

REVIEWS

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Serhiy Bilenky, *Laboratory of Modernity: Ukraine between Empire and Nation, 1772–1914*, Montreal–Kingston, 2023, McGill–Queen’s University Press, xiv + 596 pp., maps; series: Peter Jacyk Centre for Ukrainian Historical Research, 14

An up-to-date synthesis of nineteenth-century Ukrainian history has long been missing, but 2023 saw the publication of two important books capable of filling this gap: Andriy Zayarnyuk’s and Ostap Sereda’s concise volume, which focuses mainly on the rise of Ukrainian nationhood and nationalism, and, a few months later, Serhiy Bilenky’s more comprehensive study. Bilenky’s book shares with Zayarnyuk and Sereda’s the overarching question of how developments in the nineteenth century led to the emergence of Ukraine as a recognisable and relatively coherent national-political entity on the map of Europe. Therefore, the emergence of the Ukrainian national movement and its relationship with the imperial polities that governed modern Ukraine’s territory is accorded a central role in his account.

While Bilenky’s narrative is not strictly chronological, he structures his book around three constituent periods. The first part deals with the period from the first partition of Poland to the uprising of 1831. The key themes here are the integration of the territory into the Austrian and Russian imperial states (chapter 1) and the beginnings of the relatively apolitical heritage-gathering stage of Ukrainian nationalism (chapter 2). The second part focuses on the mid-century, discussing the clash between the imperial and national principles of political legitimisation introduced in the first part. Beginning with the period of romantic nationalism (chapter 3), to which he has previously dedicated an entire monograph, Bilenky moves through Alexander II’s attempt to reform Russia into a modern bureaucratic autocracy (chapter 4) to the ensuing backlash against both liberal reformers and Ukrainian particularists. This backlash culminated in the infamous Valuev Circular of 1863 and the Ems Ukaz of 1876, which outlawed without exception the use of the Ukrainian language in schools and print journalism in the Russian Empire (chapter 5). Finally, the third part of the book turns toward the fin-de-siècle. Following the conventions of Ukrainian historiography, this involves a geographical shift to Austrian-ruled Galicia, where the Ukrainian national movement profited from constitutional liberties unimaginable under the repressive Tsarist regime (chapter 6). The final two chapters deal with the last decades of Romanov



rule in Ukraine, focusing on the territory's rapid economic modernisation (chapter 7) and innovations in high culture and popular education (chapter 8). Bilenky covers much familiar territory in the book, from the uprisings of the Decembrists and the Polish nobility (pp. 81–7, 92–8, 179–89) to the canonisation of Taras Shevchenko as a national poet (pp. 115–21), and his book will do well as a primer for readers new to Ukrainian history. Its value for specialists lies in Bilenky's balanced and, at times, bold (re)conceptualisation of the broad outlines of imperial rule in Ukraine.

The book's argument is firmly rooted in a modernisation paradigm. Bilenky is very insistent on the importance and interconnectedness of modernisation processes in various areas: the emergence of modern statehood from the bureaucratic expansion under enlightened absolutism to early-twentieth-century mass politics, the inclusion of Ukraine in imperial trade networks and the rapid industrialisation of some of its regions, the rise of mass education and literacy, and the slow spread of nationalism among the masses. Ukraine's nineteenth century, in this account, was very much a European nineteenth century. While many developments happened a few decades later than in France or Germany, Ukraine's modernisation should not be understood as belated and imitative. Globally speaking, Ukraine's modernisation was, in fact, a relatively early case of a pattern that would be repeated worldwide over the twentieth century, whereby a predominantly rural population transitioned almost directly from feudal subjection to a world of capitalist economic practices that were promoted and sometimes violently imposed by imperial rulers.

In nineteenth-century Ukraine, socio-economic issues were intimately connected with questions of nationhood. Economic and ethnic identities tended to correlate. If nineteenth-century Ukrainian nationalists identified the peasantry as the core of the nation, this was because the Ukrainian language was used first and foremost by peasants. This situation significantly impacted Ukrainian nationalism, inevitably connecting it with various projects of social reform or revolution. Therefore, the history of Ukraine holds important lessons for historians of other European regions who are interested in rediscovering the progressive sides of nationalism (even though, of course, historians of Ukraine are also aware that nationalism necessarily comes with a dark side). In this respect, Bilenky's book is a valuable introduction for all newcomers to Ukrainian history because he embeds his analyses of politics firmly in economic realities, giving readers a good idea of life standards in the period and of the socio-ethnic hierarchies that governed both city and countryside. Bilenky is keenly aware of the ironies and paradoxes involved in the empires' attempts to modernise the periphery economically and, at the same time, integrate it culturally. Thus, he notes that the widespread illiteracy in the countryside of Ukraine under Russian rule can also be seen as a "blessing in disguise", preventing the linguistic assimilation of the peasant masses. In a world where Russian

was the language of urban and industrial modernity, the underdeveloped villages remained a Ukrainian-language environment where traditional folk culture was not reduced to a dead ethnographic relic (pp. 404–5).

Of course, a synthesis of Ukrainian history in the nineteenth century could be criticised as methodological nationalism. After all, no such political entity as Ukraine existed on the maps of the period. Yet, Bilenky's book shows that bringing together the history of Galicia, Bukovyna, and Dnipro Ukraine across imperial borders can help bridge the gap that has opened between the historiographies of the Habsburg and Romanov Empires. Not only were both the Ukrainian and Polish questions entangled across the border, but Ukrainian nationalists in Kyiv also observed and sometimes emulated their Czech peers in Prague (pp. 106, 264–7). Like others before him, Bilenky shows the vital role of Austrian Galicia as a "Ukrainian Piedmont" at the forefront of nation-building endeavours, yet at the same time, he convincingly argues against an exaggerated Galician exceptionalism. While the region's role as a pioneer of Ukrainian nationhood in the late nineteenth century is undisputed, he contends, several regions of Dnipro Ukraine were more advanced in terms of economic development than poor agrarian Galicia, where the early boom of the petroleum industry hardly gave any profit to the labouring masses (pp. 342–57).

In writing the history of Ukrainian nationalism, the book takes methodological inspiration from the field of Habsburg history and applies it to territories east of the border. Russian-ruled Ukraine, where the national movement was hampered by a repressive imperial regime as well as by low levels of popular education, is an ideal test case for the assumptions of the "national indifference school" of Habsburg history. But the fact that the national movement was ultimately successful also allows historians of Ukraine to question whether some of this school's assumptions about the limited popular appeal of nationalism might be a little overstated, and to combine the story of successfully constructed and popularised nationhood with an awareness of the many obstacles that it had to surmount. Ricarda Vulpius has recently suggested that the coming years may see the emergence of a 'new national history', an analogue to the 'new imperial history' that has been influential in the historiography of the Russian Empire in recent decades. Such a paradigm, she suggests, would integrate the insights of global and transnational histories in studies of the development of cohesive civic forces, and thereby go beyond a teleological narrative of ethno-national group formation. Bilenky's *Laboratory of Modernity* represents an important step forward in the direction of such a critical and transnationally informed history that nevertheless adopts a national frame of reference.

