

Kraj Habsburške Monarhije: intelektualna povijest debata i prijepora u britanskoj i američkoj historiografiji [The End of the Habsburg Monarchy: An Intellectual History of Debates and Controversies in British and American Historiography].

By Nikolina Šimetin Šegvić.

Zagreb: Plejada, 2022. 335 pp.

Jure Trutanić 

Faculty of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb; Borongajska cesta 83d, 10 000 Zagreb, Republic of Croatia; jtrutanic@fhs.hr

At the end of 2022, the Zagreb publisher Plejada released a new book titled *The End of the Habsburg Monarchy: An Intellectual History of Debates and Controversies in British and American Historiography* by Croatian historian Nikolina Šimetin Šegvić. With this volume, Šimetin Šegvić has undertaken a very ambitious research endeavour, especially considering that this is her first scholarly monograph.

The theme of the book is logically structured, and the content is evenly organised. A brief “Preface” (pp. 7–10), in which Šimetin Šegvić explains her motivation for tackling the subject and outlines the history of her research, is followed by somewhat more detailed introductory considerations (pp. 11–44). The central part of the book is divided into two well-balanced chapters: “British historians’ main interpretations of the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy” (pp. 45–168) and the corresponding “American historians’ main interpretations of the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy” (pp. 169–284). The book ends with a brief “Conclusion” (pp. 285–94), in which the author precisely recapitulates several answers to the main problems of the subject, followed by an impressive “Bibliography” (pp. 295–322), an “Index of names” (pp. 323–34) and a “Note on the author” (p. 335). After reading 335 pages of her dense, cogently argued and nuanced texts, the book comes across as an instance of ambition achieved, thanks to the comprehensive character of the survey and the attention to analysis.

The subject is discussed in a structure manner, prefaced by the theoretical introductory remarks. Šimetin Šegvić notes that outside the Central European area, studies on the Habsburgs have been systematically dominated by British and

American experts in terms of visibility and importance. But this extensive body of research has so far demonstrated little autoreflexivity by attempting to explain the roots of this phenomenon, just as it has failed to provide a complete answer as to why British and American Habsburg studies have for decades remained mired in controversies and debates about the last period of the Habsburg Monarchy's existence and its disintegration. This query remains at work in marking out the focus of the subsequent discussions, as well.

On the basis of the book's title alone, one might think at first glance that it is essentially an extended bibliographical survey. This would be wrong because the book cannot be reduced to that by any means—it is a deeper and more complex undertaking. It does not strive for (unnecessary) completeness but offers a nuanced problematisation and systematisation of various historiographical positions, approaches and methods of key syntheses and works devoted to the last chapter of the Habsburg Monarchy's existence (the nineteenth century), perhaps missing some less influential works and historians not close enough to the canon. In order to explain certain phenomena in British and American historiography, the author sometimes extends the context to include (mostly) French historiography (L. Eisenmann, V. L. Tapié, J. Berenger) or thematically within American historiography to influential historians whose works, do not deal directly with the dissolution of the Monarchy (W. Johnston, C. E. Schorske, G. Cohen). The book partially fulfils the bibliographical purpose, if unintentionally, for the literature contained in almost a thousand footnotes and collected in the bibliography at the end can serve as a reliable overview of the state of research in Habsburg studies in the Anglo-American world—and beyond.

One of the greatest methodological and conceptual challenges for the author is the question of how to systematise such a large number of heterogeneous authors and their works in a meaningful way. Šimetin Šegvić approached the problem in a multidimensional manner, aiming for a comparative analysis focusing on approach, interpretation, theoretical profile and methodology, as well as the writing style and general characteristics of how the key topic is discussed. For the purposes of his study, helpful collective terms are used and added to the names of the British and American experts, introducing a division into different groups: 'the founders' of Habsburg studies, 'essayists' and, in the case of British historiography, 'reporters,' whose ideal type would be Henry Wickham Steed. In this way, a practical categorisation is made according to groups of experts—rather than generations—in order to be able to classify different historians both diachronically and according to the period of their activity.

