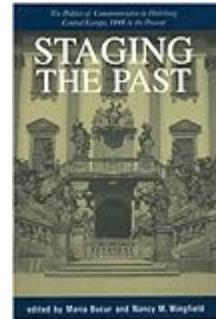




Maria Bucur, Nancy M. Wingfield, eds. *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present.* West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2001. xii + 337 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-55753-161-2.



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Published on HABSBUrg (March, 2002)

Framing the Past and the Instrumentality of Culture

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There is much to recommend in this new collection of essays on the politics of commemoration and cultural representation in the Habsburg Empire and its successor states. As the word 'staging' in the title implies, each contribution to this volume treats the public "performance" of a projected or selectively "constructed past" or conception of state through collectively designed and articulated cultural markers such as monuments, cemeteries, festivals, and holidays. "Staging" also reflects the emphasis given to the formation of local, ethnic, and national groups through cultural-political processes. The state or a cultural grouping performs the past to express and instantiate shared understandings of common tradition, shared heritage, the recognition of origins and genealogies, and about the history of a local, state, or national entity. The ritualistic forms of public presentation analyzed in this book serve to legitimate rule, to help groups publicly assert shared values, and thereby serve both the constitution and maintenance of social, political, and cultural groupings. The movement from a local social and

political formation to an ethnic and national one is one of the sub-themes in this book and is rightly emphasized in the introduction. As most of the essays suggest, the repeated activation of monuments and memorials in public contexts and the celebration of festivals contributed to the delineation and consolidation of distinct local, ethnic, and national identities in an Empire that was plural and mixed in its languages, cultural traditions, religions, and shared values.

The book holds up commemoration and the public display of history as a mirror to the dissolution of Habsburg state into distinct multi-ethnic and multi-national entities and to the further nationalization of the successor states as well as to their ethnic homogenization. This reviewer, whose work has recently centered on commemorative practices in the central and eastern regions of Europe and especially in Germany, post-Habsburg Austria, and in a number of cities not considered in the collection, cannot claim to be able to question the details in each study, though it is in the impressive marshalling of these historical details that most of the authors have substan-

tiated their theses. My limitations in reviewing this volume derive from my own formation as an art and architectural historian with a strong dosage of cultural history in a German university context. With a full appreciation for the historical richness of the volume, I will approach some of the larger issues familiar to an historian of art and culture. I must leave it to other historians to discuss the transformations in social, ethnic, national, and state consciousness related to the uses of culture.

Before engaging the individual essays I will begin by answering a few questions typically posed to a reviewer by a publishing house. Will the book make a valuable contribution to scholarly literature, and if so, in which fields? Who will or should be its readers? Would you use this book in a course on a related topic?

All the essays make contributions to the fields of nationality and ethnicity studies, Habsburg studies, European Studies, and a few to the study of commemorative practices. Yet not one of them makes any substantive contribution to the field of material culture or the social and political history of art. There is little reflection on the vast literature concerning museums, monumental-representative sculpture, or festival culture in art and cultural history; the lack and very poor quality of the illustrations is a symptom of this. The book does not even have a list of illustrations and figures. Only a nod to the standardization of sculpture and use of allegory in Nancy Wingfield's contribution and the comparison of narratives and emphases in museum exhibitions in the essay by Maria Bucur show any sustained attempt at describing or analyzing the "stagings." Still, the historical research assembled here largely in case studies will aid those engaged in a more object-oriented study of "staging history," for most of the essays in this book of history are grounded in new primary research, and several are related closely to dissertations.

The essay by Jeremy King on the "The Nationalization of East Central Europe: Ethnicism, Ethnicity, and Beyond" stands out in that it offers historians a compelling revisionist perspective on the prevalent national and ethnic paradigms in the discipline of history. Several essays – most notably the ones by Cynthia J. Paces, which considers the commemorations of Jan Hus and St. Wenceslas in connection with the commemorative practices instituted by the first Czechoslovak President, Tomas Masaryk, and the study of the Hungarian Cult of March 15 by Alice Freifeld - provide students with models for the method and writing of history. In the diversity of their methods the essays composing this collection

could be used to provide a more general overview of approaches to the politics of commemoration.