The book also offers some tentative insights into the question of colonialism, one that will inspire much debate in the coming years. Bilenky discusses the issue very thoughtfully from an economic perspective, pointing out that

the role of nineteenth-century Ukraine within the Russian imperial economy was indeed mostly that of a producer and exporter of foodstuffs and raw materials: coal, grain, and sugar as a cash crop promoted by the new multi-ethnic capitalist elites. However, Ukraine was not merely an exploited food colony; it was also a place of technical innovation and industrial production, especially in heavy industry (pp. 285–95). As Bilenky points out, Ukrainians benefited less than other groups from the turn-of-the-century economic boom, whose greatest profiteers were either foreign investors or Russians – but it is very important how he specifies this claim: these “Russian” profiteers were not exclusively ethnic Great Russians, but Russians in a political sense, i.e. imperial loyalists willing to assimilate culturally, including a good amount of self-declared “Little Russians”, people whom we would nowadays call Ukrainians (pp. 380–3). Borrowing a term used by twentieth-century historian Oleksandr Ohloblyn, Bilenky suggests that Ukraine’s nineteenth-century capitalists may have formed a multi-ethnic “territorial bourgeoisie” that often defended local economic interests without necessarily adhering to cultural nationalism (p. 323) – much as, one may add, Soviet Ukrainian leaders in the Brezhnev period and later Ukraine’s post-Soviet economic elites did.

Bilenky’s comparisons suggest that he is most inclined to see similarities between Ukraine and imperial peripheries *within* Europe. In doing so, he follows a time-honoured tradition beginning with thinkers from the period itself, such as Mykhailo Drahomanov, who saw the “Ukrainian question” as related to language debates in regions such as Provence and Brittany, and indeed Vladimir Lenin, who likened the economic exploitation of Ukraine to that of Ireland (p. 295). Like their Scottish peers in the British Empire, Ukrainian elites were both victims and agents of empire under Tsarism; like the Scotsmen, they were often in the vanguard of intellectual developments within the imperial state (pp. 47–8). As in South Wales, the industrialization of the Donbas initiated a rapid process of linguistic assimilation of local peasants who moved into the growing cities, abandoning their idioms – respectively, Welsh and Ukrainian – for English and Russian, while the agricultural regions of North Wales and Central Ukraine retained the local languages. And what a delicious historical irony that the most important pioneer of industrialization in the Donbas, John Hughes, came precisely from South Wales (p. 292)! Future work might extend Bilenky’s comparative perspective further, applying it, for instance, to a comparison of the Ukrainian experience under a Russifying regime to the Slovak or Romanian experience of Magyarisation in Transleithania.

Besides economic factors, some scholars have also termed Ukraine a colony based on cultural analyses inspired by ideas such as orientalism or racial othering. Indeed, exoticising and orientalist – or perhaps one should say, “meridionalist” – attitudes towards Ukraine can be found across historical sources. However, Great Russian peasants were also exoticised, as were the

peripheral peasants of the *hégaxone* in French elite discourses. The most rigorous attempt before the First World War to establish a strict racial division between Russians and Ukrainians was not the work of a Russian imperialist but of a Ukrainian nationalist, the anthropologist Fedir Vovk. Even contemporary conceptualisations of Ukraine as a colony were multi-layered and ambivalent, going beyond a simple dichotomy of colonising state and colonised natives. To name but one example: In his early-twentieth-century memoirs, Ukrainian nationalist activist Borys Poznans'kyi repeatedly compared right-bank Ukraine to colonial Africa – once to South Africa and once to Cameroon. In these comparisons, obviously, the Ukrainian peasants took on the role of the African natives. However, the role of the German colonialists and of the Boers was not assigned to agents of the Russian Empire; instead, Poznans'kyi portrayed the local Polish nobility as colonisers.

The difficulty in applying a colonial lens to Ukraine's history under Tsarist rule seems to be that it does not neatly fit into the typology of colonies that historians are used to. Resource extraction for the benefit of the imperial centre did happen, but many imperial cities in Ukraine ended up wealthier than those in the empire's Russian core. The South Ukrainian steppes of "New Russia" were doubtless a settler colony, but Ukrainians comprised a significant share of the settlers, replacing non-Slavic nomadic populations (pp. 280–1). Racialist attitudes towards Ukrainians existed, but Ukrainians willing to assimilate did not face a glass ceiling in Russian imperial society. Bilenky concludes that "it was not so much economic exploitation as blind cultural negation and political repression that made Ukraine into some sort of colony" (p. 308). He is definitely right about both repression and cultural negation. Yet, the peculiarity of both lay in the fact that the Russian Empire tried to force Ukrainians to become part of the state's dominant population – and this policy only truly made sense once the imperial government embraced some aspects of nationalist thinking. Perhaps in the next step, historians of Ukraine would do well to treat "colony" as a category of practice rather than a category of analysis. Instead of debating whether nineteenth-century Ukraine objectively *was* a Russian colony – a question for which specialists are unlikely to even agree on what criteria to base the answer – they could ask who called Ukraine a colony and why, whether imperial administrators and local actors compared it to non-European colonies, what this terminology did for them, and why they preferred it over other vocabularies.

This review has focused on the topics that, for better or worse, still dominate the historiography on nineteenth-century Ukraine, namely the questions of nationhood and empire. However, Bilenky's book has more to offer. Interspersed in his account of political developments and socio-economic change are compelling vignettes on cultural topics ranging from homosexuality among Ukrainian intellectuals (pp. 339–41), through the boom of modernist literature at the turn of the century (pp. 388–401), to the landscape

of historical monuments in both Kyiv and L'viv (pp. 102–3, 266–73). Bilenky has a masterful command of both Ukrainian and foreign historiography, and many of the issues that he touches on may inspire future, more detailed investigations. There is little of substance to criticise in this highly erudite, well-written, and wide-ranging book. At almost 500 pages of dense text, it is rather lengthy, and its idiosyncratic mixture of genres – part monograph, part textbook, part collection of essays – means that there are a number of repetitions that would have benefitted from some cuts. Despite its length, however, Bilenky's study is both an excellent introduction to Ukraine's age of empires and an innovative treasure trove of themes and stories that will hopefully find enthusiastic readers for years to come.

