the Empire offered social mobility and a source of patriotic pride. The nobility identified with the monarchy's ancient crownlands that needed the Empire as a structure for a larger state. When Ferdinand promised a constitution most citizens linked this development to their own participatory vision of Empire, while at the same time creating civic guards to contain the revolution. In many parts of the Empire the Revolution quickly turned into a celebration of the Emperor and his constitution. Even in some of the areas dominated by Italian speaking populations, like Trieste, or parts of Tirol and Dalmatia, followers of the Revolution were convinced that their territories should remain under the Empire. Unlike much of what we think to know about the springtime of European peoples, 1848 was more than a revolution against imperial oppression. Judson's long chapter on 1848 offers a self-contained and refreshingly new history of the Revolution in the Austrian Empire.

Judson judges the following period of neo-absolutist bureaucracy harshly, a regime that implemented a considerable array of economic and administrative reforms by means of a police state. Not entirely convincing, he presents the loss of the Italian territories in 1859 and 1866 as the consequence of these failed policies. As a matter of fact, Franz Joseph, against the advice of his cabinet and court, had made several important steps to reconcile Italians with Habsburg rule.<sup>23</sup> The compromise with Hungary, reached in 1867, together with the guarantee of constitutional rights in Austria, finally stabilised the monarchy, supporting a decade of rapid economic growth and infrastructural development in both halves of the Empire. In more detail

than most surveys Judson explains the different facets of the complicated Compromise with Hungary, as well as the 1868 arrangements between Hungary and Croatia, demonstrating how Austria used the settlement to reinforce its status ‘as fundamentally multinational’, while Hungary ‘sought to increasingly assimilate ethnic non-Hungarians to an ethnic Hungarian identification’ (265). The same issue still divides Hungarian politics 150 years on. As a consequence of what Judson describes as an ‘ethnic chauvinist policy’ (267), and in order to avoid the election of deputies from linguistic minorities, governments in Hungary did their best to avoid reforming the franchise. Austria, instead, progressively widened the suffrage after 1867, culminating in the introduction of universal manhood suffrage for Parliament in 1907 and coinciding with the abolition of the curial system of voting. The direct comparison is striking, confirming what the Czech historian Jiří Kořalka concluded many years ago, that the conditions of any nationality within Cisleithania before 1914 were certainly much better and more satisfying than those of the minorities anywhere else in Europe.<sup>24</sup> A fundamental law for Austria proclaimed in 1867 that ‘all national groups within the state are equal, and each one has the inviolable right to preserve and to cultivate its nationality and language.’ (293) This is not to say that the application of such laws was a simple matter or that national communities enjoyed a role as political actors in the legal system. One problem was that according to the terms of 1867, Hungary had the right to overturn any structural reform of the Empire that would grant any other lands, such as Galicia or Bohemia, any amount of power comparable to that of Hungary.

Among the most original sections of Judson’s book is the chapter on ‘culture wars’, where he questions the assumption that political conflicts in the monarchy were the natural consequence of differences between linguistic groups. Taking up

arguments made in his book on the Bohemian language border, he shows that ‘people often simply ignored nationalist demands for their loyalty’ (271), that nationalism dominated some daily life situations but never penetrated other aspects of life in the multinational Empire.<sup>25</sup> He also reminds readers that the connection between social conflict and linguistic diversity worried state-builders in many parts of Europe. For Judson, what made Austria different was its imperial practice and the legal tradition of its crownlands, which were in themselves multinational. It was on these different levels of administration that language issues came to the fore and enjoyed a forum for public participation that other European states simply lacked. More importantly, the Empire did not oppose identification of its peoples with national cultures; and many saw allegiance to their nation as compatible with forms of imperial patriotism. Judson reads the Badeni crisis of 1897-98 - the popular reactions against mandating equality of the Czech and German languages in Bohemia - not as a sign of failure of Austria’s institutions, but of popular involvement in political institutions. While the level of political participation triggered by Badeni’s ordinances seems remarkable, and Judson rightly argues that in Austria language policies could never be successful if imposed from above, for many Czech speakers the crisis ended hopes of full linguistic emancipation. Despite this sense of disillusionment, over the following decade membership in nationalist organisations actually declined; and the Moravian, Galician and Bukovina Compromises demonstrated that solutions to language conflicts were possible. But were these Compromises an improvement? In Moravia, for the first time, people had to decide whether they wanted to be Czechs or Germans. Registering as Moravians, or simply as Austrians, was no longer an option.

