

Variations and Transformations of Childhood in the Bohemian Lands and Slovakia.

Hrsg. von Frank Henschel, Jan Randák, Martina Winkler und Gabriela Dudeková Kováčová. (Bad Wiesseer Tagungen des Collegium Carolinum, Bd. 42.) Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. Göttingen 2023. 230 S. ISBN 978-3-525-37318-7. (€ 50,-.)

Introducing this collection of essays from the 2019 Proceedings of the Annual Conference of Collegium Carolinum, Frank Henschel and Martina Winkler assert that the history of childhood has recently advanced from being a “small and frequently marginalized area of research” (p. 1) to garnering more general recognition by historians. This is surely right. It was by convention launched in 1960 with the publication of Philippe Ariès’s *L’Enfant et la vie familiale sous l’Ancien Régime* (published in English as *Centuries of Childhood* in 1962). The book initially failed to attract much attention, but it and its subject matter gradually gained momentum among historians during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, eventually moving on from its origins in case studies drawn from Western Europe and North America to a more global perspective.

At the same time, while acknowledging that the history of childhood has become a rich and fruitful field of research, Henschel and Winkler make clear that their aim is to build on this body of work with new areas and fresh questions. The book does indeed engage with such issues as children’s experience of living through the total wars of the twentieth century, in this case in Bohemia and Hungary during World War I, and of coping with daily life in institutions such as orphanages and special schools for children described at the time as “mentally weaker.” It must be said that these are topics that have certainly not been ignored by historians in this field, but there remains plenty of scope for new additions such as these.

The introduction, with the title “Variations and Transformations of Childhood in the Bohemian Lands and Slovakia,” acknowledges that East Central Europe is usually missing from general surveys, theoretical debates, and edited volumes on the history of childhood. At the same time, it suggests that a closer look reveals a number of detailed and highly readable studies in this field, citing histories of ideas on child-rearing, child labor, and schooling (though it should be added that many of these appeared in foreign languages). Overall, the extensive footnotes in this chapter will doubtless be a great asset for both specialists and non-specialists in the area seeking further reading, even those limited to English-language material. Its concluding section usefully emphasizes the ambivalences of childhood, relating, among other things, to concepts of the future and nostalgia and of discipline and freedom.

The rest of the chapters in the book range widely over some of the main themes in the history of childhood and children applied to East and Central Europe. The main contribution to the history of childhood, understood as the cultural dimension of the topic, comes from Maria-Lena Faßig, with her chapter entitled “Other Childhoods: Constructions of Childhood and Childishness of the Roma Minority in Popular Periodicals of Socialist Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1968.” The history of children is covered in chapters on family and childcare, schooling, and the impact of warfare. These include “The Provision for Education of Children in Orphanages in the Kingdom of Hungary during the Early Period of Their Existence (1750–1850),” by Ingrid Kušnířáková. It contributes to a substantial literature already in existence on this type of institution in Europe, based on the extensive documentation they have tended to leave in public and private archives.

The editor Gabriela Dudeková Kováčová provides a chapter on the experience of children in Bohemia and Hungary during World War I, again adding an interesting dimension to a subject popular with historians. She focuses on the concept of “war culture” and its role in the mobilization of the population in support of the war regime. This draws on the fashionable notion of childhood as a cultural construct, varying according to its context, providing the framework for a study of war propaganda targeting young people in the Habsburg lands. There follows a study of childcare in the family during the 1920s and 1930s in Slovakia, fetchingly entitled “Then the Bell Rang and the Nanny Was Allowed to

Enter.” It forms part of a broader ethnographic study of the rural and urban populations, which is necessary because a largely illiterate population was incapable of providing ego documents such as the peasant autobiographies available in parts of Western Europe. The authors, Marta Botíková and Ľubica Voľanská, refer to “deep ethnographic interviews” (p. 77) conducted as part of their research into childcare in the family and household. What emerges, above all, is the contrast in childcare practice between rural and urban populations, notably with the reliance in urban middle-class families on young women from the countryside looking after their children as nannies.

Mirek Němec’s “Children of the Socialist Paradise: Images of Children and Youth in Opposition and Exile Circles (Kundera, Kryl, Wegner)” explores the fierce criticism of communist propaganda in Czechoslovakia from the Right. The other chapters in Czech history that can only be mentioned in passing are Jan Randák’s study of special school pupils under the communist dictatorship, Martin Pácha’s examination of the struggle between the communist state and the Catholic Church for the soul of the child, and Henschel’s account of adoption and child welfare policies under the socialist regime.

In conclusion, let it be noted that every chapter is clearly expressed and well documented. The upshot is a varied collection of essays that are all detailed accounts that will particularly appeal to specialists in the history of the area in question. Taken together, they provide both a top-down and a bottom-up view of childhood in this part of the world and some sense of changes over time in the modern period.

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Michael R. Cude: The Slovak Question. A Transatlantic Perspective 1914–1948. University of Pittsburgh Press. Pittsburgh 2022. X, 288 S. ISBN 978-0-8229-4702-8. (\$ 50,–.)

Michael R. Cude widmet sich in seinem Buch der Slowakischen Frage in einer transatlantischen Perspektive, die in seiner Interpretation zwei Bedeutungen hat: erstens als Einstellung der amerikanischen Slowaken zu den Ereignissen sowie der nationalen, politischen und kulturellen Situation in Mitteleuropa – insbesondere zur Situation in Ungarn und der Tschechoslowakischen Republik, wo ethnische Slowaken lebten; zweitens als Widerspiegelung der Slowakischen Frage in den Verlautbarungen offizieller Stellen in den USA (Präsident, Außenministerium, Diplomaten). Dieser zweite Abschnitt, der auf Archivdokumenten basiert, stellt den wertvollsten Teil der Veröffentlichung dar. Die zitierten Dokumente zeigen, dass die amerikanische Politik sich bis 1918 nicht allzu sehr für die komplexe Situation in Mitteleuropa interessierte und erst nach der Gründung der Tschechoslowakischen Republik begann, die Existenz der slowakischen Frage in ihre Überlegungen einzubeziehen. Und selbst dann waren die ihnen zur Verfügung stehenden Informationen eher oberflächlich und einseitig. Es ist ein wenig schade, dass der Autor über die Haltung der amerikanischen Politik zur Slowakischen Frage größtenteils nur berichtet und keine tiefer gehende Analyse vornimmt.

Die Beziehung der amerikanischen Slowaken zu den Ereignissen in ihrer ursprünglichen Heimat (Ungarn und Tschechoslowakei) bildet einen äußerst wichtigen Aspekt der Darstellung. C. stellt fest, dass die slowakische Gemeinschaft in den USA nie wirklich geeint war, obwohl entsprechende Bestrebungen in der Gründung der Slowakischen Liga in den USA (1907) ihren Höhepunkt fanden. Einigkeit herrschte am ehesten in den Jahren des Ersten Weltkriegs, als die amerikanischen Slowaken die von Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk geleitete „Auslandsaktion“ zur Schaffung eines gemeinsamen Staates von Tschechen und Slowaken unterstützten. Diese verschwand jedoch nach der Gründung der Tschechoslowakischen Republik wieder. Gegen die Präsidenten der Slowakischen Liga, Albert Mamatey und Milan Alexander Getting, die nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg die Tschechoslowakei besuchten und ihre Zufriedenheit mit der Entwicklung im Staat und in der Slowakei zum Ausdruck brachten, erhob sich unter den amerikanischen Slowaken Widerspruch, der schließlich mit Mamateys Ausschluss aus der Slowakischen Liga endete. Bei der Darstel-