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Frank Rochow, *Architektur und Staatsbildung. Festungsbauten als Instrument habsburgischer Herrschaft in Krakau und Lemberg*, Göttingen, 2024, Wallstein Verlag, 347 pp., 12 ills, series: Polen: Kultur – Geschichte – Gesellschaft, 8

Architecture history (and art history, for that matter) frequently suffers from superficiality, i.e. when the scholar analyses the object of study through just a single lens, for instance, that of art or authority. Vows to base the art-historical analysis more on socially-related factors, expressed long ago by such figures as Arnold Hauser (a convicted Marxist, to be sure), were very often brushed aside. More recently a trend to conceive of architecture as an outcome of multi-layered negotiations between different social actors as well as between the plans and reality on the ground has emerged, but it remains an ideal to be pursued rather than actual practice. Frank Rochow, a trained historian now based at the Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg in Germany, has attempted such an endeavour. In the book, envisaged as his PhD thesis, the Author approaches the issue of military and, thus, public architecture as an element of the modernising efforts of the Habsburg monarchy, undertaken in a bid to restore peace and stability after the tumultuous period of 1848–9. Within the Author's focus are the investments in different types of urban fortifications in the crown land of Galicia and its two main urban centres in particular: Lviv (Lemberg, Lwów, L'viv) and Krakow (Krakau, Kraków). Lviv's citadel and Krakow's forts are not prime examples of architecture in the fine arts meaning of the term, so, understandably, a more innovative approach had

to be employed. The Author succeeded in proposing a new, more broad perspective for studying military architecture and the state's agency as such.

To achieve that, Rochow proposes to look at the fortification funding spree of the young emperor Francis Joseph through the political field analysis (as defined by Pierre Bourdieu) and by the presumption that power relations are inscribed in space (after Henri Lefebvre). The context is rather apparent from the start: the power is wielded by the Habsburgs and the field is constructed by social actors and institutions involved in the building process. The power, however, encountered obstacles on the ground in the form of financial and resource-related hardships and not consistently favourable attitude of the inhabitants towards the new investments, which were unattractive, to put it mildly. Nevertheless, new architecture (or sometimes maybe better constructions?) ultimately appears and starts to stabilise the meanings imposed on the space from above.

The book begins with very long theoretical presumptions, which characterise German scholarly literature and which, in this case, swallow up around one-third of the text.¹ To put it briefly, while not oversimplifying the matter, the main presumptions, apart from those sketched above, allow the Author to see the building process as a political cycle. Rather than drawing from historical or art-historical theories, Rochow turns to sociology: the theories of Lefebvre (the production of space), Martina Löw (sociology of space) and Silke Steets (sociology of architecture), and the construction history studies (conducted in Cambridge since the 1980s). In effect, architecture is here not so much real object(s) in space but a discourse, political confrontation and an administrative process, and its creation is a long and versatile process that can be divided into stages. The Author chooses four of them: agenda setting, policy formulation, policy implementation, and policy evaluation. This helps him to navigate the sources of state bureaucracy, which are used here as the central pillar of the narration. Rochow translates the state machinery into the categories of analysis, dividing the actors into central (Viennese) and local (Galician) ones and taking into account the bureaucratic realities: its ritualised modes of communication and acting as well as the fact that part of this inner-state communication took place orally and thus left no traces in the preserved sources. He concludes (pp. 44–5) that the state's *modus operandi* leaves a historian with only hints of how decisions were made; the inner workings remain obscure most of the time. Further insights are made on the issue of the production of official documents and their circulation, in which the most interesting is probably the hypothesis of a 'pyramid of trust' which helps us to envision the bureaucratic structure not as a homogenous

¹ I include here the first chapter on the political context of Galicia, which is formally marked off as the analysis of the first stage of creating architecture.

organism but as a web of actors sometimes connected rather loosely and divided by prestige, location and place within the communication channel (in this case: Vienna–Lviv–Krakow). For Rochow, maps and plans make up an indispensable part of the legislative process; they also help recreate state actors' intentions.

The first chapter is virtually a continuation of the introductory remarks as it includes reflection on the character of the Austrian empire after 1804. The questions arise: the issue of the monarchy's timely or anachronistic (backwards) nature, the issues of its integrity versus flimsiness, of the economic progress (can the post-Napoleonic reforms be compared with those of Maria Theresia and Joseph II?), or the issue of nationality (which did not appear in the political agenda before 1848). Finally, the Author concentrates on the reforms' proposals after 1848 and the many visions of the monarchy that prevailed at the time (unity or federation, inclusion of far-off provinces or abandoning them) and the outcome of these mind-bending discussions, i.e. the hardly surprising resort to the military force as the vehicle of stability and unity. The new neo-absolutist state relied thus on centralisation and on the resignation from the historical distinctiveness of the provinces that had saved the Habsburg political project so many times. The emperor was now supposed to unite the empire even more than before, as well as guarantee the modernisation efforts and the rule of law. Rochow lists many tools of centralisation, including railways, but also maps themselves and the military. Here, the Author stresses the fact that the army became—as the new pillar of the monarchy and an embodiment of centralisation – a kingdom within the kingdom, and the state of siege acted as a fig leaf, allowing for thorough control of the population within the modern legal framework. The description of the centralisation efforts in Galicia (including the Germanisation of the Krakow University after the city fell into the Habsburg hands again in 1846) is a logical coda to this chapter.

In my view, the actual analysis only starts in the second chapter. It is about the formulation of policy and its goal: to put it simply, to transform the new idea of the centralised state into reality on the ground. The driving force here were the theories of the monarchy's military weakness and its neighbours' aggressive nature. Instead of conceiving the state as a defensive system, the idea of internal enemies as real threats gained the upper hand. That is why, besides the systems of fortresses to neutralise the external enemies in Italy and Hungary, the military budget contained large sums to defend the Galician towns and cities against the social upheaval. The peripheral status of Galicia was easily translated into military logic, where it was conceived of as a shield against Russia (the context of the Crimean War was crucial in this regard), and it was the urban centres that demanded the attention of the army. Interestingly, besides Krakow and Przemyśl, which were ultimately transformed into fortresses, the official documents also mentioned Zaleszczyki and Tarnow

(pp. 115–6). However, the stress was placed on forts and citadels that could assure inner stability. The narration then encompasses the structure of the military staff, particularly the central and local general boards of military engineers, the protagonists of the book who designed and built fortifications, and the fortification inspectors. The staff lists are examined here, bringing its multi-ethnic character to the fore. Other aspects are then discussed, like the movements of the staff employees and their contact networks. The analysis of the military plans prepared in Vienna and changed in Lviv and Krakow follows. Here, the discrepancies between these centres are clearly visible: the context of Lviv as a city serving as the capital of Galicia for a long time, and Krakow, the newly acquired Habsburg outpost to the east and a more difficult environment to plan state policies. The chapter ends with reflections on the planning practice in the Austrian army, with the staff shortages at the local level and the domination of the centre over peripheries in terms of planning procedures. The challenge posed by the geographical distances is hinted at, as well as a slight advantage of the local organs over the centre regarding the knowledge to be gathered. It was the lower receiving end of the bureaucratic machinery that was responsible for the execution of the plans and which had sufficient understanding of the situation on the ground. As for the conclusion, the planning and execution measures were simultaneous, giving the local level officials some manoeuvring space.