While nationalists fought their cultural battles, liberals and socialists challenged conventions in order to transform the Empire according to their vision of



modern society. Modernisation meant that increasing numbers of citizens engaged with the Empire on a day-to-day basis, indirectly as taxpayers and via educational institutions, or as representatives of Empire working as telegraph or railway operators, or for the postal services. Also political modernity was lived as an imperial experience, for instance when in 1905 Austrians from across the Empire joined demonstrations to demand universal manhood suffrage. As a consequence, resentment against other national, social or religious groups was rarely articulated in anti-imperial terms. Judson confirms what Jakub Beneš has recently demonstrated: that Austrian Social Democrats advocated a democratic and federalised Empire as a way to serve workers' as well as national interests.<sup>26</sup> Their party was federalised along linguistic lines. When in 1911 it gave in to pressure from rival nationalists to split into separate parties, it used internationalist ideals to retain collaboration across the new structure. The first elections under universal manhood suffrage in 1907 made the Social Democrats the largest single party in parliament and 'showed socialists that the Empire was indeed theirs' (375). During those years Franz Joseph continued to enjoy popularity, also among workers.

Rather than nationality conflicts, for Judson frictions between the military and civil society after 1914 played a huge role in the Empire's demise. The military's assumption of vast dictatorial powers at the start of World War One constituted a breaking point in Habsburg history: ending a centennial tradition of rule of law; destroying the political role played by the crownland diets; and leading to a situation where the imperial bureaucracy had to sign responsible for unpopular wartime measures imposed on them by the military command. The military largely ignored the overwhelming signs of patriotism among the Empire's nationalities, submitting especially the Slavs to unreasonable levels of suspicion. Sections of the German

population responded to this new climate by settling old accounts with the minorities through denunciations, further damaging the Empire's reputation among the minorities.<sup>27</sup> These conflicts notwithstanding, in 1917 various groups of Slavs still submitted programmes for the constitution of autonomous states within a restructured Empire. Even then Hungary still opposed any new federal units; and continued to resist suffrage reform in its realms. The epilogue to Judson's book constitutes an excellent essay on the problems of nationality in the Empire's successor states. They called themselves nation states – and they were regarded as such by the victorious powers – but in practice they were multinational states that treated its non-national citizens far worse than the Empire had ever done. The people affected by these policies were largely denied a view on matters of their cultural identities.

For several decades Central European history has been striving, especially in the United States. What we learn from the new literature on the Habsburg monarchy is that many of the existing descriptions of the Empire, and explanations of its disappearance, do not match the lived experience of people in Central Europe. Our conventional assessment of the post-Napoleonic period, which reduces Austria's role to a reactionary force of evil, ignores the motivation behind Metternich's political thought, as well as the legacy of enlightened cosmopolitanism and of the rule of law in much of the region. Neo-absolutist rule under Franz-Joseph went hand-in-hand with an impressive push towards social and economic modernisation, while continuing the Empire's remarkable educational ambition. Throughout this period the Empire celebrated the diversity of its peoples and promoted its many national cultures, while touting the benefits of imperial unity. Liberal and democratic historians have often viewed Hungarian nationalism sympathetically, but also after the 1867 Compromise, which granted autonomy in almost all matters of policy and administration, it was the

Empire's Hungarian part where democratic advances, and in particular the rights of national minorities, remained far behind standards in Cisleithania or elsewhere in Europe. Without resorting to counterfactual arguments, all this obliges us to rethink the question to what extent the Empire's multi-nationalism offered a viable alternative to the Europe of nation states propagated by the so-called progressive forces of history.

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<sup>1</sup> This article discusses three substantial new works on the Habsburg Monarchy: Wolfram Siemann, *Metternich. Stratege und Visionär. Eine Biographie* (München 2016). Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA 2016). Michaela und Karl Vocelka, *Franz Joseph I. Kaiser von Österreich und König von Ungarn. 1830-1916* (München 2015).

<sup>2</sup> R.J.W. Evans, 'Communicating empire: the Habsburgs and their critics, 1700–1919 (The Prothero Lecture)', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society. Sixth Series*, XIX (Cambridge 2009), 117-38. On the Habsburgs as Holy Roman Emperors, see Peter H. Wilson, *Heart of Europe: A History of the Holy Roman Empire* (Cambridge, MA 2016), 427 sq.

