



A map of Central Europe. Source: Tim Corbett.

# Towards Pluricultural and Connected Histories: Intersections between Jewish and Habsburg Studies

by *Tim Corbett, Björn Siegel and Mirjam Thulin*

## 1 Cartographic Fictions

The interconnected regions of Central Europe, East-Central Europe, and the Balkans were home to a long succession of polities, dynasties, and empires through the course of the last millennium, with borders, rulers, populations, and even names subject to constant change. For example, the name “Austria” has held multiple meanings over the past centuries: In the late Middle Ages, it referred to a pair of small duchies along the Danube (Austria Above and Below the Enns); then, for a brief period in modernity (1806–1867), it denoted one of the world’s most powerful empires, before meaning (unofficially at least) the Cisleithanian half of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy until 1918. Today, however, “Austria” applies solely to the diminutive Austrian Republic.<sup>1</sup>

The Austrian example is characteristic of the region as a whole: Contrary to present-day nationalist claims, the sprawling lands of Habsburg Central Europe<sup>2</sup> were characterized prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century more by change and

<sup>1</sup> We have endeavored in this volume to be consistent in our use of terminology while at the same time avoiding anachronisms. For example, we differentiate between the Habsburg Monarchy as a loose dynastic construct in the period before 1806 and the consolidated Habsburg Empire that existed between 1806 and 1918, officially divided into Austrian (Cisleithanian) and Hungarian (Transleithanian) halves from 1867.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of “Central Europe” itself has a long pedigree, see the seminal essay by Milan Kundera, “The Tragedy of Central Europe,” translated by Edmund White, *New York Review of Books* 31:7 (1984), 33–38. We use the term “Habsburg Central Europe” here to refer to all the lands once connected to the dynasty and/or empire and, following Moritz Csáky, as a “space that is not easily delineable in geographic or historical terms, but rather a relational space that is constantly being discursively renegotiated.” Moritz Csáky, *Das Gedächtnis Zentraleuropas: Kulturelle und literarische Projektionen auf eine Region* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2019), 9. All translations in this text, unless otherwise stated, are our own.

heterogeneity than continuity or homogeneity, a fact that renders any attempts to cartographically depict the region in an objective or inclusive form difficult, if not impossible.<sup>3</sup>

The cover of this volume is therefore illustrated with a blank map of the region, through which we wish to draw attention to the manifest geopolitical, demographic, cultural, and dynastic complexity that reigned here over the centuries. The blank canvas allows for the projection of all manner of signs and meanings: names, landscapes, and population centers; topographical features, roads, and railways; and, of course, borders, and boundaries. Yet, the blank canvas also calls to mind absence: the absence of ruined empires, like those of the Habsburg and Ottoman dynasties; of vanished regions, like Bukovina and the Banat; and of course the absence of entire demographics erased in a century of ethnic conflict and genocide, like the German-speaking communities expelled from across the region after 1945, but especially the Jewish and Romani communities extinguished during the Holocaust.

To this day, historiographic works on the former Habsburg Empire and its successor states are nevertheless commonly illustrated with colorful maps claiming to represent the region's "ethnolinguistic" and/or "national" makeup before 1918. The definitions and distinctions in this context usually remain vague. However, these maps are based on a fiction, as the historian Pieter Judson demonstrated in his magnum opus *The Habsburg Empire*: the fiction that the present-day "nations" of Central Europe constitute "transhistorical" (that is, primordial) "ethnic groups" and that nationalism is sui generis antithetical to dynastic imperialism.<sup>4</sup> According to this view, established in the earliest historiographies in the field, the empire, as a dynastic construct, represented an anachronism in the modern world of nation-states, surviving only as a "prison of nations," the demise of which was therefore attributable to the empire's very diversity and the volatility this ostensibly entailed.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See generally Herbert Karner and Martina Stercken, eds., *Habsburg kartieren: Schriftbildliche Entwürfe von Herrschaft im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024, forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 9.

