

Zitierhinweis

Kuzmany, Börries: review of: Iryna Vushko, *The Politics of Cultural Retreat. Imperial Bureaucracy in Austrian Galicia, 1772–1867*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015, in: *Hungarian Historical Review*, 2016, 2, p. 423-426, DOI: 10.15463/rec.648334928, downloaded from recensio.net

First published:

<http://www.hunghist.org/index.php/component/content/artic...>



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The Politics of Cultural Retreat: Imperial Bureaucracy in Austrian Galicia, 1772–1867. By Iryna Vushko. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015. 328 pp.

Following the First Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1772, a region the size of today's Czech Republic and populated by approximately 2.5 million inhabitants at the time became part of the Habsburg Empire, of which it remained a part until the end of World War I. Iryna Vushko examines the first hundred years of Austrian administration in Galicia. She argues that the imperial bureaucracy might have failed in its original aim to forge an imperial Germanophone culture out of the pre-existing political, social, and economic circumstances; in the long run, however, it created structures that allowed for the successful integration of this Crownland into the Habsburg Monarchy. Focusing on people rather than on institutions, she presents her argument in eight chronological and thematic chapters.

The first two chapters are dedicated to the early period of Austrian rule in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Habsburg Enlightened absolutism initially perceived Galicia as a *tabula rasa* which should be remodeled from scratch; very soon, however, this attitude gave way to a more pragmatic view. The former Polish administrators were dismissed, and Vienna dispatched Austrian bureaucrats to serve in the new Crownland; still, it never sent enough of them. Having at his disposal a mere dozen people in his central office in L'viv and not even as many as 2,000 bureaucrats in the entire province, the first governor, Johann Count Pergen, could hardly reshape the administration of such a huge crownland before the expiration of his two years in office. Before coming to Galicia, quite a number of bureaucrats had actually served in the Bohemian lands and where thus better qualified to administer a province where Polish, Ukrainian, and Yiddish were the most widely spoken languages. Still, many of the officials had ended up in Galicia because they did not qualify to be promoted elsewhere, especially people from the lower ranks. Vushko sensibly pays special attention to Galicia's long-time governor Joseph Karl Brigido, who between 1780 and 1794 tried to reconcile the impetus of the Enlightenment with the interests of the Polish aristocracy, not least by insisting on a partial opening of the civil service to local nobles.

The third chapter deals with the Austrian bureaucracy during the time of the Napoleonic Wars. Unfortunately, it contains numerous factual errors, which

contribute to mistaken conclusions. Chapter four touches upon the Galician context of the Polish Uprising in 1830–31, in particular on Prince August von Lobkowitz, Galicia's acting governor at that time. Sympathizing with the Polish case and overestimating his political agency, he stirred hopes that Austria might intervene on behalf of the insurgents. In the end, Lobkowitz could only provide a relatively friendly welcome to individual refugees after the suppression of the uprising.

Chapters five, six, and seven investigate the Austrian bureaucracy's relationship with Galicia's ethno-confessional groups—Poles, Ruthenians, and Jews. While Austrian rule, represented in its provincial government, rather quickly made arrangements with the local noble elites, it did not transfer direct power to them, but rather allowed them to participate in Austrian rule via its bureaucratic apparatus. The increasing contacts between Austrian officials and the local Polish elites prompted assimilation processes that have been more convincingly described by Isabel Röskau-Rydel (*Niemiecko-austriackie rodziny urzędnicze w Galicji 1772–1918: Kariery zawodowe – środowisko – akulturacja i asymilacja* [2011]).