The way in which this systematisation works and in which various British and American historians fit into this research can be checked in a tabular overview for

American (p. 20) and British scholars (p. 22). Take, for example, the historian A. J. P. Taylor and his seminal work *The Habsburg Monarchy 1815–1918* (1941; 1948). Because of his scholarly production and his services to the establishment and popularisation of Habsburg studies in Britain, Taylor has been accorded the dual role of ‘founder’ and ‘essayist,’ in contrast, for example, to Alfred F. Přibram, who, through his teaching and mentoring activities, is classified only as a ‘founder’ but not as an ‘essayist’ because he left no capital outline of Habsburg history. In contrast to Přibram, Taylor’s student Alan Sked is only categorised as an ‘essayist,’ which also applies to other scholars from different generations and schools of history. According to his approach to the subject and his interpretation, Taylor is placed in the British historiographical tradition, of which he himself laid the foundations, in contrast to, for example, C. A. Macartney, who, due to his transatlantic contacts, also intersects with the American tradition. According to Šimetin Šegvić, Taylor’s distinctive approach, style, and interpretation make him an ‘individualist’ within the British tradition, which places him in a school by himself.

As far as American historiography is concerned, a division into ‘founders’ and ‘essayists’ is perhaps less appropriate since Habsburg studies in the USA show a different, delayed, and more institution-centric development than British historiography. Overall, the tables mostly function well, yet in some places, they could be questioned. Indeed, the systematisation of the experts in the table does not always correspond to the interpretation of their work and impact as given in the text. For example, Edward Crankshaw is said to have been a borderline case between ‘reporter’ and ‘essayist,’ whereas the table classifies him as an ‘essayist,’ although in view of his work and career, one could say that according to the established criteria, he certainly belongs to the group of ‘reporters.’ In any case, Z. A. B. Zeman belongs to a separate group of outsiders, representing a noticeable discontinuity within British historiography, as the author notes, but in the table, he is positioned together with Taylor, and not as an outlier. Since methodological and theoretical positions of the individual Habsburg scholars considered during the research often did not correspond to the general trends or directions of the time (Šimetin Šegvić, for example, cites the book *The Fall of The House of Habsburg* by Edward Crankshaw, written in 1963), the systematisation has obvious limitations. It is, like any alternative, not definitive and partially open to different interpretations, but as a model for this book, it is applicable and should be commended despite some minor inconsistencies.

Šimetin Šegvić examines two linguistically and culturally similar historiographical traditions in which she easily finds common origins, as their foundations were laid by emigrants from the territory of the former Habsburg monarchy, who were able to make the Central European space an important segment of general/European/imperial history. In Britain, this role was taken on most convincingly by

Lewis Namier and Alfred Přebíram, and in the USA by Oszkár Jászi and Robert A. Kann, without whom, according to the author, American Habsburg studies would be unthinkable. The transfer of ideas that followed such intellectual intertwining was also accompanied by the transfer of sentiments, prejudices and generalisations that remained visible to some extent for a long time in both of the historiographical traditions studied. Šimetin Šegvić argues that this is best seen in the examination and juxtaposition of interpretations of the collapse of the Dual Monarchy. By juxtaposing key theses of various scholars, she claims that the most common starting point for British ‘essayists’ was the inevitability of the fall of the Monarchy, with *reporters* such as Henry Wickham Steed and R. W. Seton-Watson playing an important role in establishing this view. Both were important British war propagandists during World War I. According to Šimetin Šegvić, they wrote the Monarchy’s death sentence during the war and subsequently tried to present the collapse of the Monarchy as more certain than it actually was (also judging by their own pre-war texts).

On the other hand, under the influence of Jászi, American experts tried to find ways in which the fall of the Danube Monarchy could have been prevented, wondering whether the disintegration came from within or from the outside. Thanks to the canonical works of Jászi and Kann, which Šimetin Šegvić calls the ‘Old and New Testaments of American Habsburg Studies’ in reference to Paula Sutter Fichtner, who introduced the terms in an article, younger generations of scholars are thoroughly familiarised with the main themes of late Habsburg history. Robert A. Kann personally, together with other ‘founders’ (S. Harrison Thomson, A. May, R. J. Rath, etc.), was involved in the institutionalisation of American Austrian/Habsburg studies after World War II—its most important achievements became evident with the launch of the *Austrian History Yearbook* (1965) and the founding of the Center for Austrian Studies (1977).

