



Rudolf Jaworski. *Deutsche und tschechische Ansichten: Kollektive Identifikationsangebote auf Bildpostkarten in der spätesten Habsburgermonarchie.* Vienna: Studien-Verlag, 2006. 218 pp. EUR 26.90 (paper), ISBN 978-3-7065-4097-1.

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The Nation in the Mailbox: Visual Culture and Nationalist Postcards in the Late Habsburg Monarchy

The turn of the twentieth century marked the heyday of the picture postcard. In an age of expanding mass travel, tourism, and consumption, picture postcards became popular mementos and collectors' items across Europe. In the Bohemian lands, however, these postcards did not simply convey to family and friends back home greetings and images of faraway landscapes. They also became important vehicles for the nationalist propaganda of expanding German and Czech nationalist movements. In this work, Rudolf Jaworski examines the picture postcard as a window into nationalist self-understanding in the final decades of the Habsburg monarchy. The transformation of the postcard into a nationalist medium reflected an important development in the political culture of the late Austrian Empire. As German and Czech nationalist movements sought to infuse everyday choices and actions with nationalist significance, they exhorted citizens to buy and send postcards in order to express deep-felt nationalist loyalties.[1]

Jaworski's study is a welcome investigation into the visual aspects of nationalist political culture in the Bohemian lands. It is no coincidence that historians of this region's nationalist movements have typically focused on written texts, since German and Czech nationalist activists themselves obsessed over the politics of language. But Jaworski's analysis suggests that visual representations of the nation should not be neglected, as they shed light on both the ideological content and emotional resonance of nationalism in the late Habsburg Empire. Even better, his book offers scholars and students the oppor-

tunity to examine a rich set of sources firsthand, as the book is beautifully illustrated with over one hundred examples of postcards, many in color.

Each of the first several chapters focuses on a particular genre of postcard. The book begins with an exploration of the signs, symbols, and icons meant to mark particular people, places, and events as exclusively German or Czech. These symbols often served to render the nation's imagined character traits and assets concrete and visible. For example, Czech nationalists appropriated the linden tree, with its slender branches, soft wood, and tender green leaves, in order to promote an image of a young and peace-loving nation. The deep gnarly roots, robust leaves, and hard wood of the German oak, by contrast, were meant to represent the collective character and status of the German nation. Other chapters examine depictions of historical scenes, national leaders, and heroes, the postcards hawked by nationalist associations, and the popular cards which depicted and advertised nationally-segregated expositions and trade fairs. Each of these popular genres reflected the intense competition that drove the expansion of the Czech and German nationalist movements and the production of nationalist postcards. Nationalists used their postcards to compete for the loyalties of the population, to mobilize financial support and contributions, to campaign for schools and welfare institutions, and finally, to claim victories in the nationalist battle to embody the values of economic development, technological innovation, and cultural progress. In addition, the postcard served as a form

of photojournalism—publicizing, interpreting, and often sensationalizing contemporary events, ranging from duels to parliamentary brawls, and investing them with nationalist significance.

Despite the richness of what is on offer here, however, Jaworski might have explored the gendered qualities of nationalist images in greater depth throughout the book. Postcards not only served an important role in territorializing the nation, claiming specific landscapes as Czech or German national property, they also embodied the nation in gendered images of men and women, soldiers, mothers, peasants, and martyrs. In addition, it would have been useful for readers to learn more about the artistic trends and technologies that shaped the production of nationalist images at the turn of the century. How did postcards resonate with other popular visual art forms, such as photography, poster art, and advertising? What statements were artists making about nationalist ideals through the artistic styles and techniques that they chose to use?

While Jaworski provides important historical context for the nationalist images that adorned postcards, he seems conflicted about the relationship between his sources, the nationalist viewpoints they promoted, and their broader reception in Bohemian society. To what extent did nationalist postcards reflect preexisting nationalist loyalties and ideologies in the Bohemian Lands, and to what extent did they serve to create them? On the one hand, Jaworski insists that the picture postcards of the late Habsburg monarchy were rarely inventive. On the contrary, he argues, postcards “transported, conveyed and popularized already existing models for identification, but did not first create them” (p. 1). Postcards seem to have served little pedagogical purpose, and played little role in imagining new sites of memory, new myths, symbols, or nationalist viewpoints. Simultaneously, Jaworski himself suggests that everyday life in the Bohemian lands was far more nebulous than the nationally-polarized social world depicted on postcards. Nationalist postcards, he argues, “were more platform than reality... Ultimately, the Bohemian lands were populated not simply by Germans on one side and Czechs on the other” (p. 153). While many consumers may easily have recognized the nationalist significance of oak and linden trees, the book is filled with examples suggesting that the nationalist viewpoints represented by the postcards were far from universal or transparent. The artists and publishers who created and distributed the postcards often were motivated more by profit than nationalism. Jaworski also suggests that the national significance of postcards

was sometimes ignored by indifferent or oblivious consumers. These consumers often chose and sent postcards for non-nationalist reasons—because they were attracted by a pretty landscape, or because it was the only card available. In an excellent chapter that analyzes the relationships between images and text, Jaworski notes that it was not uncommon for a greeting in Czech to be scrawled across a German nationalist postcard or vice-versa.

Nationalist postcards also competed or coexisted with cards representing a wide variety of other popular loyalties, especially religious and dynastic loyalties. Jaworski’s analysis of dynastic postcards suggests the extent to which both German and Czech nationalist movements competed to express their overriding imperial patriotism and devotion to Emperor Frances Joseph, rather than working against the state or dynasty. This conclusion has been widely supported by other recent research on the relationship between nationalists and the Austrian state in the late Habsburg Empire. Czech and German-language postcards alike commemorated and celebrated events such as the Imperial Jubilee of 1908 or the kaiser’s visits to the Bohemian lands in a shared visual language. Even during the First World War, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between “German” and “Czech” postcards, as cards in all the monarchy’s languages depicted common wartime themes—guardian angels and nurses, loved ones at home, patriotism, sacrifice, and glory on the battlefield. Indeed the same images often were reproduced with captions in different languages. At the same time, German-Bohemian postcards tended to lose their specificity during the war, increasingly resembling the patriotic postcards produced by German allies in the *Kaiserreich*.^[2]

At times, the nationalist *Ansichten* presented by Jaworski seem somewhat too coherent. The late Austrian Empire did not play host to one exclusive German or Czech nationalist viewpoint. It would be surprising if picture postcards did not reflect debates among nationalists of different stripes as much as the elusive fantasy of national unity. How did the postcards produced by the radical and antisemitic German nationalist association *Sächsischer Reichsbund* differ from those sold by the more liberal *Bayerischer Reichsbund* or the *Deutscher Schulverein*, for example? What kinds of postcards (if any) were produced by Socialists, agrarian party members, Christian Socialists, or Jewish organizations? In his effort to compare German and Czech images, Jaworski may have inadvertently overemphasized the respective unity of the two nationalist camps. Ultimately, picture postcards were not the only thing being sold in the Bohemia lands in the late

Austrian Empire. The nationalist images and viewpoints they depicted represented one of the many choices available to consumers, and not always the choice that was most natural, self-evident, or compelling.

Notes

[1]. On nationalist consumption and tourism in the Austrian Empire, see Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial*

Austria (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[2]. See Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Daniel Unowsky, *The Pomp and Politics of Patriotism: Imperial Celebrations in Habsburg Austria* (Indianapolis: Purdue University Press, 2005); Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*; Eagle Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists: The Transformation of the Bohemian Aristocracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

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