The third chapter finally transports the readers to Lviv and Krakow. This section deals with the topography of both cities, as well as the location of the forts around Krakow and the citadel in Lviv. Here, the interplay between central authorities, military staff, magistrates and urban associations surfaces in the narrative. The town centres are assessed as rather small in terms of the population, and the military architecture of Lviv, built under the Habsburg rule, is described as having an impact on the townscape. The Author provides a brief spatial history of Lviv and Krakow, with the bombardment and fire in Lviv during the revolution of 1848 (descriptions are taken from press articles published in Austria and Bohemia), the decision to build the citadel on Wronowskie Hills, a site that was dry, safe and not lacking drinking water, as well as the unrealised plans to relocate the nearby Polish Ossoliński National Institute (Ossolineum). Rochow concludes that a quasi-ring of military buildings was created around the Lviv centre, but on a piecemeal basis. Krakow is described through the lens of the catastrophic fire in 1850 as a place to implement new military plans (the city was regained by Austria only in 1846). This plan involved encompassing the symbolic Polish objects like the Wawel Hill and Kościuszko mound into the system of fortifications; the ensuing debates with the Kościuszko Mound Society is described in detail. In this section, the figure of the emperor as a defender of the Polish memorials stands out. Then, the chapter offers a long deliberation on the compulsory buyout practices that had to accompany the building process in Lviv, Krakow,

and also in neighbouring Podgórze. The Author shows how the mandatory purchase of land helped to modernise the way the space was perceived and understood, maps were created, and the parcels were sectioned off. Here, the sources related to local complaints are analysed, and the grassroots agency is brought to light. Rochow presents the acts of purchasing land and paying compensations in clear terms (although exaggerating a bit) as the process of state building itself and integrating provinces into the empire. To be sure, the procedure involved strikingly crucial dilemmas, such as the question of the actual ownership of Wawel Hill after 1846. Here also, the limits of the 'omnipotence' of the central Oberkommando and the dual role of the magistrates (supporting and weakening the state) become acute. The narration does not stop here. The last part of the chapter is devoted to the fortification-construction sites as "large state projects"; the sources used here are reports and inspection acts. Here one can learn more about the quality of bricks in Galicia, the right to dictate the price of stone in the public quarries in Podgórze, the insufficient local labour force (the boards had to resort to the compulsory labour of soldiers, thus making the economic situation worse) and the secrets of public auctioning of the planned works. Here, one is confronted with a (bit too much) detailed description of the minutiae of the building process and managing the construction sites. The conclusion is a rather grim picture of the building practice, with the central military authorities willing to be seen as allies of the local population and the local army staff responsible for the lack of good cooperation with it. The 'usual suspects' are to blame: the backwardness of Galicia and the malice of its Jews. Antisemitism once again played the role of an argument that simplified the economy in the reports of the local authorities.

The fourth and final chapter is focused on the evaluation of the policy. It is the shortest part of the book, as the sources pertaining to the social functioning of architecture are always scarce. The Author got out of this situation by relying on the official legislation and letters produced in Lviv and Krakow and stored in the local archives, two memoirs, as well as the local press, possibly less affected by censorship, in this case, the Krakow daily *Czas*. It is a rare instance where Rochow uses Polish-language sources (hitherto mainly adhering to the pieces of legislation and press in German). Here, the Author concentrates on the opposition against the encroachment of the army within the premises of the Polish national pantheon, expressed by some prominent social actors. It is supplemented by excerpts from the memoirs of the local activist and historian Ambroży Grabowski, who lamented in a Biblical tone the taking over of the Wawel, and his daughter Maria Estreicherowa, who deplored the difficulty to access the Kościuszko Mound, a consequence of the fortifying efforts of the Austrians. In Lviv, the case is illustrated with the activity of the local magistrate, which raised hurdles in the process of delimiting of the esplanade around the citadel. Evaluation from

the bottom is not the only perspective employed here. The Author is too eager to adopt the imperial point of view, and that is why the chapter ends with the description of the imperial visit to Galicia in 1851, its performative role in the process of policy implementation, and the practice of renaming the objects (the Sand Hill in Lviv named after the emperor, the new military barracks adhering to the Habsburg family's names in Krakow, not mentioning of a few streets in the capital of Galicia). In conclusion, the Author has to admit that the authorities could not, in the end, take into account the voices and opinions of the residents.

The book has an overwhelming structure full of detailed and general issues, interesting analyses, references to broader debates, and partial conclusions, almost as intricate as the Habsburg state machinery itself. This fact is also reflected in the construction of this review: it can be discussed only using a detailed presentation of the content. The Author succeeds in showing that the military building process amounted to something more broad and crucial than creating a useful infrastructure. It entailed a lot of effort to map and communicate distant and disparate parts of the empire, and it tested the bureaucratic *modi operandi*, the resources at the disposal of the state and its potential to rule effectively, as well as its production of knowledge. The Author's thesis is that the military came first as a modernising agent in the mid-century Habsburg empire, and the fortification works allowed for the research of the space where the state and the inhabitants met. The book offers a good glimpse into such issues and is a great complement to the works on fortifications in Krakow (by Janusz Bogdanowski and, more recently, Andrzej Chwalba, apparently not known to Rochow) and the citadel in Lviv (by Taras Pinyazhko), which are more focused on the local sources. The book is well-researched (the bibliography spans over thirty pages in small font), and the narration is disciplined and rich in insights, if sometimes too detailed and extensive. Rochow does not delve too deep into the content of the sources, keeping an eye on the overall theoretical premises of the book even when describing minor details. This is in contrast to all too many books where the narrative from the sources leads the authors. This probably stems from insufficient sources on the topic, as they usually present only a snippet of a given situation. On the other hand, the book's narration is not always logical and often bends in unpredictable directions, possibly because the Author is steered by the content of the sources he found, which form a labyrinthine structure themselves. Indeed, one can learn about only selected facts from the history of fortification-building, especially when it comes to Krakow: there is only a narrative about Wawel Hill and Kościuszko's fort, while the array of other forts is absent from the book. I am also sure that more insights regarding the reactions to the fortification-building can be found in the Polish and Ukrainian sources if only the Author had a better command of these languages. However, I have to admit that the number of language errors

in the book is strikingly low (e.g. Estreicherówa instead of Estreicherowa, Grzegórski on p. 276 – probably Grzegórzki?). The imperial perspective of the Author is also evident in his choice of the original (i.d. that of source documents) spelling of town names (Zaleszcziki, Kameniec Podolski, Stry, etc.), but their current names are given in a list at the end.

