

JAN SURMAN. *Universities in Imperial Austria, 1848-1918. A Social History of a Multilingual Space*. Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2019, 458 pp.

As its title rightly suggests, this book is a work placed at the crossroads: of nationalities, languages and territories; of centuries and events (revolutions, wars, industrialization, socio-cultural and scientific modernization, etc.); of research methods (historical, sociological, psychological, political, even geographical).

Stemming from a doctoral thesis presented in 2012 at the University of Vienna, under the joint supervision of professors Mitchell J. Ash and Soňa Štrbáňová, Jan Surman's volume tackles a provocative subject: that of universities not only as institutions with various missions, but also as "nodes within more broadly defined networks, both Habsburg and Central European". The reader is thus offered extended insight into the complex (cultural) canvas of almost half of Europe, enriching our knowledge of the long 19th century.

The main concept discussed by the author is that of space, but Surman looks well beyond its physical, concrete characteristics. He investigates how a common framework of academic practices was created within the Habsburg, then the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and how this system would be gradually transformed and replaced by a more flexible and

diversified landscape. His work investigates in fact the roots of two significant and defining phenomena for the nowadays universities: that of the centre-periphery relationship and that of hierarchy/ranking. Using a large array of archival and bibliographic sources, the author builds his demonstration chronologically, but equally in a comparative manner, focusing on three geographical, linguistic and intellectual areas: Czech, German-Austrian and Polish.

The first chapter of Jan Surman's book describes the role and the place of universities in the first half of the 1800s, explaining the reasons behind the universities' active involvement in the 1848 revolutionary movements. The period was a critical time of transformation of the academic paradigm. Initially, universities were considered and used by the Habsburg authorities as the main training ground of public servants. Instead, research and scientific debates flourished more within various learned societies (supported by the regional aristocracy), or in museums, libraries, etc., than in the state-funded universities. Set up in all the imperial provinces, these societies focused mainly on historical and philological studies, which in time led them to discover and subsequently approach the question of nationalism. We are in presence of a parallel process: the change of regional dialects, such as Czech or Ruthenian,

into literally and scholarly languages went hand in hand with a different perspective over the issue of regionalism and of the ties with Vienna, the imperial capital city. However, at least until 1848, there would be no open conflict between the provincial and the imperial (academic) spaces. As Jan Surman explains, the language of teaching stood at the core of the universities' identity: "The language of instruction was the most important binding element in the pre-1848 empire: Latin in all subjects in the secular faculties and German in the philosophical faculties. Even lectures on vernacular literatures were held in Latin in L'viv and Prague. The only exception was the practical teaching of foreign languages (readerships) and the first year of education for midwives and surgeons, which took place in the local language" (p. 34). In time, a serious dilemma was to be brought forth: that of linguistic and cultural equity within the Habsburg universities. On one hand, German language (and its use) embodied loyalty towards the state; on the other, it partially hindered the development of strong links between the academia and its surrounding community and public, as in many cases (for example in Galicia) the local population had and a different cultural or ethnic background. Very strict standards, placing Vienna (German) University in a central position, were also regulating academic appointments every-

where and prevented a large access of local scholars and elite members in the provincial universities. In a similar way, the subjects of the lectures were substantially controlled. Therefore, Surman convincingly demonstrates that there were important reasons which made professors and students alike to take part in the 1848 revolutions, and that their demands were motivated more by the need of structural reforms within their own institutions than by political aims. However, the discussions that would arise regarding the role of scholarship, science and culture post 1848 would eventually have a deep impact on the entire structure and functioning of the Habsburg/Austro-Hungarian Empire.

After the shock of 1848, the authorities were forced to implement various changes in the universities. In his second chapter Jan Surman highlights and examines the activity of Education Minister Thun-Hohenstein. The series of measures adopted during his mandate would moderately transform the academic landscape, their echoes surviving for a long time. Amongst the new concepts introduced in the 1850s was that of university autonomy, but also those of *Lehrfreiheit* (freedom of teaching) and *Lernfreiheit* (freedom of learning) whose characteristics and limits are detailed by the author. One of the strongest points of this chapter resides in the compara-

tive analysis of how the Natural and Applied Sciences and the Humanities evolved in those years. Each discipline was shaped by two main factors that mutually influenced each other: different (sometimes even contrasting) human resources policies, as well as specific scientific approaches. Unsurprisingly, historiography (and history in general) served to “show Habsburg commonalities, as well as linkages among the provinces; it simultaneously fostered provincial histories and the narrative of state unity” (p. 71). Consequently, specialists were encouraged to focus on the Middle Ages and the early modern period, instead of more recent times. (As a side note, if I were to make a comparison, it is striking that a similar mechanism would be used in the second half of the 20th century in several communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, in order to encourage loyalty towards the political regime and justify a certain idea of patriotism/nationalism.) In the philological field, heightened interest would be given to the study of classic languages and literature, but also to comparative linguistics. Meanwhile, philosophy teaching was dominated by a rather traditional approach.

