

Editors' Introduction

Studying Habsburg Bureaucracy and Civil Servants

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The workshop “The Imperial Austrian Civil Service and its Aftermath, 1848–1933” in Vienna in April 2015 was co-organized by the editors of this volume: Franz Adlgasser of the Austrian Academy of Sciences’ Institute for Modern and Contemporary Historical Research and Fredrik Lindström of Malmö University (Department of Global Political Studies), Sweden.¹ Our point of departure was the important social historical research of the Imperial Austrian bureaucracy and civil servants in the last few decades, pioneered by historians such as Waltraud Heindl and Karl Megner. However, we had noted that biographical and collective biographical research on individuals and groups of civil servants was scarce regarding the revival of interest in the Imperial Austrian bureaucracy. We identified this as a core issue for deepening the understanding of the bureaucracy, its working and its importance for the functioning of the state, parallel to similar research in the field of politics or imperial identity conducted in the last years by the editors of this volume and many others.²

From this point of departure, we decided to invite researchers to a workshop about the Imperial Austrian (and Royal Hungarian, for the period of the Dual Monarchy) civil service in the period 1848–1918 and its aftermath in the interwar years. The extension of the time frame beyond 1918 came from a recognition that although the Habsburg civil service formally ceased to exist at the end of the First World War, it had an extended life in the wholesale takeover of much of the bureaucracy in several of the successor states. Furthermore, the extension was motivated through the very biographical reflection that both individuals and groups of civil servants, as well as the

¹ Main funding for the workshop came from *Riksbankens Jubileumsfond* in Sweden, with additional support from the Austrian Academy of Sciences. We also want to thank the three leading Habsburg historians Gary B. Cohen, Pieter M. Judson and Peter Urbanitsch who gracefully accepted to close the workshop with a panel discussion.

² Compare ADLGASSER 2014a and LINDSTRÖM 2008.

types of values they represented, were carried over into the new arrangement of Central Europe.³ We also extended our workshop call to the adjoining fields of social historical and organizational studies of the bureaucracy, as well as highlighting the importance of the interaction between civil service and society. We soon realized that we were hardly alone in our assessment on the importance of biographical research to further the study of the Habsburg bureaucracy. This was overwhelmingly reflected in the workshop and also in the current publication of the main part of its proceedings. Individual and collective biographical studies of different levels of the bureaucracy, central ministries, provincial and local administration, as well as the judiciary, provided an intersection of the main groups of the state administration. The program also included several contributions on the Hungarian part of the Monarchy, something which not only decisively enriched the workshop (and the publication), but which also made our workshop title somewhat misleading. We had less success in attracting contributions on social historical and organizational themes, even if these aspects are present in some of the contributions. This imbalance may reflect the situation that these fields have been researched in the last few decades and that there is a pent-up need for biographical approaches in the field at the present. Finally, it should be noted that the interaction between the bureaucracy and society was strongly addressed in the introductory presentation by Gary B. Cohen, which made this aspect a recurring theme of discussion throughout the workshop. Even if this theme is more marginally present in the majority of contributions published here, Lindström addresses this problem in the overarching approach to “The State and Bureaucracy as a Key Field of Research in Habsburg Studies”, the introductory article of this volume.

The central part of the current volume is comprised by biographical studies into all three main levels of the internal administration in Imperial Austria and on the two levels of central ministries and counties (*Komitate*) in Royal Hungary. Further, it contains a study of judges in Imperial Austria, an essay on civil servants deployed in the territories occupied by the Habsburg Monarchy during the First World War, and a paper focusing on civil servants in the First Austrian Republic. Some of these studies are overtly collective biographical, others focus on individual civil servants, while a few mix collective and individual perspectives, as well as social historical perspectives.

³ The somewhat arbitrary endpoint of 1933 was chosen because this year marked the end of the democratic phase of the First Austrian Republic, which was succeeded by the authoritarian “Ständestaat” in the period 1934–1938. Taking Czechoslovakia as a point of reference, 1938 could just as well have been chosen.

