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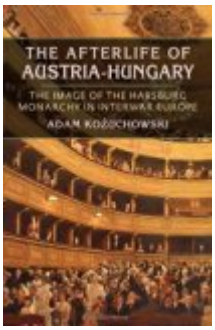

Adam Kożuchowski. *The Afterlife of Austria-Hungary: The Image of the Habsburg Monarchy in Interwar Europe.* Russian and East European Studies Series. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013. 232 pp. $25.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8229-6265-6.

Reviewed by John Fahey

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History has been good to Austria-Hungary. Though seen as anachronistic and decrepit during its later years, the violent and oppressive twentieth century has made the peculiar Habsburg solution to East Central European political organization shine in comparison to the alternatives. The monarchy certainly has its fair share of critics, but many authors point to its supranational ideals, competent bureaucracy, and tolerance. Adam Kożuchowski's *The Afterlife of Austria-Hungary* shows that most of this favorable image of the monarchy was firmly set in the interwar period. Examining historiography, political essays, and literary fiction in the Habsburg successor states written between 1918 and 1939, he finds that the image of Austria-Hungary was fully established by the start of World War II—well before nationalism became discredited as a political ideology. Kożuchowski argues that the dominant image of Austria-Hungary was formed by a relatively small group of historians, political theorists, and, perhaps most important, novelists who were personally affected by the fall of the monarchy. These writers continue to influence both the popular perception and historical study of the Habsburg Monarchy. *The Afterlife of Austria-Hungary* is a fascinating look into the relationship between memory, historiography, political theory, and popular culture.

Originally published in 2009 in Polish as *Pośmiertne dzieje Austro-Węgier: Obraz monarchii habsburskiej w piśmiennictwie międzywojennym*, *The Afterlife of Austria-Hungary* is a compact, well organized, and excellently written English volume. Kożuchowski focuses on interwar Austrian authors ranging from Joseph Roth and Hugo von Hofmannsthal to Joseph Redlich and Viktor Bibl who generally regretted the loss of the monarchy, as contrasted to the Magyar, Polish, or Czech authors who simply saw the Habsburgs as foreign oppressors who retarded their natural national growth. These Austrian authors were driven to both memorialize the lost culture of the monarchy and explain its collapse. In so doing, they created an image of an anachronistic and ancient supranational state of considerable beauty—

flawed, but noble and well intentioned. More current historians have certainly found faults with this image, but Roth's *The Radetzky March* (1932) still remains the best-written introduction of the world of the Habsburgs.

The Afterlife of Austria-Hungary devotes a chapter each to histories, political essays, and fiction about the Habsburg Monarchy. Here Kożuchowski elaborates several significant themes, perhaps most important the amorphous "Austrian Idea." The Austrian idea was first expressly formulated by Hofmannsthal during World War I, but continued to be referenced and expanded by historians, political theorists, and politicians after 1918. The idea celebrated anationalism, long and eclectic shared histories, and the flawed but inexplicably effective Austro-Hungarian system of governance. An attempt to formulate an identity for the Austrian rump state, the Austrian idea tried to find meaning within the imagined values of the past, but it remains to be used to retroactively explain Habsburg political culture and ideology. Austro-Hungarian Empire's commitment to supranational solutions and a cosmopolitan culture still show up occasionally in discussions of projects like the European Union.[1]

The interwar generation had lived under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, giving them special motivation to define its legacy. Like Count Leopold Berchtold and Redlich, many of the most important authors had been personally involved in governing the monarchy before its collapse, and hence had grudges against groups and individuals they saw as being responsible for the fall. Most interwar Austrian historians blamed Hungarian intransigence for the fall of the monarchy. The collapse of the monarchy hangs over these interwar authors, as it does over historians today; it is still difficult to write on the monarchy without making some reference to the collapse. They universally pointed to restive national minorities in general (and the Magyars in particular) as the cause.

Of course, nationalism remains the most important theme within interwar discussion of the monarchy and there again explanations by historians, political theorists, and novelists overlap. Nationalism was usually blamed for the destruction of the monarchy, though the political views of each author determine whether or not it was tragic. Political views also shaped the many counterfactual interpretations of Austria-Hungary. Most historians and political theorists Kożuchowski studies had their own theory on how the monarchy could have been saved. This is a trend that continues today—most histories of the Habsburgs identify moments or trends that doomed the empire. These range from the failures of 1848, the death of Leopold II, the creation of the *Ausgleich*, and the decision to go to war in 1914. Regardless of the ideology, Austria-Hungary remains an exciting field of endeavor for historians and political theorists.

Kożuchowski dedicates an additional chapter to Franz Joseph, who, more than any other person represented and shaped the late Habsburg Monarchy. Franz Joseph is ubiquitous in literature of all genres about the Habsburg Monarchy, and continues to support a significant portion of the souvenir economy of Central Europe. While his prominence is natural given the dynastic justification of the monarchy, in fiction and nonfiction, his role was very much open to interpretation. To critics, Franz Joseph's legendary commitment to bureaucratic minutiae proved his inability to grasp the larger issues and provide real leadership. To apologists, Franz Joseph's schedule showed his personal diligence and commitment to the monarchy and proved that if the monarchy fell apart, it was not due to inaction on his part. For many authors, the person of Franz Joseph was also tied mystically to the health and power of Austria-Hungary. As Franz Joseph aged, suffered tragedy, and endured, so did Austria-Hungary. The person of Franz Joseph is also tied firmly to the

powerful sense of nostalgia that emanates from interwar authors. After World War I, the empire Franz Joseph symbolized quickly became a far distant and ancient land. It is little wonder the sense of loss that permeates many of the interwar authors.

Kożuchowski's only major oversight is one of context. Events within Central and Eastern Europe had a significant effect on the memory of the Habsburg Monarchy. Though Kożuchowski discusses the effects of several major events—notably, the Great Depression—on the Habsburg *ex post facto* reputation, he does not address Emperor Charles I's repeated fruitless attempts to restore the Habsburg crown in Hungary. Reporting on Charles's actions would presumably be a fruitful place to look for interwar discourse on the Habsburg legacy. Likewise, Kożuchowski does not address the legal prohibitions against the Habsburg return in Austria and elsewhere. The Habsburg Exclusion Act's passage in 1919, repeal in 1935, and reinstatement in 1938 reflect public concerns and memory about the Habsburg dynasty. These and other events may be out of the intended scope of the book, but it seems that they would have been useful to at least address. Similarly, though the scholarly discourses and themes of this book are very clear, the chronological relationship between books, articles, and novels described is sometimes difficult to follow.

The Afterlife of Austria-Hungary is an extremely useful resource for students of historiography, Central Europe, and the intersection between scholarly and popular discourse. It thus bridges the problem common with studies of historiography—why historiography matters. Kożuchowski's writers shaped public memory in a way more profound than most. Thanks to the centennial of 1914, the Habsburg Monarchy has a media presence in film, news, and popular discussion. Understanding its image, and that image's sources, is more important than ever.

Note

[1]. For example, Otto von Habsburg and George Urban, "A Tale of Two Empires," *The World Today* 46, no. 5 (May 1990): 94-101.

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