Chapter six, which focuses on Galicia's Ruthenians, is certainly the best chapter in the book. It draws more on Vushko's current project on the variety of national identity choices that individuals made in the Habsburg Empire. She skillfully interweaves the biographies of Waclaw Precliczek, a fictitious Habsburg official from Jan Lam's novel *Capowice High Society*, and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, the son of Galicia's very real long-term chief police officer between 1831 and 1848. Lam, himself a Galician novelist from a German-Polish family, draws the picture of a true Habsburg official being transferred from his native Bohemia to Galicia. Married to an anti-German Polish noble and struggling with the need to identify nationally, Precliczek eventually decides to marry his daughter off to a Ruthenian dignitary. The writer Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, on the other hand, is a person who existed in reality but invented for himself a Ruthenian identity in order to exoticize himself, while also underlining his Habsburg-ness at the same time. Vushko rightly claims that these developments were possible only because of Austria's educational and ecclesiastical policies towards the Greek Catholic, i.e. Ruthenian population in the late eighteenth century. However, this issue is not linked to the book's overall topic.

In chapter seven, Vushko convincingly suggests that the administration of the Jewish population should be understood as a twofold story. Whereas in the case of the Christians, the state immediately tried to get direct access to its

subjects, in the case of the Jewry it relied on intermediary Jewish administrative structures in order to initiate the long-term transformation of Jewish inhabitants into Austrian subjects. She also stresses the enduring effects of Joseph II's policy, which was based on the implementation of a German-Jewish schooling system supervised by the Enlightener Herz Homberg.

The last chapter deals with two important political events in Galicia, the Polish Uprising in 1846 and the Revolution of 1848. Most interesting in connection with the overall focus of the book is the question of the Austrian bureaucracy's role during the 1846 upheaval, when Polish peasants, instead of joining the noble insurgents, turned their scythes against their lords. The historiographic assessment strongly varies, and many historians claim that the Austrian bureaucracy at least tolerated if not incited the outbreak of violence. Vushko underlines that there are no documents directly supporting this claim, but that one should refrain from perceiving the Austrian bureaucracy as a uniform institution. Even if the provincial administration would certainly not have approved of looting and the killing of about 1,000 nobles, some officials on the local level might well have been in no haste to contain the violence.

Perhaps the most important lesson to learn from Iryna Vushko's book is that indeed one should not understand the Austrian bureaucracy as always having been consistent, and one should keep in mind that officials had some administrative discretion. The other key message of her monograph is that one must consider the long-term consequences, intended or not, of Habsburg administration for the political and social development of Galicia, even if many administrative measures proved unsuccessful in the beginning. According to the stylistic usages of American scholarly publications, Vushko repeats these messages time and time again.

Ultimately, I am quite troubled with the book's title and the cultural arguments brought forward by the author. In fact, Vushko seems to be skeptical as well with regards to some of her contentions. While she draws a picture of a cultural struggle starting with the annexation of Galicia in 1772, she rightly does not conceive of Galicia's ethno-confessional groups in an essentialist way. Her argument that Vienna wanted to install a uniform Germanophone but supra-national bureaucracy is on the money, but allowing educated Polish locals to enter the Austrian civil service was in no way a "cultural retreat." On the contrary, it fits perfectly with the logic of an imperial bureaucracy, and there is absolutely nothing paradoxical about it. In the end, Vushko seems to disprove the argument herself when she shows that when the central state ceded power to

Galician Poles in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1848, it transferred control to Polonophone imperial officials who were from *inside* and not from *outside* the system.

I also find it difficult to maintain that the Habsburg Empire intended its bureaucracy to be the spearhead of a future supra-national Germanophone culture and society. I do not discern a strong intention towards Germanization, for instance, in the province's educational system, in which quite a number of Polish and Ukrainian elementary schools were set up and manuals published in these languages during the first decades of Habsburg rule. Agreeably, the sole exception are Galicia's Jews, who indeed were urged to attend Enlightened German-Jewish schools. Vushko herself explicitly states that before 1848 the crucial identifiers were status and rank (and not ethnicity), and one should refrain from writing the history of Galicia as story of national conflict; yet, the dramaturgy of the book strongly follows this line.

All in all the reader is left with mixed feelings. For English-speaking scholars who are not able to read the rich German and Polish secondary literature on the Austrian and Galician bureaucracy, the monograph may well prove useful.

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