Besides linguistic expertise, religious affiliation would play a big part in the selection of academic staff during Thun-Hohenstein’s era, with obvious preference being given to a Catholic background, as the educa-

tional values promoted in the Empire between 1848 and 1860 were conservative ones and looked to create a typology of „German” scholar (in an attempt to imitate and reach the quality of Prussian universities, but also to preserve loyalty towards the imperial establishment). Closely linked to these aspects was another phenomenon, namely the selection of academics from outside the imperial Habsburg space, which Jan Surman examines comprehensively.

The third chapter concentrates on several case studies – profiling universities placed within multi-ethnic and multicultural, hence contentious areas of the empire: the University of Prague, the University of L’viv, the Jagellonian University in Krakow, the University of Innsbruck and the University of Chernivtsi/Czernowitz in Bukovina. Whereas most of these academic institutions heatedly debated and took concrete steps towards choosing the language of teaching which best suited them, the University of Chernivtsi/Czernowitz was a brand new creation. Founded in 1875, this Alma Mater would play from the very beginning the role of an ambassador for the German way of life in more than one way. Indeed, this academia, proudly bearing the name of the now Austro-Hungarian Emperor, Franz Joseph, was not only meant to serve as an instrument of German/Habsburg education in a remote, borderland imperial region, but also as

an agent of soft (meaning cultural) diplomacy. Despite the fact that Jan Surman rightly pinpoints the special position of the Chernivtsi/Czernowitz University and compares it with its fellow, surrounding institutions, he is slightly less accurate when referring to other aspects of the situation in Eastern Europe, for example the foreign policy of Prince Charles I of Romania, described as “pro-Russian” (p. 108). The reality of diplomatic, political and socio-cultural relations in the area was far more complex than that in the 1870s and 1880s.

Another significant topic of the third chapter is the problem of academic appointments, which registered rather notable changes compared to the previous decades. Surman breaks down the difficult mechanisms leading to a university position or chair. It is undoubtedly demonstrated that scientific prowess, although relevant, was not the only significant factor for becoming a member of the university teaching staff. Even with heightened university autonomy, financial, political or other conjectural elements often influenced the acceptance amongst academics, especially outside of Vienna. Once inside the system, the road to a full professorship (the highest, most rewarding academic rank) was equally not an easy one. Jan Surman aptly observes that this period was defined by a professionalization of the staff, meaning on one hand that we can speak of more

stable scholarly careers, while on the other that the language issue became even more important. In fact, the linguistic boundaries between the Cisleithanian institutions of higher education deepened „because the system of rewards was bound to the language of publications. Scholars habilitating at a Habsburg university had to apply with a special publication, the *Habilitationsschrift* (habilitation thesis). This was a book in the humanities and a serious research article in the natural sciences and medicine, written in the main teaching language of the institution the scholar intended to habilitate at. While exceptions can be found, this increased the pressure on scholars to choose early on which language they would publish in, which affected their choice of career”. (p. 119). Besides an in-depth description of the habilitation procedures, a sine qua non condition for acceptance/ advancement in the academic career, the author discusses the status of *Privatdozenten* (a staff category specific to the Habsburg/Austro-Hungarian university system). These analyses equally allow Jan Surman to look into the diversification of disciplines, discovering trends and typologies: “Since institutional and disciplinary innovation was supervised by the ministry, in most cases originating from Vienna and later from other universities according to their respective status (Cracow, Graz, and Prague and, finally, Innsbruck, L’viv, and Chernivtsi), “pe-

ripheral” innovations rarely resulted in systemic change, for two reasons. In the first place, institutional innovation was inhibited at smaller German-language universities, which had to follow the capital. Second, as the flow of information between universities with different languages weakened, the possibility of specialization and disciplinary innovation did not result in a financial burden because other universities did not demand the same concessions. To put it more theoretically, while “Austrian” universities conformed to the centre-periphery models of Michel Foucault, Galician universities and the Czech University in Prague followed the model of Yuri (Juri) M. Lotman. Innovation at the “Lotmanian peripheries” was more common, but had no repercussions in the centre and hardly translated into systemic innovation”. (p. 133-134).

