



Grete Klingenstein, Franz A.J. Szabo, eds. *Staatskanzler Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz-Rietberg, 1711-1794: Neue Perspektiven zu Politik und Kultur der europäischeren Aufklärung*. Graz: Andreas Schneider Verlagsabteilung, 1996. iv + 499 pp. DM 70 (paper), ISBN 978-3-900993-43-6.

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Prince Kaunitz as Mr. Gladstone

As anyone lucky enough to have attended one of their conferences will confirm, there are no more hospitable hosts than Dr. Jan Spatny and the Historical Museum at Austerlitz. Certainly there was no more fitting location for a conference on Prince Kaunitz than his ancestral seat at Austerlitz, better known of course as the site of Napoleon's greatest victory. Following the collapse of the Soviet Empire in 1989, it was possible for one of Moravia's most prominent historical personalities to be rescued from the rubbish heap of history and to be given his due. In 1992, in a fine demonstration of what might be called the "Ozymandias principle," the name of one of the main streets in the neighbouring city of Brno was changed from Lenin Street to Kaunitz Street. The conference whose proceedings are recorded in this volume was held two years later.

In the West, Kaunitz has never been neglected, of course. As the editors record in their preface, his stock has never stood higher, as scholars such as Peter Dickson and Derek Beales have established him as the third ruler of the Habsburg Monarchy, together with Maria Theresa and Joseph II. The twenty-nine papers reprinted here testify to the enhanced vitality of Kaunitz studies, now that historians from the Czech Republic and elsewhere in eastern Europe have been liberated from the Marxist-Leninist straitjacket. Although one or two of the contributions merely take up space, the great majority have something of value to add, both by way of new information and fresh insights. Reasonably priced and attractively presented, this volume should be in every self-

respecting research library.

Worth the purchase price alone is the general essay on the life and times of Kaunitz by the Canadian scholar Franz Szabo, whose first volume of a study of Kaunitz and enlightened absolutism appeared in the same year as the conference.[1] In a lucid and challenging paper, Szabo presents Kaunitz as a consistently constructive, enlightened and far-sighted statesman, whose aims were essentially defensive and pacific, at least after 1763. His unrivaled knowledge of Kaunitz's activities as a domestic reformer allows him to correct some tenacious myths about this side of his activity. In particular he takes Friedrich Walter to task for arguing in a celebrated article of 1932[2] that it was the failure of his grand design for a revolution in foreign policy which prompted Kaunitz to enter the domestic arena. As Szabo rightly points out, there was no strict division between domestic and foreign policy at this time, for the *Geheime Konferenz* dealt with both; Kaunitz had been a member since 1749 and was chairman from 1753. He also became chairman of the new *Ministerrat* when it was set up in 1756, which in effect made him prime minister.

Szabo is also very interesting on the three great lessons which Kaunitz learned from the Seven Years War. Firstly and most obviously, Prussia was to be regarded as the Monarchy's main enemy. That fundamental premise meant that a good relationship with the Bourbon powers, especially France, was needed to neutralise the Western and Southern frontiers. So, however angry Kaunitz may have become about real or imagined French dere-

fiction, the alliance of 1756 remained the bedrock of his diplomatic system. Secondly, he learned that the alliance with Russia was worse than worthless and that the Russian *Drang nach Westen* posed a new and serious threat to the integrity of the Habsburg Monarchy. The first partition of Poland which resulted was not something he welcomed, but rather accepted as the least destabilising option.

The third great lesson taught by the Seven Years War was that the true strength of the Monarchy depended on progressive social, economic, and cultural development. Indeed, Kaunitz became the most important advocate of enlightened absolutism throughout the three reigns of Maria Theresa, Joseph II, and Leopold II. He had been an admirer of the Enlightenment from his youth and was well acquainted with enlightened thinkers from Beccaria to Adam Smith, from Winckelmann to Kant. It was an attachment he revealed in his language, repeatedly employing enlightened phrases such as *Republique des lettres*, *das allgemeine Beste*, *Aufklaerung*, *Menschlichkeit*, *Vernunft*, *Fortschritt*, *Toleranz*, *Gewissen*, etc. As Szabo argues, there was more than *raison d'état* underlying his domestic policy, there was also an alternative vision. Indeed, his life was devoted to changing the baroque, confessional, and aristocratic structure of the Habsburg Monarchy into a secular, open, prosperous and progressive *Rechtsstaat* infused by an entrepreneurial spirit.

