



Laurence Cole, Daniel Unowsky, eds. *The Limits of Loyalty: Imperial Symbolism, Popular Allegiances, and State Patriotism in the Late Habsburg Monarchy*. Austrian and Habsburg Studies. New York: Berghahn Books, 2007. viii + 246 pp. \$90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84545-202-5.

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Published on HABSBUERG (March, 2010)

Commissioned by Jonathan Kwan

Bringing the Dynasty Back In

After about two decades of new research informed by more nuanced views of nations and nationalism, our understanding of the last decades of the Habsburg Monarchy has undergone significant revisions. Gone is the image of a doomed political entity living on borrowed time without really facing up to the fateful force of nationalities. Not only were the nationalities not as solid, natural, or self-evident as used to be assumed, but we also now know that the Habsburg Monarchy, especially in the Cisleithanian half, was presiding over a rapidly developing (and modernizing) society and economy with dynamic new social and political forces emerging and gaining influence.[1] Along with the state authorities that proved to be capable of adapting to the new constitutional environment, these new historical forces could not be easily subsumed under the old heuristic rubric of dynamic, energized, but oppressed nationalities versus a petrified, outdated, and incompetent state in the dualist straightjacket.[2]

Further advancing the revisionist challenge to the teleological and nationalities-centered historiography, Laurence Cole, Daniel Unowsky, and their colleagues make a strong case in *The Limits of Loyalty* for the necessity to “ask what held [the Habsburg Monarchy] together for so long” as much as to explain why the monarchy collapsed (p. 2). The essays in this volume share a renewed focus on an old theme: the institution of dynasty. They examine “the degree to which the Habsburg dynasty retained meaning and relevance in an emerging modern, mass society, and ... how successful such efforts at ‘supranational’ integration were” (p. 4). The authors set out to correct the previous underestimation of the dynasty in its role as “a symbolic center” and “a deep-rooted element in the ‘mental structure’ of central/east central European society” (p. 5).

The majority of the essays here explore the sym-

bolic significance and political implications of specific public events, personalities, and their memorialization associated with the Habsburgs and the dynastic state. The result is a rich sampling of a promising line of research that brings the “invention of tradition” (and in some cases, the *lieux de memoire*) approach to the study of Habsburg Central Europe, and one that complicates and questions the long-standing assumptions about the categorical incompatibility between national consciousness/identity on the one hand, and patriotism to a multinational state and dynastic loyalism on the other.

After the programmatic introduction that questions the still-influential Jaszian dichotomy of centrifugal/centripetal forces,[3] this book begins with two studies on the mechanisms that were supposed to generate popular allegiance to the imperial state and the dynasty. Ernst Brückmüller compares the content of elementary school readers in different languages, and studies state policies on *Gymnasium* history instruction. He finds that the Habsburg authorities responded to the growing influence of nationalist thinking by integrating selected national myths and local traditions into primary school instruction. The combination of dynastic tales and local/national figures may be uneasy, but apparently the Austrian state was promoting a compound loyalty in which the attachment to national-cultural homelands coexisted with and reinforced the allegiance to the emperor and the larger common fatherland he represented. In the case of *Gynasium* history instruction, however, the Austrian central state wanted to make sure that the main orientation in educating the future elite was an “Austrian patriotism” (p. 29).

The Habsburg loyalist cause also was served well enough by the military experience of male citizens. Cole’s essay looks at veteran organizations, which grew significantly after the introduction of conscription in

1868 (well-above two thousand across Cisleithania by 1912). This growth was an indication that state patriotism and dynastic loyalty received strong and growing support at the grassroots level as a result of military service. In the Italian-speaking regions of South Tyrol, fast-expanding and active veteran groups “act[ed] as a conduit for the dissemination of Habsburg-patriotic sentiments in society at large” (p. 47). These interfaces between the military and civilian realms enjoyed wide popularity, and created “a parallel pro-Habsburg patriotic milieu” (to national societies) without rejecting the local Italian culture (p. 55). But this success had its limits, since it did not touch the influential section of the liberal bourgeoisie in Trentine society. “The upsurge in Austrian patriotism before 1914” was ultimately not enough to overcome the blow dealt by the First World War (p. 55).