Šimetin Šegvić notes that the topic of the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy was taken up several times depending on the geopolitical changes in Central Europe/Eastern Central Europe (the *Anschluss*, Cold War, fall of the Iron Curtain). Strategic thinking in relation to Central Europe as the ‘problematic European centre’ also directed the vision of historians. A detailed analysis of the intellectual inclinations of individual experts, which also includes a prosopographical survey, reveals that a large number of the scholars were recruited by various information and intelligence services of Great Britain and the USA. The frequency of such arrangements (H. W. Steed, R. W. Seton-Watson, E. Crankshaw, L. B. Namier, A. J. P. Taylor, C. A. Macartney, S. A. Thomson, P. Sugar, W. E. Wright, C. E. Schorske) suggests that this is a collective feature of British and American historians that requires additional attention and analysis.

As a reaction to lasting instability in Central Europe, more favourable views of the Habsburg Monarchy’s existence eventually emerged. Such changes were

particularly visible in American historiography, which, after 1945, gradually came to revise the theses about the apparent gradual decline of the Habsburg Monarchy, i.e., about the necessity of its demise in general. Šimetin Šegvić sees the culmination of these efforts in British historiography in the appearance of new texts such as *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire 1815–1918* (1989) by Alan Sked, who, in contrast to Gibbon's principle of structural decline, argues for the thesis of 'fall without decline'. The author does consider more contemporary historiographical output as well, but despite notable contributors (R. Okey, M. Cornwall, M. Rady), she considers that Habsburg and Austrian studies in British, in contrast to American universities, are experiencing a sharp decline in interest and a rather unpredictable future.

Positive revisionist tendencies, best expressed in the British tradition by Alan Sked, can also be observed in American historiography in the 1970s; this is also a new point of significant convergence between these two traditions. Historiographical discourse is fragmenting, so that the dominant historiography, which focused on political-institutional history, and the tendency to outline Habsburg history, is increasingly being replaced by case studies that focus on cultural, intellectual and economic content. The established institutional background gradually transformed American historiography, in the author's words, "into a laboratory for theoretical and methodological approaches" relevant not only to Austrian/Habsburg studies. Šimetin Šegvić is very much aware of the 'New Habsburg History', especially when it comes to intellectual and cultural history, and she is no stranger to such approaches in her own research, which in this book she complements with references to economic history (especially the works of David F. Good) and military history, while also surveying the historiographical production on the occasion of the centenary of World War II. A high point of the wave of 'New Habsburg History', she claims, can be found in the work by the 'essayist' Pieter M. Judson entitled *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (2016), in which she identifies the revisionist potential implied in the title. The final chapter not only compares the analytical depth of the two revisionist approaches (British and American) but also points out the interestingly long duration of the heated arguments between some British historians, led by Sked, and their American counterparts. At the same time, the author herself points out the great weakness of the American approaches, which ignore the perspective of the Hungarian and thus also the Croatian, Serbian, Slovak and Romanian experiences in the Habsburg Monarchy: The dominant conclusions are too often derived from Cisleithanian examples.

Nikolina Šimetin Šegvić's book is indeed a necessary guide, especially for Croatian historiography, which lags behind in the reception of Anglo-American production and understanding of general methodological shifts in the field of Habsburg studies. As the author expertly addresses the core of many major works of

British and American Habsburg studies, this book could, with some delay, popularise these works among the scholarly and general public and thus partially compensate for the lack of translations into Croatian of the vast majority of key syntheses (even those by Alan Sked). Before the Croatian translation of Judson's book, the last such synthesis published was that of A. J. P. Taylor—this speaks volumes. By cleverly interweaving intellectual history and the history of historiography, Šimetin Šegvić also affirms a neglected field, that of historiography, and an underdeveloped sub-discipline (intellectual history) within Croatian historiography. In this skillfully written book, which represents an original scholarly contribution by bridging a major gap, the hundred-year history of important segments of two major historiographies, the British and the American, are brought to the light in incisive manner, which would very much justify an English translation of this volume.

