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Paula Sutter Fichtner. *The Habsburg Empire: From Dynasticism to Multinationalism.* Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, 1997. x + 210 pp. $13.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-89464-896-0.

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Habsburg History in a Nutshell

Paula Sutter Fichtner's contribution to the Anvil Series, *The Habsburg Empire: From Dynasticism to Multinationalism*, is designed for undergraduate students taking a survey course on the Habsburg Monarchy or central Europe. In the first section of the book, "The Rise and Fall of the Habsburg Empire," Fichtner presents a 117-page history of the Habsburg Monarchy from the election of Rudolf of Habsburg as German King in 1273 to the dismemberment of the monarchy in 1918. The brief summary emphasizes the period from 1740-1918. Throughout Part I, Fichtner refers the reader to relevant documents in Part II. The second section contains twenty-seven documents relating to the monarchy's history. Fichtner translated some of them herself; others are reprinted from books previously published in English. The book includes two useful maps of the monarchy often found in surveys of Habsburg history: one topographical, the other depicting the geographical distribution of the monarchy's major nationalities. A four-page select bibliography includes many of the important works in English on the monarchy and its provinces and ethnic groups.

Although Fichtner's text itself is disappointingly devoid of engagement with historiographical issues, she does offer her own interpretation of the history of the monarchy in a brief preface. She sees the history of the monarchy as the story of the destabilization of a dynastic state by the growth of national movements:

Habsburg rulers continued to view their empire as a kind of personal possession but they increasingly had to accommodate their dynastic sensibilities to an outlook which questioned whether any family, no matter how venerable, could legitimately rule peoples who differed from themselves in language, culture, religion, and historical origins. The values each side espoused may have been too polarized for them ever to have been reconciled. Legitimacy stood on the side of the monarchy, the democratic progressivism of nineteenth-century political and social thought reinforced the convictions of nationalists.

The fact that war broke out in 1914 proves to Fichtner that the "international arrangements which had helped the Habsburgs to keep nationalist movements from unseating their rule were no longer functional" (pp. vi-vii).

Fichtner's argument is strikingly similar to Hans Kohn's in his *The Habsburg Empire, 1804-1918*, published for the Anvil Original series in 1961. In his book, which includes a brief summary of Habsburg history and excerpts from twenty selected documents, Kohn argued that "the conservatism of the dynasty and the nationalist intransigence of Magyars and Germans" did not allow for the creation of "a stable and democratic order in a multiethnic and multilingual state on the basis of democracy and federalism." According to Kohn, the "stresses of the rising forces of nationalism and democracy" led to the dissolution of the state in 1918.[1] This argument certainly has advocates among Habsburg scholars. Others, however, have argued that ethnic tensions did not immediately threaten the integrity of the monarchy and that national consciousness and imperial loyalty were not necessarily mutually exclusive.[2] Even those who do see nationality as the great problem threatening the integrity of the state have added considerably to the argument Kohn pursued in 1961.[3] Unfortunately, because Fichtner neither engages with alternative approaches to Habsburg history nor discusses literature supporting her own contentions, she does not fully develop her argument.

Part I is divided into ten more or less chronological chapters, each subdivided into short sections. The first chapter describes the development of Habsburg power in ethnically fractured central Europe. The consolidation of Habsburg power was a consequence, she writes, of "dynastic interests and the policies employed to realize them" (p. 12).

Chapter Two examines institutional reform, religious strife, and the Hungarian challenge to creating a uniform monarchy before describing the reforms of Maria Theresa and Joseph II. Convincingly, Fichtner places them in the context of the Habsburg interest in increasing the power of the dynasty throughout its provinces. The failure of Joseph II to create a uniform structure for the monarchy reflected the ability of entrenched local elites to protect their positions against the centralization of power.

Chapter Three treats the period from the Napoleonic wars to the 1830s. Fichtner argues that advocates of the rights of nations inherently threatened dynastic states, and Metternich's understanding of this dynamic led him to endeavor to suppress all democratic and nationalist activity. Chapter Four covers the 1840s and the revolutions of 1848-49. Fichtner sees the cause of revolution in the dangerous combination of liberalism and nationalism, most potent, she avows, in Hungary. Though the dynasty emerged victorious, revolution and the spread of national movements in Germany and the east showed that the survival of the monarchy had become dependent "on the skillful conduct of foreign relations and on minimizing the role of liberal republicanism and ethnic particularism at home" (p. 48).

In Chapter 5, Fichtner analyzes the benefits and shortcomings of neoabsolutism before briefly describing the unification of Italy, the beginning of constitutional rule in the monarchy, the unification of Germany, and the Ausgleich. She illustrates some of the weaknesses of the Ausgleich, focusing on its fundamental unfairness to non-Hungarians and non-Germans. For her, the Ausgleich was an imperfect solution that had short-term advantages, but created or ignored problems that would prove difficult if not impossible to solve in the future.

Chapter Six looks at the economy of the Dual Monarchy, supporting recent research on the economic growth the monarchy experienced in the second half of the nineteenth century. Chapter Seven describes "Politics in a Multinational Setting," introducing major ethnic conflicts and the creation of a functionally autonomous Galicia. Here her reference to "adjacent Ruthenia" (p. 74) is confusing. The eastern half of Galicia, in which a majority of the population were Ruthenian/Ukrainian speakers, was not a separate province under the Habsburgs. The chapter also briefly considers the rise of Karl Lueger and the Christian Socials as well as the growth of Social Democracy.