<sup>5</sup> See paradigmatically Oscar Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (originally published 1929, this edition University of Chicago: 1961); Robert Kann, *The Multinational Empire: Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1848–1918* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), and Robert Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire 1526–1918* (Berke-

The cartographic representations of the former empire's "ethnonational" makeup, which continue to have a powerful and enduring impact into the present day, were in fact created from the outset by small elites of ethnonationalists with the explicit aim of justifying geopolitical demands.<sup>6</sup> And, as Judson further demonstrated, the rampant nationalism that came to characterize the region in the years preceding World War I – and still profoundly shaping the region today – not only thrived under but was integrally conditioned by imperial structures, thus demonstrating the intertwined history of "nations" and "empires." The December Constitution of 1867, for example, which granted emancipation to the "peoples" of the Austrian half of the newly established Dual Monarchy, contributed to the cultural, political, and crucially also legal formation of the very concept of "peoples" and "nations." Not only constitutional reforms, but the reification of "ethnic" diversity in the Habsburg Empire (for example in the renowned *Kronprinzenwerk* published between 1886 and 1902) engendered and even stimulated the very primordialist thinking that ultimately paved the way – specifically in the aftermath of empire – for exclusionary politics of ethnicization and, ultimately, a long succession of wars, population transfers, and even genocide.<sup>7</sup>

## 2 Habsburg Legends and Jewish "Nostalgia"

The history of the Habsburg Empire – including the debates on nationalism and imperialism as well as the question of what ultimately caused the empire's collapse – has been subject to a major historiographical revision in recent years. As the historians Peter Berger and Günter Bischof recently summarized: "the legend of a historically inevitable decline of Austria-Hungary was nothing but that: a legend."<sup>8</sup> Pointing to the century of peace and

ley: University of California Press, 1974). Incidentally, both of these authors were political émigrés of Jewish background.

<sup>6</sup> See Larry Wolff, *Woodrow Wilson and the Reimagining of Eastern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 328, 381. See also Gerald Stourzh, "Ethnic Attribution in Late Imperial Austria: Good Intentions, Evil Consequences," in *The Habsburg Legacy: National Identity in Historical Perspective*, eds. Ritchie Robertson and Edward Timms (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 67–83.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Berger and Günter Bischof, "Nicht lebensfähig? Austria's Economic Viability after the Two World Wars," in *Myths in Austrian History: Construction and Deconstruction*, eds. Günther Bischof, Marc Landry and Christian Karner (Contemporary Austrian Studies Vol. 29, New Orleans: UNO Press, 2020), 195.

progressive emancipation that characterized the Habsburg Empire between the Napoleonic Wars and the Balkan Wars, the authors explicitly condoned the view put forward in Stefan Zweig's famous and posthumously published autobiography *The World of Yesterday* (1942 in German/1943 in English), in which Zweig argued that the Habsburg Empire had acted as "a guarantor of stability in Central and Eastern Europe" and was thus not inevitably determined to fail.<sup>9</sup>

For the longest time, Zweig's autobiography was not only understood as a literary engagement with the former Habsburg Empire, but also heralded (and dismissed) as the quintessential expression of "Jewish nostalgia" for a past that never existed.<sup>10</sup> However, the historian Steven Beller pointed out that the attribution of "nostalgia" to the reflections of (often Jewish) contemporaries should rather be seen as admiration for a unique "Central European Jewish tradition" which shaped Viennese and Habsburg society despite the complex and sometimes contradictory social, political and cultural circumstances of the time, and as a coping mechanism in the face of its destruction.<sup>11</sup> In this lived experience, the Habsburg Empire was neither ultimately doomed, nor an easy and conflict-free region, but a space of political (nationalizing and ethnicizing) conflict, cultural interaction, fruitful cooperation, and intellectual engagement all at the same time. Far from universally heralding its demise, in the final years of its existence, many observers were calling for, if not predicting, the transformation of the Habsburg Empire into a truly federal superstructure, a model for a future "United States of Europe."<sup>12</sup> The parallels between the diverse and fragmented society of the empire of yesteryear and the European Union today are self-evident, which may explain the enduring interest in Habsburg history. As the essayist Karl-Markus Gauß recently remarked, the Habsburg Empire acted explicitly as a guardian of diversity in the

<sup>9</sup> Berger and Bischof, "Nicht lebensfähig?" 195.

<sup>10</sup> Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964).

<sup>11</sup> Steven Beller, "The World of Yesterday Revisited: Nostalgia, Memory, and the Jews of Fin-de-siècle Vienna," *Jewish Social Studies* 2:2 (Winter 1996): 37–53, here 51.