The intricate relationships between languages and scholarly careers stand at the core of the following two chapters of Surman’s research. In the fourth chapter, he investigates the internal mobility patterns in the German-language universities of the Austro-Hungarian empire (namely Vienna, Graz, Innsbruck, the German University in Prague and Chernivtsi/Czernowitz), validating the witticism of renowned classical scholar and Nobel Prize laureate Theodor Mommsen, which claimed that Habsburg academics are “sentenced to Chernivtsi, pardoned to Graz, promoted

to Vienna”, with the help of abundant sociological and economical data. External mobility, namely links and/or exchanges with professors coming from other countries, in particular the German Empire, is also taken into account. Based on various statistical measurements, Surman illustrates the rather autarchic character of the employment system, highly inclined to favour appointments of Habsburg born or trained scholars above all the rest. Thus, “nominees from the German Empire included up to 30 percent Habsburg returnees, a third of whom had previously held a professorship at a Habsburg University and more than half of whom had gained their doctoral degree in the Habsburg Empire” (p. 165) and “in general, around 14 percent of nominees came from German Empire universities and 80 percent from Habsburg ones, with the highest rates of foreigners (21 percent) in the humanities” (p. 168). Stemming from the linguistic similarities between Berlin and Vienna, such a selective attitude was motivated mainly by the fact that the Austro-Hungarian authorities considered science as a key element of their “cultural competitions with Prussia”, although additional geopolitical factors played their part too. In fact, we are witnessing dual, centripetal and centrifugal tendencies, in regard to the question of (scholarly) movement within the German language academic world.

Another debated topic, closely and directly derived from the aforementioned one, was that of academic hierarchy. Unsurprisingly, Surman underscores yet again, with new arguments, the predominance of the Viennese Alma Mater over its peers, a reality that deeply shaped the reality of the Habsburg educational space.

In comparison, the Czech and Polish language universities of Cislethania (thoroughly analysed in the fifth chapter of the book) favoured slightly different human resources policies. In our opinion, it is obvious that here Jan Surman moves in his most familiar scientific territory while detailing all these mechanisms, as well as depicting the general atmosphere and the academic personalities of the Habsburg Slavic space. Thus, this chapter can be considered as the best written one of the entire book.

As a rule, the Czech University of Prague and the universities of Krakow and L'viv were more inclined towards promoting their own graduates/ own staff for academic careers than their German counterparts. For both Galicia and Bohemia, internal academic mobility, in particular for "professorial appointments", would rather be the exception than the rule. However, the Galician universities would be more open to receive and endorse Polish candidates from either neighbouring Germany or Russia, compared with the Czech ones, as it is rightfully pointed out by the au-

thor. Such an attitude was motivated by several factors, the central one being the complex relationship between culture and national identity, which became more and more defined as we approached the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Language was, again, another key element and Jan Surman outlines one dilemma that the academics had to face in these regions: "As can be observed with other scholars in the empire, there were often three languages "types" they could use: that of the institution, that of the linguistic culture they identified with, and German, the scientific *lingua franca*. In many cases these three converged in one language (i.e. German), and only in rare cases did the three types correspond to three different languages" (p. 200). Academic teaching in the national languages of the Czechs, Poles and Ruthenians (namely Ukrainians) would in fact gradually pave the way for other socio-political demands. Consequently, the selection of candidates held higher, more subtle political stakes and revealed both fractures and common points of the Cislethanian university system.

An added issue, more evident in the Slavic parts of Cislethania was the generational conflict between the university professors that was often doubled by ideological differences, most notably between conservatives and liberals. It should also be noted that, in several cases, Slavic academics gradually transitioned into

influential public figures, getting involved in national politics – Thomas Masaryk being perhaps the most prominent example.

