

Karl Vocelka. *Glanz und Untergang der hÖfischen Welt. ReprÖsentation, Reform und Reaktion im Habsburgischen VielvÖlkerstaat.* Vienna: Ueberreuter, 2001. 542 pp. EUR 51.90, cloth, ISBN 978-3-8000-3529-8.



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Published on HABSBURG (September, 2002)

Austria in the Eighteenth Century

If, as we are led to expect, each new generation of historians must rewrite, or at least rethink their craft and its assumptions, then this new series of twelve volumes covering the history of "Austria" as largely defined from prehistory to the end of the second millenium must be welcome. [1] Karl Vocelka's volume on the eighteenth century does not disappoint. From the beginning each section opens a view on the theories as well as the new researches published in the past three or four decades, and provides a clear view of the debates about the meaning of this key period in the history of the monarchy.

Perhaps the most visible break with past narratives is the organization of topics with heavy emphasis on changes in social structure, gender relations, and the "under class". There is a pervasive concern with "identity," a new age interest that challenges much of twentieth century historiography and the notion of a "master narrative". Vocelka's suggestion that it is necessary for the next generation to "deconstruct Maria Theresia" makes clear his wish to transcend the cloying adu-

lation of her in the popular mind (p. 33). Throughout the volume the natural human longing for heroic figures is challenged vigorously. In his search for a genuinely "Austrian" identity in the history of the eighteenth century, Vocelka sees the seeds of a modern society more skeptical, humble, rational, and humane than its own past.

Inside the covers of this lavishly produced book are endpapers with a map of central Europe, with the modern state of Austria overlaid upon it, suggesting that this is the subject, not the empire from which it later emerged. This is clearly a history written from and about the center, specifically Vienna, and not about the separate parts joined by dynastic accident. There are many references to Bohemia, Hungary, Italy, Poland and other corners of the "periphery" but most of them have to do with general cultural developments such as education, literacy, scientific contributions, rather than with regional social and political developments.

One recurring theme is the notion that the very cosmopolitan eighteenth century saw the "Europeanization" of Austria just as it did much of

the rest of the planet in an age of imperial expansion. This was throughout the work of social elites, particularly the "courtly world" which systematically reinforced its dominance by "representation" of secular and religious symbols. The monarchs, from Leopold I through Francis II/I, are rated here on a scale relating to the number and locations of the monumental sculptures created to give physical evidence of their power and virtues. From there the scale descends to the generals, the reforming ministers, and a few folk heroes of the Napoleonic wars. As time passed the composition of the political and social elite expanded beyond the great magnate nobles, but it remained totally dependent on the absolute power of the monarchs, who alone could confer or ratify the privileged status of any of their subjects.

The decline of the Ottoman Turks after 1699 left a vacuum of power in the east which the monarchy sought to fill through military conquest, migration into newly acquired lands ruined by generations of warfare, and the exploitation of new acquisitions to provide the resources for its continuing conflicts with France. The Pragmatic Sanction, efforts to pacify perennially rebellious Hungary, and attempts to use the commercial strength of the Austrian Netherlands failed to achieve the intended results in time to meet the crisis precipitated by the death of Charles VI in 1740 and Prussia's instant seizure of the occasion to occupy Silesia. By then the monarchy looked like a great power, but had neither the economic organization nor the political institutions to act like one. Representation of power in the elaborate late baroque court ceremonial, the effusive architecture adorning Vienna and some other cities of the empire, proved to be but elegies for the fading glory of an outdated feudal society.

Austria's defeat by Prussia displayed two absolutist states competing for dominance in a world in which military power depended more on technology, professional discipline, and institutions that could deliver the resources needed to

field a superior force. Prussia showed that the reforms of Frederick William I and Frederick II overcame many of the structural weaknesses of their exposed territory. Behind those reforms lurked the intellectual revolt against traditional authority which some were already calling an "Enlightenment."

