

Reference of Diploma Thesis

Master's Degree Programme 'Central European Comparative Studies'

Emilia Sbroscia, *Integration and Everyday Life of Italian Refugees Exiled to Northern Bohemia in the First World War – A Microhistorical Look at the Daily Experience of Sannicolò in Jablonné v Podještědí*, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague, 2016.

For her Master thesis Emilia Sbroscia chose a historical topic dealing with the issue of Italian-speaking refugees during the World War I who were moved due to the opening of war hostilities between Italy and Austria-Hungary from their homeland in the south of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to its norther extremity in Bohemia. This focused framing of the topic on a little segment of the overall migration flows during the war was further particularized using the method of microhistory. The source that Emilia found to nourish her narrative was a detailed diary of an unknown Italian-speaking man from Rovereto calling himself Sannicolò.

The thesis is based on both extensive secondary literature as well as the above mentioned primary source, even though most of the sources used are in English or Italian which somewhat narrows the basis. Nevertheless, the author demonstrated her knowledge of the literature and ability to work with it creatively using it for developing her narrative. I would like to especially appreciate the efforts that the author must have made searching for the appropriate primary source that seems to be a rare item under the criteria given and the way she worked with it interpreting its contents in the broader framework of the topic. The thesis has got a clear and logical structure with the only exception of the 'Introduction' that could have been better arranged using subchapters for the different topics discussed. Also the referencing system could have been unified throughout the text (e.g.: fn. 4 – Austrian History Yearbook is a periodical journal).

One of my objections considers the use of language in terms of distinguishing between author's terminology and others' vocabulary. Mixing up these different terms does not only makes the text sometimes confusing but it also clouds the different perspectives. In some place, Emilia seems to project certain national master-narratives on the described situation which I find ahistorical in relation to the period of the World War I. Sometimes it is a mere copy-editing issue such as using both the Czech and German local names throughout the text (e. g. Gabel/Jablonné or Zittau/Žitava) but sometimes it can have more far-reaching consequences in shaping the perspective. Considering the Germans in 'Jablonné v Podještědí' to be part of a German 'minority' in Bohemia (pp. 57, 62) fails to stress that in the regional micro-view they were a majority—and Sannicolò confirms this. Although Emilia showed that she was aware of the problem of ascribing national identities it seems in some places that she projects the currently existing identities retrospectively. A careful definition of overlapping terms such as 'Italian-speaking' and 'Italian', 'Bohemian' and 'Czech', 'German' and 'German Austrian' or 'Austrian' would have made the text clearer. I also think that the term 'refugee' is not a synonym for 'evacuee' because it indicates a difference in circumstances of the migration. More attention could have been paid to Sannicolò's own language in which he refers to the world around him. Emilia put the original citations in Italian into the footnotes but unfortunately she did not work with these further showing possible differences between Sannicolò's own vocabulary and the words of his contemporaries or the academic language used today.

Despite the points mentioned above, some of which are mere technicalities and some of which are an ever returning problem in the historiography of Central Europe, all in all, I consider this thesis as carefully written, logically structured and bringing bits of new knowledge. According to the 7th Consolidated Code of Study and Examination of Charles University in Prague I recommend this thesis for defence and I suggest to award it the grade 'excellent' (i. e. výborně, 1).

PhDr. Václav Šmidrkal, Ph.D.

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