With emendations as well as a slight expansion, *Staging the Past* has the potential to become a set piece in Habsburg studies, especially because of its willingness to enter into the gray areas of national, state, ethnic studies. It raises new questions about the cultural definition of identity along local, class, state, national, and ethnic lines. Furthermore, the book will certainly prove useful in courses grappling with the contingencies of state, nation, and ethnic formation within the borders of that empire subject to the mixing and un-mixing of cultures concomitant with the constitution of ethnic, state, and national consciousness. The book has already found a place in courses at Harvard.

Staging the Past is ably edited and organized clearly and logically into three sections dealing with 1) imperial representative practice; 2) countervailing commemorative practices in the localities and regions of the Empire; and 3) the legacies of commemorative practice in the successor states. Given the diversity of chronology, method, and scope in the studies, it might have been more appropriately entitled *Staging Pasts*, since it considers the multiple and sharply varying uses of histories constructed by selected supra-national, nationalizing, and sub-national groupings. The chronological, social, and geographical range is both broad and diverse, and, as noted by David Blackburn in his commentary to the collection printed on its back cover, the collection is "richly textured". That said there is much room for constructive criticism of this attempt to provide a broad and incisive view of commemorative practices related to a particular constellation of "emergent nation-states."

The subtitle "The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present" misleads, for the bulk of the book, except for last sections of essays by Alice Freifeld and Maria Bucur (on Romanian national celebrations), and the preface by Charles W. Ingrao, present "stagings" before WWII. Though it provides a solid basis for understanding the Serbian consciousness of nation in the present, it is a pity that an essay by Melissa Bokovoy concerning commemorations of Serbia's Wars of National Liberation, 1912-1918 did not offer a more sustained perspective on the present. The book avoids the commemorative practices related to the memory of WWII, and to its accompanying deportations, mass murders, and realignment of borders. This merits an explanation as does the limited reference to post-Communist patterns of commemoration. This re-

viewer can imagine several reasons for the exclusion, but a reader is left to ponder the fact that the bulk of contemporary discourse about commemoration in the region has been ignored. This absence might be easily remedied by stressing the aspect of continuities from the Habsburg period to the present. One also has to wonder why the whole history of commemoration associated with that state that would call itself Austria after WWI has been left out of the volume. In effect the successor state at the center of the Empire has been ignored. Why is this?

With their very condensed introduction, the editors of the volume have lost a great opportunity to make the texts more accessible and to establish relevant ties to other historical research in the field of commemorative studies. They do distinguish the texts presented in the volume from other such collections, noting the collection represents the first volume to concentrate on commemorative practices in “Habsburg Central Europe” and that the region is a “fruitful site” for such a study and “ideally suited” because of the regions “rich cultural legacy of multinational exchange.” More should be said about the specific character of the Habsburg Empire and the cultural-political parameters of its demise.

This compilation of texts exhibits very different methodologies, scopes, contexts, and chronologies. This begs for an introduction that would make comparisons from context to context within the volume and beyond. Such a comparative approach in the introduction would have woven particular contributions together and established leitmotifs or central questions that could be read across the collected texts. A much more specific referencing of other texts is also needed in the introduction to open these texts to similar discussions of commemorative practices focused on other regions in Europe.

This unwritten introduction or an afterward could, for instance, have made the obvious connections between the various cults of person and personality introduced by diverse essays. Cynthia Paces shows how Masaryk allied himself with Czech nationalist mythology represented by Hus and St. Wenceslas. How does this compare to the public alignment of Franz Joseph with Catholic ritual (Daniel Unowsky), to the imperial Jubilee, which is a celebration of the person of the sovereign (Steven Beller’s essay), and to the instrumentalization of the Emperor Joseph II as the defender of German privilege delineated so clearly by Nancy Wingfield? Linking these articulations of historic and contemporary personages would allow the essays to speak with one another. For example, Maria Bucur shows how Ceausescu’s personality cult in-

strumentalized national celebrations and emptied them of content.

Such typological pointers would help these texts emerge from the delimited world of Habsburg studies and make them much more useful to students and colleagues teaching in various disciplines and fields. After reading the essays mentioned, I wanted to re-read Thomas Carlyle’s essay on heroes and hero-worship.[1] I returned to my notes from the context largely ignored in this volume, art history, and revisited the many lectures and readings on the body of king or representations of power through both secular and sacred (divine-right) associations. Just a little cross-referencing in the introduction or in very short introductions to each segment of the book would have improved its didactic merit immensely. It is a book that belongs in the classroom.