Maria Theresia shared none of the anticlerical tone of the French rationalist philosophers, but many around her did. While she remained a traditionalist in many ways, she was practical enough to be convinced of the need for fundamental change. The greatest blow to the old world came with the secularization of education and the gradual creation of new schools throughout the empire, though at first largely in Austria and Bohemia. Luring Gerhard van Swieten from the Netherlands put a reformist in charge of the censorship, the medical system, the university, and much else. With the support of her consort, Francis Stephen of Lorraine, Maria Theresia gave her trust to Haugwitz, then Chotek and Kaunitz, all of whom introduced fundamental changes in the economy and social institutions, most of which had the effect of excluding the old aristocratic estates from acting as intermediaries between the monarchs and the population they ruled but were rarely able to govern directly.

The resulting phenomenon called even then "enlightened absolutism" showed all the contradictions and ambiguities implicit in what seemed to many an oxymoron. When Joseph II, freed at last from the conflicts of co-regency with his mother, began reigning alone in 1780 the pace of changes decreed from above reached a new intensity, one which opened the doors to often violent reaction against the monarchy by subjects who had little taste for change, especially when it appeared to come in heretical vestments. Religious toleration, especially for Jews, offended both the pious peasantry who had been conditioned by generations of preachers to blame all their misfortunes on these foreigners, and many tradition-

al orthodox Jews and the Hassidim who saw in toleration a temptation to abandon their own culture and assimilate into a secular world.

With the outbreak of revolution in France the reaction began in Austria. Leopold II (1790-92) shared both his brother's desire to create vital institutions, and his mother's pragmatism in realizing just where the line had to be drawn to avoid civil unrest. Vocolka insists that the Habsburg empire was not "inoculated against revolution" by the reforms, but rather by its lingering traditionalism, faith in the Roman church (especially in Austria), and the horrors of civil war following the declaration of a French Republic. The subsequent wars against France confirmed the reaction in Austria. The few "Jacobins" who spoke out were quickly and brutally suppressed. For Austria, revolution had to wait until 1848 and an industrializing society.

If reaction dominated the political scene, however, society itself went through fundamental structural changes in the second half of the eighteenth century. Some were conceptual changes, such as a new concept of the state and its relation to its populace. Local institutions were slowly but relentlessly subordinated to the state, which began counting the population, numbering its houses, measuring its land holdings, sponsoring new institutions: schools, hospitals, poorhouses and the like. Vocolka sees virtually all these changes as part of a great system of "social disciplining" in which the individual was integrated into a new "public" infused with the bourgeois values of hard work, frugality, and loyalty. It was also largely a male world in which women found little to applaud in the reforms. Education had a fundamental role in this process, but for most it was training for a craft or profession, not education in the more liberal sense, particularly where women were concerned.

In the concluding chapters Vocolka portrays an Austria grown smaller than its empire, making an identity for itself from the remains of the re-

form era in the second half of the century. The Austria emerging slowly from its eighteenth century chrysalis is a secular territorial state with a classical age embodied not so much by great heroes or poets, but by the transcendent musicians of the late eighteenth century--Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and the lesser composers around them. An identity particularly suited to the view from Vienna, where language was divisive, and music and architecture attracted patronage because they were not.

This is a solid and useful book, beautifully produced with many excellent illustrations, an index that goes a little way beyond the usual *Personenregister* and an extensive bibliography which used with the extensive notes can organize titles topically. If the other volumes in this series reach the level of this one, they may well last another generation.

Note:

[1]. So far nine volumes of the series, under the general editorship of Herwig Wolfram, have been published, including the volumes on the 19th and 20th centuries: Helmut Rumpler, *Eine Chance für Mitteleuropa: Bürgerliche Emanzipation und Staatsverfall in der Habsburgermonarchie* (Vienna: Ueberreuter, 1997), and Ernst Hanisch, *Der lange Schatten des Staates: Österreichische Gesellschaftsgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Ueberreuter, 1994).

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Citation: John Spielman. Review of Vöcelka, Karl. *Glanz und Untergang der hÖfischen Welt. ReprÖsentation, Reform und Reaktion im Habsburgischen VielvÖlkerstaat*. HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. September, 2002.

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