Chapter Eight discusses the many diplomatic problems confronting the monarchy in its last decades. Fichtner shows that attempts to influence domestic politics with diplomatic and/or military victories did not bring hoped-for advantages. Chapter Nine considers the dynasty itself, the longevity of Franz Joseph, and the position of the emperor and his heir in the political landscape of the monarchy. In Chapter Ten, Fichtner describes the reasons for the decision to go to war–dynastic prestige above all else–and considers the damage done to the already structurally weak monarchy by the stresses of a long war.

The book is similar in intent to John W. Mason's *The Dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire 1867-1918*, reviewed earlier this year by Lee W. Eysturlid for HABSBURG.[4] Mason, however, limits his material to the period 1867-1918, dividing his book into short thematic sections, introducing issues and discussing the views of various Habsburg historians. Fichtner attempts to cover a much broader period in the same space. Though Fichtner does move swiftly through the most significant political developments and even finds a few pages to discuss economic growth, she often confronts her reader with a barrage of facts that overwhelms her analysis.

Fichtner's text is also marred by editorial mistakes: there are numerous spelling errors and incomplete, confusing sentences. In addition, the publishers did not allow for diacritical marks beyond the occasional umlaut. This decision complicates the problem every historian dealing with the Habsburg Monarchy faces when making decisions regarding place names, since many towns and cities within the monarchy had names in two or more languages. Fichtner also confuses *k.k* (imperial-royal) and *k.u.k.* (imperial and royal). She mistakenly writes that the Hungarians preferred the designation *k.k.*, when the opposite was the case (p. 60). Hungarian politicians opposed the use of *k.k.*, which to them suggested a unified polity in which "imperial" took pride of place. To the Hungarian leadership, *k.u.k.* reflected a looser connection between two distinct entities.[5]

Fichtner gives no sense of the variety of opinion on one of the most debated questions in Habsburg history: was the monarchy doomed to dissolve in the age of democracy and nationalism? Though the debate may seem tired to Habsburg historians, this question will be new to undergraduate students taking a survey course in Habsburg history. Ethnic/national identity, state identities, state-making, ethnic politics, monarchy and constitutional rule are among a myriad of important and interesting issues involved in the study of late Habsburg history that have relevance to the study of present-day problems in central and eastern Europe and beyond–and that do not receive enough attention in this slim volume.

Despite these problems, however, this concise summary of Habsburg history could serve to reinforce knowledge gleaned from other books and articles. Of perhaps greater interest is the collection of documents in Part II. The documents range from Ferdinand I's creation of the Military Border to Karl Seitz and Karl Renner's writings on the national question during World War I.

The documents Fichtner chooses contrast sharply with the kinds of documents published in Mason's book. Mason's choices, most often already available in books published in English, include various statistics and brief excerpts from longer pieces. His documents offer glimpses into how contemporary artists and literary figures such as Stefan Zweig and Oskar Kokoschka viewed events. Mason also includes writings by political figures who made their careers outside the monarchy itself, such as Trotsky and Hitler. Fichtner's book prints longer excerpts from important documents such as the Pragmatic Sanction and Franz Joseph's address "To My Peoples" from July 1914, parliamentary debates, and writings by some of the monarchy's political actors like Metternich and Palacky.

Fichtner's documents, taken from a variety of official and unofficial sources and covering events and issues of central importance to the history of the monarchy, would nicely complement material presented in any Habsburg history course. The inclusion of one or two key documents concerning the reforms of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, however, would have been a welcome addition to those published in the book. Candidates for publication might have included one of Maria Theresa's urbaria, Joseph's Edict of Toleration, or one of his various edicts concerning the status of serfs. Furthermore, none of the chosen documents refer to Galicia. Perhaps an inclusion of one of the several addresses sent to Vienna from the Galician Sejm in the late 1860s pledging dynastic loyalty in return for devolution of power to the Polish elites would have enhanced the collection. The inclusion of this kind of material would have illustrated some aspects of the complicated relationship between regional politics, national consciousness, and imperial loyalty.

Although Fichtner's book cannot replace a survey of Habsburg history on an undergraduate syllabus, it does provide a readable overview of Habsburg history. The document collection is well suited for use in undergraduate courses.

Notes:

[1]. Hans Kohn, *The Habsburg Empire 1804-1918* (Princeton, 1961), p. 4.

[2]. See among others: Alan Sked, *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire, 1815-1918* (London and New York: Longman, 1989).

[3]. An example of a powerful argument about the inability of the Habsburg state to deal effectively with nationality politics and national conflicts within the monarchy is Gerald Stourzh, "Ethnic Attribution in Late Imperial Austria: Good Intentions, Evil Consequences," in Ritchie Robertson and Edward Timms, eds., *The Habsburg Legacy, National Identity in Historical Perspective* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), pp.67-83.

[4]. John W. Mason, *The Dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire 1867-1918*, second edition (London and New York: Longman, 1997).

[5]. Steven Beller explains these designations in *Francis Joseph* (London and New York: Longman, 1997) [reviewed by the present reviewer on HABSBURG], p. 96.

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