Brückmüller and Cole show that the monarchy was able to act and achieve a certain degree of success in generating popular attachment to the imperial state and the dynasty. But the remaining essays paint a far more ambivalent picture. The two essays by Nancy Wingfield and Hugh LeCaine Agnew show how supposedly “centripetal” dynastic symbols lost their integrating and uniting power in Bohemia. Wingfield’s deft tracing of the image of Joseph II is an excellent example of how an absolutist, pre-national reformist figure could be mobilized by different political forces. Beginning as the *Volkskaiser*, an “imperial humanitarian” in the early nineteenth century (p. 66), his image was invoked in *Vormaerz* and the Constitutional Era to fight for liberal political reforms and the *Kulturkampf*. His memory later morphed into a shorthand to rally German nationalists in their struggle with the imperial state. The success of German liberals/nationalists in appropriating and monopolizing Joseph II’s memory showed how far the nationalization of political frame of reference had gone at the turn of the century. It also made clear that a popular imperial figure could be deployed by oppositional political forces in Bohemia “as a weapon against the politics of the imperial center from the periphery,” and thereby losing its—and by implication, the entire dynasty’s—centripetal efficacy (p. 81).

Agnew focuses on a specific symbol, the Crown of St. Wenceslas, in an elegant narrative of popular responses to Emperor Franz Joseph’s visits to the Bohemian lands. While Franz Joseph became more popular among Czechs as he aged, the failure to be crowned king of Bohemia remained a sticking point that symbolized the unfulfilled German-Czech compromise. The radicalization of nationalist politics further hollowed the symbolic meaning

of the monarch, as Franz Joseph assumed the persona of someone who tried to balance competing forces, and one who commanded respect but could not “dramatically affect the political contests” in a new political landscape (p. 103). Since the timing for a politically significant coronation had passed, the Crown of St. Wenceslas became “a [Czech] national symbol without a concrete connection to Franz Joseph and the dynasty,” and a symbol of “division and contestations” in the Bohemian lands (pp. 99, 106).

Franz Joseph’s 1880 imperial inspection tour to Galicia provided the occasion for or impetus to the public display of three competing (and nationalist) visions of Galician politics within a three-month period. In his essay, Unowsky discusses the Polish conservatives’ staging of the emperor’s visit as an affirmation of their political hegemony, the Polish democrats’ commemoration of the failed 1830 revolution that positioned Habsburg Galicia as the beacon of hope for an independent Poland, and the Ruthenian intellectuals’ public celebration of Joseph II that sought to refute Polish claims of provincial unity. The relative success of the Polish conservatives and the Ruthenian intellectuals in their respective national communities, argues Unowsky, showed that the imperial center, and specifically the emperor and some of his ancestors, could still inspire enthusiastic support among the masses. But the provincial political activists had an agency of their own in deploying supposedly unifying symbols, and these symbols may serve to heighten, and not to bridge, the divisions.

Unowsky’s case had a parallel in Zagreb. During Franz Joseph’s brief inspection tour there in 1895, Croatian students from the university staged a demonstration featuring some anti-Serbian violence, a procession, and the burning of a facsimile of the Hungarian flag. With conscious decisions about their costume, procession route, slogans, and behavior during and after the demonstration, Sarah Kent’s concise but lively account of the demonstration reinforces what Unowsky’s case has suggested: symbols of unity and display of dynastic loyalty did not function in a straightforward manner. Enacting a certain notion of corporate identity and carefully framing their actions as pro-dynastic, Croatian students showed that dynastic loyalty was “not necessarily coterminous with the imperial policy” (p. 162). Even though the allegiance to the emperor and the dynasty remained largely reliable, the erosion had begun and the renovated imperial ritual could not disguise its own limits in a nationalizing world.

The power of the personal in creating critical politi-

cal alliance and legitimacy is discussed in Alice Freifeld's essay on Elisabeth (Sisi). As both a player and a symbol, Elisabeth had four roles in Hungarian politics: "helping to defuse the Hungarian martyrology of revolutionary defeat in the 1850s"; contributing to the Dualist conciliation in the 1860s; serving as "justifying icon" for the liberal Compromise order; and acting as a symbol of martyrdom for the "fall of the Kingdom of St. Stephen" (p. 142). Freifeld's exploration in the two latter roles leaves a lot to be desired. Her discussion of the first two, in contrast, intriguingly shows how successful manipulation of national symbols—Elisabeth's politically shrewd fashion choices, for example—and timely (and perhaps also sincere) cultivation of personal touches and connections made the queen a key catalyst for a Hungarian patriotism that incorporated Habsburg dynastic loyalty. Elisabeth's case testifies to the importance of the personal in the constant remaking of the monarchy, which, in turn, ensured its continued relevance.