In the same vein but more with an eye to academic readers, another type of cross referencing would improve this work. In his focused text tracing the critical reception of Imperial Jubilee in the contemporary press, Steven Beller comments on the unwanted imperial guests and interlopers from the German Empire, who can only remind Franz Joseph of the failures of his regime. There is a vast literature concerning commemoration in that significantly “other” Empire to the north.

Why is the entire literature on nation, memory, history, and commemorative practice dealing with Imperial and post-Imperial Germany largely ignored? Why isn’t there some reflection on the different time frames in the gestation of literature about commemorative practice in the fields of German history and Habsburg history?

This “other” literature is unwisely ignored, especially given the methodological and theoretical impulses it offers. I am surprised that Thomas Nipperdey, Peter Reichel, Rainer Koselleck, Jan Assmann, Dieter DÄ¼ding, Wolfgang Kaschuba, Ekkehard Mai, and Wilfried Lipp are not mentioned even in the footnotes. The scholastic pro forma citing of Anderson and Nora, and of imagination and invention, seems less important than referencing a literature that deals quite specifically with the construction and propagation of imperial and national pasts, with the assertion of identities through the erection of monuments, the establishment of commemorative sites, with public festivals and holidays, and with the coordination of different pasts into a larger national-imperial framework. In both empires, one can trace the growing identification of an emergent, modern, and urban bourgeoisie and educated elites with particular formulations of “national past” that pose a tense relationship between

a bourgeois and a dynastic tradition. The comparison between an emerging “national” empire and a disintegrating multi-national one might at least have been broached.

The very good and excellent individual studies presented in *Staging the Past* have much in common with the localized studies of commemorative practices in Germany, whose touchstone is Thomas Nipperdey’s essay on “Nationalidee und Nationaldenkmal in Deutschland in 19. Jahrhundert”- an essay which appeared in its first version in the *Historische Zeitschrift* in 1968![2] The chance for at least a glancing comparison is doubly missed in that *Staging the Past* does something that much of the German literature does not: it begins to question many assumptions about “national” and “ethnic” traditions shared by historians for years. Perhaps, this reviewer is asking too much when he suggests a short historiography should be included in the introduction, naming a few major studies in the larger Germanic context, would have been helpful. Should we suppose a footnote with “see for example Rudy Koshar” indicating an overview text by that author takes care of this well enough?

But even if that exterior point of reference were to remain in a footnote, what happened to the theory on commemorative practice developed at the heart of the empire? As an art historian, I looked for references to various authors, among them Julius Schlosser and Hans Tietze.[3] But above all I missed some reference to that indigenous theorist of historic memory and monuments, Alois Riegl, whose work on the “Cult of Monuments” is central to historic preservation and a cultivation of the past within the Austrian context and indeed within the whole Central European context including Germany. Riegl’s writings on monuments, especially his discussion of *Erinnerungswert*, *historische Werte*, and *Gebrauchswert* as well as the codification of many of his ideas into the laws on historic preservation and the state recognition of monuments, make him relevant to any study of “staging the past” in Habsburg Central Europe. Riegl’s relevance to this collection lies not so much in how he defined his categories of historical values, memory values, use values, and aesthetic values, but rather in that he produced cogent categories with which to articulate and analyze the uses of the past.[4]

Categories of commemorative practice and the terms used to describe them sometimes lack precision in this collection. Set against a wonderfully refreshing questioning of nationalism, nation, nationality and ethnicity in the individual essays, and a veritable production of in-

tersections in meanings that Jeremy King calls “crossed wires”, there is an unquestioned use of terms such as “collective memory.” The fivefold usage of this term on the first page of the introduction alone without a considered definition, confuses. Is the memory of the collective a mode of remembering or is it fixed and how so? Can it be “institutionalized” if it is so subject to change as many of the essays suggest? Exactly how is it linked to “performative aspects of remembering”?[5]

