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### Review Of "Staging The Past: The Politics Of Commemoration In Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 To The Present" By M. Bucur And N.M. Wingfield

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**Conference Group for Central European History of the American Historical Association**

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Staging the past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present by Maria Bucur; Nancy M. Wingfield

Review by: Pieter M. Judson

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experience within the movement, remained vague and very flexible. For Welskopp the workers' own experience is the essential matter. He argues that for both the "Lassallean" and "Marxist" branches of the workers' movement, the specific theoretical and practical views of the masters only met with selective acceptance. Lassalle, Marx, and Engels were all honored and respected for their contributions to the movement, but their ideas on the nature of the state, democracy, the role of the proletariat and so on were filtered through the experience and desires of the workers themselves and their leaders. Thus, many of the masters' key theoretical concepts were ignored, altered, or absorbed into the movement's political rhetoric when they could have no practical effect (e.g., women's equality in the future socialist order).

Most social democratic workers believed that the resolution of the pressing political and social problems of the day hinged on the "self-determination" of the individuals and their ability to act in voluntary association with others on every level, including that of the state. This conception was rooted in the milieu of the craft worker, his *Verein*, and the wider context of his experience. Marx may have correctly ascertained that the world of the craft worker would eventually give way to that of the proletarian wage-laborer under industrial capitalism. However, as the frustrations voiced in his *Critique of the Gotha Program* and his correspondence make clear, he misunderstood the origins of the attitudes of the social democratic workers of his day.

This book will be read from cover-to-cover only by the most stalwart of specialists, but it is a very valuable addition to the literature in the field. Any reader interested in the social basis of the early German workers' movement, the social and cultural functions of its organizations, and their place within the broader polity will gain much from it. In addition, Welskopp closes the book with a brief but interesting section comparing the movement to other, similar ones in the U.S., France, and England. While too brief to be conclusive, he raises some interesting questions about the nature of the German *Sonderweg* and how the workers' movement should be viewed within it.

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*Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present.* Edited by Maria Bucur and Nancy M. Wingfield. Lafayette: Purdue University Press. 2001. Pp. 350. \$24.95. ISBN 1-55753-161-7.

It has been twenty years since James J. Sheehan in his article, "What is German History? Reflections on the Role of Nation in German History and

Historiography," *Journal of Modern History* 53, no. 1 (1981): 1–23 (to cite only one example of many) called upon German historians to rethink the boundaries of their field. Since then, however, very little in the conceptualization of the field "German History" has changed. Class syllabi, monographs, textbooks, all make passing reference to the importance of Sheehan's challenge, and then proceed to ignore it. German history remains largely the history of Germany. German historians, and more importantly, the graduate programs that train them, are apparently loath to abandon the convenient fictions of the *kleindeutsch* nation state. These fictions continue to structure the field, long after they can possibly hold any relevance to the field. *Staging the Past* is a strong and well-focused collection of essays that should help Germanists to reframe their field in ways that have hitherto eluded them.

The authors in this engaging new collection take as their starting point the role of public commemoration in asserting nationalist forms of self-identification in Habsburg Central Europe. Six of the essays concentrate on developments in the period 1848 to 1918, while the final four focus on events in the interwar period. The latter essays, however, make useful reference to the period since 1945 as well, in an attempt to demonstrate the ways in which particular nationalist symbols and celebrations continue to find contemporary uses.

The authors do not simply apply existing constructivist theories on the origins of nations to specific cases in Central Europe. Nor do they simply document invented traditions in new geographic contexts. Instead, they often focus on the hard ideological work undertaken by individuals, groups and institutions who forged new forms of group identification. The essays set in the context of the multicultural Habsburg Monarchy examine efforts to construct nations against the state, not simply in competition with it, as was often the case in the *Kaiserreich*. Those essays that document nation-building in the successor states relate an even more complex phenomenon. Although (or because) the successor states called themselves *nation-states* they were wracked by far deadlier conflicts over cultural, religious, and linguistic differences than had been the Habsburg Monarchy. As Cynthia Paces's essay on interwar Czechoslovakia aptly demonstrates, these regimes aligned themselves self-consciously with one imagined community against others. This strategy, impossible under the anational Habsburgs, unwittingly produced new social spaces that opponents of the regimes (in Paces's example radical German and Slovak nationalists, but also Catholic activists) eagerly exploited to good advantage.