But, despite dissimilar approaches to parts of the educational process or of the institutional functioning, there were still enough common elements and standards to maintain cooperation inside the imperial academic space. Jan Surman argues that in the 1880s and 1890s and even further along into the early 1900s, for the scientific world, loyalty towards the Habsburg state would be increasingly summarized in the formula unity in diversity, while the idea of German supremacy faded in the background. Yet, even in this context, Vienna succeeded in maintaining its top position in the academic hierarchy, especially by remaining the “most open university for scholars of other nationalities (...) [They] depicted Vienna as the most secure place to be during these volatile times, an image that remained powerful after 1918 as well”.

Titled *Imperial Space and Its Identities*, the sixth chapter tackles the delicate question of religion and its profound impact on academic careers in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, Surman continues and deepens here his preliminary observations from the second chapter, regarding the importance of Catholicism within the Habsburg/Aus-

tro-Hungarian Empire and subsequently in the academia. He equally examines the Jewish problem, namely the multifaceted status of Jewish scholars (or scholars with Jewish descent) within the various Cislethian universities. The question of Jewish students is also analysed, especially due to the fact that in Eastern and Slavic Cislethania there was a significant Jewish population. And, although “most of the national groups of the Habsburg Empire included prominent and influential intellectuals of Jewish faith” (p. 236), Surman demonstrates and exemplifies that there were various, more or less subtle forms of discrimination against the Jews who aimed to join the academic ranks. Confronted around the turn of the century with both “a vertical glass ceiling and a horizontal invisible ghetto wall”, in Vienna and elsewhere, the Jews remained a sore point of the educational system.

In the seventh and last chapter, Jan Surman looks at how the Great War impacted the Cislethian universities and subsequently how the old academic routines and/or networks evolved after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Surman is one of the very few researchers who analyse in a comparative manner the intricate transitioning from imperial to national universities in Central Europe, albeit partially. Most of the observations he makes are correct and verifiable – i.e. that “the new

states profited not only from scientific knowledge of Habsburg origin, but also from organizational know-how or that, in all post-Habsburg relations, however, it was personal connections that made academic relations possible, rather than state support or exchange policies". Yet, there are some disparities, partially explained by Surman's access to archival and bibliographical sources, regarding the changes of the post 1918 academic world, the focus being more on the so-called big, namely top of the list institutions like Prague, than on the smaller ones like L'viv, Innsbruck, Krakow or Chernivtsi/Czernowitz, etc.

His final remarks summarize many aspects of the complex relationship between scholarship and languages, with a particular focus on two topics: academic mobility and the influence of politics on academic internationalism. Surman has managed to demonstrate convincingly in his research that "through a combination of political and cultural claims, education – and thus both scholarship and universities – progressively became plurilingual throughout the [Habsburg/Austro-Hungarian] empire but monolingual within the walls of each university. This meant, however, the codification of a hierarchy of languages, with German as the supralanguage and with culturally defined universities now being able to use their own local language" (p. 275). We agree with him that in-

depth knowledge of the Habsburg academic system can be used a relevant paradigm in the present-day debates regarding "the language of science, scholarship, and higher education", as well as academic excellence. The competition and diverging development patterns of the Humanities and the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines, which stand at the core of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Alma Mater, could equally learn a thing or two looking back into the history.

To conclude, Surman's book is a compulsory read for the specialists of history of universities, intellectual and cultural history, history of science, but also those generally interested in Central and Eastern Europe. For the most part, this research covers its ambitious title, because it is indeed a social history approach to universities as institutions. However, it focuses much more on the academic staff (especially professors and Privatdozenten) than on the students, who are the second pillar of academic life. In our opinion, elements of the book could have been more detailed and even accurate – i.e. the history and evolution of peripheral universities like Innsbruck, L'viv or Chernivtsi/Czernowitz is too narrowly presented at times. The pre-war years (1907–1914) also seem a bit too briefly analysed, at times even superficially, and perhaps it would have been a good idea to have a dis-

tinct chapter regarding those crucial times for the fate of Europe.

Without exhausting the subject, Jan Surman's book does answer many questions and offers a refreshing, innovative perspective. His findings, and in particular the considerable appendix/databases that he provides the reader with, open the way for new investigations of cultural, social and even political history. Equally, this research offers many clues for those interested in developing historical studies of specific scientific disciplines.

Last but not least, the book certainly needs to be completed by a similar investigation regarding the Transleithanian universities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in order to have a complete image of the academic world of Central and Eastern Europe in the modern times and subsequently compare it with what was happening in the rest of the world.

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