Besides this easily remedied vagueness of central terminology, a certain confusion of political categories becomes evident on page 5 of the introduction. The editors write the following in regard to the essays by Daniel Unowsky (“Reasserting Empire”) and by Steven Beller (“State Consciousness Raising in the 1908 Jubilee Parade”): “As both authors show, the sharing in symbolic ritual or public spectacle was an essential component of the attempts to create a unified collective national (my emphasis) memory.” Were the Habsburgs interested in creating a unified national memory when they were “reasserting empire” and trying to create a “consciousness of the state” by parading a multiplicity of national types before the emperor? This particular confusion of categories may flow from the editors’ insistence on emphasizing “collective memory.” In each of the instances of state representation carefully described by Unowsky and Beller, it is not memory but rather the political legitimation of sovereignty that is at stake. Moreover, the sovereign is defined in dynastic and not national terms. Beller draws on the contemporary usage *Staatsbewusstsein*, which I would translate as both “consciousness and recognition of the state.” This state is imperial and not national. Unowsky describes rituals of imperial incorporation that are aimed at establishing an identity between ruler and subject.

The texts in *Staging the Past* all treat forms of cultural production and reproduction related to the consolidation of state power and/or to the constitution of ethnic and national identities. The book is thus about cultural practices and the instrumentality of those practices in conveying common meaning and a sense of belonging, in defining parameters of social and political inclusion and exclusion as each ethnic and national group formed. The instrumentality of culture can be reinforcing, incidental to, creative of, or destructive to social and political formations along local, ethnic, state, or national lines. Sometimes cultural representation seems only to give ex post facto expression to such formations. Each study contained in this volume approaches the question of instrumentality differently and draws different conclusions from it;

those most successful in dealing with this issue are able to recreate contemporary discursive fields, which both define and are defined by cultural representations. This involves a rendering of relevant historical processes and defining the position of groups within these processes at any given point in time.

For example, Keely Stauter-Halsted's important attempt to trace the incorporation of the Polish peasant into the myth of the Polish nation identifies the process correctly and offers a vivid rendering of how the "peasants" almost insinuate themselves into national celebrations. But even on a second reading of the text, the definition and relationship between the social groups eludes me—perhaps because she calls the peasants alternately lower classes, smallholders, and peasants. The roles of the Polish magnates and the impoverished aristocracy are not distinguished clearly; indeed the social division that is being transformed is perhaps more complicated. Did the gentry really still have a monopoly on national memory in the late decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century after the establishment of large bureaucratic and professional populations in cities such as Lwów and Cracow? Does the peasant participation in the national festivals coincide with their representation in history books as actors? Are they enfranchised as they represent the nation by wearing local costumes in national celebrations? Or did they just provide "local color" necessary for myth of national origination and consistency in people and land, while disturbing the arbiters of national history with local smells and sounds? The exacting answers to such questions about the social-political historical context will strengthen or weaken any thesis involving the instrumentality of culture. The questions posed do not challenge Stauter-Halsted's thesis in as far as that thesis about myth is made merely on the token level of representation in ephemeral celebrations and not on the level of the distribution of political representation within the polity of a nation.

So, besides the contextualization variously provided by the essays in this collection, there is a need to establish levels and categories of cultural representation. When one begins to distinguish between such levels of representation, it is much easier to ascribe significance to a statue of Joseph II or a museum exhibit in Transylvania that provides an alternative reading of Romanian history. A suggestion in this regard by Maria Bucur, to examine different venues of cultural representation—mass media, exhibitions, religious rituals, public festivals, etc.—to consider constellations of signifiers within a given historical

context associated with a single or set of issues is well taken. The institutionalization (a very ugly word) of cultural meanings takes place at different times in different areas of communicative culture. The book as a whole conveys this understanding.

But, because these essays are focused case studies, they delineate well the shifting interpretations of the cultural "vehicles" and markers over a period of time and by different groups constituting their ethnic or national identities. One sees how certain cultural-political representations accrue or lose significance. They are embodied in the historical personage of Joseph II and Andreas Hofer (in the essays by Wingfield and Cole) or in certain dates of a national calendar, such as March 15 in the Hungarian calendar or December 1 in the Romanian (essays by Freifeld and Bucur).