Two of the essays document attempts by the Habsburg state itself to build forms of popular identification with the dynasty that might compete with emerging political nationalism. Far from simply standing by and allowing sectarian nationalists to monopolize public discourse, imperial ideologists constructed their own forms of commemoration to reinforce popular loyalty to the

dynasty. Daniel Unowsky examines Habsburg efforts to reinvigorate popular loyalty after 1848 by reviving religious celebrations that focused attention on the central symbolic role of the emperor. Of course, as Unowsky's essay shows, the kinds of loyalties fostered by imperial ideologists cannot be considered a structural equivalent to those promoted by nationalists. In his essay Stephen Beller suggests that such efforts to increase public loyalty to the dynasty did little to promote the popularity of the Habsburg state itself. Beller relies too heavily on a limited number of newspaper accounts of the jubilee celebrations of 1898 and 1908 to reach such broad conclusions about the loyalty of Austrian citizens to their state. Nevertheless, he reminds the reader of the important unwillingness of Habsburg ideologists to rally public loyalty around the *political* accomplishments of Francis Joseph's reign (the achievement of a constitution far more liberal than that of Germany, of universal manhood suffrage, of stunning economic developments in the region). As Jeremy King aptly points out in his essay, in the decade before the First World War the social space available for those who identified themselves as *not-national* rapidly disappeared.

In the next section, entitled "Contestation from the Margins," four authors analyze forms of commemoration that gave specific local significance to larger grammars of national self-identification. Keely Stauter-Halsted ably documents how village peasants in Galicia, enfranchised by the Austrian liberal reform of communal government in the 1860s, fought existing noble traditions of the Polish nation to assert their own place in nationalist commemorative practice. Laurence Cole analyzes the surprisingly conservative and religious content of German nationalism in the Tyrol through an examination of religious and historical festivals. Cole's essay perceptively demonstrates the ways in which both Catholicism and federalism, traditionally viewed as opponents of German nationalism in Austria, could serve to reinforce a regionalist understanding of German loyalty. Nancy M. Wingfield's perceptive essay cites the German nationalist mania for erecting statues to Joseph II, especially in Bohemia and Moravia, to document the growing struggle between German and Czech nationalists in those provinces for ownership of key public spaces.

In the most important essay in this collection, Jeremy King takes historians of nationalism to task for what he calls their *ethnicism*. King documents the ways in which social scientists have themselves implicitly adopted the ahistorical worldview of nineteenth-century nationalists, by posing ethnic groups as the essential forerunners to nations in East Central Europe. He uses examples of alternative forms of self-identification drawn from the city of Budweis/Ceské Budějovice to show how ethnicist readings overlook critical ways in which people themselves understood their relationship to what later became known as nations. Space limitations in a review of this nature prevent me from doing full justice to the nuances of King's arguments, nor in fact to the sophistication to be found in almost all the pieces in the collection.

The final section focuses on “Legacies and Contestations in the Successor States.” Alice Freifeld manages in very little space to convey a picture at once dramatic and richly complex, of the meanings attached to the Hungarian cult of March 15 since 1849. Cynthia Paces analyzes the missteps in early Czechoslovak leaders’ attempts to forge national commemorations oriented around a historical figure so richly controversial on so many accounts as Jan Hus. Melissa Bokovoy presents a subtle analysis of the nationalist significance that became attached to Serbian War graves from the time of the Balkan Wars through the First World War. Maria Bucur examines the contested meanings up to the present day of the December 1 anniversary of Romania’s 1918 unification with Transylvania.

It is no exaggeration to say that with this volume, a new generation of scholars of Central European history makes a strong debut. Although the analytic focus of each piece rests on the issue of contested commemoration, the works included here present a powerful challenge to the current historiography on nationalism in Central Europe. In particular it is to be hoped that historians both from and of the successor states, including Austria and Germany, will engage with and learn from these essays.

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*Deutscher Liberalismus und Sozialpolitik in der Ära des Wilhelminismus: Anschauungen der liberalen Parteien im parlamentarischen Entscheidungsprozess und in der öffentlichen Diskussion.*

By Holger J. Tober. Husum: Matthiesen Verlag, 1999. Pp. 477. EUR 66.00. ISBN 3-7868-1460-0.

During the 1990s, scholarly discussion of German liberalism under the Kaiserreich notably intensified. Given much impetus by the parallel *Bürgertum* projects in Bielefeld and Frankfurt and by a surge of research on Saxony following the opening of the archives after 1989, important monographs and programmatic essays have been appearing in some profusion. Moreover, if two decades ago the tones were set by Lothar Gall, Wolfgang Mommsen, and James Sheehan in debates over the collapse of a liberalism shaped by the preindustrial contexts of the earlier nineteenth century, now discussion has moved to the societal contexts of the Kaiserreich itself, bringing liberalism’s later specificities very much to the fore. While in many ways Dieter Langewiesche provides a new presiding voice, a broad younger cohort has been taking up the issues, tracking liberalism to the regions, contextualizing its strengths, and exploring its putative capacities for renewal. Major contributions have now been made by,