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Besides well-established scholars, whose participation certainly added weight to the conference, young scholars were also given the opportunity to present the results of their research. The resulting volume is a very useful read, but non-Serbian speakers will inevitably be limited to the summaries. The publisher might therefore

consider making an additional effort and either prepare an integral English edition or make a selection of the most important articles. Foreign scholars would certainly find even an abridged version useful for acquainting themselves with some Serbian views on the causes and consequences of the First World War.

JEAN-PAUL BLEDE, *L'AGONIE D'UNE MONARCHIE. AUTRICHE-HONGRIE 1914-1920*.
PARIS: TALLANDIER, 2014, 464 p.

Reviewed by Veljko Stanić*

In his recent essay "Austria-Hungary and the First World War" the distinguished British historian Alan Sked points out "two schools of thought regarding the role of the Habsburg Monarchy in the origins of the First World War". While one is traditionally focused on "the failure to implement domestic reforms ... as having forced it [Monarchy] in 1914 to go to war to prevent the 'nationality question' from destabilizing ... it from within", the other is rather preoccupied with the issues of foreign policy, especially in terms of "dynastic honour or prestige".¹ In a similar manner, the American historian John Deak denounces the old-fashioned historiography on Austria-Hungary inspired by Henry Wickham Steed, Robert William Seton-Watson, Louis Namier and Alan John Percivale Taylor describing it as a "Hegelian narrative in which the Habsburg Empire declines and collapses in order to give birth to a host of modern nation-states". More sympathetic to the Double Monarchy and inspired by a new research trend, Deak claims that "we must stop seeing the war in terms of liberation

and progress" and "focus our research and energies on what the process of arming, feeding, mobilizing and – especially, controlling the populace of Austria-Hungary actually destroyed". He therefore proposes a more careful examination of various aspects of Austria-Hungary's history in its last years which coincided with the First World War.² Undoubtedly, there is an important revival of Habsburg studies largely linked to the First World War that should be particularly welcomed.³

The book under review here clearly comes as a result of this renewed interest in the Habsburg Monarchy and the First World War. Its author, the renowned French historian Jean-Paul Bled is professor emeritus of the Uni-

² John Deak, "The Great War and the Forgotten Realm: The Habsburg Monarchy and the First World War", *The Journal of Modern History* 86 (June 2014), 336–380.

³ Samuel R. Williamson Jr., "Austria and the Origins of the Great War: A Selective Historiographical Survey", in 1914, *Austria-Hungary, the Origins, and the First Year of World War I*, eds. Günter Bischof and Ferdinand Karhofer, guest ed. Samuel R. Williamson, Jr., Contemporary Austrian Studies, vol. 23 (Innsbruck University Press, 2014), 21–33.

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¹ Alan Sked, "Austria-Hungary and the First World War", *Histoire@Politique* (P.F.N.S.P), 2014/1, no. 2, 16–49.

versity Paris-Sorbonne (Paris IV), and since November 2015 a foreign member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. A leading French specialist in the history of the Habsburg Monarchy, Bled is the author of more than dozen books on Austrian and German history. Moreover, he authored important biographies of Franz Joseph and Franz Ferdinand,⁴ which naturally led him towards a single volume on the last years of Austria-Hungary. This book has all the qualities of Bled's previous works: reliable information, clarity and conciseness of narrative penned in a most elegant style. Based on the author's intimate knowledge of archival sources and vast literature, *L'Agonie d'une Monarchie* demonstrates Bled's rare ability for synthesis. In fifteen chapters on 450 pages, Bled takes into consideration political, ideological, military, social and cultural questions. He draws our attention to the problems of international relations in Europe, military operations, as well as issues of internal politics and social reality of home fronts. An accomplished biographer, Bled paints vibrant portraits of Leopold Berchtold, István Tisza, Stephan (István) Burián, Ottokar Czernin, Emperor Karl I and Conrad von Hötzendorf among others. This is the first monograph on the subject in French historiography and it stands as a counterpart, if more concise, of Manfred Rauchensteiner's *Der Erste Weltkrieg und das Ende der Habsburgermonarchie 1914–1918* (Böhlau, 2013).

