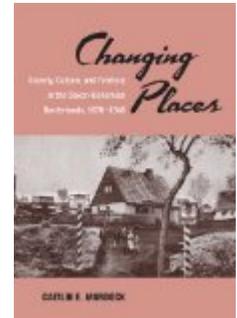


**Caitlin E. Murdock.** *Changing Places: Society, Culture, and Territory in the Saxon-Bohemian Borderlands, 1870-1946.* Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany Series. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010. 288 pp. \$70.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-472-11722-2.



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**Published on** HABSBURG (July, 2011)

**Commissioned by** Jonathan Kwan (University of Nottingham)

The political border dividing Saxony and Bohemia took its current form in 1635. The three mountain ranges that run along that border—the most well-known being the Erzgebirge/Krusné hory—had of course been around much longer. But the Saxon-Bohemian borderlands, Caitlin E. Murdock argues in this impressive book, only took form in the nineteenth century and then largely disappeared during and after World War II. Borderlands, according to Murdock, are defined above all by movement: “It is the mobility of populations, political and cultural ideas, and material goods that creates lived frontier zones in places otherwise distinguished only by a few territorial markers” (p. 7). In describing the back and forth across state borders, as well as the reactions of numerous actors and institutions to this movement, Murdock provides a unique perspective on some of the major issues in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Central European history.

In the course of the nineteenth century, major industrial centers—Dresden, Chemnitz, Plauen, Usti nad Labem, Most, and Cheb—sprouted up

along the foothills of the mountains jutting up along the Saxon-Bohemian border. Crafts, such as bobbin lace and artificial flowers, traveled from highland villages to these lowland cities and then on to the international market. Textiles and glass also traveled from the region’s interior to destinations outside the region. Industrialists shipped coal and semi-finished goods from the Bohemian half of the borderlands to Saxony, which sent finished goods in the other direction. Day laborers and other workers crossed the border as well, often in search of work in the industrial centers on the Saxon side. Much to the dismay of Saxon bakers, consumers crossed into Bohemia to buy cheaper flour. In the evening, revelers went in the same direction. In Bohemia they could drink cheaper beer and dance until 1:00 am.

Industrialization and the rise of a consumer economy, in other words, set the context for the creation of a territory defined by movement and economic entanglement. The Saxon-Bohemian borderlands could not have taken form, however, without the assistance of states that, up through

the middle of the century, had done their best to restrict the movement of goods and people. Habsburg Austria abolished its internal passport system in 1856; in 1871 the German states did the same within the newly constituted German empire. In the 1880s, Saxon and Austrian governments constructed more rail lines across the highlands. By the end of the century, laborers and consumers could cross the border without presenting travel documents. The 1880 Saxon census counted 30,000 Austrian citizens within its borders. Thirty years later, it counted almost 160,000, the majority of whom claimed residence within twenty kilometers of the Saxon border. Saxon Social Democrats protested that Bohemian workers were depressing local wages. Bohemian German and later pan-German nationalist organizations warned that Czech nationalist organizations were “Czechifying” Saxony. Yet, as Murdock argues, these claims had little resonance, for the moment. Instead, by the turn of the century, “borderland residents from industrialists to day laborers had come to consider frontier communities’ economic interdependence an indispensable right and tradition” (p. 30).

The slow decline of the borderlands as a “lived frontier zone” began during World War I when mobilized states began to monitor and restrict movement across the border, which could only be crossed at a limited number of places. States even registered carrier pigeons and forbade the birds from crossing the border. After the war, Weimar Germany and the newly created state of Czechoslovakia hesitantly reopened the border, but passport requirements, stricter border controls, and an intense policing of foreign residents meant that the days of relatively unrestricted movement across the border were over. Economic crises ratcheted up tensions within the borderlands. In 1922 and 1923, Czechoslovak currency deflation and German inflation drew thousands of Bohemians shoppers across the border. Saxon beggars crossed the border pleading for Czechoslovak crowns, which had become legal

tender in Saxony. Smuggling became epidemic, causing German authorities to police the border even more vigorously. Gun shots and beatings became more common. Czechoslovak authorities responded with their own restrictive measures. Neither set of measures could restrict the smuggling. Many German-speaking Bohemians continued to cross into Saxony, but now the borderlands, in which economic decline persisted throughout the 1920s, seemed more divided than ever.