<sup>12</sup> This was a policy envisioned not least of all by the ill-fated heir presumptive, Franz Ferdinand, see Corinna Peniston-Bird, *The Debate on Austrian National Identity in the First Republic (1918–1938)* (PhD Thesis, University of St. Andrews, 1997), 201; and Jászai, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, 123–124.

face of homogenizing nationalism, safeguarding “the survival especially of the small and smallest peoples [...] amidst larger, mightier nations.”<sup>13</sup>

And yet, as the Habsburg scholar Tara Zahra explored, most historiographies of the region continue to be written along nationalizing lines, insisting that the kind of ethnonational or linguistic pluralism as represented in the Habsburg Empire necessarily leads to “bloodshed” and that “[o]nly the homogenous nation-state, in this view, could guarantee lasting democracy, peace, and prosperity.”<sup>14</sup> Concurring with Judson that the unique cultural makeup and dynastic superstructure of the Habsburg Empire did not suppress, but much rather engendered ethnonationalist movements, Zahra pointed to the crucial problem of sources, which she identified as one of the major reasons for historiographical mischaracterizations of the Habsburg legacy: when examining cultural diversity and coexistence in this region, historiography still relies primarily on hegemonic source materials that not only promoted, but even constructed and imposed artificial notions of “difference.” What these sources do not depict is diversity in all its iterations, from multilingualism to multiculturalism to sheer indifference.<sup>15</sup> As the contemporary Bohemian ethnographer Karl von Czörnig (1804–1889) remarked: “every crownland in the empire was in fact linguistically and culturally heterogeneous” and therefore “no single language group could make an authentic or exclusive claim to any crownland.”<sup>16</sup>

### 3 Pluricultural Habsburg Central Europe

Drawing especially on postcolonial theory, the field of Habsburg studies has for some time already been reevaluating diversity and pluralism in the Habsburg context along with the associated “national” master narratives.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Karl-Markus Gauß, *Die unaufhörliche Wanderung* (Vienna: Zsolnay, 2020), 108, 113.

<sup>14</sup> Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands 1900–1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), x.

<sup>15</sup> Tara Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis,” *Slavic Review* 69:1 (Spring 2010), 93–119, here 106, 101–102. See also Katherine Arens, “Building the Habsburg Subject: Scholarly Historical Fictions,” *Journal of Austrian Studies* 54:4 (Winter 2021), 37–71.

<sup>16</sup> Cited in: Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 243–244. On Judson’s concurrence with Zahra’s above-cited findings, see also 269, 272–273, 294, 311–312.

<sup>17</sup> See for example the open-access article repository “Kakanien Revisited,” run by the University of Vienna since 2001, especially the section “Theorie,” <https://www.kakanien-revisited.at/> (last

As the recently deceased literary scholar Anil Bhatti, among others, explored, postcolonial theory allows for a shift in perspective away from what Pieter Judson termed the “pathologizing” understanding of cultures as inherently homogenous and adversarial and towards a “pluricultural” paradigm in which diversity, heterogeneity, and intercultural exchange are posited as the normative framework of everyday lived experience in multicultural regions such as existed in the Habsburg Empire.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, the one paradigm does not preclude the other, the key point being rather that both approaches to diversity – inclusive and exclusive – exist in all complex societies and are promoted by different actors in different contexts and to different ends. Indeed, many antithetical drives existed simultaneously in Habsburg society, always in an uneasy equilibrium.<sup>19</sup> One of the most disastrous developments in modern European history was consequently the decision in the aftermath of World War I to privilege the “segregationist aspirations” of a loud minority of ethnonationalists, as explored in a recent volume on the Habsburg legacy of the region, which necessarily led to disintegration on multiple scales – imperial, regional, and communal – and finally culminated in ethnic conflict, war, and genocide.<sup>20</sup> This process can still be observed in parts of East-Central and Southeastern Europe today, especially in the Balkans and Ukraine.

The fraught contradiction between everyday heterogeneity and aspired homogeneity has been demonstrated in manifold new studies in recent years, for example with regard to thoroughly diverse former Habsburg crownlands like Galicia and Bukovina, as the contributions of Alicja Maślak-Maciejewska, Ilya Berkovich, and Johannes Czakai in this issue also show. The inhabitants

accessed 7 August 2023); or more recently Tim Corbett, ed., “Empire and (Post-)Colonialism in Austrian Studies,” *Journal of Austrian Studies* 56:2 (Summer 2023).