The book offers a broadening view of architectural (and urban) history. The Author sets out to show ‘the other side of the coin’ in construction history and the backstage of empire-building in the nineteenth century. He also incorporates the lesser-used military sources to show that the military factors and *modi operandi* were crucial not only during war, but also in the peacetime, and that it had the potential to transform the state and impact the way the empire was perceived and evaluated by the locals just when it was supposed to wield only a limited influence.

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Raluca Goleşteanu-Jacobs, *Habsburg Galicia and the Romanian Kingdom. Sociocultural Development, 1866–1914*, London–New York, 2024, Routledge, 348 pp., 36 b-w ills, series: Poland: Transnational Histories

In 2024, Raluca Elena Goleşteanu-Jacobs published a comparative study of the sociocultural development of Habsburg Galicia and the Kingdom of Romania in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was part of a newly created publishing series entitled *Poland: Transnational Histories*. The series editors include Polish and international historians affiliated with the Polish Academy of Sciences (Maciej Górny, Maciej Janowski), the German Historical Institute in Warsaw (Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, Miloš Řezník), the University of Illinois Chicago (Keely Stauter-Halsted), and the Collège de France (Catherine Gousseff). Before we move on to discussing the publication itself, I should devote a few sentences to the Author of this monograph. Raluca Goleşteanu-Jacobs, PhD, is a self-described ‘independent researcher’. She specialises in research and comparative studies on Central and Eastern European culture and urban culture. In addition to her academic interests, she is a research communicator on subjects such as postcolonialism, imperial heritage, and centre–periphery relations.¹ Apart from the book discussed in this article,

¹ <https://independent.academia.edu/RalucaGoleşteanu/CurriculumVitae> [Accessed: 21 July 2024]; <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Raluca-Goleşteanu-Jacobs> [Accessed: 21 July 2024]; ‘Introduction’, in Raluca Goleşteanu-Jacobs, *Habsburg*

Goleşteanu-Jacobs has written several papers on modernisation processes and cultural transgression.²

Habsburg Galicia and the Romanian Kingdom. Sociocultural development 1866–1914 is unquestionably the Romanian researcher's greatest academic achievement so far. It grew out of the doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of Maciej Janowski, a historian at the Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The thesis was successfully defended in 2012 at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, where the Author spent four years honing her research and scholarly skills, while making use of her stay in Poland to carry out thorough queries in libraries and (to a lesser extent) archives, as evidenced by the contents of the post-doctoral monograph.

Let me begin this review by taking a look at the periodisation adopted by Raluca Goleşteanu-Jacobs, spanning the years 1866–1914. The Author chose 1866 as the beginning of her story, a decision that seems to be fully justified from a Galician perspective. The year 1866 is to be taken as a key moment for the then-nascent autonomy, thanks to the so-called 'communal law' adopted on 12 August by the Diet of Galicia and Lodomeria in Lviv – a piece of legislation that determined the social and political modernisation of Galicia. That same year, Krakow also received its own statute, a foundational document for the functioning of the city. Nonetheless, in my opinion, it would be more reasonable to consider the revolutionary year of 1848 as the starting point – the moment in which the process of 'citizenization' of Galicians began. Although the next decade was marked by the young Franz Joseph Habsburg's restoration of absolutism, the flywheel of change had been set in motion. The transformations of the 1860s, as seen in Galicia, resulted from – beyond the well-known international factors, of course – the Spring of Nations, which swept across almost the entire Habsburg empire,

Galicia and the Romanian Kingdom. Sociocultural Development, 1866–1914 (London–New York, 2024).

² Raluca Goleşteanu-Jacobs, 'Representations of Central and Eastern Europe in Travelogues of Romanian and Polish Public Figures', *Linguaculture*, 2 (2015), 43–61; *ead.*, 'The Towns of Drohobycz and Roman in the Work of Bruno Schulz (1892–1942) and Max Blecher (1909–1938). A Study in Local History, Personal Geography and Jewish Identity at the Peak of Modernity', *CAS Sofia Working Paper Series*, 8 (2016), 1–74; *ead.*, 'Biblioteca de la moşie, cabinetul de lectură și librăria de la oraş. Scurtă discuție despre carte și spațiul de lectură în secolul al XIX-lea, la răspântia Imperiilor Otoman, Habsburgic și Rus', *Anuarul Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române Iași*, ix (2016), 19–39; *ead.*, "'Vom fi ce am fost odată": capitale simbolice în lumi periferice. Iașul și Cracovia secolului al XIX-lea sau cum se poate întâlni memoria cu istoria', *Anuarul Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române Iași*, ix (2016), 40–65.

from its capital, Vienna, to the eastern Galician frontiers of the state. It is hard to move past the popular election of the Austrian parliament in 1848 or the occurrence of the first, albeit short-lived, liberal policies, such as the abolition of censorship and the introduction of freedom of speech. Similar revolutionary and democratic processes took place in Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania, i.e. lands ethnically dominated by Romanians.

The year 1914 is the temporal caesura that concludes the story, and it seems to be the right choice. And although for most scholars, the culmination of the ‘long nineteenth century’ was marked by the collapse of centuries-old European monarchies ruled by the Habsburg, Hohenzollern and Romanov dynasties, the first year of the Great War already saw major changes in the functioning of the warring powers. In Galicia, a state of emergency was imposed on 25 July 1914, and then superseded on 1 August with unconstitutional martial law (similar to that in Austrian Silesia and Bukovina), which restricted civil liberties granted by the December Constitution of 1867, as well as the work of autonomous local governments.³ Concluding the section of the review focused on the period covered by the study, it should be noted that the initial date (1866) has a substantive rationale, although 1848 would have been more appropriate for the sociocultural analysis of Galicia. It is important, though, that Goleşteanu-Jacobs also recognised how much the events in the Habsburg monarchy during the Spring of Nations affected the processes under study, which is reflected in the book’s introduction:

Propitious periods in the history of the two cases under review, such as the debut of Galicia autonomy and the aftermath of the modern Romanian state’s establishment (1859), represents inspiring sources for observing phenomena such as the representation “West-East”, as it is employed in the writings of Galician and Romanian decision-makers of political and/or intellectual orientation in the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century. They subscribed to at least one of the attributes that accompanied the concept of the West at that time: humanitarian, tolerant ideas (with reference to the 1848 Revolution); the multiplicity of interests (parliamentarian system of government); democratisation (political representation for all social categories), industrialisation („seen as the central element of a modernisation process that affected most other elements of society”).⁴

Significantly, the starting point for the scholarly narrative presented in comparative terms was also the year 1859, a watershed moment in Romanian historiography comparable to 1867 for historians specialising in the history

³ *Dziennik ustaw państwa dla królestw i krajów w Radzie Państwa reprezentowanych*, 186 (1914), 891; Konstanty Grzybowski, *Historia państwa i prawa Polski*, iv: *Od uwłaszczenia do odrodzenia państwa* (Warszawa, 1982), 387–9.

