

General surveys of Austro-Hungarian history have sometimes suffered from the limitations of their authors' knowledge of the numerous languages of the Monarchy. This is not the case with *A History of Habsburg Jews 1670–1918* whose author, William O. McCagg, Jr., includes among his languages Czech, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, and Russian. His exhaustively researched book is a welcome contribution to both Habsburg and Jewish history.

In an attempt to create a “mirror of the Habsburg middle class” rather than simply a history of the Habsburg Jews, McCagg has concentrated on those Jews who assimilated, or tried to, to the Jewish core of the Habsburg bourgeoisie, rather than on traditional Jewry. The author considers the Jews of the Monarchy, who prior to the First World War comprised the second largest Jewish population in Europe, to have been a consistently bourgeois element throughout Austria-Hungary. He interprets their assimilationist tendencies – in contrast to the nineteenth-century nation building of the other peoples of the Monarchy – to be a reflection of Jewish self-denial, which is a main theme of the book.

The volume is organized chronologically and McCagg examines what he calls “leading sectors,” rather than trying to tell the “whole story.” He focuses both prominent individuals and the Jewish masses using biographies as well as statistics to illustrate his argument.

In the first two sections of the book, covering from 1670 to 1850, the author traces the beginnings of the often rugged path toward Jewish modernization and intergration into Christian Austria. He initially considers on the Bohemian Crownlands, home of the dominant Habsburg Jewish community in early modern times and of the majority of the Cisleithanian Jews following their expulsion from the imperial capital und Lower Austria between 1669 and 1671. McCagg then moves to Vienna, to which the Jews increasingly returned in the late eighteenth century. He examines Jewish response to those governmental decrees and policies enacted on their behalf from the time of Maria Theresa through the first two years of the reign of Franz Josef. Here particularly McCagg makes good use of individual examples. The reader is introduced to Brünn-born Thomas Schönfeld [Moses Dobrushka], the only active Austrian participant in the “central turmoil of Europe’s modern revolution, the upheaval at Paris,” and Fanny Arnstein, who from the late 1770s presided over one of the most famous salons in Vienna.

In his discussion of nascent nationalism in Austria at the beginning of the nineteenth

century, the author notes that the decision of Austrian Emperor Franz I in 1810–1811 to accommodate the French – a reversal of previous policy – represented a retreat from nationalism and resulted in a nationally neutral stance by the Monarchy. This made it easier for the wealthy Jews of Vienna who were beginning to assimilate. Due to the emperor's decision not to build up an Austrian national identity, the “host” people made few demands on the Jews' old identity.

For the period from 1850 to 1875 (section three), McCagg examines Galicia, Hungary, and Vienna. He asserts that prior to 1848, Habsburg Jewry “had lofty visible prospects for finding a place for itself among the peoples of Central Europe” (p. 158). However, in the twenty years following the revolution of 1848 – which McCagg interprets as a turning point in the history of the Habsburg Jews – the following occurred. Firstly, it appeared that Galician Jewry was not moving forward. Secondly, although in Hungary, an effective formula for the mobilization of even Galician Jews was found, it was at the cost of Jewish disunity: a break with the centralizing German language of the Enlightenment. Finally, in Vienna, the logical focal point for leadership of Habsburg Jewry, the Jews suffered from Christian intolerance.

In the fourth section, Trieste, the Bukovina, and Bohemia provide examples of Jewish reaction to the Imperialism and anti-Semitism of the late nineteenth century, while turn-of-the-century Galicia, Hungary, and Vienna mirror Jewish response to the “Austrian Question”: the very ability of the Empire to survive. McCagg concludes with the response of the Habsburg Jews, class by class, to the dissolution of the Monarchy. McCagg's groupings, which he notes are not equivalent to classes in Christian society, include the Orthodox, the lower classes, both rural and urban; and the upper stratum. The author includes in the last-named not only the *Habsburgtreu*, who despaired at the collapse of the Monarchy, but also the assimilationists and Zionists, who saw hope for a better future in the new states. At the war's end, assimilationist Jews began participating in a broad range of non-Jewish political parties in the successor states.

This book is a useful reference tool. In addition to primary sources, McCagg has employed a wide range of secondary materials, and his notes and bibliography include numerous recent articles and books in English and German. At the beginning of the notes for each chapter, the author lists general texts relevant to the focus of that particular chapter. The comprehensive index is cross-referenced, which facilitates its use. In addition to the map locating the nationalities of Austria-Hungary, a map showing the density of Jewish population throughout the Monarchy would have been helpful.