<sup>18</sup> See Anil Bhatti, “Heterogeneities and Homogeneities: On Similarities and Differences,” in *Understanding Multiculturalism: The Habsburg Central European Experience*, eds. Johannes Feichtinger and Gary Cohen (New York: Berghahn, 2014); Anil Bhatti, “Plurikulturalität,” in *Habsburg Neu Denken: Vielfalt und Ambivalenz in Zentraleuropa – 30 Kulturwissenschaftliche Stichworte*, eds. Johannes Feichtinger and Heidemarie Uhl (Vienna: Böhlau, 2016), 171–180.

<sup>19</sup> See generally Johannes Feichtinger and Heidemarie Uhl (eds.), *Habsburg Neu Denken: Vielfalt und Ambivalenz in Zentraleuropa – 30 Kulturwissenschaftliche Stichworte* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Sieglinde Klettenhammer and Kurt Scharr, “Editorial,” in *Was heißt Österreich? Überlegungen zum Feld der Austrian Studies im 21. Jahrhundert*, eds. Sieglinde Klettenhammer and Kurt Scharr (Klagenfurt: Wieser, 2021), esp. 17, 20.

of these regions served explicitly in the writings of some contemporaries (many of them Jewish, like Karl Emil Franzos, 1848–1904, and Josef Drach, 1883–1941?) as models for an idealized “*homo europaeus*,” the embodiment of European heterogeneity. At the same time, these regions and their inhabitants (Jewish and non-Jewish) served for the projection of all manner of racializing (and thus racist) discourses of “Europeanness” and “Orientalness,” of professed hegemony and projected alterity, as also explored by Omar T. Nasr and Tim Corbett in this volume.<sup>21</sup>

Czernowitz/Cernăuți/Chernovtsy/Chernivtsi/Czerniowce, the capital of the former crownland of Bukovina, has achieved some notoriety of late as a paragon of lived diversity before the violent homogenization of the region beginning in World War I. Yet, the former Bukovinian capital was far from unique: all the major urban centers of the empire were thoroughly mixed in terms of language, religion, and “nationality” by the early twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> As a case in point, the city of Vienna (which is often construed in historiography as “German,” but has in fact been a multicultural crossroads of peoples, however defined, from across Europe for centuries<sup>23</sup>) was not only home to the third-largest Jewish community in Europe around 1900 after Warsaw and Budapest, but also constituted the single largest Czech population center in the world and had a considerable Sephardic population, as Lida-Maria Dodou and Martin Stechauner demonstrate in this issue.

The most profound finding of the vast body of literature briefly touched upon above – which is explored in more detail in the theoretical articles by Moritz Csáky and Klaus Hödl in this volume – is that binary narratives of majorities/minorities, like Jewish/non-Jewish, autochthonous/foreign, and so forth, do not do justice to the everyday realities of life in Habsburg Central Europe before the forced and at times genocidal attempts to homogenize the newly established nation-states in the course of two world wars. While there were certainly hegemonic forces at work in the empire – the Habsburg

<sup>21</sup> It seems no coincidence that the Bukovinian-born Josef Drach, who as late as 1920 still prophesized the emergence of a “United States of Europe” with Vienna as its capital, would ultimately be murdered in the Holocaust, see Amy-Diana Colin, “Czernowitz/Cernăuți/Chernovtsy/Chernivtsi/Czerniowce: A Testing Ground for Peaceful Coexistence in a Plural Society”, *Journal of Austrian Studies* 53:3 (Fall 2020): 17–44, here 33–34.

<sup>22</sup> See Csáky, *Das Gedächtnis Zentraleuropas*, 69–73.

<sup>23</sup> See Tim Corbett, “Introduction: Interdisciplinarity and Diversity in Austrian Studies,” *Journal of Austrian Studies* 56:4 (Winter 2023), forthcoming.



dynasty, the supranational aristocracy, the German- and Hungarian-language bureaucracy, or the Catholic Church, for example – it makes little sense to speak of “majorities” and “minorities” in this context, in which no single language, religion, culture, “people,” or “nation” was numerically predominant. This makes the study of Jewish history in this region fascinating, not least because Jews have experienced issues such as migration, alterity, discrimination, toleration, integration, and interaction in unique and profound ways. Crucially, however, these issues are not specifically “Jewish,” with Jews rather having shared their experience with other inhabitants of Central Europe in manifold different contexts.