The Great Depression restricted the movement of goods and people further. Perhaps more significant, it created the conditions for political radicals to claim the borderlands as a “crisis zone where the fates of whole states and nations were at stake” (p. 158). Bohemian German and Czech nationalist organizations, as well as Czechoslovak Communists, held noisy demonstrations on the Saxon side of the border. In 1933, SA men crossed into Czechoslovakia without regard for Czechoslovak authorities, sometimes harassing frightened locals. Between 1933 and 1935, Saxon authorities choked off labor migration to Germany and reviewed the files of people naturalized after 1918. Anyone deemed to be Jewish, Czech, a Communist, or a Social Democrat had his citizenship rights revoked. But it was not until 1937 that the Nazi regime took an interest in the region, encouraging a series of crises that would eventually lead to the Munich Agreement and the annexation of the Bohemian half of the borderlands with Germany. Nazi rule, the postwar expulsions, and rise of Communist states left the region dilapidated and divided.

*Changing Places* takes seriously the idea, stated perhaps most elegantly by James J. Sheehan nearly thirty years ago, that the post-1871 German state need not frame studies of German history.[1] In her book we see many of the main themes of German history—late nineteenth-century industrialization, the inflation crisis, Adolf Hitler’s rise to power, and the ever-changing policies toward foreign workers, to name just a few—play out in in-

interesting ways along the Saxon-Bohemian borderlands. Murdock's source base cannot draw a straight line from the emergence of a local designation of the Saxon-Bohemian borderlands as a crisis zone to Hitler's manipulation of Konrad Henlein's Sudeten German party and the Munich Agreement, but the role of local radicals in making Hitler's plans possible is an intriguing one. Similarly, Murdock reminds us that Bohemian and Habsburg history need not be constricted by political borders. Surprisingly, Czech and German nationalist organizations in Bohemia provided both inspiration and organizational models for many pan-German nationalists in late nineteenth-century Saxony. Yet, just as in the language frontiers throughout Austria described in Pieter M. Judson's *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontier of Imperial Austria* (2006), national activists found few followers among the local population. Economic and political elites in the Saxon-Bohemian borderlands had a vested interest in promoting labor migration and trade among various linguistic communities in the region. Wages and work conditions concerned workers more than nationalist drum-beating. While Judson points to the nationalizing state and minority-group status to explain the hardening of national identities in postwar successor states, Murdock shows how mobilized states enacted policies, such as new citizenship laws and stricter policing of the border, that often drew on nationalist rhetoric. Even more important, Murdock argues, economic decline and economic collapse tilled the soil that allowed nationalist rhetoric to take root among the disaffected.

*Changing Places* thus succeeds in being both a regional and transnational history in that it examines a coherent territory where the interaction among various peoples, governments, and nationalisms allows the author to engage a number of historiographies at once. If there is an imbalance, however, it is toward events on the Saxon side of the border. We see quite clearly, for example, how the influx of Bohemian workers into Saxony in

the late nineteenth century fueled industrialization, complicated Social Democratic efforts to organize workers, and put Saxon officials at odds with a German government eager to restrict the flow of migrant workers into Germany. Less clear is how these flows of people across the border affected social relations, politics, and industrialization in cities on the Bohemian side of the border. This imbalance, however, is corrected in the later portions of the book. More important, the borderlands remain the primary organizing device throughout the work. For its residents, as Murdock convincingly shows, the Saxon-Bohemian borderlands was the central context within which they made sense of political, economic, class, and national relationships. The "reality" of regional identities and lived experiences is something that historians should take note of as well.

Murdock, in short, has written a bold and thoughtful book that only a handful of historians could write. Crossing borders and combining historiographies has led to an important work that should find a wide audience among historians of Saxony, Germany, Bohemia, the Habsburg monarchy, and Czechoslovakia--not to mention the growing legion of scholars who simply prefer to be called historians of Central Europe.

#### Note

[1]. James J. Sheehan, "What is German History? Reflections on the Role of the Nation in German History and Historiography," *Journal of Modern History* 53 (1981): 1-23.

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**Citation:** Chad Bryant. Review of Murdock, Caitlin E. *Changing Places: Society, Culture, and Territory in the Saxon-Bohemian Borderlands, 1870-1946*. HABSBERG, H-Net Reviews. July, 2011.

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