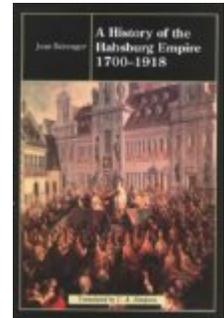




Jean Berenger. *A History of the Habsburg Empire, 1700-1918.* White Plains: Longman, 1997. ix + 342 pp. \$97.33, cloth, ISBN 978-0-582-09008-8.



Reviewed by Gary B. Cohen

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Those who teach the history of the Habsburg Monarchy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries surely have need for a new English-language survey that would reflect the last three decades of scholarship. For all its insights and wit, A.J.P. Taylor's *History of the Habsburg Empire, 1809-1918*, first published in 1948, is out of date and often oversimplified.[1] Barbara Jelavich's *Modern Austria: Empire and Republic, 1815-1986*[2] treats much of the nineteenth century in cursory fashion in order to get on to the twentieth century. Robert A. Kann offers much more comprehensive coverage both chronologically and topically in his *History of the Habsburg Empire, 1526-1918*.[3] That book, however, is nearly a quarter-century old now; and its prose is flat, the treatment of society and economics often thin, and the analytic and synthetic points frequently underdeveloped. The editors at Addison Wesley Longman must have recognized this need when they undertook publication in two volumes of a translation of Jean Berenger's *Histoire de l'Empire des Habsbourg, 1273-1918*, first published in France in 1990.[4]

Unfortunately, Berenger's treatment of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries will disappoint many who teach in the field. The strongest threads running through this volume are those of dynastic, diplomatic, and military history. The author, a professor at the Sorbonne born in 1934, intersperses the political and diplomatic narrative with brief treatments of economic development and some of the principal social trends, particularly those affecting peasants. So casual is the treatment of social structure, however, that the important contrasts are never drawn in the structure and size of the nobility in Hungary, Galicia, and the Alpine-Bohemian lands. There are brief accounts of the major cultural and intellectual trends in each period, although Austrian German culture, particularly in Vienna, gets more attention than the intellectual life of the other nationalities. Berenger generally captures well the personality and primary domestic and foreign political concerns of each ruler and offers clear accounts of the principal political and military crises. Otherwise, much of the political and diplomatic narrative will strike younger scholars, even those with strong interests in politics and diplomacy, as

old fashioned in conceptualization and interpretation.

Berenger includes in his bibliography and notes some of the most important German-, French-, and English-language scholarship on diplomatic, cultural, and economic developments published through the 1980s. Few Hungarian publications and almost no Czech or Polish works show up. The fresh accounts of Austro-Hungarian economic development by David Good, John Komlos, Herbert Matis, and Bernard Michel make their mark here as do various revisionist works from the last two or three decades on important diplomatic and military issues. Berenger treats political developments more conventionally, and older scholarship seems to have dominated his thinking on politics. He duly describes the rise of the national movements and the eventual emergence of the mass parties, but without a clear sense of the processes and phases of political mobilization. Bruce Garver's 1978 book on the Young Czech Party [5] is cited, but no works by John Boyer, Harm-Hinrich Brandt, Jiri Koralka, Christoph Stoelzl, or Otto Urban.

Berenger is at his best in describing the dilemmas of the Austrian Habsburg rulers in the early and middle eighteenth century in trying to hold their lands together and deal with the various external and internal threats to their power. The dynastic politics, diplomatic duels, and military challenges of the eighteenth century come across vividly; and these issues get generally good treatment in the account of the nineteenth century, as well. Not surprisingly, the role of France looms larger here than in most survey histories of the Habsburg Monarchy written by Austrian, English, and American scholars. Berenger treats the major domestic policies of the eighteenth-century Habsburg sovereigns and notes some of the changes they made in government institutions, but he offers little worked-out analysis of the changing structure of the state or the larger

process of state-building in which those monarchs were engaged.