Rather than to present the content of the book exhaustively, we shall briefly focus on its few important aspects: the very nature of Austria-Hungary in Europe on the eve of the First World War, its role in the origins of the war, the reasons for

its disintegration and its antagonistic relationship with Serbia.

Although Bled chooses to discuss the last years of Austria-Hungary in terms of "agony", he does not believe that the Monarchy was bound to disappear. However, he clearly says that in 1914 a multinational empire such as Austria-Hungary was a *corps fragile* and an *anachronisme* with quite a few problems concerning the functioning of recently introduced universal suffrage, national strife between the Germans and the Czechs, the way the Hungarians treated other national groups. Surely, there were positive developments such as those in Moravia in 1905, Bukovina in 1910 and Galicia in 1914. The economy and culture counted among the factors that were contributing to the unity of the Habsburg Monarchy. Moreover, Bled points out that national pluralism did not exclude a special kind of Austrian supranational cultural identity. Bled, thus, highlights the "reality of a specific cultural area at the centre of Europe" influenced by the legacy of the Baroque, German language, distinctive urban identity and modern artistic paradigms. Further still, with the outbreak of the war, one can observe a particular form of *union sacrée*, the phenomenon of dynastic patriotism mainly directed towards the almost mythic figure of the old Emperor Franz Joseph. Bled suggests that this fact shows a certain vitality of Austria-Hungary. But a long war was by no means its ally. Had it lasted a year or two less, a reformed Habsburg Monarchy could have survived, Bled believes. From 1916 onwards, it becomes clear that the Monarchy could not sustain the war effort much longer. In a nutshell, it was the combined effect of several factors, such as the length and hardships of the war, internal national problems, economic decline, food crisis, failures on the fronts and the determination of the Entente powers, that would eventually bring the Monar-

⁴ See our review of J.-P. Bled's *François Ferdinand d'Autriche* in *Balkanica* XLIV (2013), 418–422.

chy to ruin. Bled offers a meticulous analysis of the Emperor Karl's vain attempts at finding a solution for a separate peace. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether the Emperor would have had the necessary resources for this new politics. Austria-Hungary's increasing dependence on its superior ally, Germany, and political forces opposed to the young Emperor inside the Monarchy seriously challenged his ambitious projects.

As for the origins of the war, with its ultimatum to Serbia Austria-Hungary played a key role on a European scale. There is no doubt that after the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, seen in Vienna as a blow struck against the dynasty itself, Austro-Hungarian civilian and military leaders including the Emperor Franz Joseph and the foreign minister Count Berchtold opted for war against Serbia. Although the planned military action was supposed to be limited, Vienna, provided with the German *chèque en blanc*, risked a general war in the event of Russian intervention on the Serbian side. According to Bled, the Austro-Serbian conflict in 1914 was above all a third Balkan war. This conflict had a long history. Faced with its declining dominance in the German world after Sadowa in 1866 and German unification in 1871, Austria-Hungary sought to reassert its supremacy in the Balkans. After 1903, the Monarchy's political and military leadership started to look upon Serbia as a potential threat. In this sense, the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908 was a blow aimed against Serbia. The next episode of this duel occurred during the Balkan Wars in 1912/13. While describing this mounting antagonism, Bled does not seem to shed a critical light either on Austro-Hungarian imperialism or on Serbian nationalism: he rather observes it as part of the complex European political scene. Further, although Young Bosnia organised the Sarajevo assassination, Bled

still ascribes a secondary role in this affair to the Black Hand. While the Serbian government's non-complicity is unquestionable, one can contemplate whether official Belgrade did enough to prevent this political assassination. The probable warning that came from the Serbian minister in Vienna Jovan M. Jovanović might have reached Leon von Biliński, but Biliński was not in charge of Franz Ferdinand's visit to Sarajevo. The question which haunted Austro-Hungarian leaders was: if we do not punish Serbia, what will other Balkan states do, will they not unite against us? It was not just Serbia that caused anxiety, but rather the contours of a new Balkan League directed against the Dual Monarchy. Besides that, Austria-Hungary had to settle its relations with Italy, Romania and Bulgaria.

