

CFP: Habsburg Civil Servants: Beyond the State Apparatus

Announcement published by Alexander Maxwell on Tuesday, September 7, 2021

Type:

Call for Papers

Date:

November 30, 2021

Location:

New Zealand

Subject Fields:

Eastern Europe History / Studies, European History / Studies, Law and Legal History, Modern European History / Studies, Nationalism History / Studies

During the long 19th century, the Habsburg civil service grew steadily. The swelling ranks of clerks, inspectors, tax collectors, military recruiters, census-takers, policemen, judges, cartographers, sanitation officials, telegraph operators, and other minor officials did not form an entirely homogenous social group, differentiated as they were by educational attainment, region, rank, and status. They nevertheless formed an important social collective, characterized above all by literacy, but also by novel habits, values, cultural practices, and novel social circumstances.

The administrative apparatus helped bring all imperial citizens together in a common society. Their role in embodying and personifying the state at the local level proved especially crucial on various imperial peripheries, where civil servants formed the main link between villages or small towns with the imperial centre. Civil servants also represented progress, introducing into relatively isolated rural communities secular morality, hygiene, science, and myriad other social and cultural transformations sometimes collectively denoted as “modernity.” Like other middle-class professionals, they formed and joined associations, societies and social clubs, promoting charitable causes, local development, and other various causes imagined as conducive to the public good. As lobbyists for local causes, furthermore, they encouraged local particularism, spread patriotic sentiment, thus contributing to centrifugal political movements. Thus even as civil servants symbolized imperial loyalty, renouncing personal interests to support the state, they proved indispensable to the establishment of civil society, a force which successfully contested imperial absolutism, and contributed to the ultimate downfall of the monarchy.

Their complex role thus raises interesting questions that call for further investigation. Where did their loyalties actually lie: with the emperor, with the state, with their church, with their social class, with their particular Crownland, or with their imagined national community? To what extent did they obey the government’s directives, and alternatively to what extent did they attempt to modify, resist, evade, or subvert their instructions? Did they contribute, intentionally or unintentionally, to the spread of nationalism, or to alternate loyalties? What roles did they play in the monarchy’s social dramas, both in their working hours and when off duty? What were the cultural consequences of their unique role? How were they presented in journalism, belles-lettres, theatre, or other literary genres?

To explore such issues, we are planning an online conference to be held on 28-29 January. We invite scholars of any relevant disciplinary background to submit proposals on these or similar themes.

There will be no conference fee. We will do our best to accommodate speakers from different time zones.

We also have plans to publish. Howard Louthan, editor of the Berghan series of Austrian and Habsburg Studies, has expressed a provisional interest in publishing an edited volume on the conference theme. Participation in the conference does not guarantee publication: written submissions will undergo a review process. It is possible to submit to the edited volume without participating in the conference, and vice-versa. Unless told otherwise, however, we will assume contributors are interested in both the conference and the publication. NB: the eventual book will use Chicago-style footnotes.

Send your name, affiliation, and time zone along with a one-paragraph abstract of c. 100-200 words to the conference organizers: Daša Ličen and Alexander Maxwell at dasa.licen@zrc-sazu.si and alexander.maxwell@vuw.ac.nz. Abstracts are due on 30 November 2021.

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