#### 4 From Different Angles: Jewish Studies on the Habsburg Context

Not least of all with regard to pluriculturalism, academic engagements in Jewish studies with the Habsburg context often lack theoretical reflection and due deference to the bigger picture. The historian Michael L. Miller noted that, except for two attempts in the 1980s,<sup>24</sup> scholarship on Jews in the Habsburg Empire “has been written largely within national paradigms,” focusing on individual regions or territories, especially Austria, Hungary, Bohemia, Moravia, and Galicia, subsuming the local Jewish populations into larger, nationalized Jewries like Polish Jewry, Romanian Jewry, Italian Jewry, Yugoslav Jewry, and so forth.<sup>25</sup> Aside from the widespread neglect of transregional dimensions and peculiarities, there is also a marked tendency in research to focus on Jews in larger cities, such as Vienna, Budapest, Prague or Trieste.

The challenge of writing Jewish histories in the Habsburg context therefore results not only in the perpetuation of otherwise largely revised hegemonic (usually nationalized) narratives. The adoption of such hegemonic narratives in combination with a focus on smaller geographical or political

<sup>24</sup> Wolfdieter Bihl, “Die Juden” in *Die Völker des Reiches*, Vol. 3:2 of *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, eds. Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980), 880–948; William O McCagg, *A History of Habsburg Jews, 1670–1918* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

<sup>25</sup> Michael L. Miller, *Austro-Hungarian Empire, 1867–1918* (Oxford Bibliographies, last edited July 28, 2015 and last reviewed August 21, 2021, open access at: <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199840731/obo-9780199840731-0109.xml?rsk=ATHyOg&result=19&q=habsburg#firstMatch> (last accessed October 6, 2023).

areas and the consequent obfuscation of the bigger picture thereby impedes the reception of Jewish studies research within Habsburg studies. Clearly, it is a great challenge to research a demographic as diverse and fragmented as the Jewish populations of the Habsburg Empire and its successor states and regions. Yet, within the context of Habsburg Central Europe, the Jewish case was by no means unique, thinking for example about Romani history, which remains crassly underresearched and underrepresented in public and academic discourse to date.

There is no doubt that contemporary Jewish studies are following current trends in historical and cultural studies, which open up new perspectives on this complex pluricultural region and employ an interesting methodological toolkit to initiate new research in the field.<sup>26</sup> Yet, profound reflections on and explicit engagement with innovative historiographical concepts and ideas, such as postcolonialism, transnationalism, and transatlanticism are still underrepresented.<sup>27</sup> The different contexts of the various institutions pursuing Jewish studies in Israel, the USA, and Europe make the situation even more complex. Although they are all concerned with the same thematic field, their different scholarly traditions hinder broader academic conversations and limit researchers in their engagements with norms and narratives. Consequently, there are rich specialized publications in each individual scholarly and linguistic field of Jewish studies, yet their mutual reception is often limited and has only increased in recent decades through conferences and collaborative projects, usually with English as the scholarly lingua franca.

Therefore, the writing of Jewish Habsburg history from different angles has become quite common. For example, there was and is a flourishing

<sup>26</sup> For a recent summary, see Tim Corbett, Klaus Hödl, Caroline Kita, Susanne Korbel, and Dirk Rupnow, "Migration, Integration, and Assimilation: Reassessing Key Concepts in (Jewish) Austrian History," *Journal of Austrian Studies* 54:1 (Spring 2021), 1–28.