Szabo has certainly found some striking observations by Kaunitz to support this character-sketch. On 21 April 1767, he wrote to Maria Theresa:

Dieser Trieb wird durch nichts so sehr als durch eine Gewisse Art der Freyheit des Volcks, und des rechten National Geists angefrischet; Und Wo selbiger Vorhanden ist, alda pflegt die Industrie auf das hoechste zu steigen, und das Volck sich zu bereichern. England und Holland dienen desfalls zum Beyspiel; Und meines Orts wuensche ich zum Besten des Staats, dass die Slavische Denkens-Art aus den Erblanden verbannt und dagegen ein, die Freyheit liebender Industrial-Geist eingepflanzt [werde].

It was an attitude which survived the shock of the French Revolution. In one of his last memoranda, dated 15 September 1793, he wrote: "Buergerliche Freiheit und Eigenthumsrecht sind keine franzoesische Traum-bilder, sie sind tief in einer gerechten monarchischen Verfassung gegruendet." Consequently, he argued, the French Revolution should not be countered by a closed police state but by means of a *Rechts- und Kulturstaat* which would be open to intellectual competition and to

all branches of the sciences and the arts: "Das Beispiel, welches in dem gegenwaertigen Augenblicke die englische Nation vor Augen legt, beweiset, dass, verbunden mit einer milden und weisen Regierung Aufklaerung das sicherste Mittel ist, die Ruhe und Anhaenglichkeit des Unterthanen zu befestigen."

In short, Kaunitz begins to sound like Mr. Gladstone, but the suspicion also begins to grow that he has achieved this status by virtue of some Whigish history. In particular, Szabo underestimates Kaunitz's acquisitive instinct, which was usually expressed in more temperate terms than those used by Joseph II but was no less highly developed. Szabo tells us that Kaunitz was opposed to territorial compensations—unless it was an amicable exchange of the Austrian Netherlands for Bavaria which did not involve compensation for a third party. But the author does not seem to appreciate that this in itself revealed an attitude fundamentally at odds with the nature of the Habsburg Monarchy and the Holy Roman Empire on which it depended.

It was not so much that Kaunitz's ambition to turn the Habsburg Monarchy into a modern state was frustrated by the vagaries of the international system, the incompetence of the Monarchy's bureaucracy or the folly of Joseph II or whatever; Kaunitz's very attachment to the *Staatsidee* was misguided. The Habsburg Monarchy was not a state and never could become a state; it was an Empire, a multi-cultural conglomerate with the capacity for maintaining peace in Central and Eastern Europe only if it could refrain from threatening others. In trying to make it something alien to its nature—to wash the stripes off the zebra—Kaunitz and his colleagues were playing straight into the hands of their enemies, notably Prussia and Russia. It is also not difficult to find utterances by Kaunitz which make him sound much more like Palmerston than Gladstone: in 1783, for example, when he advocated exploiting the crisis over the Crimea to regain the Passarowitz boundaries, or in 1787, when he told his envoys that the Monarchy would join the war against the Turks, not only because of treaty obligations to Russia but because "sich unsere Macht befestigt hat und ein unbegrenztes Verlangen zur Beybehaltung des Friedens nicht mehr unseren ersten praktischen Grundsatz ausmacht."^[3]

The range of the other papers in this collection is best indicated by a simple table of contents:

Elisabeth Garms-Corides, "Kaunitz und die habsburgische Italienpolitik waehrend des Oesterreichischen Erbfolgekriegs" Milena Lenderova, "Wenzel An-

