

Daheur, J. and Lučić, I. (eds.): **Habsburg Natures: Imperial Governance and Environment in Central Europe, 1850–1918**. New York/Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2026. 342 p.

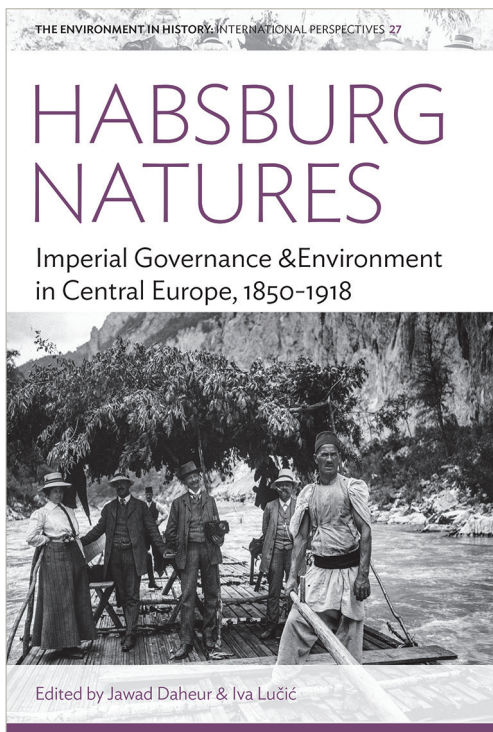
*Habsburg Natures* offers a refreshingly innovative perspective on late Habsburg history by placing the environment at its core. The volume compellingly demonstrates how rivers, forests, animals, coal, and fodder actively shaped governance structures, imperial decline, and regional interactions throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire from 1850 to 1918. This exemplary open-access publication, constructs a comprehensive new understanding of the empire that transcends conventional national narratives. It masterfully integrates physical environmental limitations – such as Alpine deforestation patterns, Danube silt dynamics, and Galician drought cycles – with complex political connections, delivering insights particularly valuable for geographers studying imperial peripheries, resource politics, and spatial state development. By thoughtfully emphasizing nature’s diverse manifestations within a continental European empire – distinct from overseas colonial contexts – the book productively challenges readers to reconsider how biophysical realities fundamentally influenced Habsburg power dynamics. The volume

traces this influence across compelling case studies, from diplomatic conflicts over river regulation to peasant uprisings triggered by forest commercialization, providing fresh methodological approaches for regional studies in Central and Eastern Europe.

The editor’s introduction expertly establishes the context, defining the “late Habsburg Empire” primarily as Austria-Hungary after 1867 and tracing its continuities back to mid-century reforms such as the 1852 Imperial Forest Act. Jawad DAHEUR and Iva LUČIĆ argue that the Empire’s geographical position as Europe’s second-largest state – 676,615 km<sup>2</sup>, 51 million people by 1910 – and its ecological diversity – from Alpine forests to Danubian floodplains – made it a laboratory for resource governance under dual sovereignty. Habsburg “internal peripheries” created inequalities through intra-imperial commodity chains, which were made political by nationalism and capitalist pressures. This arrangement is different from colonial empires that took resources from other countries. Editors Jawad DAHEUR, a CNRS senior researcher at CERCEC (EHESS, Paris), specialises in Central European environmental history with a focus on forests and trade, and Iva LUČIĆ, an associate professor of Eastern European History at Stockholm University and a Pro Futura Scientia Fellow (SCAS) co-edited the volume published by Berghahn in the “Environment in History: International Perspectives” as Vol. 27. This series advances global eco-historical scholarship and publishing cutting-edge works on nature-society dynamics; this open-access volume fits seamlessly. This book, written by multiple authors because of the different languages and archives involved, brings together eleven chapters that focus on individual stories, balancing government control with local actions, and steering clear of a one-size-fits-all uniformity.

The contributions of this volume are divided into four thematic parts, each bridging material environments and institutional geographies. Part I tracks imperial entanglements inside and between empires, Part II focuses on the dynamics of cooperation and conflict, Part III provides a multispecies perspective to engineering nature and Part IV offers insights to practices of managing different kinds of resources.