Cohen's presentation, written as a point of departure for the workshop, gives an overview of the field and thus contributes to tying together the studies of different individuals and groups of civil servants in an overarching perspective, in which also the role of the bureaucracy as "the nexus between state and society" is pointed out.

The first biographical article is written by Jonathan Kwan, who is a leading expert on liberalism and the liberal elite in late Imperial Austria. His focus lies particularly on the important role of that elite in the constitutional reforms of the Austrian state in the 1860s and 1870s. A special contribution of his research is to highlight the high degree of identification of the members of this elite with the Habsburg state, and later foremost with Imperial (Cisleithanian) Austria.⁴ In this regard, the elite in question may be seen as a core group in the reform project of transforming the old Austrian Empire into a liberal entity discussed extensively in Lindström's introduction. In his contribution, Kwan goes back somewhat in time and looks at the origins and development of the engagement for the building of a constitutional empire from the 1840s and 1850s in seven biographies of highly prominent members of this elite who worked in the central ministries and government of Imperial Austria, both before and after the watershed of 1867.

Andrea Pokludová presents a collective biographical study of the highest layer of civil servants on the third level in the state bureaucracy of Imperial Austria, the counties (*Bezirke*) and their top administrators, the county prefects (*Bezirkshauptmänner*). Pokludová's work is extremely valuable, as there is very little work on this level of state administration in Imperial Austria completed. If we are going to develop a greater understanding of the interaction of state institutions and society in Late Imperial Austria, this is the level that needs to be researched thoroughly, with different aspects highlighted and with various empirical focal-points.⁵ Pokludová looks at various county prefects in the provinces of Moravia and Silesia, a study that continues substantial previous work by her on those regions.⁶ An equally important contribution is that by Martin Klečacký, who focuses on the judiciary, an equally under-researched, but extremely important, part of the Imperial

⁴ See KWAN 2013.

⁵ Thomas Stockinger at the *Institut für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* at the University of Vienna is currently working on this level of government in Imperial Austria, with a focus on the interaction between the state administration and individuals in society in the mid-nineteenth century. Peter Urbanitsch is also currently conducting research on this level, with a focus on county prefects in Bohemia in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

⁶ See for instance, POKLUDOVÁ 2008a.

Austrian civil service. He provides a most valuable background to this subgroup of the civil service and presents a most intriguing view into how nationalist groups tried to influence the appointment of imperial judges in Bohemia around the turn of the century, using the example of the Young Czech party. This type of influencing was prevalent throughout the bureaucracy of Imperial Austria during its last decades, when nationalist movements tried to get their own candidates appointed as civil servants in key positions.

Marion Wullschleger provides an interesting perspective on the careers of governors (*Statthalter*) by conducting biographical studies into this highest echelon of civil servants on the provincial level, individuals who often worked also in the central ministries for parts of their careers and who belonged to the high bureaucracy of Imperial Austria. Wullschleger presents a paper on the three last governors of the Littoral (*Küstenland*) in the south of Imperial Austria, residing in Trieste.⁷

Judit Pál is an expert on the Hungarian bureaucracy in the Dual Monarchy, having specialized in the civil servants of the Transylvanian counties (*Komitate*) of the Kingdom, today lying in Romania.⁸ She presents us with a collective biographical look at the top echelon of the second level of administration in the Kingdom of Hungary, the centrally appointed Lord-Lieutenants (*Obergespane*) of the counties, in the process giving an overview of the research on the Hungarian bureaucracy and specifically on different categories of civil servants. Pál's own empirical focus is on the group of Transylvanian Lord-Lieutenants and its transformation over the span of the Dual Monarchy (1867–1918).

Julia Bavouzet's study takes us into the (re)founded Hungarian central bureaucracy of the period of the Dual Monarchy after 1867. She presents some findings of her collective biography of the civil servants of the central ministries of the Hungarian state, a very important aspect for research on the Habsburg bureaucracy.⁹ Bavouzet focuses on the social composition of this bureaucratic elite and highlights especially its social transformation in the period in question into a more modern organization staffed to an increasing degree with middle-class individuals selected according to meritocratic principles (*Leistungsprinzip*).