Alon Rachamimov's essay is mainly concerned with the question of conceptual practice: how can we approach the complex issue of "identity"? The case of the noted Hebrew author Avigdor Hameiri, he argues, testifies to the shifting, complex, and often "seemingly contradictory mix of cultural and political constructs" that constituted one's self-identification (p. 179). "Context was often more important than conviction and ideology, and instinctive, murky thought could be at times more typical than clarity of vision" in this regard (p. 193). Rachamimov clearly has goals far beyond the scope of this book, and his questioning of the common practice regarding the analysis of "identity" may even subvert some other essays here. Nevertheless, there are two points that have important implications: first, the First World War was a critical juncture for many in matters of self-identification; and second, loyalty to the state (behavioral) did not automatically mean strong emotional attachment to it. How historians working on different levels of social collectivities can benefit from his insights into the fluidity of individual "identity," though, remains the fundamental question.

As the proverbial "elephant in the room," Emperor Franz Joseph is almost everywhere in the assembled essays; but in the sense of being subjected to a sustained analysis as potent political actor and symbol at the center of popular allegiances and supranational loyalty, he looms large but is not quite on center stage in the book (with perhaps the exception of Agnew's essay). The emperor appears more often as a prop in the local political struggles, rather than the main subject. Christiane Wolf's comparative study of constitutional monarchs in

Great Britain, Germany, and Austria offers only a partial solution.

Based on the contemporary press, Wolf argues that Emperor Franz Joseph's image developed into a depoliticized, benign figure and a convinced representative of constitutional monarchism. This may well have been making a virtue out of necessity, but this image and the popular personality cult of a nonpartisan, loving emperor served as an integrative mechanism in an age of rising nationalist politics and paralyzed *Reichsrat*. Franz Joseph's image of being "above the fray" lent legitimacy to the Habsburg state when there was no better integrative symbol in politics. Of course, this meant that the future of the monarchy relied overly on an old man, and it was difficult to formulate a more active role for him or any future monarch.

Wolf's comparative approach, despite its promising potentials, may not have best served the general thrust of this book. A more focused study of Franz Joseph, comparable to Freifeld's piece on Empress-Queen Elisabeth, would have allowed the book to balance its periphery tilt with an account of how the most prominent dynastic-state agent and imperial symbol functioned at the center of the political structure. The personal cult itself, and how the court and the governments of both halves of the monarchy consciously cultivated (or the lack thereof) the unifying/justifying symbol of the shared monarch, are two aspects that could have been included in the volume.

In general, the essays deliver what the introduction promises: both a pertinent corrective to the Jaszian dichotomy and a promising alternative approach when studying the late Habsburg Monarchy. The rich case studies and vivid vignettes presented here reveal as much about the tensions within the late monarchy (but without any teleological accent) as about the qualified success of the dynasty, the emperor, and the state in staying relevant and even loved. This latest salvo from the revisionist scholarship could ignite the debate about the continuing vitality and adaptability of the Habsburg polity.

But in the end the monarchy collapsed in the wake of a disastrous war it started, and its decision to go to war had something to do with the perception of existential crisis. In an aptly subtitled afterword ("The Limits of Loyalty"), R. J. W. Evans offers a friendly dissenting view that tempers any excessive optimism about the political future of the monarchy. Several contributors have explicitly warned us about the limits of integrative symbols on the "receiving ends." Evans goes further, questioning how long the supposedly dynastic cadres of the

a-national state, the civil service and military personnel, could withstand the onslaught of nationalist mobilization and the state-sanctioned requirements that could strengthen ethnic and local attachment more than imperial loyalty. Additionally, the unique importance of Emperor Franz Joseph's personal cult also meant the danger of putting all eggs in one basket. The future was not rosy—though not hopeless, one may add—despite the continuing popular loyalism, and the contemporaries knew it.

In Evans's cautionary tallying of what went against the Habsburg cause, I find the most relevant to be the "supranational resonances" of dynastic loyalty, which "would not necessarily be at all the same" among different constituencies (p. 229). Different groups and locales may have been loyal and strongly attached to the emperor and the dynasty all along, but Evans shows that their preferred models of rulership and notions of the state were in conflict and mutually alienating. Following his logic, I think it is plausible that in the last years of the monarchy most citizens were loyal to the imperial center vertically, but horizontally they may not have loved or even tolerated people from the competing groups. Intensified nationalist mobilization and other political struggles may have pushed them even further away from each other. And dynastic loyalty could have been used as a cover to disguise increased sectional disjunctions, as in the cases of Galicia and Zagreb in this book.

