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REVIEWS

PIETER M. JUDSON, *THE HABSBURG EMPIRE: A NEW HISTORY*. CAMBRIDGE AND LONDON: THE BELKNAP PRESS OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2018, 567 p.

*Reviewed by Anja Nikolić**

Pieter M. Judson, currently professor of nineteenth- and twentieth-century history at the European University Institute in Florence, focuses his research on Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and, in doing so, is concerned with changing the way in which contemporary historiography tends to see the history of Central Europe. The book reviewed here is a product of such concerns. It consists of an introduction, six chapters and an epilogue. It begins with the accession of Maria Theresa to the throne and ends with the year 1918 and the collapse of the Habsburg Empire. It is the absence of a date that would mark the end of the empire that the author believes to be important for understanding the Dual Monarchy. As he himself says, the First World War destroyed the Habsburg state “by eroding any sense of mutual obligation between people and state; popular and dynastic patriotism withered away, calling into question the very *raison d’être* of empire” (p. 441). This statement perfectly illustrates what Judson wants to demonstrate in his book.

Facts are not of vital importance for this book even though it offers a chronological account of key events such as Maria Theresa’s reforms, the Napoleonic Wars, the revolution of 1848, the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, the introduction of universal manhood suffrage in the Austrian part of the country in 1907, the First World War. What is important is that the author interprets the key moments of Habsburg history in a different way from the one he regards as being entrenched. That is the new history referred to in the title. Judson’s book belongs to the trend in historiography that seeks to revise the history of the Habsburg Empire. Instead of the dominant understanding of the Dual Monarchy as a scene of a conflict between the empire and nations, he offers a different interpretation.

As Judson himself writes, “this book is about how countless local societies across central Europe engaged with the Habsburg

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dynasty's effort to build a unified and unifying imperial state from the eighteenth century until the First World War" (p. 4). He wants to examine how the imperial institutions and cultural programmes shaped different societies across the Empire from the late eighteenth century to the demise of the Habsburg Monarchy. He stresses that the empire itself should be made the focus of research rather than "linguistic groups or ethnically defined nations". In that way a different narrative for the history of Central and Eastern Europe emerges and a revised history of the empire is produced. What the author finds to be important is the relationship between state and society because he believes that they built the Habsburg Empire together. This is why this is, in a way, a history from below. The focus is not only on the processes started by those on the top of the hierarchy but also on the multitude that constitutes the society of the Dual Monarchy.

As a result of Judson's approach and attitude to the Habsburg Monarchy, the main antagonist in his account is nationalism and the national movements of the peoples living under Habsburg rule. The thesis the author insists on in several places is that it was the laws of the Empire that made the national movements possible, because in certain areas and certain periods it permitted the use of vernacular languages. According to Judson, it was the elites who created national identities, but he overlooks the presence of linguistic and cultural traditions that the elites drew from in their work on enlightening the people.

As far as the building of nation and national feeling is concerned, an especially interesting case is the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina under Austro-Hungarian occupation (1878). The author claims that the colonial regime established in Bosnia-Herzegovina sought to overcome the dangers of nationalism and that it failed. The Austro-Hungarian attempt to introduce a Bosnian nation aimed at overcoming the differences

in the area under occupation failed. Although Judson describes it as the attempt of government bureaucrats to create "a non-national Bosnian identification for Bosnian Muslims" (p. 331), it in fact was an identity experiment which failed to take root.

Judson notes that many nationalists were happy working in Austria-Hungary. The First World War, however, changed the situation completely. The Habsburg Monarchy disappeared and was replaced with national states. The ties upon which the author insists throughout the book, especially the ties between state and society, obviously were not strong enough to keep the Monarchy together.

The purpose of this book is to re-examine the views of the history of the Habsburg state, it raises new questions and offers new ideas. The author was not primarily concerned with delving into politics or facts. His is a revisionist reading of the history of the Habsburg Monarchy. Some of his bold views are subject to debate, and some objections have been raised here, especially the specific understanding of nationalism and national movements. Nonetheless, it gives researchers some interesting ideas to think about.