With Heiko Brendel's contribution, we move into a special sub-field of studies into the Habsburg bureaucracy: the administration of occupied territories during the First World War. He researches the deployment of

⁷ See also WULLSCHLEGER 2015.

⁸ See PÁL 2007, 2008.

⁹ See BAVOUZET 2017.

law-trained civil servants in the military administration of occupied Poland, Serbia, Montenegro, and Albania. We get an initiated look into the mixed civilian and military administrative structures of these areas, and a special view of the problematic role of civilian administrators in a military-dominated milieu.

Therese Garstenauer's contribution gives us a glimpse into that post-1918 period that we originally planned to give a more prominent place in both workshop and publication than we were able to realize in practice. Garstenauer's approach is social historical and thus broadens our perspective in this regard.¹⁰ The focus lies on the "conduct of life" aspect of being a civil servant in the First Austrian Republic. She uses disciplinary files to find the "limits" of accepted behavior and to present a view on the codes of conduct that a civil servant laboured under in the First Republic. This is a type of approach that would be welcome also in the late Imperial period, since this would enhance our knowledge in important regards of the groups that filled the ranks of the bureaucracy of the Habsburg state.

The concluding article in the central empirical part of the publication is a contribution written by Peter Becker, one of the most prominent cultural historians of the Austrian bureaucracy. Becker has published widely on cultural aspects of bureaucracy, and specifically on the Habsburg bureaucracy.¹¹ He delves into the heart of the late Imperial Austrian bureaucracy and its interaction with society when he investigates how the Imperial Commission on Administrative Reform in 1912 approached the issue of the interaction between bureaucracy and the population through a very ambitious, large-scale inquiry "on the views of relevant segments of the population on the workings of the bureaucracy." Becker views this inquiry as an attempt of the bureaucracy to lay itself on the "analytical couch", as it were, and gain new knowledge of its modes of functioning vis-à-vis society, an approach that allows us to view exactly the nexus pointed out by Cohen through the eyes of the contemporaries.

These articles together provide a good overview of different levels of the Habsburg bureaucracy and its aftermath; and even if they empirically may only be able to present a patchy picture of the entire field of study of the Habsburg state and bureaucracy, taken together they give a good sense of what is needed to conduct overarching research in the field. In the references of the articles, it also becomes quite evident that there already is substantial

¹⁰ See also GARSTENAUER 2011.

¹¹ See BECKER 2003, 2011, and especially his investigation into the origins of the "administrative apparatus" in the reforms of Joseph II, BECKER 2000.

research in the sub-fields concerned, but that it is mostly available in the languages of the areas covered by the case studies, therefore making it harder to be perceived and adopted on a broader international level. Here a multifaceted need for language competences and local knowledge becomes visible for anyone who contemplates initiating research on the larger field of Habsburg bureaucracy, which we do think is a pressing issue for Habsburg studies at large. The organization and funding of such research most probably need to be realized in an international network with prominent institutions in several successor states to the Habsburg Monarchy participating.

The conclusion of the volume is an essay of historiographical nature, which we deem especially worthy of sustained reflection due to its focus on the overarching issues of the current research field. John Deak's deliberations on the influence of the term "bureaucratic absolutism" on the understanding of the Habsburg bureaucracy, and the Habsburg state in the historiography since 1918, gives a most valuable background to the formation of the long-lasting image of the Habsburg Monarchy as an enemy of progress, and a dead end of historical development. Deak argues critically that this term has contributed to the spreading views of the Habsburg state that have considerably hindered the development of a more variegated view of the qualities of this state.¹²

Therefore, the historiographical essays by Lindström und Deak frame a number of essential empirical studies on the Habsburg bureaucracy and its aftermath, introduced by an overview by Cohen, thus bringing into focus the central issue of the nexus between state and society. This sharpens the view on the next research steps to be taken into the direction of an even better understanding of the Habsburg civil service as a central aspect in the understanding of this empire in the heart of Europe and its pivotal role not just for the history of this area, but also for modern European history as a whole.

¹² On this problem, see also DEAK 2014.