⁴ Goleşteanu-Jacobs, *Habsburg Galicia and the Romanian Kingdom*, 4.

of Galicia.⁵ It was then that the seizure of power in Moldavia and Wallachia by Alexandru Ioan Cuza took place, who thus began the unification of the Romanian nation and set in motion the processes of its emancipation and democratisation, culminating in the liberalization of social and economic life expressed through the agrarian reform of 1864. Finally, in 1866 (after the overthrow of Cuza), the Romanian constitution was implemented.⁶ In the following years, these reforms provided impetus to Romanians' independence from Ottoman rule.

As can be inferred from reading the book, the Author's choice of the initial caesura was also non-political. It resulted from the general modernisation processes of the societies under study. The dynamics of change of the broad urbanisation processes (referred to incorrectly by the Author as industrialisation) gained momentum in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, enabling the sociocultural transformation referred to in science as the so-called cultural urbanisation.

The comparative presentation of two 'peripheral' areas of Europe, namely Galicia and the Romanian Kingdom, may at first stir up potential dissonance due to the nature of the comparison: on the one hand, there is an independent state which the Kingdom became in the second half of the nineteenth century, and on the other hand, just one of several crown countries of the multicultural Habsburg monarchy. Readers, including the Author of this review, may have questions about the reasoning behind the juxtaposition of these two political and sociocultural areas, and Goleşteanu-Jacobs provides the answers in the introduction to the first chapter entitled 'Methods' where she wrote:

This introductory chapter aims to highlight the complexities stemming from aligning the political, social, and economic context of the two studied cases to their self-narratives of development. Traditionally, the historiographies of the two countries considered the concept of nation as the basic unit. Galicia and the Romanian Kingdom's intricate political systems, their equally complex agrarian relations and the powerful role played by their religions on the political makeup and the people's mindset were analysed in connection to the type of Polish and Romanian nationalism(s) and peculiarities of nation building.⁷

The quoted excerpt shows that the criterion for selecting 'research objects' emerged from shared correlations linked with the construction of nineteenth-century national identity. This interpretation, while briefly delineated above, seems to have substantive justification. Nevertheless, other questions might

⁵ See Juliusz Demel, *Historia Rumunii*, 2nd edn (Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź, 1986), 301–4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 304–9.

⁷ Goleşteanu-Jacobs, *Habsburg Galicia*, 27.

arise here. Why, for instance, was the focus primarily on approximating the Polish context with regard to Galicia? Why was the Ukrainian point of view not included, i.e. the narrative equally important to the Polish perspective? I leave this question unanswered. I venture to say that it is hard to discuss the sociocultural development of Galicia without including the Ukrainian and Jewish elements (although the latter are mentioned briefly in Chapter One, among other sections). Nevertheless, the marginal mentions of the Ukrainian themes mean that the Author focuses mainly on the Krakow-based *Stańczy* group and its strong presence in western Galicia while discussing conservative concepts active in the region. However, the Podolyans circle – i.e. a political grouping of Polish landowners and aristocracy from Eastern Galicia who opposed the Ukrainianization of that part of the province – was characterised rather broadly in the book.

The structure of the monograph is truly interesting. The Author divided it unconventionally into three main parts: Methods, Contexts, and Ideas. The first two provide a substantial theoretical introduction to the core insights presented in the most comprehensive third section. In the first chapter, Raluca Goleşteanu-Jacobs highlighted the specificities arising from comparing the political and socioeconomic contexts of Galicia and Romania, but also foreign (transnational) influences on the formation of the two societies' political concepts. The second chapter provides a depiction of different contexts. Emphasis is placed on discussing the historical background of the subject in question but primarily on presenting the political, economic and social circumstances of Habsburg Galicia and the Romanian Kingdom in the period. The presentation of the various perspectives lays the foundation for a proper understanding of the book's third part, which, in my opinion, is the most essential. It is composed of three thematically well-matched subchapters and an epilogue. The first two subchapters discuss, in comparative terms, the origins of Galician and Romanian conservatism ('The intellectual genealogy of conservatism in Habsburg Galicia and the Romanian Kingdom'), as well as the evolution of the conservative ideology and its prodigious legacy in Habsburg Galicia and the Romanian Kingdom. The third subchapter is devoted to democrats and socialists and their contributions to the socio-economic development of Galicia and the Romanian Kingdom ('Democrats and socialists: Ideologues and practitioners of socioeconomic development in Habsburg Galicia and the Romanian Kingdom'). The chapter is concluded by an epilogue that contains, in the Author's words, a summary of the course of modernisation and Westernisation processes carried out in Galicia and Romania between 1866 and 1914.

Raluca Goleşteanu-Jacobs founded her arguments on solid primary sources, mainly memoirs. The choice of the latter should not come as a surprise, as the specifics of the subject matter required an excellent grasp of the memoir legacy produced by the intelligentsia affiliated with the political circles of Galicia

and the Romanian Kingdom. In addition to the numerous ego-documents, the Author made prolific use of the literature on the subject. She has an excellent in-depth knowledge of Polish-language historiography, both dealing with the general history of Galicia, as well as political thought and ideas. This demonstrates the Author's exceptional erudition and the results of the years-long research stay in Poland. Goleşteanu-Jacobs has also exhibited an excellent understanding of English and German academic literature. And although these works are in the minority, their selection is correct. Accurate references to Polish fiction (*vide* the works of Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński) also deserve recognition. Unfortunately, the Author completely omitted the works of Ukrainian historians in her inquiries (I am referring to works originally published in Ukrainian). At this juncture, one cannot help but mention the achievements of Marian Mudryi, a Lviv-based historian, and Olena Arkusha,⁸ a researcher affiliated with the I. Krypiakevych Institute of Ukrainian Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, and others.⁹ Obviously, the Ukrainian research on political thought in Galicia's autonomous period and right before the autonomy cannot be compared favourably with the Polish historiography on the subject; nevertheless, findings of Ukrainian researchers do exist, and their substantive value is indisputable. In this context, I cannot help but notice that the Author did not draw on the findings of Polish historians dealing with the political and national thought of Ukrainians and their relations with Poles on the shared Galician territory.¹⁰

In *Habsburg Galicia and the Romanian Kingdom. Sociocultural Development, 1866–1914*, the Author put forward quite intriguing theses, which she substantively defended in the book's core. She proved the existence of an interdependence between the prevailing economic conditions and the socio-cultural situation of the areas defined, quite rightly, as peripheral. In my opinion, one of her most interesting research findings was the successful

⁸ See Olena Arkusha, *Oleksandr Barvins'kyy (do 150-richchya vid dnya narodzhennya)* (Lviv, 1997); *ead.*, 'Barvins'kiy Oleksandr Hryhorovych', in Valeriy Andriyovych Smoliy et al. (eds), *Entsyklopediya istoriyi Ukrayiny*, i–x (Kyiv, 2003–13).