ton Kaunitz, ambassadeur d'Autriche en France" Christopher Duffy, "Count Kaunitz-Rietberg, military strategist, 1756-63" Johannes Kunisch, "Der Aufstieg neuer Grossmaechte im 18. Jahrhundert und die Aufteilung der Machtsphaeren in Ostmitteleuropa" H.M. Scott, "Kaunitz and the Western powers after the Seven Years War" Michael Hochedlinger, "Das Ende der Aera Kaunitz in der Staatskanzlei" Ernst von Wangermann, "Kaunitz und der Krieg gegen das revolutionaere Frankreich" Lothar Schilling, "Ohne Leidenschaft und Vorurteil? Praemissen aussenpolitischer Urteilsbildung bei Kaunitz" Harm Klueting, "Kaunitz, die Kirche und der Josephinismus. Protestantisches landesherrliches Kirchenregiment, rationaler Territorialismus und theresianisch-josephinisches Staatskirchentum" Renate Zedinger, "Kaunitz und Cobenzl. Zu den Zentralisierungstendenzen des Staatskanzlers im Wiener Verwaltungsapparat der oesterreichischen Niederlande" Michele Galand, "Kaunitz et les Pays-Bas autrichiens: la centralisation administrative" Bruno Bernard, "Kaunitz et le personnel gouvernemental bruxellois" Carlo Capra, "Kaunitz and Austrian Lombardy" Antonio Trampus, "Kaunitz und das Litorale Austriaco" Antal Szantay, "Kaunitz und die Verwaltungsreformen Josephs II" Claudio Donati, "Kaunitz und das Trentino. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Beziehungen zwischen Zentrum und Peripherie in der oesterreichischen Monarchie des 18. Jahrhunderts" Christine Lebeau, "Verwandschaft, Patronage und Freundschaft. Die Rolle de Buches im Kreis um Kaunitz" Christian Steeb, "Johann Fries (1719-1785). Vom Einwanderer zum Staatsbankier und Vertrauten des Staatskanzlers" Gudrun Busch, "Kaunitz'sche Diplomatie und ihre musikalischen Folgen: Gottfried van Swieten als kaiserlicher Gesandte in Berlin (1772-1777)" Gerhard Croll, "Musiker und Musik in der Privatkorrespondenz von Wenzel Anton Fuerst von Kaunitz. Informanten und Informationen" Jiri Kroupa, "Fuerst Wenzel Anton Kaunitz-Rietberg. Ein Kunstmaezen und Curieux der Aufklaerung" R.J.W. Evans, "Moravia and the culture of the Enlightenment in the Habsburg Monarchy" Horst Carl, "Kaunitz und Ostfriesland. Aspekte adeliger Familienpolitik im Hause Kaunitz" Alwin Hanschmidt, "Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz-Rietberg als Landesherr der Grafschaft Rietberg 1746-1794" Manfred Beine, "Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz-Rietberg und die Entwicklung von Ausgaben und Ertraegen der Grafschaft Rietberg" Bronislav Chocholac, "Die Wirtschaftslage der maehrischen

Herrschaften des Wenzel Anton Fuersten von Kaunitz-Rietberg" Jan Janak, "Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz und die Textilmanufakturunternehmung in Maehren" Dusan Uhlik, "Kaunitz und die boehmischen Laender"

Most of these titles prove to be an accurate reflection of their contents, a notable exception being Wangermann's paper on "Kaunitz and the War Against Revolutionary France." Despite its promising title, this turns out to be nothing more than an account of conversations allegedly conducted by the envoy of Ragusa with the ailing Kaunitz. While Wangermann's belated interest in the high politics and foreign policy of the period is to be welcomed, he will need to learn that one should not take at face value everything a diplomat says. Although it is perhaps invidious to single out individual contributions for praise, I was impressed especially by Christopher Duffy on Kaunitz as strategist during the Seven Years War, Hamish Scott's characteristically sharp analysis of the Habsburg Monarchy's situation after 1763, Michael Hochedlinger's fascinating account of the decline and fall of Kaunitz's influence, and Carlo Capra on Lombardy and Robert Evans on Moravia. A group of contributions on Kaunitz as patriarch, landowner and patron of the arts is both original and illuminating.

In short, this was an exceptionally worthwhile conference. The editors are to be congratulated on assembling a wide-ranging and powerful collection of papers.

Notes

[1]. Franz A.J. Szabo, *Kaunitz and Enlightened Absolutism 1753-1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[2]. Friedrich Walter, "Kaunitz' Eintritt in die innere Politik," *Mitteilungen des Instituts fuer Oesterreichische Geschichte*, Vol. 46 (1932).

[3]. Quoted in Hellmuth Roessler, *Graf Johann Philipp Stadion: Napoleons deutscher Gegenspieler* (Vienna and Munich: Herold, 1966), Vol. 1, p. 137.

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