

**Manfred Reinschedl.** *Die Aufrüstung der Habsburgermonarchie von 1880 bis 1914 im internationalen Vergleich. Der Anteil Österreich-Ungarns am Wettlauf vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg.* Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2001. 202 pp. EUR 33.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-631-36924-1.

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## Austria Hungary and the Arms Race

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The title of this clearly written monograph describes its content accurately. Since about 1880 the European states were engaged in an arms race which not only saw constant efforts to raise troop strength and speed of mobilization, but also the introduction and improvement of new quick firing breech-loading artillery, machine guns and repeating rifles. Developments on land were accompanied by a naval race, which in the case of the Dual Monarchy mainly concerned domination of the Adriatic.

Austria-Hungary participated in this race, though given the relatively backward industrial position of the Dual Monarchy and above all the political and financial constraints imposed by the Compromise of 1867, it lagged behind with the rearmament of the other great powers. Even so, the author shows that despite these handicaps there had been progress. By 1914 the Habsburg Monarchy went to war with fewer divisions and with less artillery than was desirable, with faulty strategic dispositions, outdated troop training and much obsolete materiel. Nonetheless, it had developed the weapon prototypes and the production facilities needed to enable the Monarchy to keep fighting through the four and a half years of the First World War.

The problems of Dualism and its impact on the armed forces of the Habsburg Monarchy which in turn reflected its foreign relations and security problems, have been discussed many times and often in greater detail and depth. From the closing decades of the nineteenth century to

the outbreak of war in 1914, the Dual Monarchy found it increasingly difficult to keep up in the European arms race. Unable to exploit fully its manpower potential, only slowly developing an industrial capacity, divided by national rivalries, and hampered by a cumbersome political structure, the empire was falling behind in relative military strength. These developments are discussed in this work but form only the outer framework.

The core of the book analyzes Austria-Hungary's attempts to keep pace in the armament race. The first part describes the armament efforts of successive military leaders, especially Beck-Rzikowsky and Conrad von Hötzendorf, to intensify the rearmament, expand land forces and speed up mobilization, naval developments, and fortifications. This is followed by a brief analysis of the obstacles facing the leadership: the tripartite division of the army into the common army, the Landwehr and the Honvédség, the lack of support from politicians and the public, resulting in the long struggle for a basic reform of the military establishment. Finally the author looks at the military budget throughout this period.

Reinschedl's overall and important conclusion is that no one type of weapon gave any of the powers a decisive advantage, but that the number of weapons and troop strength made a substantial difference and in both, he argues, the Dual Monarchy fell short compared to the armies of its adversaries. Few would quarrel with this conclusion.

The second part of the book is technical and discusses

the development and adoption of infantry weapons, including machine guns, and the more difficult and expensive changes in artillery. Weaponry was now in a period of transition. Breech-loading weapons and the repeating small caliber rifle, the machine gun, and the quick-firing field gun were being tested. By 1885 all major powers had introduced or were in the process of adopting bolt-action repeating rifles. Austria-Hungary, too, tested various models. In 1888 the Mannlicher repeater, modified in 1895, its caliber reduced from 11 to 8 mm., was introduced as the standard weapon, though older models of various types continued to serve second line formations. Finally, and somewhat belated, in 1905 Austria-Hungary adopted the German designed heavy Schwarzlose machine gun.

Artillery received new heavy and medium field and siege pieces, Model 1880, in 12, 15-, and 18-cm. calibers. For their day these were good guns, but since Austria-Hungary did not produce adequate heavy steel barrels until after the turn of the century and also for reasons of economy, they still were equipped with steel bronze barrels. They rapidly became obsolescent and it was a sign of the Dual Monarchy's lag in armaments that the Model 1880 pieces formed the mainstay of her heavy and medium artillery for the first two years of World War I.

Field artillery presented serious problems. The increased range of infantry fire demanded direct fire support and in 1875 a new, breech-loading model with steel-bronze barrels was introduced. Adequate for its time, they soon became obsolete. Modifications included a tail spur to reduce recoil and the ability to handle heavier charges. Designated as the Model 1875/96 they remained in use into the first period of World War I.

In 1897, however, the French introduced the 75 mm. field gun, the first of the modern rapid-firing field pieces with a perfected hydraulic recoil mechanism, a fire rate upwards of 20 rounds per minute and a steel protective shield. And while the new design was immediately adopted in Russia, Austria-Hungary's new field pieces introduced in 1899 were 10 and 15 cm. howitzers with short ranges, no recoil mechanism and no protective shields. Only in 1904 there was improvement. The Skoda Works in Bohemia designed and produced a modern field gun, the 7.65 cm. M5/8, though even these still had outdated

and heavy steel-bronze tubes. Skoda now became the leading designer, producing a number of good designs, field guns and field howitzers, several light mountain guns as well as heavy mobile siege pieces such as the 24 cm mortar M 98 and the famous 305 mm M 1911 Mortar. But at the outbreak of war the army was short of firepower in its field formations, though the designs and tools for rapid mass production of new artillery models were available.

The concluding part concerns the growth of Austria-Hungary's military industrial capacity. The basic requirement for the armament industry was the production of iron and steel and while progress was made, by 1913 the Dual Monarchy remained well behind its competitors with only Italy having a lower production. In general, the importance of the Vienna Arsenal declined as new industrial centers developed such as the mass production of repeaters by the Mannlicher works in Steyr and artillery developments at the Skoda gun factories around Pilsen in Bohemia. But there also was industrial development near Budapest and a rapid increase in shipbuilding capability along the Dalmatian coast. These matters are summarized and demonstrated with tables in the third part of the book.

In summary this volume, a revised dissertation, is solidly based on archival material in the *Kriegsarchiv Wien* though perhaps unfortunately, the annotations are derived from only two fonds, albeit important ones, the War Ministry series (KM Präs) and the Imperial Military Chancery (MKSM). The author would have been well advised to widen his research base. He also has used a vast array of printed literature, though he has not used the substantial body of material existing in English. But these are minor reservations; the volume does make a genuine contribution to our understanding of the critical decades before the First World War.

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