<sup>27</sup> Some more conceptual considerations on cultural history and transfer have been provided by: David Biale, *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (New York: Schocken, 2002); Klaus Hödl, *Jüdische Studien: Reflexionen zu Theorie und Praxis eines wissenschaftlichen Feldes* (Graz: Studienverlag, 2003); Wolfgang Schmale and Martina Steer, eds., *Kulturtransfer in der jüdischen Geschichte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus 2006); Joachim Schlör, *Das Ich der Stadt: Debatten über Judentum und Urbanität, 1822–1938* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2005); Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt and Alexandra Nocke, eds., *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008). Surprisingly, such missing reflections and links are even true for transnational European and American Jewish topics, see Markus Krah, "Clinging to Borders and Boundaries? The (Sorry) State of Transnational American Jewish Studies," *American Jewish History* 101 (2017): 519–533.

historical (pre-Shoah) and contemporary (postwar) German-language Jewish historiography emerging in situ in Austria, characterized to this day by its strong focus on Vienna.<sup>28</sup> English-language Austrian Jewish historiography is also thriving in the United Kingdom and the USA, likewise focusing on Vienna.<sup>29</sup> This English-language branch developed historically in the aftermath of the Shoah as a result of the persecution and emigration of scholars from formerly Habsburg Central Europe.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, a Jewish historiography has developed in various successor states and regions in different languages of Central Europe, offering various historical as well as sociopolitical narratives. For example, in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, regional Jewish history is often conducted at local Jewish museums and Jewish/Judaic studies institutes, and is made public in their own, often vernacular series of books and journals, such as “Judaica Bohemiae” in the Czech Republic.

<sup>28</sup> Eminent pre-Shoah German-language Austrian Jewish historians included Max Grunwald, Israel Taglicht, Bernhard Wachstein and Albert Francis Pribram. Today, research on Jewish topics in Austrian and Habsburg studies is connected primarily with the Institute for Jewish History in Austria (Institut für jüdische Geschichte Österreichs, INJOEST) in St. Pölten, the Jewish Museum Vienna, and the Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Graz. One of the key works of post-Shoah German-language scholarship in the field is Eveline Brugger, Martha Keil, Albert Lichtblau, Christoph Lind, and Barbara Staudinger, eds., *Geschichte der Juden in Österreich* (Vienna: Ueberreuter, 2006). On Jewish history in Vienna, see the detailed new work in German by Tim Corbett, *Die Grabstätten meiner Väter: Die jüdischen Friedhöfe in Wien* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2021).

<sup>29</sup> The major works in English-language Jewish studies historiography include Marsha L. Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna, 1867–1914: Assimilation and Identity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), and *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), as well as Lisa Silverman, *Becoming Austrians: Jews and Culture between the World Wars* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), and Deborah Holmes and Lisa Silverman, eds., “Jews, Jewish Difference and Austrian Culture: Literary and historical Perspectives,” *Austrian Studies* 24 (2016).

<sup>30</sup> See Joshua Parker and Ralph Poole, eds., *Austria and America: Cross-Cultural Encounters 1865–1933* (Berlin: Lit, 2014); Jessie Labov, *Transatlantic Central Europe: Contesting Geography and Redefining Culture beyond the Nation* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2019); and Dagmar Lorenz, “Austrian Studies als ein Modell kosmopolitischer Vernetzung: Beobachtungen zur Entwicklung der Forschung zur österreichischen Kultur in den Vereinigten Staaten”, in *Was heißt Österreich? Überlegungen zum Feld der Austrian Studies im 21. Jahrhundert*, eds. Sieglinde Klettenhammer and Kurt Scharr (Klagenfurt: Wieser, 2021), 63–79.

## 5 On the Present Volume: Intersections between Jewish Studies and Habsburg Studies

In the aftermath of the Shoah and the ostensible triumph of nationalism, it became common in historiography to relegate Jews to the position of the “eternal other” in a series of binaries: Christian/Jewish, Gentile/Jewish, European/Jewish, non-Jewish/Jewish, and so forth.<sup>31</sup> Notably, the ossification of rigid, homogenous identity categories often occurred ex post facto, and far from home, so particularly as a result of the mass migration of Jews amongst many other Central and Eastern Europeans to the USA in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as discussed above. For the longest time, these binaries remained “characteristic of Jewish historiography in general,” as Klaus Hödl remarked, who shares his most recent thoughts in this volume.<sup>32</sup>