The multiple identities of and multiple claims on the historical personages becomes evident in Jeremy King's subtle and expansive analysis of the Imperial Royal Shipmaster Adalbert in Budejovice/Budweis and in Cynthia Paces' interpretation of the shifting fortunes of Jan Hus as a hero for the Czechoslovak state. A shorthand for the complex reasonings by King and Paces might read like this. Located on a local and supra-national level, Adalbert's historic personage proved resistant to nationalization and so his effigy in bronze survived the vicissitudes of the Czech/German national conflict. On a national level Hus, the Protestant rebel against the Habsburg state, became a divisive figure, in a new state composed largely of Catholics. What they demonstrate is that these vehicles of culture transport meaning according to the prevailing social and political, public discourse, and according to their usefulness in projecting the heritage and identity of a particular ethnic group or a particular state.

Such demonstration of contingency in *Staging the Past* draws attention to the success and failure of cultural tactics and strategies in the Habsburg realm and its successor states. Here again one can draw on the richness of this volume to begin to understand which elements of culture proved effective in which circumstances for the constitution of a group identity. The contradictions of the Empire come into view.

One can exemplify this by referring to the role of religion. Daniel Unowsky describes the institutionalization of Catholic ritual as part of imperial representation. Franz Josef characterizes himself as pious through the ceremony of the "washing of the feet" and through his "humble" participation in religious processions. The ef-

fectiveness of this is diminished greatly by the forces of modernization that the emperor himself supports. Laurence Cole suggests in his analysis of the role of religion in Tyrolean cultural practices that the patriotic celebration for “*God* [emphasis by JC], Emperor, and the Fatherland”, a very Catholic affair, turns against the center of the Empire, because of the religious tolerance it propagates while at the same time associating itself with peculiarly Catholic ritual. More direct in contradicting such political renderings of religious usages was the liberal tradition incorporated into the Hungarian tradition of national celebration, the “cult” of March 15 whose successive redefinitions presented by Alice Freifeld do maintain a core immutability of secular and liberal tradition. The title of Paces’ essay, “Religious Heroes for a Secular State,” underlines the contradiction between religious legitimization and modern state building. Melissa Bokovoy, had she taken more note of the role of the Orthodox Church in Serbian society, could have offered a parallel instance of such religious-secular contradiction by referring to the composition of the Yugoslav state, with the Serbs as the first among equals.

The strength of this volume lies in the way it unearths such contradictions in the cultural practices of an Empire and its successor states. At their best some of the essays make us aware of the role culture plays in social and political conflict and transformation, and provide wonderfully variegated scenarios and well-narrated plots for the role of culture. At their very best a few of these essays offer historians and those in cultural studies reasons to begin to question certain assumptions about the formation of ethnic and national groups. The volume engages intellectually.

Notes

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Citation: John Czaplicka. Review of Bucur, Maria; Wingfield, Nancy M., eds., *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*. HABSBERG, H-Net Reviews. March, 2002.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=6030>

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[1]. The earliest editions of his “Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History” are published in the 1840s it is republished many times including translated editions in German. Edgar Zilsel’s *Geniereligion* (Wien: Braumüller, 1918) provides another relevant reading in connection with personality cults.

[2]. Thomas Nipperdey, “Nationalidee und Nationaldenkmal in Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 206, 1968, pp. 529-85.

[3]. E.g. Julius Schlosser, “Vom modernen Denkmalkultus,” *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg, 1926-27*, ed. Fritz Saxl (Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner, 1927), pp. 1-21. Hans Tietze’s work as a historical preservationist in the central areas of Austria (he produced art topographies on Krems, Melk, Waidhofen, etc.) is important as a point of consolidation for a conception of “Austria” after WWI. His work represents the centering of German culture and its territorial inscription in the Habsburg Empire in historic “art topographies.”

[4]. See Ernst Bacher, *Kunstwerk oder Denkmal? Alois Riegls Schriften zur Denkmalpflege* (Wien: Boehlau, 1995).

[5]. Perhaps after having read Halbwachs on the social constitution of memory, Warburg on the “social memory” communicated in visual imageries, and having translated Jan Asmann on the cultural constitution and institutionalization of a “cultural memory”, I am being too sensitive to the modification and even transformation of such terms in different studies of commemorative practices. Still after the inflationary use of terms indicating collective identities (noted by Rogers Brubaker among others), one needs to be more than suggestive when propagating the term “collective memory.”