<sup>3</sup> István Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps 1848-1918* (Oxford 1990); Laurence Cole, *Military Culture and Popular Patriotism in Late Imperial Austria* (Oxford 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Monika Báár, *Historians and Nationalism: East-Central Europe in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford 2010); John Deak, *Forging a Multinational State: State Making in Imperial Austria from the Enlightenment to the First World War* (Stanford, CA 2015); Benno Gammerl, *Untertanen, Staatsbürger und Andere. Der Umgang mit ethnischer*

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*Heterogenität im britischen Weltreich und im Habsburgerreich, 1867-1918*

(Göttingen 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Eagle Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists: The Transformation of the Bohemian Aristocracy* (Cambridge, MA 2005); Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton, NJ 2005); Dominique Kirchner Reill, *Nationalists Who Feared the Nation: Adriatic Multi-Nationalism in Habsburg Dalmatia, Trieste, and Venice* (Stanford, CA 2012); Rita Krueger, *Czech, German, and Noble: Status and National Identity in Habsburg Bohemia* (Oxford 2009); Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls. National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca, NY 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Pieter M. Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries. Liberal Politics, Social Experience and National Identity in the Austrian Empire, 1848-1918* (Ann Arbor, MI 1996); Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA 2007). See also Pieter M. Judson and Marsha L. Rozenblit, eds, *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe* (Oxford 2005).

<sup>7</sup> On the difficulties of applying national categories see in particular Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*; Nancy M. Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands became Czech* (Cambridge, MA 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Probably the most striking case of revision regards the case of Czechoslovakia. See for instance Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914-1948* (Oxford 2009). More problematic: Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed* (New Haven, CT 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*.

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<sup>10</sup> For a detailed historiographical essay on past assessments of Metternich's role, and in particular on Heinrich von Srbik, see Siemann, *Metternich. Stratege und Visionär*, 16-30.

<sup>11</sup> Siemann, *Metternich. Stratege und Visionär*. Only one recent biography goes some way into the direction of Siemann's work: Luigi Mascilli Migliorini, *Metternich. L'artefice dell'Europa nata dal Congresso di Vienna* (Rome 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Vocelka, *Franz Joseph I.*

<sup>13</sup> See for instance the titles published for the new series published by Palgrave Macmillan, 'Palgrave Studies in Modern Monarchy':  
<http://www.palgrave.com/de/series/14609>.

<sup>14</sup> Siemann, *Metternich. Stratege und Visionär*.

<sup>15</sup> Axel Körner, *America in Italy: The United States in the Political Thought and Imagination of the Risorgimento, 1763-1865* (Princeton, NJ 2017), 16-25, 88, 129-131.

<sup>16</sup> Paul W. Schroeder, 'An Unnatural 'Natural Alliance': Castlereagh, Metternich, and Aberdeen in 1813,' *International History Review* Vol. 10, No. 4 (1988): 522-40.

<sup>17</sup> For an overview of recent literature on the Italian Risorgimento see Maurizio Isabella, 'Rethinking Italy's Nation-Building 150 Years Afterwards: The New Risorgimento Historiography', *Past and Present* Vol. 217 (2012): 247-68.

<sup>18</sup> Wolfram Siemann, *Metternich. Staatsmann zwischen Restauration und Moderne* (München 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Vocelka, *Franz Joseph I.*

<sup>20</sup> See for instance Carlo Moos, *Habsburg post mortem. Betrachtungen zum Weiterleben der Habsburgermonarchie* (Wien 2016).

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<sup>21</sup> See in particular Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, *Des Kaisers alte Kleider*.

*Verfassungsgeschichte und Symbolsprache des Alten Reiches* (München 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*.

<sup>23</sup> See for instance Kaiser Franz Joseph and Minister Bach, 13.08.1853: OeStA/AVA

Inneres MdI-Präsidium A 53, Landesfürstliche Behörden Lombardien-Venetien.

5990.1853, where the Emperor urges his minister to return to a civil administration

that respects the interests of the local population.

<sup>24</sup> Jiří Kořalka, *Tschechen im Habsburgerreich und in Europa 1815-1914*:

*Sozialgeschichtliche Zusammenhänge der neuzeitlichen Nationsbildung und der*

*Nationalitätenfrage in den böhmischen Ländern* (Wien 1991), 174.

<sup>25</sup> Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*.

<sup>26</sup> Jakub S. Beneš, *Workers and Nationalism: Czech and German Social Democracy*

*in Habsburg Austria, 1890-1918* (Oxford 2017), 145 ff.

<sup>27</sup> For a case study see in particular Martin Moll, *Kein Burgfrieden. Der deutsch-*

*slowenische Nationalitätenkonflikt in der Steiermark 1900-1918* (Innsbruck 2007).