



Jacques Le Rider Sommer, Moritz Csöky, Monika, Hrsg.. *Transnationale Gedächtnisorte in Zentraleuropa*. Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2002. 208 pp. EUR 22.00, paper, ISBN 978-3-7065-1809-3.



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On Transnational Sites of Memory in Central Europe

The goal of this collection is ambitious: both to expand upon and to provide a corrective to the path-breaking "memory work" of Pierre Nora, Mario Isnenghi, Etienne François, and Hagen Schultze, which concentrates on the question of the construction of national identity. Among the questions the eleven contributions from academics throughout Europe in this volume[1] address is the issue of transnational sites of memory--and if they can serve as mediators between national identity and European identity from a wide variety of perspectives, some of which I will discuss in detail below.

Andreas Pribersky makes a useful contribution to the growing literature on renewed or reconstructed symbols and sites of memory in the former satellite countries in his insightful essay, "Eine Krone für die 3. Ungarische Republik? Geschichte als Archiv der Gedächtnispolitik." The author focuses on the Crown of St. Stephen, which appears fixed in Hungarian popular memory as the traditional symbol of the state, but which ex-

emplifies changing political symbols in Hungary since 1989/1990.[2] Its fluid meanings reflect the process of reconstruction of national symbols, which some people have attempted to locate in a larger European context. Pribersky considers this attempt to connect national history with European history part of an ongoing process of (western) European integration. Reinterpretation of the meaning of the Crown of St. Stephen, reflecting the connection between tradition and modernity embodied in the crown, is also found in popular culture. The most significant example is perhaps the 1983 rock opera *István a király* (King Stephen), a re-examination of the Hungarian foundation myth.

Since 1989, the Crown of St. Stephen has occupied a central position in the construction of state symbolism. In the case of the crown, however, attempts to connect historical symbols and myths to contemporary political positions have revealed a dual, ambivalent interpretation. On the one hand, the Hungarian government, employing the crown both as representative of the nation (state and people) and of the (western) Christianizing of the

entire people by St. Stephen, thus shares some characteristics of European right populism. This right populism is reflected in other elements of the government's political rhetoric, especially in the demarcation of the national "We" versus "They" groups within the population. This "Othering" has been most noticeable vis-à-vis Hungary's Jews.[3] On the other hand, this same symbolism attempts to represent modernization politics. This modernizing aspect is symbolically equated with westernizing tendencies and gains legitimacy through contemporary political developments, including entry into the European Union and NATO. Pribersky astutely concludes that the Western European understanding of the process of "Westernization" and the "process of Europeanization" may be opposed to the renewed political tradition of conservative modernization.

In "Josef Ressel: ein gemeinsamer 'lieu de mémoire' Mitteleuropas?," Ernst Bruckmüller discusses the claims made by three groups--Austro-German, Czech, and Slovenian speakers--to Ressel (1793-1857), a Habsburg civil servant and inventor. The son of a German-speaking father and Czech-speaking mother, Ressel was born in Bohemia, and educated there and in Vienna. Ressel, who had knowledge of Italian and Slovene, spent much of his career in Istria and Slovenia where, as a forest administrator, he was also responsible for surveying forests and improving agricultural production.

Ressel is a fascinating historic figure and an inspired choice for analysis as a site of memory. After plans to honor Ressel posthumously with a statue in Trieste fell through, one was instead unveiled in 1863 before the Technical University in Vienna, where it stands today in Ressel Park. The Latin-language inscription honored the "Austrian" Ressel as the inventor of the ship propeller. The statue of Ressel worked well in mid-nineteenth-century Vienna: the unitary and theoretically transnational state urgently needed transnational

heroes, who could have an integrative effect beyond a particular language group.

Ressel would also be honored with a memorial tablet in his birthplace and streets named for him in Laibach/Ljubljana, Prague, and Vienna (a statue of Ressel was also unveiled in Chrudim, Czechoslovakia, in 1924). Bruckmüller maintains that these manifestations served to anchor the *habsbergtreu* Ressel in the collective memory of the Austro-Germans, Czechs, and Slovenes. Indeed, Ressel remained a stable figure in the memory of all three groups. A more detailed discussion of these assertions might improve this essay, because as recent research, for example, the work of historian Jeremy King, has demonstrated, national identity as a social construct is fluid and changes over time.[4] Does Ressel, who represents a triple claim as a civil, engineering, and national hero, constitute a shared *lieu de mémoire* or does he occupy three parallel universes of collective memory? I am not sure.