Apparently, Berenger believes that the Austro-Hungarian state never really changed much from its basis in early modern Habsburg dynastic politics. In his concluding chapter, after having treated World War I and the breakup of the Monarchy in the previous chapter, Berenger places the focus squarely back on the dynasty and the strengths and weaknesses of the last two emperors. Regarding the period from 1867 to 1918, the reader is told that "despite appearances, Austria-Hungary remained what the Habsburg monarchy had always been, a state resting on the dynasty, the army, the bureaucracy, and the Church" (p. 212). That statement may hold much truth as a simple generalization, but in the late nineteenth century, in an era of advanced economic development and widening mass political participation, the institutions of government bureaucracy, army, and Church surely were structured very differently, functioned differently, and related differently to various parts of the population than they had in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Readers will not learn from Berenger, for instance, that after the 1860s communal councils, district agencies, Hungary's county assemblies, and the provincial diets and their administrative agencies in Cisleithania all played important roles, along with the two parliaments, in making and implementing various aspects of public policy. Even if the processes of democratization were slow in the Habsburg Monarchy, political parties and popular interest groups at the end of the nineteenth century increasingly penetrated the local, district, and provincial bodies and forced ministerial officials to deal with them. Democratic, federal reforms of the state were conceivable during the final decades, at least in Cisleithania, precisely because of the functioning of local, district, and provincial institutions and their relations with popular parties and interest groups.

A little more attention to developments in the lower levels of government would strengthen, in fact, Berenger's assertions in the final chapters about the continuing viability of the Habsburg state and the possibilities for reform even at the very end. He finds considerable continuing vitality in the basic institutions of the Habsburg state through World War I. Berenger supports the argument that external factors were to blame for the final dissolution: the inability of Emperor Charles to get a separate peace, the economic collapse caused by the war, the shortsighted determination of the Entente powers and the United States in 1918 to be done with the Habsburg Monarchy, and the ambitions of some of the nationalist politicians, particularly those in exile. In Berenger's view, a democratic, federal reform of the state might have given the monarchy a fresh start, even as late as the accession of Emperor Charles.

The presentation of the book also leaves something to be desired. Some useful maps, genealogical and statistical tables, a chronology, and a glossary of German terms are presented at the back. The author's bibliography is a brief five pages. The translator, C. A. Simpson, has augmented that with his own bibliographical essay, but that runs only to six and one half pages. In a number of instances, Simpson, a young British historian, has failed to find the right English terminology to render accurately the historical sense of Berenger's French--or to correct his incidental errors. The description in the text of Brahms as "a Prussian...who came originally from Hamburg" (p. 228) may evoke smiles in Berlin but probably not in Hamburg or Vienna. Copyediting and proofreading are inadequate: there are numerous errors in spelling and in translations, particularly from the various Slavic languages of the Empire. For example, whether originating from Berenger's text or in the course of the translation, a note referring to the Hungarian-Croatian compromise calls it the *Ugodba* rather than *_Nagodba*.

It is hard to recommend this book for student use: for the eighteenth century Charles W. Ingrao's *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1618-1815* [6] is preferable and for the nineteenth century even with their faults so are the older surveys by A. J. P. Taylor and Robert Kann.

Notes

[1]. A. J. P. Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy, Eighteen Nine to Nineteen Eighteen: A History of the Austrian Empire & Austria-Hungary* (London: H. Hamilton, 1948; paperback in print: Chicago: University of Chicago Press, May 1976).

[2]. Barbara Jelavich, *Modern Austria: Empire and Republic, 1815-1986* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[3]. Robert A. Kann, *History of the Habsburg Empire 1526-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

[4]. Jean Berenger, *Histoire de l'Empire des Habsbourg 1273-1918* (Paris: Fayard, 1990).

[5]. Bruce M. Garver, *The Young Czech Party, 1874-1901, and the Emergence of a Multi-Party System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

[6]. Charles W. Ingrao, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1618-1815* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

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