In the summer of 1914 Austria-Hungary had no plans for annexing Serbia or some of its parts. It was rather a radical redefinition of their relations that Vienna had in mind, which in practice meant forcing Serbia into submitting to Austro-Hungarian influence and control. However, its Balkan policy would prove to be fatal. Defeated in two successive campaigns in 1914, Austria-Hungary only managed to occupy Serbia in coalition with German and Bulgarian forces in the winter of 1915/16. The situation changed dramatically when occupied Serbia was placed under military rule of the Central Powers. Bled describes the brutal methods of denationalisation and depoliticisation of Serbia but fails to mention the massacres of civilians committed by Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian forces. As the question of Serbia's future was still open, Conrad von Hötzendorf demanded its complete annexation. Opposed by Tisza and Burián, this scenario remained unrealised. Although Bled does not go any further, it should be added here that Marvin Benjamin Fried's new research casts an original light on Austria-Hunga-

ry great-power pretensions as elaborated in its Balkan policy. From this perspective, they appear to have been more offensive and expansionist, and a crucial reason for Austria-Hungary's staying in the war.⁵

Bled's concluding remarks in the melancholy tone of Zweig's *The World of Yesterday* offer a reflection on Austria-Hungary's fate: although it disappeared in 1918, the Monarchy was by no means ar-

tificial. Its historical existence was a "European necessity", "a factor of European balance". Its difficulties of transformation, accumulated problems, progressive agony in the First World War and ultimate dissolution left "a gap at the heart of Europe". Briefly, Jean-Paul Bled wrote a balanced, thoughtful and well-documented book based on his great knowledge and fine analysis. Being an important contribution to the historiography on Austria-Hungary, its translation into Serbian and other languages of the former Danubian Empire would be very welcome.

⁵ Marvin Benjamin Fried, *Austro-Hungarian War Aims in the Balkans during World War I* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

JOHN C. G. RÖHL, *KAISER WILHELM II 1859–1941: A CONCISE LIFE*. CAMBRIDGE: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2014, 261 p.

Reviewed by Miloš Vojinović*

To say that John C. G. Röhl is an expert in German history would probably be an understatement. His latest book *Kaiser Wilhelm II 1859–1941: A Concise Life*¹ under review here comes after half a century of research into Wilhelmine Germany. After the publication of his three-volume biography of the last German emperor,²

Röhl decided to do something that historians are not always willing to do: he accepted to make an abridged version and to condense more than 4,000 pages of his magnum opus into a book of less than 300 pages.

When Röhl started his research into Kaiser Wilhelm II in the 1960s the reputation of biography as a historiographical genre was in bruises. The golden days of the great man theory were long gone and the historical science was being shaped by influences coming from other disciplines with their spotlight on the significance of structures and quantification. Social history was gaining momentum and classical political biography was sidelined. Some even expected that historians would become computer programmers.³

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¹ Serbian edition: Džon Rel, *Kajzer Vilhelm* (Belgrade: Filip Višnjić, 2015).

² The three-volume biography of Kaiser Wilhelm was first published in Germany by C. H. Beck, Munich, and then followed its English edition by Cambridge University Press: *Wilhelm II: Die Jugend des Kaisers 1859–1888* (1993)=*Young Wilhelm: The Kaiser's Early Life 1859–1888* (1998); *Wilhelm II: Der Aufbau der Persönlichen Monarchie 1888–1900* (2002)=*Wilhelm II: The Kaiser's Personal Monarchy 1888–1900* (2004); *Wilhelm II: Der Weg in den Abgrund 1900–1941*

(2008)=*Wilhelm II: Into the Abyss of War and Exile 1900–1941* (2014).

³ R. J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2000[1997]),