Some of the essays in this volume capture the imagination. One of them is Pierre Burlaud's wide-ranging contribution, "Gespenster und Gedächtnislücken. Geschichte, Erinnerungen, Vergessenheit an der Donau. Ein literarischer Essay," which explicitly builds upon Pierre Nora's discussion of history and memory. In his effort to locate the Danube and Central Europe in the fluid public imagination of the region, Burlaud notes the central role the Danube has played historically as both a trade route and a border. Indeed, this border was porous: sometimes there was trade across it, as between the Romans and the "barbarians." Moreover, the author asserts, the river is not only a site of memory, but it also contains along its banks many historic sites. Burlaud, indeed, describes the interaction of numerous literary figures with the Danube (Peter Esterhazy and Panait Istrati, for instance), but his essay ranges far wider than just kaleidoscopic literary representations in its consideration of human interaction with this European river. In the 1990s, when

there was freedom all along the Danube, it was variously designated the river of memory, of misunderstanding, and of forgetting.

In his speculative Conclusion, Burlaud rhetorically asks if it is an exaggeration to assert that the continual intervention of the Great Powers has given the impression of the Danube region as a victim of history rather than a maker of the same? He provides examples ranging from the Turkish occupation of southeastern Europe through the destruction of Serbia by the international community and the European Union's recent sanctions against Austria. He concludes with a positive evaluation of the EU's influence on the region: it considers foreigners the bearers of potential enrichment rather than as a potential threat.

This collection contains some of the flaws common to many such publications: diacriticals are inconsistently employed; there is neither a bibliography nor an index. The volume also lacks a descriptive list of contributors. The clearly reproduced illustrations like those in the essays by Rudolf Jaworski and Thomas Serrier are of great value, because they help the reader visualize some of the sites of memory under discussion. This reviewer would have appreciated similar illustrations throughout.

The inclusion of essays in this conference collection that focus on areas from Dresden and Leipzig to Czernowitz raises the question: which Central Europe? The construction of Central Europe is a topic Burlaud briefly discusses, but the editors do not. This is important, not least because of the changing self-perceptions of the very regions under discussion. Defining terms is just one of the issues that the thoughtful, but brief, descriptive introduction missed a chance to address. In addition, the editors might have taken the opportunity to make greater thematic sense of this volume, which remains more a group of interesting, and often innovative, essays loosely bound by a broad theme than a coherent volume clearly and consistently addressing the premise alluded

to in the title. These criticisms aside, this is a collection well worth reading.

Notes:

[1]. Contributors to this volume are Rudolf Jaworski (Kiel), Thomas Serrier (Paris), Christoph Boyer (Dresden), Andreas Pribersky (Vienna), Andrei Corbea-Hoisie (Iasi), Ernst Bruckmüller (Vienna), Michel Espagne (Paris), Daniel Baric (Paris), Jacques Le Rider (Paris), Sylvie Arlaud (Paris), and Pierre Burlaud (Montluçon).

[2]. On changing interpretations of another Hungarian symbol, March 15, see Alice Freifeld, "The Cult of March 15: Sustaining the Hungarian Myth of Revolution, 1849-1999," in *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*, ed. by Maria Bucur and Nancy M. Wingfield (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2001), pp. 255-85; on changing symbols in the region more generally, see Richard S. Esbenshade, "Remembering to Forget: Memory, History, National Identity in Postwar East-Central Europe." *Representations* 49 (Winter 1995): pp. 72-96; and Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Post-socialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[3]. On the "Other," see Vilho Harle, "On the Concepts of the 'Other' and the 'Enemy,'" *History of European Ideas* 19/nos. 1-3 (1994), pp. 27-34.

[4]. In his article, "The Nationalization of East Central Europe: Ethnicism, Ethnicity, and Beyond," in *Staging the Past*, pp. 112-52, Jeremy King discusses conflicting Czech and German claims to the memory of imperial royal Shipmaster Adalbert/Vojtech Lanna in Budweis/Ceske Budejovice. See also Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

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