Assuming instead, as the more recent approaches in Habsburg studies do, that pluriculturalism was the basis of common experience in Habsburg Central Europe and accepting that not one fundamental “majority culture” existed, but rather imposed hegemonies in certain contexts, then the often used binaries are misleading and conceal the complex and sometimes even paradoxical conditions that shaped Jewish life in the region before the Shoah. The historian Maria Cieśła, for example, pointed out that even where Jewish coexistence with “Christians” is acknowledged, the binary conception Jewish/Christian tends to ignore the polysemy of the phenomenon “Christian,” which included Catholics alongside various denominations of Protestants and Orthodox, especially in Galicia, not to mention Muslim population groups across the empire; the latter is the subject of the contribution by Omar T. Nasr and Tim Corbett in this issue.<sup>33</sup> As the historian David Biale already remarked decades ago: “Too many histories of the Jews unconsciously fall back on the theology of Jewish uniqueness and assume that the Jewish tradition evolves

<sup>31</sup> Till van Rahden, *Vielheit: Jüdische Geschichte und die Ambivalenz des Universalismus* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2022); Till van Rahden, “Minority/Majority,” in *Geschichtstheorie am Werk*, 13/06/2023, <https://gtw.hypotheses.org/15181> (last accessed October 16, 2023).

<sup>32</sup> Klaus Hödl, “Jewish Studies without the ‘Other,’” in *The Future of the German-Jewish Past: Memory and the Question of Antisemitism*, eds. Gideon Reuveni and Diana Franklin (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2021), 121–134, here 121.

<sup>33</sup> Maria Cieśła, “Jewish Shtetl or Christian Town? The Jews in Small Towns in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 17th and 18th Centuries,” in *Jewish and Non-Jewish Spaces in the Urban Context*, eds. Alina Gromova, Felix Heinert and Sebastian Voigt (Berlin: Neofelis, 2015), 63–82, here 65.

in some splendid isolation from the rest of the world, only pausing to fend off alien influences.”<sup>34</sup>

The importance of the Habsburg Empire to Jewish history is self-evident, as the empire in its final years was home to a good fifth of the world’s Jewish population.<sup>35</sup> Yet, the Jews of Habsburg Central Europe were far from homogenous, with the Habsburg Empire having been home not only to diverse Jewish population groups in terms of language, culture, and religious practice, but also a space in which Jewish movements as divergent as Chassidism and Zionism evolved while at the same time Jews were also seminal in the emergence of broader ideas such as socialism, cosmopolitanism and, indeed, various iterations of nationalism.

The very complexity of Habsburg Central Europe both in synchronic and diachronic perspective precludes any singular historical narrative of “Habsburg Jewry,” and it is not the intention of this volume to offer an overview of “Habsburg Jewish history.” The selected articles in this volume illustrate instead how important it is to reevaluate categories, deconstruct historical narratives, and reconceptualize implemented approaches in specific geographic, temporal, and cultural contexts in order to gain a better understanding of the complex and pluricultural history of Habsburg Central Europe as a whole.

The current issue of PaRDeS attempts to tackle this challenging and complex field by offering a fresh perspective on Habsburg Central Europe, detecting entanglements and fusions without denying exclusionary and antagonistic tendencies in the region. The articles collected in this issue demonstrate that the history of Habsburg Central Europe and its Jewries has to be decentralized. Although this volume does not cover every region and time period in formerly Habsburg Central Europe, the individual contributions show, for example, that the history of the Bohemian lands is strongly entangled with the history of the Holy Roman Empire; Galicia is tied up with Poland, Ukraine, and Russia; while the Balkans are highly influenced by the history and culture of the former Ottoman Empire. By taking the complex lingual and ethno-political, but also legal and pluricultural settings of the

<sup>34</sup> David Biale, “Confessions of an Historian of Jewish Culture,” *Jewish Social Studies* 1:1 (Autumn 1994), 44–45.

<sup>35</sup> See Albert Lichtblau (ed.), *Als hätten wir dazugehört: Österreichisch-jüdische Lebensgeschichten aus der Habsburgermonarchie* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1999), 43.

former Habsburg Empire into account, this issue of PaRDeS aims to open up new perspectives on the different Jewries of the region, their self-understandings, and their entangled histories. This exploration of intersections between Habsburg and Jewish studies intends to bring both academic fields into conversation with each other and to provoke a discussion on categories, historical narratives, and assumed binaries as well as on the significance and meaning of manifold Jewish experiences for the history of formerly Habsburg Central Europe. Thus, this issue of PaRDeS should be understood as a starting point for further discussions on new topics and historical narratives, methodologies and approaches to Jewish history, culture and religion in Habsburg Central Europe.