You do not need every member to love everyone else to hold a polity together. But accumulated damages to vital political or social fabrics could be fatal when a tipping point is reached, or an unusual, destabilizing blow (a disastrous war, for example) is dealt. This book shows that the growth of nationalist awareness and dynastic loyalty were not mutually exclusive, and may even be positively correlated. In the long run, however, the dynastic bond and state patriotism could still be eroded beyond recognition in the process of escalating nationalist fights or other forms of political polarization, even if no one had intended or desired such a consequence.

Unintended consequences and contingency may therefore be what cannot be overlooked if the points of this collection are taken up in any future research. People could be loyal to their emperor, the dynasty, and grudgingly or not, their Habsburg state. Their dynastic loyalty and state patriotism may even be strengthened or renewed by the "invention of tradition"-type of symbolic politics. The question, however, is whether the accommodation of nationalizing politics was unintentionally setting the stage for a sudden implosion when

the dynastic state's political legitimacy and effectiveness weakened significantly (for whatever reason). The Soviet Union's dissolution into (originally) artificially constructed national republics can serve as a point of reference.[4]

Kent's Zagreb case points to another likely unintended consequence. Croatian protestors carved a discursive space for oppositional politics by making a clear distinction between their allegiances to the emperor and their strong opposition to the actual policies of his Royal Hungarian government. But it is quite uncertain how long such a distinction could be maintained. Steady criticisms emanating from even a loyal opposition could conceivably chip away that important distinction and the legitimacy of the current system. When and under what circumstance the erasure of that distinction happened—the tipping point(s)—is something historians could pay attention to in the future.

Contingencies, like an unexpectedly long and devastating war, is another factor that should be considered. They could magnify existing horizontal tensions, and ultimately destroy the previous uneasy equilibrium. As this book shows quite convincingly, the bond between the imperial center and the people may be livelier and stronger than previously recognized. However, extraordinary pressure originating from contingencies could shatter even strong bonds. A suggestive case is already in the book: Rachamimov's analysis of Hameiri's autobiographical writings, where the First World War's carnage turned soldiers against their beloved emperor.

This collection of essays sheds light on the underestimated efforts and successes of the Habsburg dynastic state in promoting supranational unity and patriotism. They also point out the varying effectiveness and limits of these efforts. Any future discussion on the last years of the Habsburg Monarchy's political history should build on this collection's significant achievements whether the point of departure is the monarchy's ultimate failure or a decidedly a-teleological perspective. The rich variety of cases presented here means that they may be too scattered in the covered time period, or too diverse in their scales of observation, to allow a more rigorous examination of long-term attritional effects and short-term contingencies I suggest earlier. But it is a worthwhile trade-off: as the first coherent attempt in examining the efforts to generate dynastic-oriented patriotism and the responses to these efforts, this book contains many seeds for a more nuanced and sophisticated discussion of the late monarchy. It is not a book that only critiques the old; but it also points to the possibility of something new, and

arguably more exciting.

Notes

[1]. A recent example is Pieter Judson's nationally indifferent people living in the linguistic borderlands, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). See also his "Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe: Introduction," in *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe*, ed. Pieter M. Judson and Marsha L. Rozenblit (New York: Berghahn Book, 2005), 1-18.

[2]. The latest synthesis can be found, for example, in Gary B. Cohen, "Nationalist Politics and the Dynamics of State and Civil Society in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1867-1914," *Central European History* 40, no. 2 (2007): 241-278. A succinct summary for non-Austrianists can be found in

Gary B. Cohen, "Reinventing Austrian and Central European History," *German Studies Association Newsletter* 33, no. 2 (Winter 2008-2009): 28-38.

[3]. The classic centrifugal-centripetal dichotomy is laid out in Oscar Jaszi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (1929; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

[4]. The connection between state-sponsored nationalizing politics and the collapse of the multinational Soviet state is made by Ronald G. Suny in his *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993). See also Ronald G. Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

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Citation: Ke-chin Hsia. Review of Cole, Laurence; Unowsky, Daniel, eds, *The Limits of Loyalty: Imperial Symbolism, Popular Allegiances, and State Patriotism in the Late Habsburg Monarchy*. HABSBUrg, H-Net Reviews. March, 2010. URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=25294>



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