Part I (*Inter/Intra Imperial Entanglements*) opens with riparian politics: Robert Shields MEVIŠEN examines how Danube regulation projects, from the blasting of Iron Gates (1875–1890) to delta disputes after the Berlin Congress of 1878, mixing Habsburg diplomacy with policies in the crownlands. MEVIŠEN shows that physical river dynamics – shoals, floods, and deltas – constrained navigation and forced negotiations with Romania, Serbia, and the Ottoman Empire via the European Danube Commission, while amplified in-



ternal tensions over hydraulic infrastructure funding. Jana OSTERKAMP's chapter discusses how melioration (land drainage and irrigation) helped states collaborate, highlighting projects in Lombardy's Po Valley and Bosnia. In the next chapter, Selçuk DÜRSÜN provides an Ottoman perspective, explaining timber poaching in Bosnia's border areas during the nineteenth century, before the Habsburg occupation in 1878.

Part II (*Cooperation and Conflict*) centres on forests, which covered more than third of the Habsburg landscapes. Iva LUČIĆ's study of Bosnian timber exports (oak staves, trunks) shows that the "proximate colony" acted as a dividing force: after 1878, railroads directed wood to Trieste and Austrian markets, and paved a way to exclusionary campaigns in the Cisleithanian crownlands. The two case studies of this chapter demonstrate how statistics quantify frictions, while legal disputes reveal the role of private capital in imperial fissures. Gábor EGRY's standout chapter on Transylvania illuminates "ecological nationalisms," where late-imperial commercialization – leasing forests to industrial firms – eroded peasant usufruct, sparking violence that peaked in 1918 revolts and persisted into Romanian rule. Communal properties (e.g. Năsăud School Fund, 91,000 acres) and noble estates fuelled clashes, as Romanian peasants invoked authenticity against Hungarian state forestry, blending material grievances with national claims. EGRY extends into interwar Romania, showing Habsburg legacies in lease contracts and unified 1923 forestry laws, where state-building prioritized technocracy over redistribution. Robert SKENDEROVIĆ examines Croatian-Slavonian Military Border demilitarization (post-1881), where oak commercialization threatened peasants' entitlements, yet their soldier status preserved access via negotiated state management. Collectively, these chapters recast forests not as passive resources but as mediators of sovereignty, where customary rights clashed with nationalizing conflicts and exposing dualism's limits.

Part III (*Engineering Nature*) ventures into human-nonhuman entanglements, a methodological innovation for imperial history. Wolfgang GÖDERLE's microhistory traces eleven Indian mongooses released on Mljet island (Meleda, Dalmatia) in 1910 to combat horned vipers (*Vipera ammodytes*), drawing on global knowledge – from Brockhaus encyclopaedias to Slovenian herpetology – circulated via ministries. Dalmatian civil servants mirrored human censuses with animal surveys, treating vipers as imperial threats; post-release monitoring (into the 1920s) underscores ecological legacies, with mongooses persisting despite failures. Maps of Adriatic ports (Trieste, Korčula) spatialize knowledge flows, equating administrative practices for subjects, censuses, and fauna. In the next chapter, Kristýna KAUCKÁ reconstructs the "golden age" of bark beetle (*Ips typographus*) (1868–1876) the Šumava region, where 1846/1868 storms

felled spruce, enabling infestations that ravaged aristocratic estates. Bohemian nobility lobbied for sanitation felling and railways, blending crisis response with modernization; KAUCKÁ's life-cycle illustrations and postcards evoke the infestation's visual drama, linking pests to infrastructure debates. These chapters humanize bureaucracy, showing symmetric governance for humans and nonhumans amid globalizing science.

Part IV (*Managing Resources*) confronts scarcity politics. Jawad DAHEUR's quantitative reconstruction of fodder bans in 1893 and 1904 – triggered by droughts reducing hay and oilcake output – maps export chains to Germany, where Cisleithanian producers allied trans-ethnically against bans, overriding ministerial lines. Graphs of 1882–1913 exports and tables quantify crises, revealing imperial resilience, for example, via ad hoc vetoes on railway shipments or sectarian echoes. DAHEUR's customs data plots hay flows from Galician meadows to Prussian markets, showing the 1893 drought halved yields, prompting bans that nobles and magnates circumvented through petitions. Ségolène PLYER's Bohemian coal chapter details Ostrava-Karviná basin dynamics, where lignite and bituminous deposits fuelled regional diversity. Simone GINRICH and Martin SCHMID focus on the 1852 Forest Act and aims to quantify the transitions from feudal servitudes to sustained-yield regimes, enabling wood exports that increased from 28 to 40 million m<sup>3</sup> by 1910. While prioritizing industrial timber over peasant needs led to growing tensions and dissatisfaction among the rural population, authors suggest that uneven enforcement across crownlands sowed resentments and amplified nationalism. The conclusion of this chapter revisits these as environmental dynamics and suggests that they had their fair share in the decline of the Habsburg Empire. Part IV is exceptionally illustrated as it includes nine graphs, dual tables, QGIS maps, and photos that model biophysical teleconnections, which bind and then fracture imperial fragments.