⁹ Cf. Anna Veronika Vendland, *Rusofily Halychyny. Ukrainy's'ki konservatory mizh Avstriyeyu ta Rosiyeyu 1848–1915*, transl. Khrystyna Nazarkevych (Lviv, 2015); Serhiy Plokhii, *Pokhodzhennya slov"yans'kykh natsiy. Domoderni identychnosti v Ukraini, Rosiyi ta Bilorusi* (Kyiv, 2015).

¹⁰ See Andrzej A. Zięba, 'Gente Rutheni, nazione Poloni. Z problematyki kształtowania się ukraińskiej świadomości narodowej w Galicji', *Prace Komisji Wschodnioeuropejskiej*, ii, 2 (1995), 61–77; Ryszard Tomczyk, *Galicyska Rusko-Ukraińska Partia Radykalna w latach 1890–1914* (Szczecin, 2007); Bernadetta Wójtowicz-Huber, "Ojcowie narodu". *Duchowieństwo greckokatolickie w ruchu narodowym Rusinów galicyjskich (1867–1918)* (Warszawa, 2008); Adam Świątek, *Gente Rutheni, Nazione Poloni. Z dziejów Rusinów narodowości polskiej w Galicji* (Kraków, 2014).

attempt to connect the issue of the influence of intellectual and political debate on the economic and, therefore, sociocultural development of the regions in focus. Having mapped out the public discourse created by the most prominent Galician (Polish) and Romanian intellectuals of the second half of the nineteenth century, the Author noticed that in both Galicia and Romania strategies were established to support (or accelerate) economic and sociocultural transformations. In the case of Galicia, it was federalism and autonomy, while, in the case of Romania, centralisation and economic nationalism were evident in the Kingdom throughout the latter part of the century. Interestingly, the two programs displayed stark differences but shared a common idea of modernising a provincial population. Research conducted by Goleşteanu-Jacobs further indicated that the issue of bridging the social and cultural dispersion between peripheral and central areas was linked to economic convergence. At the same time, the latter primarily correlated with political projects based on different ideological concepts, from conservative (e.g., Stanislaw Szczepanowski in Galicia) to socialist and democratic ones, espoused in Romania by Solomon Katz, a sociologist commonly known as Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea. In conclusion, the Author ventures that the Romanian model of sociocultural modernisation was founded on a process of Westernization. On the other hand, Galicians considered themselves part of the broader West to which the pre-partition Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had already aspired. Therefore, Goleşteanu-Jacobs states that the thinkers from the Austro-Hungarian province did not strive to follow Western canons at all costs but instead focused on concrete and practical economic development methods. This opinion may come as a surprise since the actions of the Polish intellectual, cultural and, above all, economic elites in Galicia were multifaceted. Obviously, the view expressed in the book existed among conservatives but was absent from the circles that gravitated towards the political centre, where the fascination with the West, particularly with Great Britain and its economic and social achievements, was omnipresent.

In conclusion, the reviewed book is a valuable and noteworthy publication. It provides a rewarding opportunity to learn the point of view of the Romanian researcher, who is well-versed in Galician realities. And although we can point to some noticeable shortcomings of the book, they are far outweighed by its merits. I am sure that Raluca Elena Goleşteanu-Jacobs's work will contribute to disseminating knowledge about Austrian Galicia among researchers in Romania and other historians specialising in the sociocultural history of nineteenth-century Europe. With this publication, the forgotten province of Europe has burst onto the main European stage. That is one more reason for deriving academic satisfaction from the book.

Natasha Wheatley, *The Life & Death of States: Central Europe & the Transformation of Modern Sovereignty*, Princeton 2023, Princeton University Press, 424 pp., 2 maps

I will start this review of Natasha Wheatley's book in an unusual way, as I am eager to admit it in the very first sentence – this is an unusual book. Here, I would like to share my own reading habits: I like to immerse myself in the act of reading while keeping side activities to a minimum. This tends to make my notes on strictly academic books rather sparse and general. After finishing *The Life & Death of States*, I realised that my notes were different this time. Lo and behold, I had several scribbled pages before me, with many quotes and thoughts jotted down in the margins. This is the best proof that the reviewed book is passionate and rich with remarkable insights. No wonder it has already become the subject of numerous discussions and even inspired a very interesting review round table.¹

The main question that the Author sets out to answer is not only the process of living and dying of the state, as hinted at in the title. Equally important for understanding the cognitive purpose of Wheatley's work is the subtitle, redirecting the audience's attention to Central Europe. However, as the reader learns from the introduction, the Author focuses on the Habsburg Monarchy and the states that emerged from its ruins (mainly: Austria and Hungary). However, in doing so, slightly at odds with the title, she overlooks the entangled history of sovereignty and statehood in other central European countries.

In articulating the primary goal of her study, the American researcher deftly captures a problem that years ago, as she points out, also preoccupied Georg Jellinek, one of the protagonists of her book. What if one sought the definition of sovereignty not by studying the statehood of Britain or France but by focusing on Austria (Austria-Hungary) and its 'afterlife'? Does this line of inquiry yield different results when rooted in non-Western research matter? I will add that in order to answer these questions, Wheatley suggests an essentially genealogical reading of sovereignty, writing a history of that which ostensibly appears to be timeless and static.² Hence, by situating sovereignty at a point in time and place and questioning the British-French norm, the Author contributes several refreshing insights while re-framing the research

¹ See *H-Diplo Roundtable XXVI-3*, ed. Diane Labrosse, <https://issforum.org/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XXVI-3.pdf> [Accessed: 16 Sept. 2024].