*Habsburg Nature*, with its rigorous spatial analysis, integrating biophysical processes with imperial power dynamics, fills a notable gap in Habsburg environmental historiography and offers a valuable contribution for geographers and scholars of regional studies. The book includes over thirty custom QGIS maps that show Habsburg territorial expansion, Danube deltas, Transylvanian forest cover, and Bohemian coal deposits, presenting environments as important factors that influence governance and using detailed data to clearly show ecological differences. Methodologically, the actor-centred fusion of multilingual archives, quantitative sources, and visuals provides replicable templates for transregional environmental histories prioritizing flows over national silos – a real strength for scholars seeking practical models. Geographers will especially appreciate this fusion of multilingual archives and visuals, filling gaps in Habsburg environmental historiography while urging material flow

analyses for timber, fodder, and coal – thrusting intra-European eco-imperial dynamics into global debates with fresh energy.

The editors' introduction frames Austria-Hungary post-1867 as a diverse "laboratory" for resource governance with ecological variety from the Alps to the Danubian plains driving innovative responses under dual sovereignty. Multilingual archives – from Czech petitions to Ottoman logs – ground microhistories like GÖDERLE'S mongoose censuses or KAUCKÁ'S Šumava beetle postcards, offering robust templates for socio-natural analysis across scales. Forestry features prominently across six of the eleven chapters, reflecting the abundance of archival sources on this theme and the pivotal role forests played in Habsburg landscapes and economies. Bosnian oak exports highlight fractures via Trieste railroads; Transylvanian leases trace peasant revolts into Romanian interwar laws; military border analysis shows peasant rights enduring post-1881. The 1852 Forest Act marks a key shift to sustained-yield forestry, boosting exports while challenging communal rights – a theme ripe for further exploration. While urban environments are mentioned briefly – especially in discussions about coal – looking more closely beyond coal could improve future research in these areas. The book also mentions connections to other empires, such as Ottoman Bosnia and Russia, which could lead to intriguing comparisons worth exploring further; using methods like material flow analysis for timber or fodder could greatly enhance the already solid research. Pre-1878 poaching or Prussian hay flows invite such extensions, globalizing Habsburg cases in parallel with Siberian taiga or tropical models.

*Habsburg Natures* excels in benchmarking intra-European imperialism, where "internal peripheries" like Bosnia or Galicia echoed colonies without overseas distance. Rivers drove diplomacy; disasters revealed adaptive bureaucracy. For geographers, it integrates Habsburg extraction, frontiers, and green statehood into global debates, with post-1918 extensions highlighting enduring legacies. This open-access volume in the Berghahn's Environment in History series sets a high standard, equipping scholars to reframe Central Europe's environmental histories through imperial ecologies. Its visuals, methods, and pivots – from entanglements to scarcities encouraging urban expansions and inter-imperial flows – offer transregional inspiration. Meanwhile, the volume's methodology both decentring Vienna and elevating the significance of Habsburg natures in worldwide scholarship.

Beyond its technical achievements, *Habsburg Natures* stands out as an exemplary model of collaborative scholarship, uniting an international roster of experts who deftly navigate multilingual archives to produce a cohesive narrative that transcends national boundaries and disciplinary silos. The open-access format ensures wide accessibility, democratizing cutting-edge envi-

ronmental history for researchers worldwide. Overall, this book sets a new benchmark for environmental imperial histories, masterfully demonstrating how nature actively shaped Habsburg power dynamics and offering geographers invaluable tools to reframe Central European ecologies within global scholarship – a truly essential contribution that will inspire and guide future research for years to come.

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