² I use the concept as defined by Michel Foucault. Genealogy, then, would be the study of past discursive problems that reveals the conditions of possibility of their existence, thereby constructing a new, 'critical' image of the past. This image as such shows the contingency of the historical narrative itself.

field. It turns out that the parameters of state-forming processes in imperial and post-imperial border regions in Central Europe differ significantly from those that can be traced in the narrowly defined West.

Writing a book with such a broad scope is risky, as the Author undertakes to intervene in several rapidly developing research trends. However, I must admit that this polyphonic character of the narrative perfectly comes together in a single main theme. This is the reinterpretation of the historical and legal debates on the state apparatus and sovereignty, carried out using the example of the Habsburg Monarchy – Austria and later Austria-Hungary – and its many successors. The starting caesura is 1848, when the centuries-old state was on the verge of collapse. The end date is not 1918, nor even 1939, when the post-Versailles order in Central Europe finally fell apart. The Author takes her analysis to the second half of the twentieth century, and her conclusions nearly reach the present day, ending at the threshold of the impending Russian full-scale aggression against Ukraine.

The Author carries out her research intentions on over four hundred pages, dividing the narrative into an introduction, seven chapters and a summary. Their internal structure is both thematic and chronological, as the subsequent decades and unfolding events generated new problems and new solutions in the legal and ideological debates around the state or sovereignty. Hence, each chapter has its main protagonists – mainly philosophers and legal theorists born in the Habsburg Monarchy. Chapters and subchapters contain rudimentary facts, both regarding the current political situation and the biographies of the protagonists, thus enabling a contextual reading of the ideological constellations they formed. The book includes the names of such prominent figures as Georg Jellinek, Hans Kelsen, Josef Ulbrich and Charles Alexandrowicz.

In the introduction, Wheatley efficiently articulates the main conundrum which she seeks to solve. The first two chapters deal with the existential challenges which the Habsburg Monarchy faced. The reader gains insight into the debates surrounding sovereignty and statehood at two key moments: the Spring of Nations and the transformation of the monarchy into a dual model.

The third chapter outlines the theoretical trends regarding the status of territories and nationalities within empires. The fourth chapter shows how Georg Jellinek and his disciple, Hans Kelsen, developed their theories of state and law while confronting the rapidly changing political landscape at the time of the implosion of Austria-Hungary during the First World War. The next two chapters are about the ‘afterlife’ of the researched legal-state system. Here, Wheatley charts how theorists grappled with creating a new order in central Europe after 1918, seeking historical and legal justifications for their claims. The final chapter shifts such considerations to the global stage by showing how the collapse of colonial empires and the Soviet Union and the creation of ‘old-new states’ (p. 27) in various parts of the world

were justified based on legal theory. As it turns out, “new” states sought justification for their existence and borders in the distant past. One example in the book is the Czechoslovak proclamation of independence of 18 October 1918, citing its authors: “our historic and natural right” (p. 187). A name and subject index supplement the book.

In my view, the book offers a cognitively stimulating mesh of insights situated at the intersection of the history of ideas and (political and legal) concepts, as well as political history with an emphasis on the apparatuses and institutions of the state. At the same time, the Author transcends the framework of traditional sub-disciplines on both these issues. Her take on the concept of sovereignty is more far-reaching than the *Grundbegriffe* in the classic works of Reinhart Koselleck and his colleagues. Instead, it is about a complex problem – or a complex issue? – which is unfolding in parallel with theoretical debates and constitutional reforms. The passages devoted to the thought of Hans Kelsen (especially in chapter six) stand out as particularly refreshing in this regard and perhaps most fully synthesise the ambition to study the relationship between the law and the state. Thus, we peek into pivotal thinkers’ desk drawers and into the salons or university halls where they held their discussions. At the same time, we follow the transformations affecting vast territories and the lives of their inhabitants. Chapter four, for example, begins with a scene in which Kelsen receives a telephone call on an October night in 1918, urging him to the residence of War Minister Rudolf Stöger-Steiner – the last minister of the monarchy, as Kelsen described his interlocutor according to the Author. Despite being aware of military defeat, Stöger-Steiner did not accept the prospect of the collapse of the centuries-old state. “The unthinkable was already in train”, Wheatley concludes (pp. 181–2).

In Wheatley’s narrative, constitutional-legal history is also not a static matter under scrutiny. Instead of a meticulous interpretation of individual provisions and solutions, the Author offers an insight into their architecture each time so that the concepts of state, law, sovereignty or constitution become fluid in her reflection and are shown as a process filled with randomness and ruptures, and even internal contradictions. As a matter of fact, at times, one gets the impression that the theorists and lawmakers do not shape the processes occurring around them but instead try desperately to keep up with them. A good example again turns out to be Kelsen and his circle of collaborators during the First World War I, which turned out to be a “wartime laboratory” (p. 231) for the philosophy of law: “having lectured on Austro-Hungarian dual sovereignty at the University of Vienna in the academic years 1911–2, 1912–3, 1913–4, and 1915–6, Kelsen found himself working on its real-world development in 1917–8 [as an employee at the Ministry of War – PK]” (p. 232).

The new knowledge(s) emerging from the efforts of the protagonists can be described only in the plural. At the same time, their attempts to change the political-legal status quo through epistemological innovations can be

compared to Baron Münchhausen's claim that he managed to pull himself out of the swamp by his hair. By the way, Wheatley points out that this figure has repeatedly surfaced in the deliberations of key authors of the book, such as Albert Apponyi (p. 75), Hans Kelsen (p. 227), and Krystyna Marek (p. 270).

While reading, I struggled to shake off the impression that there is one notable absentee in *The Life & Death of States*: the question of nationality. The aversion to raising it can be understood: after all, this interpretation of the fall of Austria-Hungary has been repeated for decades and was subjected to thorough criticism within contemporary historiography.³ Besides, Wheatley informs the reader in the introduction why she intends to give less importance to this issue, pointing out that it has been explored many times in the literature (pp. 16–7). Nevertheless, abstracting from the question of nationality can be as problematic as overstating it. Plus, since the Author's diagnosis is "The theory of sovereignty is regionally conditioned", it would also be interesting to know her answer, even if it is a negative one, to the question "Does the law have a nationality?".

Natasha Wheatley's book is a must-read for anyone interested in the transformation of Central Europe in the modern era. It depicts the changes in the region's offers in a cognitively invigorating, coherent, yet elegantly written manner, accompanied by a diverse set of methodological inspirations. Thus, we trace the paths leading from heterogeneous state monarchies through empires and nation-states to the present day, when the region is once again grappling with the challenge of imperialism. On a broader level, the reviewed study proves that none of the constellations of states and sovereignties that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought stability to Central Europe. May this general but highly unsettling conclusion inspire more researchers to explore these subjects in directions charted by the Author.

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³ In particular, see Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA, 2016).